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**SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC VULNERABILITY: OLD AND NEW RISKS  
FOR COMMUNITIES, HOUSEHOLDS AND INDIVIDUALS**

**OFFPRINT**

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## CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
INTRODUCTION .....	1
I. SOCIAL AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC VULNERABILITY: CONCEPTUAL, THEORETIC AND EMPIRICAL APPROACHES .....	3
A. THE NOTION OF VULNERABILITY, ITS COMPONENTS AND USES IN DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES .....	3
B. SOCIAL VULNERABILITY .....	5
1. Distinctions and precautions .....	5
2. Persistent and emerging social risks .....	6
3. Response capacity and adaptation skills .....	8
4. Empirical research into social vulnerability in Latin America and the Caribbean .....	11
5. Social vulnerability: significance, concepts and analytical approaches .....	16
C. SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VULNERABILITY .....	20
1. Sociodemographic vulnerability: recent approaches and a working concept .....	21
2. Long-term sociodemographic processes .....	22
V. SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VULNERABILITY POLICY OPTIONS .....	31
A. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	31
B. BASES OF POLICIES TO COMBAT SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VULNERABILITY .....	32
C. PREVENTIVE MEASURES .....	35
1. Rationality, advantages and limitations of preventive measures .....	35
2. Successes, controversies and requirements with regard to prevention of sociodemographic risks .....	35
3. Contemporary challenges to the prevention of sociodemographic risks .....	41

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	<i>Page</i>
D. INITIATIVES AIMED AT STRENGTHENING THE RESPONSE CAPACITY.....	48
1. Anticipating adversities.....	48
2. Preparing actors .....	49
3. Mitigating the consequences of adversities.....	49
4. Insurance .....	52
5. Promoting organization and group action.....	53
E. MEASURES FOR ACTIVE ADAPTATION .....	53
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	59

## INTRODUCTION

Vulnerability is an emerging issue that has been raised repeatedly in sociological analyses at the dawn of the twenty-first century and in debates on public policies aimed at alleviating poverty, promoting upward social mobility and empowering citizens. If this issue has been so topical, it is because a variety of factors, some highly controversial and others difficult to measure accurately, have contributed to the phenomenon. They include: the increasingly unstable macroeconomic context; the frequency with which households lapse into and emerge from poverty, a trend seen even among traditionally secure groups; various signs of fragmentation and social asymmetries; defencelessness against different types of risk, some of which have been growing; and new forms of segmentation of access to important assets in terms of social mobility.

Conscious of this situation, national delegations attending the meeting of the ECLAC sessional Ad Hoc Committee on Population and Development held during the twenty-ninth session of the Commission (Mexico, D.F., April 2000) requested the Population Division of ECLAC-Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE) to prepare a document on social vulnerability. In response to this mandate, which was embodied in resolution 577(XXVIII) of the Commission, a summary version<sup>1</sup> of the document, “*Socio-demographic vulnerability: old and new risks for communities, households and individuals*”,<sup>2</sup> was prepared thanks to the valuable support of other ECLAC divisions and the technical and financial cooperation provided by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and was presented and considered at the following ECLAC session (Brasilia, May 2002).

The text now being presented in electronic format consists of two chapters of the document. The first reviews the literature on the subject and describes in detail the approach and notion of vulnerability, which are considered relevant for the analysis of relationships between population and development at the level of households, communities and individuals. The second presents the conclusions formulated with a view to proposing policy options for addressing the problem of socio-demographic vulnerability and for obtaining a deeper insight into the relationship between population and development.

This material is being published electronically in response to an explicit request from countries represented on the ECLAC sessional Ad Hoc Committee on Population and Development and to a need identified in recent months, when technical assistance on socio-demographic vulnerability was being provided to countries in the region. The issue has aroused tremendous interest and high expectations, but is also the subject of doubts and skepticism. Hence, both the first chapter, which examines and elucidates the conceptual approach and the conclusions seek to give a clear picture of the scope, potential and limitations of the study of socio-demographic vulnerability in the region. The application of a notion of vulnerability that incorporates in a logical chain socio-demographic risks and the ability to respond and adapt is extremely useful, especially for considering emerging issues relating to population and development from the point of view of the individual, the household and the community and for the adoption of appropriate measures in this regard. This does not mean that the notion of socio-demographic vulnerability is cut and dried or can be interpreted in a single way or that the approach used in this case is superior to earlier approaches. This study is, rather, a contribution to the difficult and invariably complex task of understanding and predicting the demographic dynamic and of acting intelligently in this respect in order to promote recognition of individual rights, improve living conditions of households and further the economic and social development of communities.

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<sup>1</sup> LC/G.2170(Ses.29/16).

<sup>2</sup> LC/R.2086.



## I. SOCIAL AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC VULNERABILITY: CONCEPTUAL, THEORETIC AND EMPIRICAL APPROACHES

### A. THE NOTION OF VULNERABILITY, ITS COMPONENTS AND USES IN DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES

In common usage, the term “vulnerability” denotes risk, fragility, defencelessness or harm and is applied to that which “may be wounded or harmed” (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English). Studies of social vulnerability go beyond these definitions, however valid they may be, to examine the possibility of controlling the effects of materialization of such risk, since social vulnerability implies both exposure to a risk<sup>1</sup> and the extent to which each unit of reference<sup>2</sup> is able to confront it, either through an endogenous response or through support from external sources ([http://www.wfp.it/vam\\_documents/a/va99/html/vamover.htm](http://www.wfp.it/vam_documents/a/va99/html/vamover.htm); Chambers 1989):

**Vulnerability = exposure to risks + inability to respond** [1]

This relationship may be extended to make explicit the possibility of adapting to the risk. The mere acceptance of risk is a passive form of adaptation and equates to resignation, which stems from fatalism; on the other hand, an active adaptation is a particular form of response, which, being more sustainable over time, implies internal (sometimes, thorough-going) restructuring by the units of reference. In order to include this specification, a distinction should be made, with respect to the inability to respond, between an inability to face risk and an inability to adapt actively to its consequences, elements which correspond to what Moser (1998, p. 3) calls *sensitivity* and *resilience*, respectively:

**Vulnerability = exposure to risks + inability to confront them** [2]  
**+ inability to adapt in an active way**

Understood in this way, the notion of vulnerability can be applied to various social processes; in order to make the most of this potential, it is necessary to specify its conceptual scope and explore its advantages as an analytic approach. Thus, this document seeks, first and foremost, to elucidate the

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<sup>1</sup> The importance of the concept of risk for the notion of vulnerability calls for an explanation. In this document, this term refers to the possibility that some eventuality (the occurrence or presence of an event, characteristic or process) may entail adverse effects for the unit of reference (community, home, person, business, ecosystem or other). That is, a risk does not refer to an intrinsically negative event, but rather to one that can generate harm or uncertainty and whose concrete consequences may be ambiguous or mixed, combining adversity or opportunity, although the latter will only be mentioned in passing in this document. The recognition that some risks imply opportunities is the basis for the expression “positive risks”(Ocampo, 2001b, p. 16), in the sense that Schumpeter ascribes to “creative destruction” (for a recent summary of the debate on the concept of risk, see the virtual conference on the theory and practice of social sciences in catastrophic risk situations, [www.proteccioncivil.org/ceise/ceisevirtual](http://www.proteccioncivil.org/ceise/ceisevirtual)).

<sup>2</sup> The expression *unit of reference* —or failing this, the term *actor* (although a collective action is not always involved)— is used to refer to different, potentially vulnerable social entities: communities, households and persons. Communities are groups of individuals established in a well-defined territory (national, subnational or, even, urban), or who share a common culture.

specific contents of the concept of social vulnerability and, in particular that of socio-demographic vulnerability, without ignoring the links between the two. Next, on the basis of the system which links exposure to risks with the inability to confront them and the inability to adapt actively to their consequences, it considers the effectiveness of an approach for analysing vulnerability in the context of the relationships between population and development.

The notion of vulnerability is present in a wide range of disciplines, in some of which its application is fairly direct. This is true in the case of epidemiology, particularly if the risks are limited to the exposure to pathogens. However, vulnerability to any disease is not defined exclusively by contact with vectors; it also depends on the immunological system of the individual concerned, whether in its natural state or reinforced by vaccination. If the disease develops, the damage it causes can be controlled, at least in part, by external help, which will reduce or possibly eliminate its adverse effects. Lastly, endogenous mutations of different kinds can enable the body to adapt to pathogens and after a variable lapse of time, to sustain a harmless relationship with them.

In social spheres, the precise delimitation of vulnerability is more complex, even if, in some disciplines, the risks can be described in a relatively standard way, provided that the dimension that they affect is clearly identified. This is what seems to occur with the studies on food security, in which the dimension likely to be affected is the calorie intake (Watts and Bohle, 1993); in this case, vulnerability is defined as the probability of a sharp reduction in access to food or of a fall in consumption levels below the minimum rate necessary for survival ([http://www.wfp.it/vam\\_documents/va/va99/html/vamover.htm](http://www.wfp.it/vam_documents/va/va99/html/vamover.htm)) and may be expressed in a relatively simple equation, in which this probability depends on the occurrence of risks (such as droughts, floods, conflicts or price fluctuations) that cut the supply and availability of foods. The greatest conceptual difficulty in these studies stems from specifying and implementing the ability to respond and the adaptive skills of the actors.

In legal terms, vulnerability concerns the non-fulfilment or violation of rights and liberties enshrined in national legislation or contained in international agreements that have legal force in different countries. It also relates to the inability to counteract this state of affairs by institutional means—which can lead to discrimination—and to difficulties in addressing its causes or influencing those responsible or, at least, in rectifying its consequences.

In macroeconomics, the content and definition of the notion of vulnerability are drawn from the everyday professional work of economists. In general, an economy is vulnerable when it shows a high sensitivity to extrinsic shocks associated with a extensive trade liberalization or a heavy reliance on foreign capital or foreign investment flows (O'Connell, 2001; Destremau and Salam, 2001). Until recently, the impacts experienced by the economies of the developing countries were basically trade-related and were linked to fluctuations in the demand and prices for their main exports; at present, financial shocks have become the predominant problem (Ocampo, 2001a, p. 28). However, external openness in itself is not a sufficient condition for vulnerability as described in equation [2]. This situation will arise when deficiencies in forecasting and in building up defences or the extent of asymmetries between developed and developing countries in terms of their financial structure and the functioning of the economy (Ocampo, 2001a, p. 28) lead to an inability to cope with the damage caused by extrinsic shocks. If the response capacity fails, there is still the option of adapting, which means that vulnerability can be moderated or neutralized in the medium and long term, if mechanisms for structural change are used to reallocate resources, reorganize production and find alternative sources of financing.



The above example is instructive since it demonstrates that the boundaries between disciplines that affect the meaning of vulnerability are based on convention and usage in the academic world. Moreover, vulnerability is not just limited to the harmful effect of external forces, since domestic conditions (a reduction in domestic investment or a weak financial system ) can also disrupt economic activity. Non-exposure to risk (absence of external vulnerability) is not necessarily a desirable condition, since the other side of the coin of any macroeconomic risk is the existence of positive opportunities; nevertheless, if extrinsic risk were nullified through a closure of the economy to the outside world—which would make external fluctuations irrelevant— other contingencies would arise, such as a shut-down of the production sector, which would have more serious repercussions than volatility in a context of openness. This argument regarding the ambivalence of risk may be extended, with due caution, to other social processes.

The notion of vulnerability has been widely used in research relating to adolescence. More recent studies indicate that the central component of vulnerability —that is the predominant risks among teenage boys and girls (dropping out from school, teenage pregnancy or physical aggression)— may be interpreted in two ways. One of them relates to high-risk conduct (such as alcohol or drug consumption, unprotected sexual intercourse or involvement with gangs), while the second refers to “high-risk situations, which include those that are genetic, socio-structural or family-related (for example, belonging to an ethnic minority, living in poverty or being from a single-parent family) and those of a social type (for example, living in violent neighbourhoods). These interpretations give rise to two discourses on the vulnerability of adolescents of both sexes, which translate into different policy options: one geared towards individual decisions and the other to contexts in which these can develop (Fischhoff, Nightingale and Iannota, 2001); both discourses are coherent and convincing, but they are based on different notions of risk.

## **B. SOCIAL VULNERABILITY**

### **1. Distinctions and precautions**

The notion of social vulnerability applies to socially vulnerable groups, which may be identified on the basis of different criteria: the existence of some circumstantial factor that makes them more prone to facing adverse situations in terms of their social integration and personal development (groups socially at risk), practices that imply a higher exposure to harmful events or the presence of a shared basic attribute (age, sex or ethnic origin) which leads to common risks or problems. The identification of vulnerable groups has unobjectionable merits and is often used in public policies, preferably in cross-sectoral policies (such as those relating to generational or gender issues); however, it leaves open the possibility of distinguishing as many vulnerable groups as there are risks and their wide internal heterogeneity becomes an obstacle to the effective action of policies. The notion of social vulnerability, while it may lead to a classification of groups, precedes this kind of identification exercise, since it requires specification of risks and a determination both of the ability to respond of the units of reference and of their capacity for active adaptation.

One initial observation that warrants the examination of social vulnerability is that risks, defence capacity and adaptation skills vary significantly in type and complexity, as a result of which it is often difficult to distinguish between these components. The institutional fragility and lack of socio-economic

equity are usually considered to be risks as they hinder socio-economic development and undermine social cohesion; nevertheless, in a specific situation —such as a harmful environmental event— they become factors that weaken the community's (or certain sectors') capacity to respond.

A second note of caution concerns the fact that social risks can be ambiguous, not only because of the potential nature of the adversities that they imply, but also because any challenge creates options. Unlike the field of biology, where harmful events do not have obvious positive tradeoffs, in the social sphere, a number of risks entail possible opportunities, which obstruct the work of evaluation carried out by analysts and policy-makers.<sup>3</sup>

A third caution concerns the measurement of social vulnerability, which can be quantified or qualified through various indicators. Although there is abundant literature on this subject and there are numerous experiences to which it applies, there is no universal procedure or indicator of social vulnerability. This is due, largely, to the polysemic nature of the notion of vulnerability since one may be vulnerable to one or more risks. Thus, elucidating the contents of the notion of vulnerability means defining the risks, understanding their mechanisms, identifying their harmful aspects and recognizing the possible defences and responses as well as the appropriate and feasible ways of adapting. In short, this explanation implies defining the notion and setting limits on its holistic claims. Measuring social vulnerability also proves to be complicated since it is specific to each unit of reference; thus, it would be unrealistic to attempt to quantify it by adding the vulnerability of subunits.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Persistent and emerging social risks

Modern society is characterized by numerous and increasing signs of insecurity, uncertainty and lack of protection which manifest themselves in macro- and micro-economic contexts as well as in environmental, social and cultural spheres (Ramos, 2000). Such risks are closely related to some central characteristics of contemporary society, such as globalization, the complexity inherent in institutional differentiation, the technological revolution and the application of reflexivity<sup>5</sup> in all fields of human life (UNDP, 1998), characteristics that Ulrich Beck (1998) summarized in his widely-read book, *Risk Society. Towards a New Modernity*, first published in the early 1990s. One of the basic factors of uncertainty is the erosion of the structuring function formerly fulfilled by the working world; according to Sennet (2000), the dogma of

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<sup>3</sup> Globalization with the abundant challenges and options that it implies is a paradigm of the ambiguous state of social events that can be considered to be risks. This example provides another contribution for the discussion: the balance of adversities and potentialities is not the only factor that counts when deciding if one should promote or discourage a given event, since one key aspect is to determine the extent to which they are avoidable; in the case of unavoidable risks, active strategies for adapting play a central role.

<sup>4</sup> By contrast with the measurement of poverty, the level of which for a group corresponds to the proportion of poor (households or persons) existing in that group, the vulnerability of a community depends on the risks to which it is exposed as a group and the ability to respond and adapt as a community.

<sup>5</sup> The origin of the concept of reflexivity is to be found in Giddens. His institutional variant (or reflexivity of modernity) implies “the routine incorporation of new knowledge or new information into environments of action that are thereby reconstituted or reorganised” (Giddens, 1997b, p. 295). The individual variant of reflexivity has to do with the organization of the outside world on the basis of internal criteria; this means, for example, that identity and life path are ordered on the basis of a project and personal decisions, filtered and limited, to some extent, by the economic, social and symbolic structure (Giddens, 1997b, p. 14).

flexibility introduced in career paths by “new capitalism”<sup>6</sup> attacks the principles of permanence, trust in others, integrity and commitment, which formerly made routine work an organizing element in the lives of individuals and, consequently, in their integration within the community. These affirmations contrast with the broad evidence that human beings, thanks to the progress of science and technology, now have a vast and growing control over their own performance and environment, which makes it possible to eliminate various risks or, at least, to mitigate their consequences; this is the case with famines—which now occur much less frequently—and of diseases (such as small pox), which have been eradicated.

One of the authors who have recognized this dialectic of progress and risk most keenly is Anthony Giddens (1997a, 1997b, 1997c). He considers that the prevailing uncertainty in contemporary society is the result of the increased capacity for reflection on all behaviours, both individual and collective. As part of a continuous process of reviewing the world, social practices are constantly examined and reformulated in the light of new information available; this review destroys earlier certainties, threatens institutions and historical protection mechanisms and, above all, introduces a permanent question mark over the future. In short, the current risk is “manufactured”, since it depends less and less on natural contingencies and more and more on social and cultural interventions, which, in some cases unleash “natural” disasters. The most radical expression of “manufactured risk” is the institutionalization of dizzying change as a way of production and of life for individuals, households, organizations and communities. In a context in which choices have to be made every day—the only choice denied is that of not choosing—the future is highly uncertain and, from the outset, all actors appear susceptible to harm, that is to say, vulnerable.<sup>7</sup>

In the same vein as the Giddens perspective, a multidisciplinary study carried out by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, Office in Chile) on the paradoxes of modernization recognizes the existence of very strong tensions in contemporary modernity. The first tension arises between the extension of the ends-means calculation (a distinctive sign of modernization) to the different fields of social life (an inexorable and desirable process, since it generates efficiency and dynamism) and individual subjectivity, which draws on elements that are different from, and sometimes, opposed to mere rational calculation. The second tension occurs between the subjective expression of social complexification and differentiation, which it brings to the development of the self (or reflexive individuality) and its objective expression (or systemic specialization), which emancipates the various social fields and removes them from the understanding of individuals. A third tension exists between social integration based on shared standards and values (or community integration) and integration based on respect for the internal logic of the functional subsystems (functional or technical integration). In accordance with this interpretation, contemporary risks emerge from the overwhelming resolution of such tensions in favour of modernization and macro-social and macroeconomic performance at the expense of subjectivity and individual expression (UNDP, 1998, p. 17-18 and 56-76).

Another author who has underscored the importance of contemporary risk, albeit from a somewhat different perspective, is Esping-Andersen (2000). He identifies four types of risk: (i) universal type risks, such as mortality or physical deterioration in old age; (ii) those that affect specific groups or classes of the population, such as emphysema among coal-miners; (iii) life-cycle risks, which are expressed in the roles and social conditions typically linked to one’s age; and (iv) intergenerational risks,

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<sup>6</sup> The reinvention continues, flexible production and non-centralized concentration of power are the cardinal components of this “new capitalism” (Sennet, 2000, p. 47-65).

<sup>7</sup> Of course, the risks of today’s society do not only imply harm but also herald new opportunities.

which are associated with the transmission of adverse traits by parents to children through genes or through socio-cultural mechanisms, as occurs with poverty. Esping-Andersen maintains that the notion of risk leads naturally to a social policy based on insurance, which seeks to attenuate the negative consequences of risk. This approach, despite its weaknesses, is valid when the probability of being affected has a high degree of regularity and is relatively homogeneous throughout the population; however, it loses effectiveness if the risks are unknown, rare, unpredictable or multiple; the last of these are “chain risks”, which imply the accumulation of disadvantages, or, to use Sen’s term, a “coupling of disadvantages”. As contemporary societies become increasingly complex (internal differentiation), their members become more and more heterogeneous and there is a wider range of social risks with a lower probability of prediction. The variety and estocastic nature of social risks in modern societies also serve to highlight the notion of social vulnerability.

A number of authors (O’Connel, 2001; Rodrik, 2001; IDB, 2000a; ECLAC, 2000b, Pizarro, 2001; Kliksberg, 1999; Sojo, 1999; UNDP, 1998; Bustelo and Munujín, 1997) use the notion of social vulnerability or persistent and emerging risks to describe the path of economic, social, political and ecological development followed by the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean in the last 25 years. They cite a host of elements, namely: the succession of small (and not so small) economic crises; the increasing volatility in GDP and in household consumption; the persistent incidence of poverty; the worsening bottlenecks that hinder the generation of good quality jobs and, in general, the deterioration in the labour situation, which shows up in high rates of unemployment, lower protection and an increase in the various forms of precariousness; the persistent lags in terms of human resource skills and the capacity to absorb and generate technological progress, which results in enormous difficulties in sustaining competitiveness in virtuous fundamentals; the devastating effect of numerous natural disasters (the El Niño current, hurricanes, earthquakes); serious social explosions, which differ from past disturbances in terms of the leadership vacuum at the level of organized politics; rising insecurity in day-to-day life, reflected in high rates of crime and fear—both objective and subjective—; a disenchantment with politics, collective forms of action and traditional organizations for social representation, such as trades unions and political parties; the worsening of political conflicts which shrink the bases of legitimacy enjoyed by national authorities, who, in the most dramatic cases, can find their term of office brought to a premature end, with inevitable repercussions on existing systems of government, since these are now viewed with growing mistrust and skepticism.

This brief review of contemporary social risks and their past and emerging manifestations in the region points to two conclusions. The first is that the emergence of almost daily risk situations (perhaps less crucial but no less important) and of rising uncertainty attests to the relevance of the notion of vulnerability and its great heuristic capacity. The second is that whether there are more risks or greater vulnerability at present than in the past is immaterial; it makes more sense to identify which risks are persistent and which are emerging.

### **3. Response capacity and adaptation skills**

In modern society, not only does the risk scenario change but also the ability to respond and the adaptation skills of social actors.

The response capacity depends on the actors' assets —especially those they can mobilize to cope with the materialization of the risks (see box I.1)— as well as on the external support mechanisms to which they have access. The institutionalization of rapid change means that assets soon become out-of-date thus causing a constant erosion in the response capacity of the units of reference. The “devaluation of education” (Franco and Sáinz, 2001) is one example of this trend. Indeed, if education is to be effective in social terms, it must respond to the increasing need for updating. In addition, empirical research into poverty in the region shows that a significant number of households that are living close to the poverty line are exposed to situational changes: “households with incomes between 0.9 and 1.25 poverty lines are vulnerable to economic change, even if it is fairly insignificant” (ECLAC, 2000a, p. 44); this highlights the weak response capacity of a broad cross-section of people in Latin America and the Caribbean to deal with prevailing social risks. This defencelessness reflects, in turn, the weakness of external support mechanisms provided by the market, the State, the community, trade unions or political organizations and the family.

#### Box I.1

#### ASSETS AND SOCIAL VULNERABILITY

In the past, poverty reduction measures tended to focus on income and to overlook the mechanisms, factors, characteristics and opportunities that actors have, acquire or receive to strengthen their socio-economic integration. Sociologists now recognize the importance of assets and have shifted the focus accordingly (Attanasio and Székely, 1999, pp. 320-327; Moser, 1998, pp. 1-5), although the specialist literature does not seem to provide any agreed definition of this concept.

According to Kaztman (2000, p. 294), assets refer to the series of material and abstract resources over which individuals and households have control and whose mobilization can improve their situation of well-being, avoid a deterioration in their living conditions or reduce their vulnerability. While persons and households dispose of a variety of resources, only those that make it possible to use the opportunity structures of the State, the market and the community are considered to be assets under this approach. In his conceptual development, Kaztman (2000, p. 96) expands the notion of assets: “the resources that constitute each asset may be vested: (i) in persons, as mental content or physical characteristics; (ii) in legislation and customs, as rights over material or abstract goods and over access to services; and (iii) in links with persons or institutions”. Similarly, Filgueira (2001, pp. 9-10) defines assets as the ownership, control or mobilization of material and symbolic resources, which enable the individual to perform in society. Such resources include: financial capital, human capital, work experience, level of education, family composition and attributes, social capital, participation in networks and physical capital. The author claims that the distinction between the approach based on the concepts of vulnerability/assets/opportunity structures and the traditional concept of poverty or unmet basic needs arises from the analytical status attributed to assets. Whereas assets used to be identified retrospectively as part of an ad hoc examination of the conditions associated with, or which explained, the levels of deprivation, the assets approach now examines them on the basis of their internal logic of interdependence and reproduction. While, formerly, assets were subordinate to the dependent variable, under the assets approach, the primary focus is the logic of independent variables.

Rather than proposing a definition of assets, Moser (1998, p. 1) categorizes the assets of poor urban individuals

—women, men and children— households and communities in terms of a fivefold “assets vulnerability framework”. “These include well-known tangible assets, such as ...housing, as well as intangible assets—largely invisible— such as household relations and social capital”. Attanasio and Székely (1999, pp. 321-322) indicate that the important assets for poor persons are income-generating assets and that the important processes or decisions are: (i) the rate of use of their stock of assets; (ii) the market value of the assets; (iii) transfers and legacies. In their empirical analysis, these authors classify assets according to three types of capital: human capital, represented by the level of education; physical capital, which includes any material or financial wealth; and social capital, which consists of the standards and social networks that facilitate collective action. Lastly, Esping-Andersen (2000, p. 5), in what he terms the “resource approach” and based on a concept of Sen’s (“poverty, defined as inability to achieve fulfilment in life and to try to achieve objectives”), suggests that assets are all the resources that individuals can mobilize in a given situation.

The market has no welfare mission, but can be used to allocate resources for such purposes; while it may provide some defence mechanisms —such as the insurance and credit markets— it is usually biased against those actors who are more exposed to higher risks and who have less resources. Even though government regulations can reduce these biases, market logic will continue to establish a proportional relationship between the cost of protection and the degree of risk exposure. On the other hand, one of the fundamental objectives of the State is to protect and support its citizens through public policies and programmes; the welfare or provident State, of which the best examples are to be found in the Scandinavian countries, is a paradigm for the full realization of this objective. Generally, the State acts on a short-term basis providing assistance for coping with economic crises, natural disasters or social upheavals, as well as on a long term basis, when its objective is to provide assets to individuals, households and communities. In addition, its regulatory function helps to reduce uncertainties and to establish insurance (social security) systems based on the principles of solidarity. However, financial weaknesses, social asymmetries and political decisions of different kinds usually detract from the efficiency of public action directed at a number of risks. Direct public intervention for social protection in Latin America and the Caribbean has been undermined by different factors in recent decades, which has led to an increase in vulnerability.

Sharing and welfare networks that develop among individuals connected by some common trait (ethnic origin, geographic location, social class, religion or nationality) are a traditional source of support and protection, but their role has been diminished by the extension of reflexivity to all areas of life, which implies the transfer of responsibility for the progress of social actors to each individual's private sphere. For individuals, this implies that self-identity plays an increasingly prominent role; the increase in individualistic behaviour, in conjunction with social diversification and complexification, ultimately, undermines the pillars of solidarity, collaboration and community support. The reign of individual reflexivity also has an impact on the crisis of participatory and social representation organizations (trade unions, political parties, trade or professional associations), although the exhaustion of the forces and specific historical contexts that have given them support seems to be the main cause of this crisis; thus, structural transformations of the labour market have weakened trade unions and the turn of the century ideological change undermines the adherence to political parties and even gives rise to disillusionment with politics. Hence, the protection that these organizations used to offer in the past dies out, without their being replaced by any alternative structure that is able to provide the same security, representation and social action. Lastly, the family is the basic entity for protection and socialization of its members; while its functions are concentrated primarily in the process of raising children, it gives support and protection to its members throughout their lives. Nevertheless, enormous changes have weakened the role of the family, so

that it is highly ironic to assume that the family will take on the functions that other support and response organizations have ceased to fulfil.

Adaptation is a form of response which, for analytical and practical reasons, should be examined separately. In its passive version, it implies acceptance of change as if it were predetermined and as if the only solution were to resign oneself or adopt a *modus vivendi* for living with the prevailing situation, which can cause perverse effects. In its active form, it implies internal adjustments for reducing or eliminating adversities; if the risk is inevitable, active adaptation will be fundamental for the survival of actors, and if it brings opportunities, it will become a strategy for promoting progress.

Communities, households and individuals display a wide variety of skills for adapting to social risks but these do not lend themselves to simple classifications, since they usually depend to a great degree on each situation. If unemployment becomes an unpredictable and probable risk, active adaptation by the individual will call for the deployment of various strategic components: psychological talents for maintaining self-esteem in adverse circumstances; ingenuity for coping with new work situations, which implies both diversifying contacts and adopting a flexible attitude in order to adjust to the change in paid activity or to increase the degree of specialization; bargaining skills so that the person can reach agreements on current wages with a view to obtaining employment in the future. Such strategic components are specific but are probably not appropriate for adapting, for example, to environmental risks. At the level of communities, adaptation develops along evolving paths that are increasingly influenced by the skills of decision-makers in forecasting risks and acting accordingly. Since many social risks faced by communities are outside the time or existential horizon of households and individuals, decision-makers who seek to promote active adaptation will need specialized knowledge in order to design and put into practice forward-looking public policies which transcend that horizon and which, therefore, in the short term, may prove incomprehensible to individuals and households.

#### **4. Empirical research into social vulnerability in Latin America and the Caribbean**

A number of analytic and operational studies conducted in the region refer to the notion of “population socially at risk” or vulnerable in different ways to social damage is used. They identify various risk factors (poverty, exposure to deviant behaviour patterns, family instability and prolonged unemployment, among others), which adversely affect the way society operates and cause emotional damage or trigger anomic conduct. When these factors operate in conjunction, they generate a vulnerability which is defined by the accumulation of characteristics that predispose the units of reference to show adverse social and psychosocial results. This approach, used in biomedical studies (which recognize endogenous or environmental risks) and for classifying units of reference according to their degree of risk exposure (UNICEF, 1990), may be applied to many different purposes, depending on the dimension of the social risk involved, which can range from insufficient calorie intake to involvement in criminal activities. Nevertheless, it does not adequately address the substantive components of the notion of social vulnerability, especially those relating to the determination of the nature of the risk, including the forces that generate and condition them, the response capacity and the relevant adaptation skills.

Systematic research into social vulnerability took off in Latin America and the Caribbean during the 1990s, as the fruit of reflection on the social effects of the “lost decade”, the subsequent structural

adjustment measures and the transformations ushered in by globalization. Initial efforts were directed towards working out the reasons for the persistence of poverty despite the policies implemented for addressing it and the signs of economic recovery observed in some periods. Two phenomena, of which there were empirical signs, influenced the development of this line of work. The first was the apparent increasing turnover in poverty affecting the 10%-15% of households which are located around the poverty line (ECLAC, 2000a, p. 44; Filgueira, 1998, p. 124), which gave rise to the concept of vulnerability to poverty.<sup>8</sup> The description of such households has helped to identify some of the factors that lead to this form of vulnerability: human capital deficit, precarious or low-intensity employment, a heavy demographic burden and cultural exclusion (ECLAC, 2001b and 2000a, 2000b and 2000c). The second issue is the repetition of economic crises that immediately have a far-reaching effect on household income and consumption levels and which counter the advances towards poverty reduction achieved during economic booms. The notion of vulnerability can be applied perfectly well to exposure to external shocks and, as such, this concept has been used in the study of economic crises (Ferreira, Prennushi and Ravallion, 1999). For this purpose, two assumptions were made: (i) that the poor are the those most hurt by such crises and that some members of poor households are more affected than others because of the characteristics of these households and their capacity to mobilize assets at opportune times. These studies, which used surveys based on repeat visits, discovered a set of characteristics associated with the probability of experiencing greater damage during economic crises; some of these characteristics, for example, the high number of minors in the home (Glewne and Hall, 1995), are sociodemographic factors.

Another line of work is based on the asset vulnerability framework (Moser, 1998), which is centred on the relationship between poverty and the characteristics of the household and its environment. While this approach draws on classic texts by Sen, who defines poverty as the absence of skills for controlling one's destiny (Kaztman and others, 1999b, p. 2), it also makes two important contributions: first, it recognizes that the poor cope with their precarious situation by drawing on their tangible and intangible assets (work, human capital, housing, domestic relationships and social capital)<sup>9</sup> and secondly, it highlights the role of poor people's assets and not that of their liabilities, which suggests that appropriate policies for rising above poverty and coping with socioeconomic crises should promote use of assets.<sup>10</sup> This approach was used in a study on poverty in various cities in the world, among them Guayaquil, and the results reinforced the idea that the policy should seek to intensify the use of the assets of the poor. In this regard, Kaztman and others (1999b, p. 3) state that in an effort to improve the capacity for action of anti-poverty programmes, Moser analyses the responses of households and considers the development of multiple strategies which individuals and households put into practice to deal with crisis situations, radical economic and institutional changes and conditions of vulnerability.

The asset vulnerability framework was also used in a comprehensive study carried out in various countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on the assets of the poor. The basic idea of this study is that

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<sup>8</sup> A recent study on Costa Rica defines as vulnerable those households whose income is equivalent to less than 1.4 times the poverty line (Proyecto Estado de la Nación en Desarrollo Sostenible, 2001, p. 94).

<sup>9</sup> "In demonstrating the complexity of asset portfolio management in the context of urban economic crisis, the study contributes to a growing body of evidence that points to the limitations of income-poverty measurements to capture complex external factors affecting the poor as well as their responses to economic difficulty" (Moser, p. 14).

<sup>10</sup> "Identifying what the poor have, rather than what they do not have focuses on their assets." "The asset framework goes beyond a 'static' measuring of the poor toward classifying the capabilities of poor populations to use their resources to reduce their vulnerability." (Moser, pp. 1 and 14).



household income is given for the returns obtained from different assets possessed and used productively by family members. These include human capital, as well as physical and financial assets and access to what is referred to as “social capital” (Attanasio and Székely, 1999, p. 361). Results show that the poor in the region have little human capital (measured in terms of years of education), that much fewer poor women use this capital to generate income by entering the work force, that little is done among poor people to upgrade their human capital and that there is little likelihood of a transfer of assets through institutions such as marriage, since couples usually have a similar stock of assets (Attanasio and Székely, 1999, pp. 335-343).

In terms of policy design, the above-mentioned study draws two important conclusions. The first is that efforts to improve the situation of the poor by developing their assets opens up a wide range of options for intervention. Some are of a welfare type, for example, direct monetary transfers, which, in addition to their impact on the family budget, can have a positive influence on other assets including access to human capital; others are more structural in nature and difficult to apply in a market economy, for example, increasing the relative price of the assets that the poor have. There are other options which must be implemented with caution to avoid possible negative long-term consequences (for example, promoting the use of available assets may encourage child labour); lastly, the poor can be encouraged to acquire additional assets and to improve their capacity to use them. The second conclusion refers to the need to concentrate measures on asset accumulation processes in order to reverse the imbalance in distribution, a situation which marks the poor from birth. (Attanasio and Székely, 1999, p. 326).

The notion of vulnerability —as opposed to poverty or even the poverty line— is also used as the pivotal point for a comprehensive and complex discourse by a multidisciplinary working group which studies the societies of the Southern Cone, where the developmentalist State may be compared to the welfare State in the developed countries (Katzman and Filgueira, 2001; Katzman, 2000; Filgueira, 2001 and 1998; Katzman and others, 1999a and 1999b). This approach is based on an intensive study of three elements: the contribution of the asset vulnerability framework, which highlighted the role of assets, albeit insufficiently (Katzman and others, 1999b, pp. 2-5); the change in the development style, including the reduction in the protective role of wide State coverage and the negative repercussions that this has had;<sup>11</sup> and the far-reaching changes in other dimensions of social life that cannot be attributed to poverty or dealt with by forms of State protection that are now passé.<sup>12</sup> On these last two points, Katzman (2000, p. 277) maintains that as the consequences of changes in styles of development became deeper and as new forms of precarious participation in the job structure emerged, there was a significant increase in the number of households vulnerable to the combined effects of market fluctuations, the decline of the role of the State and the weakening of vital institutions (basically, the community and the family)”.

As a corollary of the foregoing, vulnerability remains patent in the fact that broad segments of the population are now living in a situation that is in now way conducive to upward social mobility. While it may be used as a framework for empirical studies (Katzman and others, 1999a and 1999b), this approach is being constantly revised and the researchers participating in its development are introducing nuances

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<sup>11</sup> “According to some international organizations, after 20 years of neo-liberal experiments, the countries of the Southern Cone and of other parts of the region have acquired an enormous social debt or have neglected “development with a human face” (Filgueira, 1998, p. 124).

<sup>12</sup> The instruments and mechanisms generated in the past by the welfare State for protecting members of the society from situations of risk and uncertainty are today insufficient and inappropriate. (Filgueira, 1998, p. 135).

that added to its complexity. These difficulties notwithstanding, some of its basic characteristics should be described:

- (i) Far from being restricted to the area of poverty, the notion of vulnerability has a wide field of application: in general terms (for purposes of simplification, we will refer only to households) a household's vulnerability varies in inverse proportion to that unit's capacity to control the forces that shape its own destiny or to counteract their effects on well-being (Kaztman, 2000, p. 278).
- (ii) Social vulnerability refers to deficiencies in assets or to their obsolescence. Unlike the concept described in the asset vulnerability framework, assets must be useful for the development of strategies for social mobility and not only for rising above poverty or coping with economic crises.
- (iii) Vulnerability is defined not only in terms of available assets but also in terms of how they relate to the socio-economic context, represented by structures of opportunities,<sup>13</sup> which are probabilities of access to goods, services or activities which affect the well-being of the household because they facilitate the use of its existing resources or provide new ones which are useful for social mobility and integration through existing channels (Kaztman, 2000, p. 299). Hence, the conditions of vulnerability depend both on the assets available and on the likelihood of access through the State, the market and the community.<sup>14</sup>
- (iv) In addition to those recognized by the asset vulnerability framework (physical, human and social capital), assets may also be extended to the sphere of rights (Kaztman, 2000, p. 296).
- (v) The mere accumulation of assets is insufficient for satisfactory social integration or for ensuring the control by units of reference of their own course of development; it is also necessary to have a strategy for using these assets in a reasonable way and structural opportunities that are favourable to their deployment. This notion of strategy incorporates the vision of the actor in the process of acquiring and using assets.
- (vi) A distinction can be made, in a way that is still preliminary, between "new and old social vulnerabilities". The "new" forms of vulnerability are associated with: demographic changes and changes in the family; transformations in the structure of employment and in the way the labour market operates; coexistence between persistent, hard core poverty and a "new poverty" that is emerging; weakening of the safety nets provided by the State (Filgueira, 1998, pp. 129-136).

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<sup>13</sup> In fact, this approach is usually referred to as "assets/structures of opportunities" (Kaztman and others, 1999a).

<sup>14</sup> Other studies state that structures of opportunities contribute to the valorization of assets, since they define their returns (Kaztman and Filgueira, 2001, p. 35); it is also claimed that in the particular framework of the approach put forward here, the notion of vulnerability is centred on the determinants of these situations [the inability to control the forces that shape one's destiny], those that arise because there is a lag or lack of synchronization between the requirements for access to structures of opportunities afforded by the market, the State and society and assets of households which would enable the latter to take advantage of such opportunities (Kaztman, 2000, p. 278).

Other authors, using a perspective similar to the above, but with a clearly different emphasis, state that the consolidation of the new pattern of development, based on external openness, the market and a subsidiary role for the State, is the fundamental cause of vulnerability as a widespread social phenomenon (Pizarro, 2001; ECLAC, 2000a, pp. 49-53): “In the 1980s and 1990s, the number of persons, especially in urban areas, who felt they were subject to risk, insecurity and defencelessness increased especially in urban areas. This was due to changes in the labour market, the decline in the role of the State, new institutional forms for access to social services, the decline in traditional modes of social organization and difficulties being experienced by micro and small businesses. “This perception among citizens and the actual conditions that underlie it reflect the growing social vulnerability that now encompasses, not only the low-income strata but large segments of the middle-income strata as well” (ECLAC, 2000a, p. 49).

The association between vulnerability and lack of social protection in this approach is patent. While there has never been a welfare State anywhere in the region that is on par with those of Western Europe, some countries —those of the Southern Cone, Mexico and Costa Rica— forged an active developmentalist State in terms of social protection; since the 1980s, however, and even earlier in Chile, broad segments of the population lost the welfare provided by the State (Gwynne and Kay, 1999, p. 24; Filgueira, 1998, pp. 135-136). These groups form the bulk of the middle strata, which historically had benefited from government policies for advancement and protection. A recent article on Costa Rica describes this situation: “What emerges clearly is the weakening of the middle class, which is more closely linked to the State and responsible for the welfare and redistributive policies which are now on the wane. Undoubtedly, they seem to be the losers in the new socio-economic and political processes” (Vega, 2000, pp. 43-44). Once the State reduces its scope and functions, it targets its social policies towards the poor and favours competition over protection, these middle-class groups lose important guarantees and some of the justification for their social position becomes weaker: “...in Greater Buenos Aires alone, while traditional poverty entrenched in the structurally poor sectors has remained relatively stable in the 1990s, at approximately two million, the on-going household surveys of May 1996 shows that there are now over four million poor Argentines who come from different segments of the former wider middle class” (López, 1997, p. 41).<sup>15</sup> A recent study of trends in Latin America in the area of occupational stratification concludes that “Latin American societies are not on the way to becoming ‘middle-class societies’ —at least not as far as employment and income are concerned— ... On the contrary, there is every indication that the occupational structure has become the foundation for an unyielding and stable polarization of income” (ECLAC, 2000a, p. 68). Thus, it is clear that the notion of vulnerability lends itself to the analysis of this gradual social decline of the middle classes.

A study on the small-island States of the Caribbean includes a reference to vulnerability in a wider sense (ECLAC, 2000b, pp. 247-260) and among the risks identified are: (i) exposure to environmental disasters (natural disasters, such as hurricanes, and man-made disasters, such as oil spills) associated with their geographic location; (ii) isolation or difficult access, which result in higher transport costs; (iii) a limited resource base; (iv) an undiversified production structure and one that is highly sensitive to fluctuations in international demand; (v) a weak institutional capacity, in particular with respect to the availability of skilled human resources; (vi) high costs of infrastructure and services; (vii) social risks linked

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<sup>15</sup> In those countries in which the middle class was more developed, its fate is the subject of controversy. Thus, among researchers who clearly consider that the situation of the Argentine middle class is critical, some still credit it with a favourable outlook for the future, while others declare that it is a lost cause (Ansaldi, 1997, p. 13).

to low investment in human capital, high unemployment, social insecurity, delinquency and drugs, emigration and socio-economic (income) gaps, and cultural (religious and ethnic) differences, which weaken social cohesion. As can be seen, the emphasis is macrosocial in slant and refers to different spheres of vulnerability. One important issue is that the accumulation of disadvantages arises at the national level, placing severe pressures on public policies.

The notion of vulnerability has been used recently to sketch the situation of international migrants, in particular those migrating from poor countries to developed ones. Bustamante (2000, p. 16) indicates that there is growing consensus in the international community that the vulnerability of migrants is the factor most commonly associated with abuses against human rights. He goes on to state that “vulnerability is not a condition that migrants carry with them to the host country, irrespective of the legality of their entry, ...it is a situation that arises from the social interaction of foreigners that immigrate to a country... The vulnerability of migrants depends on their probable lack of empowerment in the other country to the extent that they are labelled as different by nationals” (Bustamante, 2000, pp. 16-17 and 26). This notion of vulnerability, which implies that migrants are “virtually stripped of their human rights” (Bustamante, 2000, p. 34), concerns an aspect of lack of protection or of risk which is relegated to second place by the approximations that focus on the net outcome of behaviour. The human rights dimension, often overlooked in former approaches, refers to the asymmetries between symbolic and material resources that characterize the actual structures of power.<sup>16</sup> The extension of the notion of vulnerability to the vast field of rights paves the way for addressing the central issue of citizenship in modern societies.

### 5. Social vulnerability: significance, concepts and analytical approaches

A few basic conclusions may be drawn from the brief review that was made of research into social vulnerability, especially in relation to Latin America and the Caribbean, (see figure I.1):

Figure I.1  
CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES FOR THE STUDY OF  
SOCIAL VULNERABILITY

APPROACH	WHAT VULNERABILITY IS	WHAT IT IS ASSOCIATED WITH	WHAT IT APPLIES TO	WHAT TO DO
Vulnerability and rights (Bustamante, 2000)	Lack of power	Exclusion and discrimination in the context of social systems with asymmetric power distribution	Individuals (especially international migrants)	Create conditions that favour broad citizenship and full exercise of rights
Vulnerability and pattern of development (Pizarro, 2001; ECLAC, 2000a)	General feeling of defencelessness that has a material basis	Labour market segmented and openly favourable to capital Restricted access to social services Reduction in collective	Economic and political actors in the broad sense	Balance labour relations Expand citizenship and participation Offer universal access to some services Support microenterprises

<sup>16</sup> Kaztman, participating in the international seminar, Las diferentes expresiones de la vulnerabilidad social in América Latina y el Caribe (ECLAC, Santiago, Chile, June 2001), declared that this was one of the outstanding issues to be studied with respect to vulnerability.

APPROACH	WHAT VULNERABILITY IS	WHAT IT IS ASSOCIATED WITH	WHAT IT APPLIES TO	WHAT TO DO
Vulnerability and poverty (ECLAC, 2000a)	Risk of falling below the poverty line	action and general apathy Collapse of microenterprises  Low and volatile income	Individuals and households	Strengthen the quality of public action Create contingency funds Respect macro-social balances Provide focused support to strengthen income levels Promote new sources of income or subsidies
Vulnerability and economic shocks (Glewwe y Hall, 1995)	Incapacity to resist the impacts of economic crises	Intrinsic vulnerability associated with socioeconomic changes (there is also circumstantial vulnerability related to changes in public programmes) The actors see their income reduced owing to: a strong connection with the economic context; low level of diversity of sources of income in households; low level of skills Difficulties in minimizing the effects of a fall in income: low availability of assets, savings or access to credit; few options for increasing the labour density of the household; limited potential for using experience in new jobs; lack of access to transfers from other households; resistance to changing habits of consumption; obstacles to direct production; difficulty in adapting to new situations	Persons and households	Take various kinds of action to mitigate intrinsic vulnerability. Evaluate the effect of the increase in circumstantial vulnerability
Vulnerability and mobilization of assets (asset vulnerability framework) (Moser, 1998)	Lack of assets or incapacity to mobilize them Insecurity and sensitivity of actors to changes in the environment	Low level of available resources in any household (labour, human capital, housing, household relations, social capital) to help deal with shocks or adapt to external changes	Households	“Discover” resources Support management capacities Promote social capital Use the vision of the actors
Vulnerability and	Imbalance between	Low capacity of actors to	Social actors,	Identify and promote assets

APPROACH	WHAT VULNERABILITY IS	WHAT IT IS ASSOCIATED WITH	WHAT IT APPLIES TO	WHAT TO DO
structure of opportunities (Kaztman and others, 1999 y 2000; Filgueira, 1998)	assets and structure of opportunities	take advantage of available opportunities in various socio-economic areas and to improve their level of well-being or prevent its deterioration: resources in terms of individuals; resources in terms of rights, resources in terms of relations	especially households	Reduce segmentation Adjust assets to the structure of opportunities

Source: Population Division of ECLAC – Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE).

- (i) There is a growing interest in the concept of social vulnerability because it can be used to describe objective and subjective conditions of uncertainty and lack of protection and to understand fluctuations in the social mobility of communities, households and persons; it also offers an alternative, yet complementary, view to other approaches or concepts that are used to describe situations of social disadvantage, such as poverty and exclusion.
- (ii) The concept of social vulnerability does not have an exact definition, and hence various theoretical and operational definitions have been used in the practice of research (see box I.2); the variety of meanings, analytical approaches and attempts at implementation is due to the fact that vulnerability is inseparable from social life, which is characterized by changing risks.
- (iii) Continuously changing risks, especially in contexts of accelerated social change, are a permanent challenge to researchers and decision-makers and means that any comparison of abstract measurements of vulnerability, in contrast to those of other disadvantaged situations, such as poverty, is of dubious value with regard to content or method.<sup>17</sup>

#### Box I.2

##### MEASURING VULNERABILITY FOR DIFFERENT REFERENCE UNITS

In a recent study (United Nations, 1998), the vulnerability of the economies of small island states was measured using indicators referring to: economic exposure (trade openness); export concentration; peripherality (costs of freight and insurance for imports); imported commercial energy; and foreign sources of financing. Three factors were also identified which contribute to the volatility of income of such States: instability of purchasing power of exports, instability of capital flows relative to GDP, and vulnerability to natural disasters (measured by the proportion of the population affected).

In order to measure environmental vulnerability to anthropogenic activities and natural risks, a composite index is used that includes a sub-index of exposure to risk, another of intrinsic resilience and a third relating to degradation of ecosystems. In some applications in countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, 39 risk indicators were selected, 5 resilience indicators, and 13 for environmental degradation (Gómez, 2001).

Some authors maintain that contemporary risk can only be understood in its own context: "Taking these sociological considerations altogether, it becomes unmistakably clear that risk problems cannot be described adequately by referring to objective statistical measurements as technical approaches of risk assessment assume. Causal approaches miss that risks are social constructions, attributed in various, context-dependent ways to (characteristics and problems); those at greater risk of being in situations of exclusion and marginalization were defined as vulnerable (Busso, 2001)."

In Latin America indices of social vulnerability have been developed that refer to one way of perceiving human security. In Bolivia, for example, the index consisted of a simple average of various indicators referring to culture, habitat, housing, education, employment and political participation. In Ecuador a weighted sum was calculated for five aspects of risk: illiteracy in the adult population, infant malnutrition, poverty in

- (iv) An approach based on social vulnerability requires public policies that are: (i) dynamic, in the sense of being constantly in tune with the changing risks and requirements of modern life; (ii) diversified, integral and universal, so that they are appropriate to the nature of social risks, which are numerous, tend to accumulate and affect, to differing and complex degrees, all population groups; (iii) facilitating, with the objective of encouraging education and training of individuals to exercise their citizens' rights and to realize their aspirations; (iv) interconnected, as they must combine prevention, support and adaptation measures.
  
- (v) There are many sources of social vulnerability in Latin America and the Caribbean. One is the labour market, where risks manifest in increasingly precarious working conditions and the growing obstacles to creating productive and well-paid jobs (Stallings and Weller, 2001; Tokman, 2001; Ocampo, 2001b; ECLAC 2000a, 2000b and 2000c). Another source of uncertainty is income volatility (of countries, local communities and households) for which there are few remedies (Rodrik, 2001; Destremau and Salama, 2001) and some remedies, such as child labour, are even harmful in the long term. Social inequity in the distribution of assets is clearly a historical source of vulnerability for a large part of the population and one dramatic result of this is the high levels of poverty and inequality of income. The consequences of this relative lack of assets are felt throughout society, both in terms of the disenfranchisement of a significant proportion of the human resources, and in many internal tensions, which range from criminality to social disturbances (Klikberg, 1999). The weakening of institutions that historically provided support and represented

interests such as the family, the State, communities, political parties, trade unions and associations (ECLAC, 2000a; Filgueira, 1998) constitutes a risk, as it reduces the capacity for response; although the erosion of these institutions is not in itself a sign of definitive crisis, as there have been more traumatic changes in the course of history (and the adaptation process that followed has resulted in social progress), it does bring uncertainty with respect to the future and current shortages for which there are no alternative support agencies.

- (vi) Social vulnerability is not new; its current notoriety is due to the combination of emerging risks with the deterioration in historical forms of protection. While the idea of increasing social vulnerability is thought-provoking, it is virtually impossible to evaluate it in practice owing to the enormous variety of risks involved and the fact that some of them also offer various opportunities. Furthermore, there is no unanimous agreement that the available evidence confirms some of the signs of emerging vulnerability highlighted in the research. Thus, in Latin America and the Caribbean, social spending, which is an indicator of protection of public activity, increased in recent years (ECLAC, 2000a, p. 57); similarly, despite the crises that affect them, there are signs of a new valuation for the role of the family and communities.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, and taking into account these conclusions in the light of the basic analytical scheme of the components of social vulnerability, this notion may be understood as a combination of: (i) events, processes or characteristics which may pose obstacles to the exercise of the various kinds of citizens' rights<sup>19</sup> or the success of projects undertaken by communities, households and individuals;<sup>20</sup> (ii) the incapacity to respond to the materialization of these risks; and (iii) the inability to adapt to the consequences of the materialization of these risks.

### C. SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VULNERABILITY

Several of the approaches to social vulnerability take some sociodemographic variables into account in their conceptual design and in their empirical applications. Thus, in a study on Peru, Glewwe and Hall (1995) found that the households affected by a sharper drop in income or consumption during economic crises included those with a large number of children and hence a high demographic dependence ratio. Jiménez and Ruedi (1998), in research on the determining factors of economic inequality among households in Latin America, also found a close relationship between demographic dependence and the level of per capita income. Moser (1998) includes the work of household members among the assets of

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<sup>18</sup> A recent paper claims that "The 'high modernization' period in Latin America (1970-90) was broadly characterized by a weak civil society and the depoliticization of society... Yet the period of the 1970s and 1980s also oversaw the mobilization of diverse groups of Latin American society into social movements and other forms of collective political action. How can we explain the paradox of apparent depoliticization together with mass mobilization around an innovative set of political repertoires and new agendas?" (Radcliffe, 1999, p. 203).

<sup>19</sup> As suggested by Hopenhayn (2001, p. 118), expanding the original proposal of Marshall (Turner, 2002, pp. 189-190), these rights include civil, political, economic, social, cultural and republican rights.

<sup>20</sup> Socio-economic development for communities, ascending social mobility for households, satisfactory social integration for individuals.



the asset vulnerability framework, but maintains that mobilization is difficult when there is a high proportion of children or elderly people, who are unable to work or, if they do, face negative impacts in the medium term. Along the same lines, studies of Latin American households show that the average number of children in households of the poorest quintile is double that of the households of the richest quintile (ECLAC, 2001a, p.111).

In general, population may be regarded as an asset, depending on its structure, as individuals generate income if they enter the work force.<sup>21</sup> Moser (1998) adds that intrahousehold relations are an asset that depends on the structure, composition and cohesion of households; this implies recognizing a broader role for demographic variables in the configuration of social vulnerability. The emphasis on these variables is greater in the approach that considers assets and the structure of opportunities; Filgueira (1998) warns that the demographic transition and its method of socioeconomic dissemination originate in a scenario in which new risks —relating to progressive ageing of the population— are combined with other risks that existed previously, but are now stronger, such as the persistent threats facing children. He claims that these latter risks are now increasing because children are born in households less equipped to carry out basic functions, partly due to the fact that a larger number of families are incomplete, undermined by the weakening of marital ties, the increase in cohabitation and the absence of the father from the home (Filgueira, 1998, p. 130).<sup>22</sup> An empirical study on Uruguay adds two other sociodemographic factors which cause social vulnerability: socioeconomic residential segregation in the cities and adolescent fertility (Kaztman, 2001 and Kaztman and others, 1999a).

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<sup>21</sup> This reasoning is valid at the domestic scale, as "when the occupational income of the main breadwinner is inadequate, increasing occupational density is usually an effective way for a household to avoid or reduce the severity of poverty or to improve its prospects of social mobility" (ECLAC, 2000a, p. 85). It is also valid at the scale of communities, especially if a low ratio of demographic dependence opens a window of opportunity to take advantage of the relatively large proportion of potential producers (ECLAC, 2000b; IDB, 2000b; Chackiel, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> "The combined effects of increased divorce rates, postponement of marriage, teenage pregnancy, single mothers, single-parent households, together with longer life expectancy have challenged the security traditionally provided by the family" (Filgueira, 1998, p. 130).

## 1. Sociodemographic vulnerability: recent approaches and a working concept

In the past few years research projects have been carried out that are devoted specifically to the study of sociodemographic vulnerability. One of them uses an approach based on the accumulation of social disadvantages to identify the sociodemographic features which have adverse effects on the social and domestic performance of households (Rodríguez, 2000). Although some of these features, such as high fertility and the high demographic dependence ratio, were observed in previous studies of the demographic dynamics of poverty, their joint analysis goes beyond the traditional view, as they have to be related to the budgetary and time restrictions inherent in an age composition with a high demographic dependence ratio, at stages of the life cycle when accumulation is difficult (for example, households headed by very young or elderly persons), and the instability and fragility of unions which, as well as involving gender biases, is an attack on development and damages the process of bringing up children. The combination of these sociodemographic risks gives rise to obvious disadvantages, and as such risks are understood to involve potential hardships, generate a situation of sociodemographic vulnerability for households; moreover, they may also erode the response and adaptation capacity of households in the face of external socioeconomic shocks. Sometimes it is a very narrow line that divides the components of the analytical scheme (risk, response and adaptability) and hence the analysis should be cautious, but this illustrates the quantity of issues which may be interpreted using an approach based on vulnerability.<sup>23</sup>

Another line of research on sociodemographic vulnerability has been followed by the National Population Council (CONAPO) of Mexico, which deals simultaneously with various aspects (income, assets, exposure to environmental damage, lags in relation to reproductive health and location in marginalized areas) and their relationship to population variables. The risks examined include a high level of early fertility, a high demographic dependence ratio in households, the break-up of unions and dispersion and isolation of towns (CONAPO, 2001, pp. 219-226). Also, a conceptual link is postulated between social vulnerability, the phase of life and the demographic transition, for which some specific indicators are used (see box I.3).

Taking advantage of the contributions of the two lines of research referred to, the concept of sociodemographic vulnerability used below is analogous to that of social vulnerability (equation [2], presented at the beginning of this chapter) and sociodemographic vulnerability is understood as a dynamic situation which is affected by: (i) sociodemographic risks, which are events, processes or characteristics that make it difficult to carry out community, domestic or individual projects or are limitations on rights; deficiencies in the capacity to take on such risks; and (iii) a lack of ability to adapt actively to them.<sup>24</sup> This operational concept guides the empirical analysis, whose objective is to identify sociodemographic risks and their probable future scenarios, as well as specifying the factors that undermine the response capacity and adaptation abilities in relation to such risks. Although the three components referred to are equally important, only the first (risks) can be described exclusively in terms of population variables, for which

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<sup>23</sup> This research includes an index of sociodemographic vulnerability, and the results, which are consistent with the approach of accumulation of social disadvantages, illustrate the methodological difficulties of measurement.

<sup>24</sup> A vision based on opportunities, which is complementary to the approach based on vulnerability, can show that sociodemographic events, characteristics and processes also generate potential —use of which usually depends on the dynamics and policies in other social areas— favour the exercise of citizens' rights and, to some degree, constitute assets for the different reference units (Rodríguez, 2001c; IDB, 2000b; CELADE/IDB, 1996; ECLAC/CELADE, 1995, 1996). In view of this intrinsic ambivalence in population variables, this document focuses on demographic risks and not on opportunities.

reference is made to three long-term demographic processes; the other two components of vulnerability are contingent with and depend on essentially social factors.

Box I.3

**SOCIAL VULNERABILITY, PHASE OF LIFE AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION:  
AN APPLICATION IN MEXICO**

In an analysis of sociodemographic vulnerability, the National Population Council of Mexico (CONAPO) considers three central elements: (i) the phase of life of men and women, which consists of phases with specific vulnerabilities, such as infancy, adolescence, youth, the reproduction and labour phase, and old age; (ii) the basic rights that should be protected during each of these phases; and (iii) the stage of demographic transition. These three elements are used as a reference to propose four indicators of social vulnerability relating to phases of the life cycle. First, there are the socioeconomic conditions associated with children's health problems, including an excessive mortality level in infancy; these conditions include a low level of education of the mother (less than secondary level) and residence in homes with earth floors and a lack of potable water. Secondly there is a lack of compliance with a right that results in a severely debilitating social situation that affects children and young people: absence from school or dropping out. Thirdly, there is unprotected labour, without a contract that ensures respect for basic rights, including health and pension contributions, holidays, and institutional benefits. Lastly, there is the lack of institutional social security for the elderly, who are usually included in family households which at least provide them with some degree of protection.

**Source:** National Population Council of Mexico (CONAPO) *La población de México en el nuevo siglo*, Mexico City, 2001, pp. 213-229.

## 2. Long-term sociodemographic processes

In general, the treatment of sociodemographic risks in analyses of social vulnerability is limited in terms of the range of population variables considered and the comparative advantages of demography with regard to prediction are not taken into account (see box I.4). Experience shows that the basic processes of change in population take place over relatively extensive periods of time (even centuries) and that they have the special feature of beginning in some areas of the world and then disseminating, in a slow and specific way, around the globe. These changes are similar to the "long-term historical processes" identified by Braudel (1978); they are not "laws" —as nothing guarantees that they will reach the whole of humanity, or that their possible dissemination will follow a common pattern— but are probable changes. Each one of these processes models sociodemographic risk profiles that are relevant for communities, households, and individuals.

With regard to population, the model for the long-term processes is the demographic transition, the central element of which is a sustained decline in birth and death rates. This transition is reflected in the growth rate, which shows an initial acceleration —mortality tends to fall earlier and more rapidly than birth rates— and a subsequent slow return to lower levels. It also affects the structure of the population, with an initial rejuvenation followed by an increase in the intermediate ages, to conclude with an increase in the proportion of elderly persons. Around this pattern, the historical processes of demographic transition differ significantly in aspects as important as the time of onset, the rapidity of change, initial and final levels of fertility and mortality, the role of the variables involved, such as nuptiality or epidemiology, and the methods

of dissemination within the social structure (Hill, Morelos and Wong, 1999; Kirk, 1996; Zavala de Cosío, 1992; Coale, 1977) (see box I.5).

Box I.4

**PREVENTIVE CAPACITY OF DEMOGRAPHY**

One aspect of demography is that it can be used to make reliable projections of population changes in the long term, over periods of 50 years or more. In economics, in contrast, past history can be used to predict probable behaviour only over very short periods of time; in the latter discipline, the long term is restricted to about five years, as many variables go through stochastic oscillations, which may cause changes over periods of less than one year, or even of several days.

The choice of hypothesis is a key factor in developing reliable population projections. The most important decisions relate to the selection of appropriate fertility rates and mortality tables, and the forecast of migratory movements; however, owing to a lack of knowledge, the main inputs that are used at present refer to fertility and mortality, as migratory movements tend to be relegated to the category of correction factors. There are at least two reasons why fertility and mortality predictions may be more accurate than those for migration. The first is that age pyramids show the potential growth of a population: when there is a wide base, as in sub-Saharan Africa, the population may be assumed to have a high growth potential; on the other hand, a narrow base, as in Europe, indicates the reverse, implying possible negative growth. The second reason is that the evidence accumulated over centuries of research suggests that, in general, neither fertility nor mortality rates experience abrupt changes.

Despite the greater safety margin for population projections, they are exposed to random and unpredictable changes. Human history has included situations of war and natural catastrophes that have substantially modified any demographic projection made (for example, the millions of deaths in the two world wars, or, more recently, the large-scale massacres that took place in Ruanda). There have also been substantial migration movements, fertility explosions, such as the baby boom after the second world war, and the decline in the 1970s. All of these factors are the weak point of demographic projections, as they cannot be predicted by any theory of population growth.

The first demographic projections were not based on the use of explicit hypotheses. On the premise that populations followed a pattern of growth according to precise laws, it was believed that the population could be estimated for a future moment in time merely by measuring the current growth rate, and then applying it over the necessary period. Malthus, in his *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) suggested that population grew at a geometric rate. Later, in the nineteenth century, Quêtelet, and then Verhulst, replaced the law of geometric growth with one of logistical growth, according to which the growth rate diminished proportionally with the size of the population. One significant task for the demographer is to anticipate changes in the factors that directly determine growth. This is done by means of observation of extensive past series to extract trends that are then extrapolated. It is not an infallible method, but there is a second method that is usually used to correct the results of the first, which consists of looking for reference populations that have followed a development similar to what is expected for the population being studied.

Taking all of these factors into account, demography is a discipline that can be used to make very reliable projections for periods of between 5 and 10 years, reasonable ones for between 25 and 40 years, and not entirely unrealistic ones for a period of 100 years.

**Source:** Based on J. Vallin, "La Demografía", series E, No. 41 (LC/DEM/G.147), Santiago, Chile, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 199, pp. 131-139.



## Box I.5

**THE DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION: APPLICABILITY, GENERAL FEATURES AND SPECIFIC ASPECTS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

The core of the classical model of demographic transition, which is a sustained decline in fertility and mortality, is applicable to Latin America and the Caribbean; the region's development is linked to a set of socioeconomic and value changes (urbanization, secularization, wage labour and an instrumental rationale), which can be described generically by the term "modernization" (CELADE, 1995). Beyond this general vision, however, the demographic transition has specific features in the countries of the region. Some of them are clearly demographic and are related to the time at which the process begins, its speed, the high initial fertility levels and the widespread nature of the marital union. Other specific features are socioeconomic in nature. The European transition, and in general that of the industrialized countries, developed together with a structural socioeconomic change which in the long term generated an increase, not exempt from fluctuations, in the standard of living and economic activity; the positive interaction of the two processes provided those countries not only with sufficient time to adapt their structures and institutions to the emerging demographic scenarios, which could be predicted beforehand (apart from exceptions, such as the "baby boom" or post-war surge in the birth rate), but also resources to deal with the new challenges caused by the demographic change (Hill, Morelos and Wong, 1999; Kirk, 1996; Livi-Bacci, 1994; Vallin, 1994). In Latin America and the Caribbean the process was much more rapid, as various countries experienced a true demographic revolution in just 30 years, with the consequent shortage of time to introduce socioeconomic and institutional adjustments to match the emerging demographic dynamic. In addition, the manifest asymmetry between the rapidity of demographic change and the slower and more volatile pace of socioeconomic development makes it likely that the region will become the first in the world with a basic demographic dynamic (fertility and mortality rates) of a developed country and the standards of living and level of economic activity of a developing country. This is a cause for concern, as for a certain period of time (and various countries are already at this stage) the specific needs must be met of the earlier stages of the transition, such as steady growth in the working age population (ECLAC, 2000b; CELADE/IDB, 1996), and those of the advanced stage, such as ageing of the population.

Although these particular features separate the Latin American and Caribbean experience from the classical model, especially the European one, they also make it similar to other recent demographic transition processes, such as those occurring in South-East Asia (IDB, 2000b; Tabah, 1989), where since the mid-1950s there have been drastic declines in fertility, even more intense than in Latin America and the Caribbean. On the whole, an in-depth review could identify various differences between the latter two regions, such as the pre-transitional fertility levels, synchrony between the demographic transition and economic development and the degree of social heterogeneity. In the countries of South-East Asia it is clear that there are no fertility floors (United Nations, 2000). Its transition process, as well taking place in conjunction with accelerated economic growth and an improvement in living conditions, contributed decisively to socioeconomic development (McGuire, 2001; IDB, 2000b), so that these countries are better prepared for the challenges of the post-transition period, in particular to meet the growing needs of the elderly. Finally, experience shows that in Latin America and the Caribbean, the differences between socioeconomic segments within countries have increased and are persisting. Although some countries have had success in reducing demographic inequalities among socioeconomic groups, in many the inequities with regard to income have remained, or are becoming more acute.

**Source:** J. McGuire, "Social policy and mortality decline in east Asia and Latin America", *World Development*, vol. 29, No. 10, 2001; Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), *Desarrollo más allá de la economía. Progreso económico y social en América Latina. Informe 2000*, Washington, D.C., 2000; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) *Equity, development and citizenship (LC/G.2071(SES.28/3))*, Santiago de Chile, 2000; United Nations, "World Population Monitoring" (ESA/P/WP.159), New York, United Nations Population Division, draft version, 2000; K. Hill, J. Morelos and R. Wong (coords.), *Las consecuencias de las transiciones demográfica y epidemiológica en América Latina: memoria del seminario internacional*, Mexico City, El Colegio de México, 1999; D. Kirk, "The demographic transition" *Population Studies* vol. 50 No. 3 London 1996; Latin American Demographic Centre/Inter-



In view of its importance, the path of demographic transition tends to be the only long-term process that is included in population and development analyses, which causes two problems; the first is that the theory of demographic transition rests on the premise that populations go from a stage of equilibrium between high levels of fertility and mortality and low demographic growth to another stage at which the reduced levels of both variables also result in low growth (United Nations, 2000; Kirk, 1996; Vallin, 1994, p. 146). This implies that there are fertility floors, as otherwise the population would continue to decline and the equilibrium would be lost: "...transition theory sets a limit on the decline in fertility (2.05 children per woman)" (Vallin, 1994, p. 149).<sup>25</sup> In this scenario, it is frequently supposed that the demographic risks will disappear as the transition progresses, which seems to contradict the historical evidence. The second problem is that exclusive concentration of analytical efforts on the "classical" demographic transition means omitting a review of two other long-term demographic processes that have a decisive impact on the configuration of sources of social vulnerability: the urban and mobility transition, and the second demographic transition.

In its most basic form, the central element of the urban transition is a sustained increase in the percentage of the urban population and demographic lethargy in rural areas, which is accompanied by a change in the national mobility patterns in favour of transfers between cities and moves within metropolitan areas. This transition is usually associated with the establishment of a new pattern of international migration, consisting of flows which are mainly directed from poor countries to rich ones, and which face antagonistic forces, as the greater facility of movements is set against growing regulatory restrictions in the destination countries (ECLAC, 2002). Some authors have developed urban transition models using a logic similar to that of the demographic transition (see box I.6), and others have emphasized the synergies between the two processes.

Box I.6

**THE URBAN AND MOBILITY TRANSITION**

In 1971, the United States geographer Wilburg Zelinsky introduced the idea of the mobility transition, a concept that is highly interactive with the process of urbanization. According to this approach, the direction and magnitude of migration flows take on different characteristics in each of the five stages of development of the societies that the author considers. In pre-modern traditional societies there is little real migration, as mobility is related to land-use practices, trade rules, customs for social visits and religious rituals. In societies in the initial stage of transition there is mass migration from the country to the cities and to new settlement areas; there is also a higher level of international migration and the significance of various national mobility circuits increases. In societies at an advanced stage of transition, migration to the cities increases, as well as the mobility circuits between urban areas. In advanced societies migration to the cities is reduced, both in relative and absolute terms, high levels of interurban exchanges are generated, international migration from poor countries to rich ones increases, international circulation of qualified workers begins and movements to new settlement areas reduce drastically. Finally, in future super-advanced societies, the rate of migration involving a change of residence decelerates, but inter-urban mobility increases and there is strict control of international migration, although international circulation is on the ascent.

**Source:** W. Zelinsky, "The hypothesis of the mobility transition", *Geographical Review*, No. 61, 1971.

<sup>25</sup> Not all the experts agree with the implicit assumption of homeostasis in the theory or with the supposed fertility floors (United Nations, 2000, pp. 13-16; Demeny, 2001).





The expression "second demographic transition", coined in 1986 by the European demographers Ron Lesthaeghe and Dirk van de Kaa, describes a set of changes in marital and reproductive conduct that have taken place in the countries of Western Europe since the 1960s. This transition, in addition to bringing fertility indices much lower than the replacement level, which some researchers perceive as features of the posttransitional stage of the classical demographic transition, consists of an increase in the proportion of unmarried people, delayed marriage, postponement of the first child, an increase in consensual unions and births outside of marriage, a greater frequency of marital breakdowns and diversification of family structures. According to Lesthaeghe (1998) and van de Kaa (1987), these changes reflect a profound cultural transformation, together with the model of late modernity proposed by Giddens (1998, 1997b and 1997c), in which individuality plays a central role, there is reflexivity in all spheres of life and the implementation of personal projects meets new options and requirements; van de Kaa, however, postulates that the basis of the second transition is post-modern values (see box I.7). Beyond the conceptual differences, various elements bring together the different viewpoints as to the material and symbolic basis on which the second demographic transition rests; they include the growing pre-eminence of the self-centred individual, a cultural figure which, in the long term, will tend to spread from the countries of Western Europe to the rest of the globe, thus helping to disseminate this second demographic transition.

Using these three long-term processes as analytical tools, different theoretical and stylized scenarios may be distinguished in relation to sociodemographic risk, some of them diachronic, that can be used to organize this presentation (see figure I.2). Thus, the following chapters deal with the risks inherent in the delay in the classical demographic transition and those associated with adolescent fertility, the control of reproductive behaviour (especially the imbalance between wishes and reproductive experience), the changes in the age structure caused by demographic oscillations and ageing, and the morbidity and mortality profile. They also consider the risks inherent in increasing urbanization —with particular reference to residential segregation— and to international migration. Lastly, some risks are identified which are linked to the degree of progress in the second demographic transition. In each of the processes an effort is made to distinguish between traditional risks —such as those relating to the transitional delay— and emerging ones —such as those brought by ageing. Identification of risks and their development refers to communities, households and persons in Latin America and the Caribbean, and their consideration includes consideration of the capacities for response and adaptation abilities.

The link between sociodemographic and social vulnerability is based on previous studies that emphasize the difficulties posed by sociodemographic events, characteristics or processes (risks) for the exercise of rights or the development of the life cycle of the reference units. Another connection arises from the review of the response capacity and adaptability of those units; the analysis attempts to find out which communities, households and persons are most affected by sociodemographic risks and investigates possible processes of accumulation of disadvantages that could threaten their response capacity or lead to harmful adaptation processes in the long term. Although this approach to sociodemographic vulnerability is similar to that used in studies on the demographic dynamics of poverty, it is different in that it considers risks that are not exclusive to the situation of poverty and investigates topics (response capacity and adaptability) that do not depend only on socioeconomic position. In the chapter on policies, this approach will be expressed in its full complexity in order to present a range of options for intervention that are rarely included in studies on the interconnections of population and development.

## Box I.7

**SECOND DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION, MODERNITY AND POST-MODERNITY**

The theory of the existence of a second demographic transition began to be developed at the end of the 1980s, when van de Kaa and Lesthaeghe drew attention to the coincidence of two phenomena: (i) the consolidation of a reproductive pattern that is below the replacement level, which breaks with the homeostatic assumption inherent in the demographic transition, which would be long-term equilibrium in a stationary population; (ii) the increasing postponement of marriage and the first child, significant indications of the erosion of the marital institution, due both to the fact that cohabitation is becoming a general and permanent alternative to the formal marital union and to the ever-increasing fragility of formal unions, as indicated by the increase in divorce rates.

This second demographic transition is essentially cultural. Although it may be thought that this implies individual behaviour and decisions that are taken in relation to socioculturally constituted normative frameworks, that also occurs in the case of the classical demographic transition. The cultural essence of this second transition must be found, rather, in determining factors that are mainly based on the level of value changes. On the whole, these determining elements have a material basis, which, as claimed by Lesthaeghe, "explanations solely relying on either the ideational changes or on structural economic factors are non-redundant, yet insufficient" (van de Kaa, 2001, p. 301). But the material basis is not restricted to the functioning of the economy and society, but rather relates to technology. The "contraceptive revolution", one of the pillars of which is the mass availability of more efficient methods of avoiding pregnancy, considerably increased the range of demographic options for successive cohorts from the 1960s onwards, but these options developed within a profound cultural transformation with regard to sexual and reproductive matters. The feedback between technological change and cultural change managed to bring about a situation where an area as essentially intimate as reproduction is increasingly subject to the control of individuals.

Despite the significance of its socioeconomic and technological bases, the second demographic transition is based on a definite cultural pattern. Van de Kaa (2001) described it as a result of the consolidation of post-modern values together with post-materialist values. With the progress of modernization, "materialist" priorities such as survival and economic achievement are giving place to other values that are post-materialist, such as quality of life; this is possible to the extent that the first needs are satisfied, as post-materialist values emphasize the personal choice of lifestyle and free expression of individuality (Inglehart, 1998). Although they probably come from different conceptual viewpoints, these proposals concerning post-modernity and post-materialism share many elements of Giddens' premises on late modernity, which emphasizes the importance of individual reflexivity, personal choice, life project and lifestyle in an advanced stage of modernity (Giddens, 1998, 1997b and 1997c). The cultural links that these discourses on modernity seem to come close to are: the obligation of permanent individual choices, the self-centred and reflexive individual and the acceptance of diversity.

Even when the theoretical development relating to the second transition remains open, some researchers propose quite firm ideas on what can be done and expected; van de Kaa, in particular, considers that if adequately defined, the concept of a post-modern value framework offers a solid foundation for conceptual investigation: "The change in value orientations involved is well documented in the shift towards postmaterialism and, one must assume, in the postulated broader shift toward postmodernity. The demographic patterns resulting from the second demographic transition, I should like to argue, have to reflect the advent of the postmodern era." (van de Kaa, 2001, p. 302). Further, he postulates a general outline for progress in the second demographic transition similar to that of the dissemination capacity of the classical demographic transition: "As societies develop, the classic demographic transition will inevitably follow. At an



Figure I.2  
**THREE LONG-TERM DEMOGRAPHIC PROCESSES:  
 SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC RISK SCENARIOS**

**SCENARIO 1**

**DEMOGRAPHIC DYNAMICS OF UNDER-DEVELOPMENT: THE SITUATION IN THE REGION UP TO THE BEGINNING OF THE 1970s**

<b>LONG-TERM PROCESSES</b>	<b>CLASSICAL DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION</b>	<b>URBAN AND MOBILITY TRANSITION</b>	<b>SECOND DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION</b>
BASIC FEATURES	High and early fertility Accelerated population growth Age structure with high level of child dependence	Accelerated urbanization Migration from the country to the city International immigration and intraregional migration	Does not exist
COMMUNITIES Aggregate trends	Significant life uncertainties Growing pressure on the resource base Concentration on requirements for raising children	Unsustainable urban expansion Complex integration of rural migrants Rural dispersion	Does not exist
HOUSEHOLDS Structure and life cycle	Most of resources and time needed for raising children	Urban expansion owing to the arrival of migrants from the country Diseconomies of scale, overcrowding, internal conflicts Loss of members of productive age in rural households Rural dispersion	Does not exist
PERSONS Decisions Behaviours Unexpected events Standards and attitudes	Less time for accumulation of assets and human capital owing to high morbidity rate Incompatibilities between raising children and education of parents Concentration of domestic burden on women	Exclusion and discrimination against rural migrants "Short-sighted" migration Rural dispersion	Does not exist

**SCENARIO 2**  
**DEMOGRAPHIC DYNAMICS OF DEVELOPMENT WITH SOCIOECONOMIC SUB -DEVELOPMENT: THE REGIONAL FUTURE?**

<b>LONG-TERM PROCESSES</b>	<b>CLASSICAL DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION</b>	<b>URBAN AND MOBILITY TRANSITION</b>	<b>SECOND DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION</b>
BASIC FEATURES	Low fertility and mortality Slow growth Older age structure	High urban percentage Slow rate of urbanization Migration between and within cities Growing international emigration to developed countries	Fertility levels below the replacement level Increase in proportion of single people and delayed marriage Postponement of first child Increase in consensual unions and births outside of marriage Higher frequency of marital breakdowns Diversification of family structures
COMMUNITIES Aggregate trends	Ageing, which implies: Demand for complex and expensive health services Social security needs Intergenerational conflicts Institutional imbalances Socioeconomic and cultural rigidity	Not predicted by the theory	Declining population: Questions about under-use of production capacity and scarcity of labour Institutional imbalances Increase in transaction costs (divorce) Erosion of the family, the key social institution for socialization and training of human resources
HOUSEHOLDS Structure and life cycle	Ageing, which implies: Loss of assets owing to reduced income and additional costs Dependence on external support Intra-family conflicts	Not predicted by the theory	Family breakdowns and associated socioeconomic and psychological costs Extension of the period of dependence of young people Fragility and instability of unions One-parent families and associated difficulties in raising children
PERSONS Decisions Behaviour Unexpected events	Ageing, which implies: Illness and handicaps Dependence Lack of definition of roles	Not predicted by the theory	The problem of feeling: Ontological uncertainty Erosion of key anchors, such as children

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Standards and attitudes	Exclusion from decision making		Dilution of resources and networks on account of divorce
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**SCENARIO 3****CONFLUENCE OF TRANSITIONS: THE CURRENT REGIONAL SCENARIO**

<b>LONG-TERM PROCESSES</b>	<b>CLASSICAL DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION</b>	<b>URBAN AND MOBILITY TRANSITION</b>	<b>SECOND DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION</b>
BASIC FEATURES	Fluctuations of cohorts Uncertainty as to the convergence of fertility and mortality, and fertility timing Adolescent fertility Discrepancies between desired and observed fertility	High urban percentage Slow urbanization Migration between and within cities Growing international emigration to developed countries	Lag in the management of reproductive behaviours Out-of-date institutional structure in view of denial of new patterns of behaviour (sexual behaviour and fertility control, cohabiting, divorce)
COMMUNITIES Aggregate trends	Fluctuations that bring generation conflicts, co-existence of sectoral demands and "social problems" associated with relative size of age groups (adolescence and youth: criminality) Persistence of gaps that contribute to reproducing social and gender inequities Morbidity and mortality not linked to ageing is resistant to change: violence, accidents, and some sexually transmitted diseases Adolescent fertility resistant to change: loss of human resources (parents), services and support needs and low education potential (sons/daughters) Desired fertility: questioning of basic rights	Persistent rural dispersion Rural depopulation and ageing "Urban problems" Intrametropolitan mobility stimulates residential segregation and horizontal expansion Loss of qualified human resources because of international emigration Dependence on foreign currency from remittances	Limitation for training of human resources Corruption, use of legal devices or informal mechanisms (sometimes risky or illegal) to "resolve" issues for which the current institutional framework has no response (access to reproductive health for adolescents, divorce, children outside marriage) Emerging processes of inequity of opportunity; those who do not control their reproductive behaviour, those who are deprived of their rights for being born outside of marriage
HOUSEHOLDS Structure and life cycle	Persistence of excess fertility and mortality Pressure on the family budget on account of adolescent pregnancies Establishment of precarious households because of adolescent pregnancy Conflicts between partners	Rural dispersion Dependence on remittances Segregation Family separation owing to international emigration	Intergenerational conflicts within families Institutional discrimination
PERSONS Decisions Behaviours Unexpected events	High fertility is an obstacle to asset accumulation Adolescent fertility shortens educational process	Discrimination, exclusion and lack of defence of international migrants	Obstacles to implementing personal projects Social and economic discrimination owing to



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Standards and attitudes	Undesired fertility frustrates aspirations		institutional rigidity Cognitive dissonance owing to contradictory messages
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**Source:** Population Division of ECLAC - Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE).



## V. SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VULNERABILITY POLICY OPTIONS

### A. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

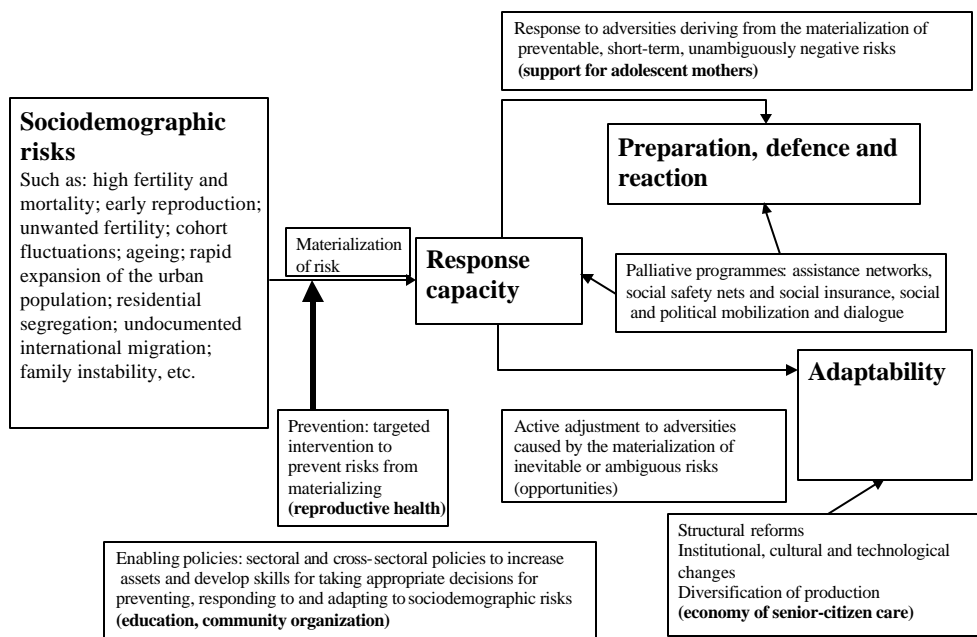
How can communities, households and individuals deal with sociodemographic vulnerability? First, it is necessary to be aware that it exists, that current demographic trends do not eliminate but only alter it, and that it is important because it limits people's ability to exercise their rights and constrains the pursuit of collective, household and individual endeavours. Second, it must be understood that the long time horizon of demographic processes makes it possible to anticipate future scenarios with a greater degree of precision than in other social sciences. In turn, this facilitates and encourages early interventions designed to prevent adversities from worsening. For this reason, decision-makers must be made aware of the benefits of taking proper advantage of the long-term nature of these phenomena because—inertia being a major component of some demographic risks—failure to act early will mean that much larger efforts will need to be deployed in the future. Third, a number of the measures that can be taken to reduce sociodemographic vulnerability can result in gains for all the actors involved (win-win policies), although part of these dividends may be contingent upon the simultaneous effects of other policies. Fourth, there are three fronts on which measures can be deployed (see figure V.1): prevention, or averting the materialization of the risk; strengthening of response capacity, which refers to the ability to react once the adverse effects of the risk have manifested themselves; and enhancement of active adaptability, which consists of making endogenous changes to adapt to the scenario generated by the materialization of the risk.<sup>1</sup>

There is a repertory of preventive policies and the choice depends, among other factors, on the nature of the sociodemographic risk. It is possible to strengthen the actors' capacity to respond to the adverse consequences caused by the materialization of the risk by means of anticipatory policies, palliative measures and defensive strategies, which may or may not be publicly assisted. Enhancing adaptability requires an initial assessment of the nature of the risk. If the risk is judged avoidable, adaptation would, in principle, be counterproductive. If not, a course of action would be to develop policies, incentives, regulatory frameworks, awareness-raising measures and institutional and legal reforms intended to remodel community, household or individual behaviour patterns in order to align them with the risks. Successful adaptation implies achieving an improvement on the previously existing state.

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter focuses on the fourth point. The distinction between prevention, reaction/defence and adaptation is an analytical one, because although all are modes of response, they differ in forms of action and outcomes.

Figure V.1  
**SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VULNERABILITY: BASIC ANALYTICAL SCHEME AND  
 POLICY OPTIONS**



## B. BASES OF POLICIES TO COMBAT SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VULNERABILITY

Until the 1990s, population and development policies were based on the evaluation of the objective effects of sociodemographic variables on the evolution and living conditions of communities, households and individuals. If a set of sociodemographic features and trends obstructed the development of communities, the wellbeing of households and the social advancement of individuals, then it would be “objectively” beneficial to change them. This view gave rise to preventive policies geared towards averting risks and trends that were perceived as obstacles, particularly those which appeared to encumber the development of national communities. In consequence, an emphasis came to be placed on rapid population growth as a barrier to economic and social progress in poor countries. Policies took on an openly macrosocial bias (aggregate relationships between population variables and processes of socioeconomic development), and often specified quantitative demographic targets.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Mexico is a typical case. The enactment of the General Population Law in 1973 (www.cddhcu.gob.mx/leyinfo) was followed, in 1977, by the National and Regional Demographic Policy, 1978-1982,

This line of argument was based on the twofold supposition that experts were able to identify precisely those sociodemographic trends that were obstructing development, and that the social players were aware of them. The initiatives designed by the experts and the images and aspirations of the actors were therefore judged to coincide. Another supposition was that the removal of sociodemographic obstacles would raise living conditions for communities, households and individuals in a virtually direct and inevitable manner. These premises had their limitations, however. First, there was lengthy debate among experts on how to identify those demographic features or processes that were “obstructing” development. Second, once the first measures geared specifically towards altering demographic behaviour had been prepared, it became clear that their proposed objectives were not based on the perceptions and expectations of the population. What is more, it was concluded that the aspirations of individuals in their natural state did not constitute a solid basis for government intervention, and that *raison d'état* should prevail over the rationale of the people; thus what is known as the “isolation paradox” and, in particular, its negative externalities,<sup>3</sup> were brandied as a basis for government intervention in birth control, even in the absence of explicit wishes of the population in this regard. Lastly, the regional experience has also made it clear that there are no demographic solutions to problems of development, wellbeing, poverty and social mobility. Although sociodemographic changes in the last 30 years have coincided with the objectives sought by policy-makers and have, in general, been welcomed by the actors —albeit a case of inducement to some extent— they have not proven to be the key to the sustained improvement of economies and societies.

In the light of this, it should come as no surprise that the 1990s produced a strategic change in the basis of sociodemographic policies. Without prejudice to the relevance and validity of the previous approach, this new line of thinking focused on rights as the ultimate justification for any intervention in the field of population and development. By contrast with the macrosocial bias of previous population policies, the new approach “emphasizes the integral linkages between population and development and focuses on meeting the needs of individual women and men, rather than on achieving demographic targets” (United Nations, 1995, p. 1). Another important aspect of this new approach is its indissoluble link with the empowerment of women, which represents a break with the classic debate over which comes first, development or fertility control. The improvement of women’s status is a matter that cannot wait for development to expand (or trickle down), but must be advanced immediately. This makes it necessary to foster demographic changes fairly independently of the progress of socioeconomic development.

Although the invocation of the rights of individuals and couples is not new (Singh, 1998), its pre-eminence suggests that policies intended to combat sociodemographic vulnerability should focus on the relative risks of disregard for the basic rights of individuals. In the sociodemographic field these range widely, from the right to life and health (avoidable mortality) to the right to move freely through the national territory and across its borders, passing through sexual and reproductive rights. The primacy afforded to rights, which in principle come before the objective consequences of behaviour patterns, does

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which set explicit targets for the period 1978-2000. The natural annual rate of growth of the population was to decline gradually, to 2.5% in 1982, 1.9% in 1988 and 1.4% in 1994, in order to reach 1% in 2000. Federal agencies were also set targets in line with the national ones (CONAPO, undated, p. 75).

<sup>3</sup> This argument is still used today, ironically enough, to justify pronatalist measures: “Parental decisions on the number of children they have may have results in positive aggregate growth that is socially too high, or negative growth that is recognized as socially harmful” (Demeny, 2001, pp. 23-32).

not release the State from responsibility. Quite the opposite, as State involvement is crucial in the assurance of demographic rights and, although the State should not impose models of behaviour, it can encourage those considered beneficial and can take action in the event of conflicts of rights between individuals or among individuals, households and communities.

The fact that policies to combat sociodemographic vulnerability have a right-based rationale gives them legitimacy, because they effectively become a channel for the realization of mandates reached by consensus within the national or international community. Nonetheless, the scope of the rights approach is an insufficient basis for all measures to combat sociodemographic vulnerability, because not all sociodemographic risks stem from disregard for or infringement of rights. Some derive from the dynamics of population on an aggregate scale which escape the real and debated status of the rights of individuals, households and communities. Other sociodemographic risks even grow out of progress in the observance of certain rights; examples are rights associated with longer life spans and ageing and the right to free decision on reproductive matters, which can lead to a free fall in fertility rates.

Although the rights approach has huge moral substance, its weaknesses vis-à-vis implementation can consign it a declaratory role, unable to mobilize actors or generate incentives for changing structures or behaviour patterns. In addition, conflicts between public and private (community and individual) interests and rights cannot always be resolved by appealing to the pre-eminence of individual rights. Under certain circumstances, constraints on the rights of the individual can even attract social and institutional approval; apart from the exceptional situations provided for in national legislation, such restrictions can be justified on the basis of the individual good (in the case of conduct that is harmful to the individual) or the common good (conduct that undermines the rights or wellbeing of other individuals). Lastly, with respect to a number of sociodemographic risks, intervention means discouraging certain patterns of conduct, and this requires the public authorities to follow a course of action that does not necessarily coincide with the wishes of individuals.

In short, policies to combat sociodemographic vulnerability are strongly based on the rights approach, insofar as consensus exists that no intervention may infringe the rights of individuals. In this regard, citizen participation is crucial for the promotion, design and implementation of policies. The rights of individuals are not the only rationale for such policies, however. Policy interventions continue to be steered by the aspiration to instigate demographic trends that can contribute to the sustainable and equitable development of communities, the wellbeing of households and the realization of individual endeavours. In the light of this, technical expertise is a basic requirement in order to identify the possible outcomes of different sociodemographic features or processes for communities, households and individuals. Expert research, citizen participation, institutional development and financial considerations are all of a piece with policy measures and, as well, serve to assess different types of sociodemographic risk and their foreseeable trends, determine the most appropriate technical means of dealing with them and make choices between preventive, reactive/defensive and adaptive measures. As a response mechanism, citizen participation may take several forms—from community solidarity networks to social mobilization—and it is also a tool for the defence of existing rights and the recognition of new ones. Institutional development facilitates the coordination of public policies and the adaptation of rules to emerging sociodemographic processes. Financial considerations are unavoidable in a field in which experience has demonstrated the high rate of social and private return on spending and in which, moreover, it is easy to fall into the trap of proclaiming rights without the material support to ensure their observance.



## C. PREVENTIVE MEASURES

### 1. Rationality, advantages and limitations of preventive measures

The prevention of sociodemographic risks consists of deploying efforts intended to avoid their becoming reality. This is the purpose of public policies —“any organized form of action aimed at achieving objectives of collective interest rather than being restricted to objectives of the State” (ECLAC, 2000b, p. 11)— or measures taken privately, by the community or autonomous non-governmental agencies. Policies are implemented through a number of mechanisms —laws, regulations, incentives, sectoral or multi-sectoral measures, investments, informative and educational campaigns— and their outcomes may be evaluated by means of different procedures. While the key parameter of this evaluation is a reduction in the relative frequency of the risk, the social distribution of that reduction and its costs are also relevant factors.

Prevention of the risks of sociodemographic vulnerability has at least two great merits. First, it generates a more secure and favourable environment for the actors, whose world thus becomes less threatening. Second, the social and economic costs involved are usually lower than those incurred by measures to mitigate or alter effects that have already materialized. Preventive action —which obviates the need for expenditure to respond or adapt to the materialization of adverse effects— enshrines major “forward economies”;<sup>4</sup> in consequence, there is a broad political and technical consensus that priority must be afforded to preventive policies in dealing with social and sociodemographic risks.

Prevention alone is not enough to deal with sociodemographic risks, however. One reason for this is that many occurrences are simply not preventable, either because they are stochastic events that cannot be modelled or foreseen on the basis of contemporary knowledge (such as economic cycles), or because they cannot be managed with the technological media currently available (such as many environmental and sanitary problems). Another reason is that the prevention of social risks is unlikely to eradicate them altogether, as the causal relationships in this regard are non-deterministic. Prevention, therefore, implies reducing the probability of the risk becoming reality or limiting the impact of its realization to a smaller number of reference units than would have been affected had no measures been taken.<sup>5</sup> The third reason is that social risks often contain some degree of ambiguity, as they combine potential threats and opportunities (such as globalization). In this case, generic preventive action is inappropriate, even if valid with respect to the most obvious potential threats.

### 2. Successes, controversies and requirements with regard to prevention of sociodemographic risks

Prevention has proved to be highly effective in dealing with a number of sociodemographic risks, notable examples being the prevention of high mortality, high fertility and, by extension, rapid population growth. This success must be measured in terms of the scope and promptness of the transformation, and by the

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<sup>4</sup> The advantages of preventive action is especially obvious in the area of health: “Preventive medicine is of inestimable value to the betterment of health which, in most cases, is appreciated only once it has been lost” (Filho, 1999, p. 161).

<sup>5</sup> For this reason, communities, households and individuals affected by the risk must react to defend themselves, which requires a different —no longer preventive— type of policies, interventions and actions.



fact that it took place in the context of economic crisis, changes in government and social disturbances. Unquestionably, this is no small merit in a region frequently beset by financial volatility and political instability and lacking institutional memory and a history of perseverance with public policies. In conclusion, it is feasible to implement preventive measures —which usually have a high rate of return.

Short of entering into a detailed description of prevention initiatives in Latin America and the Caribbean, it is possible to identify three different ways in which decisions and actions on the part of public and non-governmental actors are manifested. First, the preventive approach from the standpoint of the State which, undaunted in the face of opposition from interest groups, broadcasts clear messages regarding the consequences of individual decisions and conducts for individuals, households and communities. The most obvious example of the design and implementation of such a policy is Mexico, whose National Population Council (CONAPO) acts as the main agent of awareness-raising, institutional coordination, follow-up of targets and systematization of technical information in this regard. This does not mean, however, that such agencies have been the direct executors of the measures in question, since most of the principal efforts to prevent sociodemographic risks are conducted by other bodies, many of which are sectoral in nature (witness the influence of the health sector on the course of the demographic transition). The example of Mexico is not to suggest that the State's only option is to create a high-level governmental body formally commended with the responsibility. The purpose can also be achieved by means of a clear, consistent policy to orient the actors involved (whether public or otherwise), define technical and value criteria of measures and identify suitable incentives and activities to achieve its objectives.

The second way in which the decisions of the actors with regard to prevention are manifested is in the formulation of appropriate policies and priorities, based on budgetary exercises and encompassing sectoral measures and long-term programmes to create qualified human resources. The major efforts of the region's countries to reduce child mortality are an example of this. The acknowledged fruits of these efforts (ECLAC, 2001a) were built upon a vigorous and committed expansion of primary health care, with an emphasis on coverage for the poor and open and efficient targeting of resources on the mother-child binomial (see box V.1). Favourable influences also came from progress in other areas of social development, in particular from education. Programmes geared towards preventing HIV/AIDS contagion are another example of the importance, scope and advantages of prevention (see box V.2).

## Box V.1

**CHILD MORTALITY: THE IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL WILL  
AND ITS TRANSLATION INTO CONCRETE MEASURES**

A study on social policies and child mortality, which compares two experiences in East Asia (Republic of Korea and Taiwan, Province of China) and two in Latin America (Chile and Costa Rica), concludes that different strategies were responsible for the heavy decline in child mortality recorded in each region. In East Asia emphasis was afforded to a policy of “shared growth”, the key to which was a generalized socioeconomic upturn and the redistribution of land, human capital and well-paid jobs, while public investment in primary health care was fairly low. In the Latin American countries, by contrast, the welfare state was the predominant model. Governments provided direct public health services, greatly expanding primary health care coverage for the poor, even within a context of sharp and persistent social inequalities and high levels of poverty.

In the early twentieth century, Costa Rica and Chile had extremely high rates of child mortality, of at least 250 per thousand. In the 1940s these rates began to decline steadily, concomitantly with the implementation of social security and health schemes. Even so, both countries (especially Chile) continued to display surprisingly high rates until the 1960s. From then on, thanks to the extension of social security and primary health care to almost the entire population, the rate decreased rapidly. In Costa Rica a landmark came in 1973 with the creation of the rural health programme, which covered over 600,000 people living in small communities. In Chile, the consolidation of a broad network under the auspices of the National Health Service and the strengthening of mother and child programmes helped to reduce child mortality even in the context of very trying socioeconomic circumstances, such as the recessions of 1972-1976 and 1982-1984. In both countries the training of specialized human resources for the health sector was a key factor. In addition to the much wider supply of professionals and technicians, incentives were offered to work in rural areas and isolated communities, which directly benefited most of the inhabitants.

The examples of Chile and Costa Rica show that perseverance with the right policies can bring worthwhile achievements in human development, even when it is necessary to contend with low economic growth, sharp inequities in income distribution and high levels of poverty.

**Source:** J. McGuire, “Social policy and mortality decline in East Asia and Latin America”, *World Development*, vol. 29, No. 10, 2001.

The third way in which actors are able to manifest their preferences with regard to prevention is through the active and responsible intervention of civil society, non-governmental organizations and international agencies, which have woven a network of awareness-raising, promotion and assistance around specific and clearly delineated objectives. This network complements that of the public sector and, in some cases, surpasses it in quantity and quality (see box V.3).

## Box V.2

**PREVENTING AIDS IN THE REGION**

In 1994, the Brazilian Health Ministry's National Programme for Sexually Transmittable Diseases and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome launched Project SIDA (AIDS) I, within the framework of an agreement between the Brazilian government and the World Bank (Cohen and others, 2001). In the area of prevention, the Programme targets broad specific population groups, including the rural population, workers, homosexuals, convicts, indigenous people, women, young people, children and users of injectable drugs. Thanks to the programme, these groups have developed a greater awareness of the illness and its modes of transmission. Safe sex practices have also been widely introduced, with a high rate of condom use recorded among both heterosexuals and homosexuals. The programme has been crucial to slowing the rapid expansion of the disease observed among young Brazilians in the early 1990s.

In Mexico, the National Centre for the Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS (CENSIDA), which reports to the Ministry of Health, undertakes intensive dissemination of information and educational material about AIDS and the diagnosis of HIV. A priority area of action is promoting the use of condoms, with explanation of their proper use, as a means to avoid infection. Although sexual transmission continues to be the main cause of infection, transmission between male partners has declined sharply (in the mid-1980s over 90% of transmissions were between male partners, but by 1999 this figure had dropped to almost 50%). Meanwhile, transmission between heterosexual partners has increased as a proportion of the total. Major efforts to ensure the safety of blood transfusions have achieved a decrease in transmissions of HIV via this channel from 15% in 1990 to just 0.02% in 2000. Lastly, thanks to free health care for pregnant women, the incidence of the disease among this group has been reduced to a very low level, thus avoiding transmission to unborn children, which is the leading cause of infection among children under the age of 15.

In Chile, the National AIDS Commission (CONASIDA) was created in 1990 to coordinate the AIDS Prevention and Control Programme. CONASIDA is responsible for a system of epidemiological monitoring of the disease and carries out research, implements direct measures and acts as a coordinating agency for the various actors involved in helping to prevent contagion. Epidemiological monitoring is conducted by means of both passive and active mechanisms (passive ones include obligatory notification of cases of AIDS and non-symptomatic HIV, while active control consists of studies on HIV sero-prevalence using sentinel centre methods). At the end of 2001, the Law on the Human Immunodeficiency Virus was enacted along with fiscal benefits in case of catastrophic illness, as a means to strengthen prevention, ensure the control and dignified treatment of the illness and avoid social and labour discrimination against infected individuals. CONASIDA carries out prevention work in society —information and awareness-raising campaigns in the media and through the formal education system— among specific groups and conducts education and training targeting more exposed groups, such as those working in the sex trade, men who have homosexual partners and the penal community, as well as young people and housewives. It also carries out prevention work on an individual basis, providing support to interested parties through experts working in sexually transmitted disease centres and public health centres throughout the country, and free and confidential telephone counselling.

**Source:** Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) ([www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)), 2001. Ernesto Cohen and others, *Gestión de programas sociales en América Latina: análisis de casos; Vol. II: el Programa Nacional de Enfermedades Sexualmente Transmisibles (DST) y Síndrome de Inmunodeficiencia Adquirida (SIDA) de Brasil*, serie Políticas sociales, N° 46 (LC/L.1470/Add.1-P), Santiago, Chile, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2001. United Nations publication, Sales N° S.01.II.G.37; National Centre for the Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS (CENSIDA) ([www.ssa.gob.mx/conasida/](http://www.ssa.gob.mx/conasida/)), 2001; National Council for the Prevention and Control of AIDS (CONASIDA) ([www.minsal.cl](http://www.minsal.cl)), 2001.

## Box V.3

**PROFAMILIA: A KEY PLAYER IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY PLANNING  
AND SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE IN COLOMBIA**

The Colombian Association for Family Welfare (PROFAMILIA), a private non-profit institution established in 1965, provides programmes of family planning and sexual and reproductive health that target especially the most underprivileged groups of the population. By charging modest fees and broadening the range of services it offers, and thanks to an extensive network of institutional donors, it has been able to become 90% self-financing.

PROFAMILIA has played an important role in the rapid decline in fertility recorded in Colombia since the mid-1960s. It makes a contribution in a wide range of fields: sexual and reproductive health care services for the care of the body and prevention of disease; provision of a number of family planning alternatives for couples to support their decisions on the number and spacing of children; education targeting adolescents of both sexes, to raise awareness of the need to avoid unwanted pregnancy; legal advice on sexual and reproductive rights; training of public and private sector personnel in the implementation of the institution's different programmes; generation of scientific information on population, family planning and sexual and reproductive health; and distribution of various types of contraceptives and associated products.

PROFAMILIA now has 35 centres providing contraceptive and medical services. These account for over 70% of all family planning services in Colombia today. Its diversified programmes reach many different types of people; its mobile health care centres bring services to remote, largely rural areas. In these areas and in marginalized urban areas a community system of contraceptive distribution is run through local leaders. PROFAMILIA has conducted major programmes of voluntary sterilization for women and has two clinics devoted exclusively to the performance of male vasectomies and other sexual and reproductive health services. With regard to the prevention of AIDS, the organization's programmes, consisting of information and distribution of condoms, have been directed at high risk groups.

**Source:** [www.profamilia.org.co](http://www.profamilia.org.co).

From the observations made here, it may be concluded that there is a clear winner in the classic rivalry between approaches that reduce sociodemographic risks through structural social change and those that afford priority to delineated and specific action to remove them.<sup>6</sup> Undeniable evidence exists that sociodemographic risks can be reduced without significant concomitant socioeconomic development. The debate, however, continues unabated. In the view of a number of authors, the evidence fails to reveal a causal link between explicit sociodemographic policies and the profound demographic change caused by the rapid advance of the demographic transition (see box V.4).<sup>7</sup> Others argue that prevention is the net effect of macroeconomic or macrosocial policies and that social —including sociodemographic— policies must therefore focus on strengthening response capacity and adaptability.<sup>8</sup> There is a third position, however, between the unshakeable upholders of preventive action and authors who see its efficiency as relative or doubtful. This group favours the “qualification” of such measures through the identification of

<sup>6</sup> This debate reached a high point at the United Nations World Population Conference, which was held in Bucharest in 1974. On that occasion, those who argued that development is the best means to prevent high fertility (“development as a contraceptive”) clashed with those in favour of investing in birth control (as “an obstacle to development”) as an option that would have highly positive effects in the long term.

<sup>7</sup> “Overall, the influence of explicit policies on fertility reduction has been negligible by comparison to the unplanned and unintended effects of a variety of public and private initiatives” (Martine, 1996, p. 72).

<sup>8</sup> “Risk reduction covers macroeconomic management, regulations and institutional development policies that help prevent crises from occurring” (Hicks and Wodon, 2001, p. 96); i.e., prevention is essentially a matter for macroeconomic policy.

factors that may contribute to their success. Preventive measures with regard to the risks involved in transitional lag, therefore, might be aided by synergies with technological advances; the expansion of knowledge regarding the risks and their determining factors; the significance of profound socioeconomic changes and the essentially preventable nature of risk.

Box V.4

**FERTILITY DECLINE IN BRAZIL: AN UNINTENDED CHANGE**

Brazil's rapid fertility decline occurred during a period of far-reaching social change, which encompassed times of both rapid economic growth and economic downswings. Government-induced modernization, begun in the 1950s and intensified during the 1960s, changed the locus of economic activity, accelerated rural-urban migration, promoted the development of a consumer society and gave a more powerful role to the media, whose messages helped to bring about a change in attitude in favour of smaller families. As a result of these changes, the costs of rearing children increased, and family-size preferences rapidly declined.

Many of the institutional changes of the 1960s, which were made by a military regime seeking to modernize the country in a short space of time, had collateral effects on both people's reasons for controlling fertility and their ability to do so. In general, these outcomes increased social pressure to have fewer offspring, but a combination of measures on the part of a number of social actors limited the practical availability of modern contraceptive methods, which meant that abortion and sterilization became the most common methods of fertility control.

Explicit policies have had a negligible influence on fertility reduction in comparison with the wave of unplanned effects of a variety of public and private initiatives. In fact, the Brazilian government has never had a policy explicitly geared towards reducing population growth.

The Brazilian experience is of great significance for a critical review of research and policies in this domain. It clearly demonstrates that fertility decline does not require large-scale family planning programmes. It also suggests that an unassisted or "market based" fertility reduction, whereby women use whatever methods are available, can have serious negative implications for their health, as reflected in high abortion and female sterilization rates.

**Source:** G. Martine, "Brazil's fertility decline, 1965-1995: a fresh look at key factors", *Population and Development Review*, vol. 22, No. 1, 1996.

There can be no doubt that technological advances—in medicine, techniques and knowledge—have played a key role in the prevention of mortality and in birth control. Many of these advances were developed outside the region, which benefited from them through mass dissemination (of knowledge and techniques) or imported them. Neither can there be any doubt about the crucial role of a number of actors who have helped to enhance the prevention of mortality and high fertility. This has been a matter not only of political will and incorporation of technical progress, but of encouraging the impressive increase in research and in the stock of knowledge on both phenomena, which have made for better founded and, therefore, more efficient measures.

Fertility and mortality declines are not only mutually reinforcing, but have been driven by socioeconomic changes of a structural nature (see figure V.1; IDB, 2000b; Chackiel and Schkolnik, 1998; CELADE/IDB, 1996; CELADE, 1996; Kirk, 1996; Bajraj and Chackiel, 1995; Vallin, 1994; Tabah, 1989, World Bank, 1984). These structural changes—urbanization, the expansion of physical and symbolic connectivity (which is very important in access to health care and the construction of a preventive health culture) and the gradual process of emancipation of women, among others—are to some extent independent of economic and social development.

Lastly, at the risk of stating the obvious, the risks of high mortality and fertility share a common feature that is essential for the success of preventive policies: both are preventable. High mortality, especially in childhood, is caused by a number of pathological infections which can readily be controlled with low-cost measures (see box V.5). In turn, measures to prevent high fertility are usually required where there is an unmet family planning need; if there is no such need, then the first objective of fertility reduction measures must be to dispense with the material, institutional and symbolic motives underlying preferences for large families, in order to hasten what is usually the “natural” fruit of sociocultural modernization.

Box V.5

**PREVENTING CHILD MORTALITY: MAKING THE MOST OF THE FACILITIES**

Mortality in children under one year old is often caused by afflictions that can readily be controlled with low-cost measures. Three out of every four deaths occurring before one year of age are caused either by dehydration resulting from diarrhoea or by an acute respiratory infection. A sachet of rehydration salts costs US\$ 0.08 and respiratory infections can be avoided with adequate nourishment and access to basic medical care. Together with good pre- and post-natal care, which are also inexpensive, these measures would greatly reduce the number of preventable child deaths.

Other low-cost investments which would significantly improve the quality of life of newborns, their mothers and families are: (i) Three capsules of vitamin A, which are sufficient to protect a child for one year from blindness and other health problems caused by vitamin A deficiency, US\$ 0.07; (ii) one fetal stethoscope for carrying out basic checks on pregnant women, US\$ 1.23; (iii) one plastic latrine with drainpipe to provide basic sanitation for one family and thus eliminate a major source of infection, US\$ 5; (iv) inputs required—syringes and needles, refrigeration facilities, health personnel—to immunize a child against the six main childhood diseases, US\$ 15 average; (v) one thermally insulated container for keeping 500 doses of vaccines cool, US\$ 15.50; and (vi) one hand-operated pump, piping and fittings for a well to provide 50 families with drinking water, US\$ 150.

**Source:** ECLAC, 2001a.

### 3. Contemporary challenges to the prevention of sociodemographic risks

As may be deduced from the foregoing discussion, the prevention of risks associated with transitional lag is both feasible and a good policy option. Although prevention is also viable for most other risks, experience shows that such measures involve logical, normative or practical difficulties. Problems of logic arise when risks grow out of the reduction of other risks, or those which appear to be inevitable in the long term, such as ageing. Normative complications arise when risks derive from the exercise of individual rights—such as the spatial mobility of the population—making preventive measures unadvisable (see box V.6).<sup>9</sup> Practical difficulties arise in the case of risks that can and should be prevented, but whose

<sup>9</sup> Although the measures in question touch on issues that are a matter of individual rights, this is not reason enough to refrain from taking them, as has been demonstrated by successful fertility reduction programmes in the region. Prevention is of limited scope with regard to some risks, however, such as the risks inherent in opportunities

complexities often nullify efforts deployed to prevent them, adolescent fertility being an example. Despite their significance, these obstacles in no way render preventive programmes and measures unprofitable, however. The cases outlined below show that prevention is an essential tool, albeit one that requires to be carefully elaborated and complemented with other policy options.

## Box V.6

**THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT BETWEEN AND WITHIN COUNTRIES**

Article 13 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* provides that: (a) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State; and (b) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 12 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* states that: (a) Everyone lawfully within the territory of a State shall, within that territory, have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence; (b) Everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own; (c) The above-mentioned rights shall not be subject to any restrictions except those which are provided by law, are necessary to protect national security, public order (ordre public), public health or morals or the rights and freedoms of others, and are consistent with the other rights recognized in the present Covenant; and (d) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country.

The first aspect of the right to freedom of movement is the freedom to reside in the territory of a State. This applies to everyone, regardless of nationality. However, it extends only to individuals residing legally in the territory of a particular State, which means that it does not extend to undocumented migrants or migrant workers in an irregular situation.

The second aspect of the right to freedom of movement is the right to leave any country, including one's own. This is also applicable to everyone with no distinction whatsoever. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights has sustained that although the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights does not stipulate the right to enter any country, apart from one's own, the right to leave and return should be interpreted in a broad manner. This right has therefore translated into the right to travel, of which access to the requisite travel documents may be considered an integral part. The main limitation on the right to freedom of movement is that, according to international law, it does not imply the right to enter the territory of another country. In fact, one of the most widely recognized principles of the sovereignty of States is the right to establish the conditions of entry to their territory.

The third aspect is the right to enter one's own country. The interpretation of this provision has been lengthily debated over such issues as whether nationality is a requirement. The exercise of this right has also proven problematic in the absence of the requisite documentation or travel identification.

It has also been argued that the right to freedom of movement necessarily implies the right *not* to move or not to be displaced. International and internal armed conflicts, civil wars and the implementation of discriminatory domestic policies can cause displacement and thus infringe the right to the freedom of movement, not only because the displaced invariably find their movements restricted (when for example, they are confined in camps or resettlement villages), but also because they cannot exercise their right to return to their country of origin or original area of residence. The right of people to live in peace, in their homes, land and countries was also reaffirmed by the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities at its forty-eighth session, in resolution 1996/9.

**Source:** R. Perruchoud, "Legal Standards for the protection of Migrant Workers", presented at the Symposium, on International Migration in the Americas, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) - International Organization for Migration (IOM) San José, 4-6 September, 2000.

and those contained in individual, household and collective strategies — such as international migration — and those that may be the collateral effects of sociocultural modernization, such as an increase in consensual unions and divorce.





### (a) Prevention and adolescent pregnancy

Prevention of early reproduction can take the form of structural, specific or mixed strategies. Structural strategies are based on the principle that adolescent fertility arises from a lack of social and cultural options that “pushes” men and women into early parenthood. Structural prevention policies therefore aim to broaden the range of opportunities, in particular for adolescents. Specific interventions, by contrast, aim to have a direct impact on the immediate determinants of early fertility (Davis and Blake, 1956) and are based on the supposition that the decision to postpone parenthood requires the tools to do so—knowledge, training and access to contraceptive methods—and incentives to delay the beginning of sexual activity (or marriage, if for cultural reasons sexual activity takes place essentially within marriage). Although a combination of structural and specific preventive policies would seem the best option, the need for a rapid and decisive means to prevent the risk tends to lead to a predominance of specific measures. When it comes to prevention, there is no single best approach, but a number of options whose applicability depends on the context, the political tendency of governments and the specific psychosocial features of adolescent men and women.

The contextual factors underlying adolescent fertility (ECLAC, 2001a) may reflect cultural patterns that encourage the trio of initiations (sexual, nuptial and reproductive) to take place early. Structural and specific measures come up against symbolic barriers that make it difficult to offer life options which discourage early union and pregnancy. Where adolescent fertility is part of a phenomenon of distorted sexual and reproductive modernity, however, prevention may take the form of special awareness-raising campaigns and education (at school, in health centres and in the media) to promote responsible reproductive behaviour. It may also translate into programmes that act on the immediate determinants of adolescent fertility, by broadening access to contraceptives or attempting to delay sexual initiation. Such measures should obviously treat adolescents as potentially sexually active individuals.

Apart from the differences between sociocultural contexts—which are largely a reflection of how modern or traditional they are—preventive measures in the area of adolescent fertility must be adapted to the specific features of counties and regions. For example, in Central America and the Caribbean there is a pattern of early formation of unions, most of them informal (Guzmán and others, 2001), which translates into high rates of adolescent fertility outside marriage, but within the framework of unions that can become permanent. There are two countries, however, that display major contrasts. One is Haiti, which has high total fertility and a low rate of contraceptive use in all age groups, but low adolescent fertility.<sup>10</sup> In Jamaica, by contrast, total fertility is low but adolescent fertility is high, which is attributable to a pattern of early sexual initiation and early union.<sup>11</sup> Another example of cultural specificities are the

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<sup>10</sup> In the mid-1990s, just 3.6% of Haitian adolescent girls used some method of contraception (in Brazil the figure was 15%); among those in some form of union 10.7% used contraception and among those not in unions but sexually active, 23% (in Brazil the figures were 54% and 66%, respectively). In adolescent boys, 16.5% of the total and 36% of those not in unions but sexually active used some form of contraception (in Brazil, 33% and 73%, respectively). (Guzmán and others, 2001). Data from the Population and Health Survey of 1994/1995 indicated that the rate of adolescent fertility in Haiti was 70 per thousand in the quinquennium 1995-2000 (in Brazil this figure was 86.3 per thousand) and only 11% of adolescent girls were mothers.

<sup>11</sup> According to a survey conducted in 1997 by the Caribbean Documentation Centre, adolescent fertility in Jamaica was 112 per thousand, and 29% of women in the 25-29 cohort at the time of the survey had become mothers before the age of 18. Of these women, 63% had had sexual intercourse before the age of 18, and 74% of men aged 15-19 already had sexual experience.

indigenous communities in the altiplano of Bolivia and Peru, where total fertility is high and the use of contraceptive generally low, although adolescent fertility tends to be low, due to a pattern of relatively late union. In each case, policies must consider —and use, if necessary— the values, norms and traditions that encourage behaviour patterns.

The prevention of adolescent fertility also depends on the political orientation of governments. Direct interventions regarding the immediate determinants may aim to expand information and knowledge about contraceptive methods and access to them, or to delay the onset of sexual relations. Although it is theoretically valid to pursue both goals at the same time, in practice they tend to pull in different directions, since their political and ideological implications tend to be opposed.<sup>12</sup> In any case, the basic principle applicable to adolescents is no different from the principles applicable to women in general, in other words to have access to the means to avoid unwanted pregnancies.

The specific psycho-social features of adolescent boys and girls play a key role in the definition of measures of fertility prevention in this group. Because of their high degree of dependency on their parents or families and because they are going through a complex (and sometimes erratic) period of life, adolescents tend to be resistant to programmes of sexual and reproductive health and responsible parenthood designed with adults in mind. Although increased use of contraceptives reduces the risk of fertility in women in general, its rate of success is much lower in adolescents (see table V.1). This is due both to technical reasons —since having the means at hand is not necessarily equivalent to using them properly— and to psycho-social reasons that form part of the characteristics of this age group, such as emotional inexperience and instability and difficulties in conducting reflective negotiations with a partner (Guzmán and others, 2001, Fischhoff, Nightingale and Iannota, 2001; ECLAC 2000e and 1998).

Table V.1  
**LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN (SELECTED COUNTRIES): MODEL OF AGGREGATE RATIO OF ADOLESCENT TO TOTAL FERTILITY AND PREVALENCE OF MODERN CONTRACEPTIVE USE AMONG ADOLESCENTS AND WOMEN OF CHILDBEARING AGE IN UNIONS, 1980s AND 1990s<sup>a</sup>**

Parameters and proofs relevant to the regression	Dependent variable: adolescent fertility		Dependent variable: total fertility	
	1980s	1990s	1980s	1990s
Constant (intercept)	114.2	100.6	5.64	5.78
<i>x</i> coefficient	-0.53	-0.05	-0.04	-0.04
Standard error for <i>x</i>	0.61	0.40	0.01	0.01
<i>t</i> statistic for <i>x</i>	-0.86	-0.01	-3.93	-5.56
Probability of error when the null hypothesis is rejected	40%	91%	0.2%	0.01%
Percentage of the variation in fertility explained by the use of contraceptives (R <sup>2</sup> )	5.8%	0.1%	56%	72%

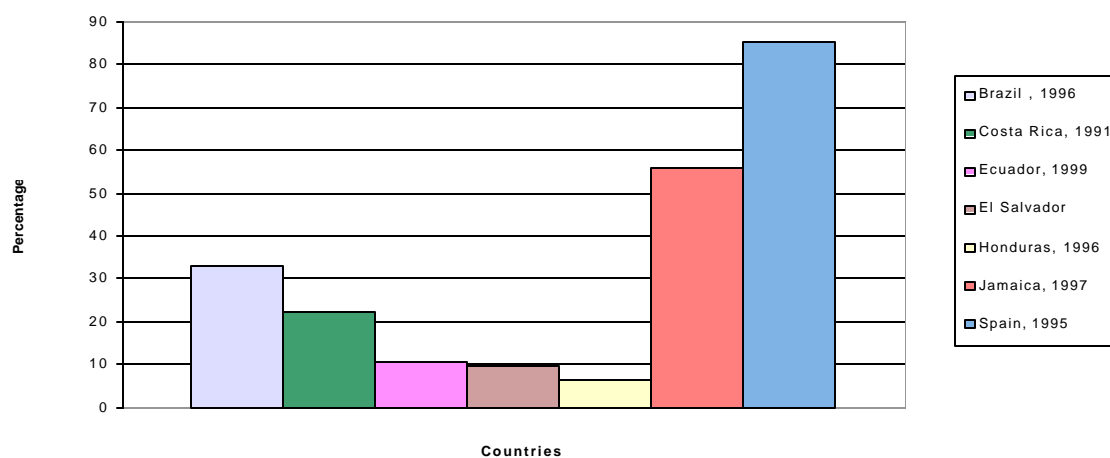
**Source:** Authors' calculations using data from specialized surveys conducted by Demographic and Health Surveys and surveys conducted by the Caribbean Documentation Centre.

<sup>12</sup> The decision to make modern contraceptive methods universally available to adolescents could be interpreted as an incentive for early sexual initiation. By contrast, the denial of access to contraception in order to discourage sexual initiation in adolescence (which would contravene an established right) could increase fertility (especially unwanted fertility) and abortion rates among adolescent girls.

<sup>a</sup> Cross-sectional regressions. Estimates calculated by ordinary least squares. Observations correspond to the following countries: Belize (1991); Bolivia (1989 and 1999); Brazil (1986 and 1996); Colombia (1986 and 2000); Costa Rica (1986 and 1993); Ecuador (1987 and 1999); El Salvador (1985 and 1998); Guatemala (1987 and 1998/1999); Haiti (1994/1995); Honduras (1996); Jamaica (1997); Mexico (1987); Nicaragua (1992/1993 and 1997); Paraguay (1990 and 1998); Peru (1986 and 1996); Dominican Republic (1986 and 1996); and Trinidad and Tobago (1987).

Jamaica stands out for high rates of adolescent fertility observed alongside high indexes of contraceptive use, even among adolescents and even, moreover, during the first sexual encounter (Guzmán and others, 2001) (see figure V.1). It certainly may not be inferred from this observation, however, that widespread availability of contraceptives among adolescents is ineffective or counterproductive. The experience of European countries has shown that the proper use of contraceptives is both feasible and associated with low levels of adolescent fertility. Public intervention in the area of sexual and reproductive health among adolescents does, however, require special programmes (health, education, affective development) that take into account the key aspects that influence their sexual and reproductive decisions (Guzmán and others, 2001).

Figure V.1  
**LATIN AMERICA, THE CARIBBEAN AND SPAIN: PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN AGED 15 TO 24 YEARS WHO USED MODERN CONTRACEPTIVES IN THEIR FIRST SEXUAL ENCOUNTER**



**Source:** Fertility and Family Survey (FFS) for Spain; for the Latin American countries: Paraguay Centre for Population Studies (CEPEP), United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Center for Disease Control (CDC) (1999), National Survey of Maternal and Child Health: 1998; ENSMI-98. Final report, page 72, table 7.13; for Jamaica, National Family Planning Board (NFPB), 1999, Table 11.10 and 11.11.

## (b) Prevention and ageing

In theory, population ageing can be prevented by measures that modify its direct demographic causes. Since the option of raising adult mortality is excluded, policies should seek to increase fertility or to achieve a “rejuvenating” migratory balance. This can be achieved through various combinations of net migration levels by age (United Nations, 2001). But what seems feasible in theory has proven to be not only extremely complex in practice, but also insufficient for redressing maturing situations.

The experience of several European countries shows that initiatives taken to promote fertility are generally unsuccessful (Teitelbaum, 2000). Indeed, actions of this type tend to have the opposite effect to the dominant trend in the region—which is to increase birth control—and run counter to the logic implicit in most public policies and long-term social processes, which tend to favour a decline in fertility. The sharp increase in the older population is already a reality in many countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, since it is the result of the intense demographic growth in the past and the increase in life expectancy at 60. In short, a possible increase in fertility could attenuate the growing proportion of older adults in the population, but would not manage to contain the enormous social pressures generated by its expansion in absolute terms.

On the other hand, migration can be a preventive (or adaptive) mechanism in dealing with ageing. In fact, in some countries, age selectivity of international migration has helped to counterbalance ageing at least temporarily, although there is consensus that it is not a solution for this process (United Nations, 2001; Lesthaeghe, 2001). More doubtful still is whether replacement migration can be used to prevent ageing in Latin America and the Caribbean, since the region is currently a net exporter of young people (ECLAC, 2002; ECLAC, 2000e and 2000f; Villa and Martínez, 2001) and does not hold much appeal for persons from other latitudes. For its part, the option of promoting emigration of older persons would call for very powerful direct support, even from the potential destination countries, since, on the contrary, only persons with the resources to leave would do so. Moreover, some countries, especially the Caribbean, have been recording a return migration of former emigrants, who have now reached retirement age.

To sum up, indications are that policies for coping with the risk of population ageing must be centred more on strengthening the response capacity and adaptation skills than on prevention. Nevertheless, prevention can be fundamental for postponing or attenuating some adverse effects of the process. This is especially relevant in the case of individual ageing, of which the most negative effects are physiological deterioration, socio-economic dependency and the absence of a well-defined role. To counterbalance these effects, policies for response or active adjustment should be designed and implemented; such an approach would be somewhat short-sighted, however, since the promotion of healthy life styles, routine health checks, building self-identity (self-esteem) and other similar actions significantly reduce some of the sources of psycho-physiological deterioration (see box V.7). These preventive measures can become adaptive responses to ageing when it is already further advanced.

Box V.7

**PRINCIPLES FOR A COMPREHENSIVE POLICY FOR OLDER PERSONS**

Ageing is a universal phenomenon.

Ageing is part of life and, as such, calls for an intergenerational approach directed towards promoting health throughout the life cycle.

The chronic disability associated with old age can be prevented or delayed. Prevention is not only a health concern, but also has social, economic and environmental ingredients.

Ageing is a development issue. The social and economic integration of older persons is essential for population development. A productive old age is a human resource.

Older persons participate in the development of healthy communities or municipalities, which ensure their proper nutrition, promote “user-friendly” housing, provide opportunities for continuing education, seek alternative sources of paid labour or stimulate the development of micro-businesses to support self-sufficiency of older persons, foster artistic and cultural expression, seek access on an equitable basis to primary care services and provide opportunities for the creation of positive and productive roles for the older population.

**Source:** Division of Health Promotion and Protection/Pan-American Health Organization/World Health Organization (HPP/PAHO/WHO), 1999.

### (c) **Prevention and ambiguous sociodemographic risks**

As with other sociodemographic risks, international migration and family instability can be prevented, but only in a limited way and with due precautions. Since, in such cases, reference is made to behaviour, actions may be dissuasive (for example, institutional barriers or socioeconomic deterrents), without it being necessary to proscribe certain types of behaviour. One example of this is the proposal for making the grounds for divorce stricter (Instituto Libertad y Desarrollo, 2001, p. 3), or that of promoting levels of institutional mediation (such as specialized advisory services for couples considering divorce or persons wishing to emigrate), which would come into play before a final decision is made. In the same vein, there could be specific incentives for promoting alternatives to high-risk conduct (such as tax regulations that encourage legal marriages instead of informal unions) and specific penalties (such as red tape for the recognition of social security contributions accrued abroad). Dissuasion can also be centred on symbolic, cultural and psycho-social issues during early stages of life (such as efforts that seek to instil values in children and reflexive attitudes in the face of particular conducts).

Nevertheless, the application of these dissuasive measures implies controversial biases: Why should emigrants be penalized? Why discriminate against consensual unions? Moreover, measures of this kind can stigmatize some persons (for example, divorced persons), whose behaviour merely reflects the exercise of universally recognized rights or the solution to a problem for which there may have been no other solution. Lastly, these actions may be sterile if one does not recognize the sense of the macrosocial processes underway, many of which lead to the spread of such risks.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from dissuasive action, which focuses directly on risks, more structural initiatives directed at weakening the root causes may also be considered. This is, undoubtedly, the option most in keeping with international agreements; for example, the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development states that: “Governments of countries of origin and of countries of destination should seek to make the option of remaining in one's country viable for all people” (United Nations, 1995, p. 56); this would reduce emigration based on “push factors” in the home country, which is usually the most insecure form. Underlying this approach is an implicit model of causal relationships between risks and their determining factors, essentially material ones: emigration is associated with labour market rigidities and social upheavals in the countries of origin; consensual unions seem to be a basic part

<sup>13</sup> Although this does seem to be the case for divorce, the most recent figures recorded in some European countries show zero increase in the probability of this outcome, which suggests that its relative frequency has limits. There have also been cases where “modernity” tends to reduce family instability (Heaton, Cammack and Young, 2001).

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of social exclusion and mistrust in the State; divorces seem to be the result of economic constraints and lack of public support for harmonizing family life and individual aspirations. Undeniably, there is a need for policies to cope with the material determinants of risks, but even if the results were successful, it would still be necessary to address the underlying symbolic and cultural factors. Historically, action aimed at dealing with structural determinants has been one of the objectives most neglected by Governments in the region.

## D. INITIATIVES AIMED AT STRENGTHENING THE RESPONSE CAPACITY

Various types of action may be adopted to strengthen the capacity of units of reference to respond to adversities that are the outcome of sociodemographic risks. One of these is to enhance these units' capacity to forecast risks and take prompt action to avoid the spread or intensification of their adverse effects. Another line of action is to train units of reference to defend themselves and react to negative outcomes by increasing and updating their assets and to promote skills for designing and implementing appropriate strategies. A third type of initiative could be directed towards alleviating the effects of the materialization of risks by signing agreements and establishing institutional linkages. Units of reference also need to be insured against the occurrence of specific risks and to establish credit mechanisms to face up to them. Lastly, a central component of the efforts taken to strengthen the response capacity is to enhance the organization and group action of units of reference.

### 1. Anticipating adversities

Policies aimed at anticipating risks and their effects hinge on the generation and accumulation of knowledge and information. Thus, communities can identify the emergence or intensification of a risk at an early stage to the extent that they dispose of a body of technical staff —and reliable sources of information and appropriate systems of indicators— specialized in the follow-up of sociodemographic trends; such knowledge can be used to prepare probability scenarios and to develop other response or adaptation mechanisms. That is, a community's forecasting capacity is key, since many sociodemographic risks operate at an aggregate level and develop over long periods of time.<sup>14</sup> While these risks are not evident until after they have materialized, —which means that they cannot be prevented— projecting their course of development will help to increase the awareness of decision-makers and sectoral specialists as to what may be expected in the future. Demographic ageing and cohort fluctuations are examples of risks whose adverse consequences can be attenuated through appropriate forecasting and this can be used to develop other types of response; in this respect, sectoral policies, whose sensitivity to the demographic dynamic has been underscored in recent years, have a crucial role to play (IDB, 2000a and 2000b; CELADE/IDB, 1996; CELADE, 1996).

Early identification is also suitable for attenuating the adverse repercussions of risks for individuals and households. With respect to health and mortality, for example, the danger of many diseases is a direct function of their phase of development, so that a timely diagnosis increases the prospects of success in treatment and, consequently, reduces the financial and psychological costs for households and communities. The capacity for early action is essential in the case of risks relating to individual decisions, since this approach is taken in anticipation of the event and acts as a preventive mechanism.<sup>15</sup> Thus, for example, emigrants who are aware of their rights and of the existence of support networks and who have

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<sup>14</sup> Some countries in the region have set up mechanisms for generating a demographic culture (CONAPO, 1995. p. 55).

<sup>15</sup> This refers to healthy lifestyles and prophylactic practices of all kinds. The anticipation of the effects of certain conducts can serve to avoid the materialization of risk (and can be aimed, for example, at preventing unwanted fertility or adolescent fertility).

access to information on the real options offered by the country of destination will have more resources for dealing with the risks of discrimination, exclusion and violation of their rights.

## **2. Preparing actors**

Another way of strengthening the response capacity of actors is to prepare them to react to adversities to which they may be susceptible and this can be achieved by increasing the assets of communities, households and persons, as well as by enhancing their skills for designing strategies and putting them into practice. Social policies play a central role in this exercise to the extent that they provide appropriate assets. Perhaps the best example is that of education policies: education that provides wide coverage, is of a high standard and that is relevant and comprehensive is a solid foundation for achieving successful, productive integration and a satisfactory level of income. That is to say, education enables students to secure assets that are a powerful defence against the material adversities entailed by the materialization of social risks of any type and sociodemographic risks in particular. Such assets can also reduce (or, in some cases, cancel out) the pressures, exigencies and material difficulties caused by extended families, divorce or teenage pregnancy. In particular, building up financial reserves is one of the most obvious ways in which individuals can prepare for adverse events. Education also provides symbolic assets which expand one's understanding of the world and promote the establishment of symmetrical relationships with others;<sup>16</sup> thus, a suitable education for migrants provides them with information, knowledge, arguments and codes for defending themselves against the possibility of discrimination in their place of destination.

Cross-cutting policies, such as those that promote the advancement of the status of women in communities and households and seek to reduce gender imbalances, have a tremendous impact on the preparation for addressing sociodemographic risks. This is due to the fact that, for predominantly cultural reasons, women are those who suffer the harshest adversities; by changing their weak sociocultural situation one can enhance their response capacity. This is particularly valid given the socio-economic adversities associated with situations of marital breakdown, since because of sociocultural constraints, women have less means and fewer supports for coping with domestic life or employment without a partner.

There are also specific initiatives whose purpose is to prepare communities, households and individuals to cope with adverse sociodemographic occurrences. The psychosocial support provided to pregnant teenagers helps them to mature and to acquire the knowledge needed for raising children. The preparation of potential international migrants by providing them with important information and by promoting contacts with networks that support their integration defends them against abuse, discrimination or xenophobia in destination societies. Investment in environmental protection infrastructure to communities located in zones exposed to environmental disasters enhances their resistance.

## **3. Mitigating the consequences of adversities**

Since social and, hence, sociodemographic risks can scarcely be eradicated completely, palliative measures are invariably necessary when such risks materialize; even if the preventive action were highly

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<sup>16</sup> Thus, education policies—and, in general, social policies based on promoting citizenship rather than on a welfare approach—have an enabling effect which is of crucial importance for prevention and active adjustment.



efficient, there would always be communities, households and persons who face risk and adversity. In any event, the palliative action must be designed in such a way that is not construed as condoning the materialization of preventable risks (or moral hazard), since this would imply reversing the order of priorities of the policies, diminish individual responsibility and entail avoidable expenses. This does not mean that persons, households and communities who have placed themselves at risk as a result of inappropriate conduct or a wrong decision, should be abandoned to their fate. Apart from the ethical and political considerations that may be put forward against such an orthodox approach, the fact that practically all palliative programmes at the sociodemographic level contemplate only partial compensation of the adverse conditions drastically reduces the probability that their application may be taken as an incentive for high-risk behaviour.

Within the wide range of palliative programmes, non-contributory transfers (in cash or kind), which are granted to older persons, mothers with young children, widows, displaced persons and households in remote areas, are examples of measures that seek to moderate sociodemographic problems or exigencies, such as ageing, high fertility, forced migration and location in inhospitable areas. Support, training and subsidy programmes conducted in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica and other countries for female heads of household are palliative measures.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the institutional systems for adoption and care of abandoned or abused children seek to reduce the consequences of unwanted pregnancy or family dysfunction. The support initiatives provided to patients with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) attest to the relevance of palliative as well as preventive action.<sup>18</sup>

While prevention is the first policy option for addressing the risk of teenage pregnancy, support provided by countries to adolescent mothers is a palliative measure that has proven indispensable for overcoming the most severe adversities. Such support comes from various sources (public, private-sector, non-governmental agencies) and is geared towards different objectives, but, almost systematically, seeks to enable girls to pursue their schooling, to enhance their parenting skills and to benefit their children (see box V.8). These programmes arise not only from the need to respond to the exigencies of pregnancy and child-rearing, but also from the need to counteract the institutional and cultural regulations which penalize pregnant teenagers and adolescent mothers twice. The fact that most programmes are geared towards reinforcing motherhood/fatherhood and that —unlike the systems of adoption or institutional care— their objective does not imply transferring responsibility for bringing up the child, the probability of moral hazard is also reduced.

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<sup>17</sup> Most of these programmes target women of reproductive age who, because of gender bias, must assume responsibility for raising their sons and daughters often from a broken union.

<sup>18</sup> For example, the National Programme on Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) of Brazil, in addition to its preventive components comprises activities for reducing morbidity and mortality and for improving the quality of life of infected persons; this helps to delay the onset of the disease or prolong life, as well as to lend dignity to their condition by providing them with appropriate medical attention and by taking steps to create awareness of the rights of those affected in order to avoid discrimination against them; since 1996, carriers of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and AIDS sufferers have been granted universal, free access to the required drugs and to comprehensive support services with multidisciplinary professional teams (Cohen and others, 2001). In other countries, while laws have been enacted to expand coverage of the effective treatment of AIDS (double and triple antiretroviral treatment), it is only assured to specific groups of the population, such as children and pregnant women; estimates for Chile suggest that 80% of infected persons registered under the public health system receive triple therapy and the related examinations ([www.minsal.cl](http://www.minsal.cl)).



## Box V.8

**SUPPORT PROGRAMMES FOR PREGNANT ADOLESCENTS AND ADOLESCENT MOTHERS:  
SOME REGIONAL EXPERIENCES**

The Building Opportunities Programme developed by the National Women's Institute (INAMU) of Costa Rica is intended for adolescent mothers or pregnant teenagers or those socially at risk. It includes support workshops for living (in which more than 4,000 girls have participated) and, in conjunction with other public entities, supports young women by providing pre- and post-natal health care and assistance with infant and child care in the early years of life. In addition, in coordination with public universities and private agencies, it encourages the reintegration of girls into the education system through open education mechanisms and technical training; in 2001, a plan was implemented which offers training in non-traditional, competitive technical areas.

The Operational Unit for Education and Training (UNOPEC) of the Centre for Reproductive Medicine and Holistic Development for Adolescents (CEMERA) of the University of Chile is a pilot experiment designed to enable pregnant teenagers to remain in school, to prevent abortion and to avoid the abandonment of children and child abuse. It targets pregnant adolescents or adolescent mothers and even adolescent fathers from middle- and low-income strata. Financed with contributions from the State and from the students, subject to individual capacity, it offers participants a flexible, non-discriminatory, equitable and comprehensive system for assistance to enable them to continue their elementary and secondary schooling and acquire work training, without interrupting the work of child-rearing (UNOPEC has a daycare and kindergarten); participatory-type study plans are functional for adolescent students. In 1995, the system enabled 72% of a total of 185 participants to complete their studies.

The Peruvian Institute for Responsible Parenting (INPPARES) is a private, non-profit-making institution, one of whose missions is to promote the development and valuation of the role of young men and women in society by having them participate in the design and implementation of programmes that concern them directly. The Institute's work with adolescents under the programmes for different beneficiary populations is centred on education; courses are offered on sexual and reproductive health and workshops conducted for improving relationships between parents and children, since this factor often has a bearing on the occurrence of pregnancy. INPPARES also runs a shelter for adolescent mothers, where they are trained in the production of food and textiles. The participants put their new knowledge into practice to feed themselves by rearing small animals and growing organic vegetables.

In Ecuador, the Fundación Nuestros Jóvenes, a private, non-profit-making institution, has been carrying out a variety of projects, one of which is devoted to the comprehensive care of pregnant adolescent migrants. Its objective is to ensure proper living conditions for them and their children, including optimum development throughout pregnancy, birth and early childhood. The girls spend six months in one of the Foundation's shelters and receive health care as well as guidance and help from a psycho-educational specialist to support them in raising their children and to help them to integrate socially.

**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Building equity from the beginning: the children and adolescents of Ibero-America (LC/G.2144), Santiago, Chile, 2001; Ministry for the Status of Women/National Women's Institute (INAMU), *Report of Costa Rica. Thirty-third meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Trinidad and Tobago, 9-11 October), 2001.

#### 4. Insurance

Insurance is the best-known form of protection against any type of risk (Sojo, 1999); it combines anticipation and preparation with palliative-type measures. Since it is so widespread in modern societies, it should be considered as a specific policy option for strengthening the response capacity and for active adaptation to new risk scenarios. Its main distinctive feature is the use of formal (public and private) arrangements for accumulating resources —through various mechanisms (taxes, pricing, quotas, private disbursements)— in order to cover damage or exigencies that may result from an eventuality whose probability can be estimated. The long-term horizon which is a feature of social security systems, the size of the destination population and the element of redistribution (between social groups, generations or productive sectors) are features that distinguish these systems from private insurance and safety nets (EC-ESA, 2001; Hicks and Wodon, 2001; IDB, 2000a), which normally act as a cushion against economic shocks.

Insurance is probably the most obvious policy response to various socio-demographic risks. Perhaps the most typical case is ageing, in respect of which social security provides —irrespective of its various administration schemes and different pension schemes— a powerful institutional response. Notwithstanding their main advantages, any form of insurance has limitations that prevent it being considered as an exclusive policy option for risk management. Among these limitations are requirements for calculating probabilities that a particular risk will materialize (Guseva and Rona-Tas, 2001) and the levels that must be achieved to counteract fully the effects of certain risks' actually occurring; this places insurance in a subordinate position to prevention and training or development of actors' endogenous abilities (Esping-Andersen, 2000). In addition, with the exception of ageing and mortality (and, under certain contractual circumstances, divorce), most sociodemographic risks lack markets or the appropriate institutionality for insurance; if these risks do materialize, they should be handled on an ad hoc basis through individual initiatives or with support from private, family, community or public sources. Sociodemographic risks, like many other economic and social risks (Schiller, 1998), but unlike unemployment, accidents and theft, have characteristics that do not fit readily into public or private insurance plans.<sup>19</sup>

Credit is another policy option for addressing sociodemographic vulnerability and it can be used not only for palliative, but also for preventive, purposes. For example, some of the hardships involved in international migration, in particular those relating to economic integration in the destination society, could be avoided if the persons had access to public, private or other (international, cooperative or community) loans. In general, credit is an effective palliative against a significant increase in expenses, a decline in regular income flows or a decline in financial capital. Although for such purposes, any loan option may be considered valid, in countries with highly developed loan markets, there are arrangements, normally of a private nature, that cover sociodemographic risks (such as the birth of a son, the death of a breadwinner or an intra-metropolitan move). While credit provides temporary relief if financial difficulties arise, its action is limited to the monetary level. However, just as or more important than this is the fact that many sociodemographic risks imply financial blows that rule out the recovery of income flows, which increases the uncertainty as to the ability to repay the loan and highlights a bias that is characteristic of private loan systems: the fact that they discriminate against those who are least solvent.

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<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the potential adversities are difficult to express in monetary terms and there is ambiguity between damage and potential opportunity.

## 5. Promoting organization and group action

There are two approaches for dealing with sociodemographic risks and the eventual adversities that may materialize: through the natural or acquired capacities of individual actors (communities, households or persons) and through institutional initiatives (by the State, the market or non-governmental organizations). Nevertheless, an important part of the response capacity of the units of reference is based on behaviour patterns, an area in which organization and group action (that of the family, neighbourhood, community, trade union or other) play a leading role.

Family networks are the basic social units for dealing with the challenges involved in raising children, especially in the case of large families, adolescent mothers and single-parent households. Networks for migrants (whether internal or international) fulfil just as vital a role in terms of welcoming and protecting them and even helping them to integrate in their place of destination. Something similar occurs with community organization mechanisms which cope with the difficulties that are peculiar to a peripheral urban location. Particularly important is the role of group organizations and family networks on ageing, especially in terms of care for older persons.

In addition, units of reference are better able to sensitize the socio-political system and exert pressure on decision-makers in order to obtain direct support, formulate and implement policies or introduce institutional changes if they form representative organizations and take joint action. Although the most outstanding examples of this capacity for response exist outside of the sociodemographic field, group claims for public initiatives or institutional change are not unknown in areas such as sexual and reproductive health, migration, divorce and living conditions for older adults.

The foregoing suggests clearly that social networking is a powerful instrument for addressing sociodemographic vulnerability. The principal policy orientation of public or private agencies and non-governmental organizations should be to maximize this potential. However, one should bear in mind that the existence of a group organization, however strong it may be, is no guarantee of a suitable response to the outcome of a risk and, therefore, is not a substitute for action by public-sector institutions. In addition, and even when there is a wide range of instruments for promoting this type of organization, the result of its application is uncertain and, in many cases, comes up against structural forces that limit its development. Lastly, the official promotion for participation and popular action has a downside in that it can be used to control social actors through manipulation, co-optation or patronage tactics.

## E. MEASURES FOR ACTIVE ADAPTATION

Adaptation is ultimately another form of response, although it is different from simply strengthening response capacity, because it involves a long-term effort and multidimensional and endogenous changes on the part of communities, households and individuals in order to deal with the materialization of risk. Adaptation is a fully valid strategy in response to risks that are inevitable, part and parcel of modernity or combined with opportunities whose merits outweigh their potential adversities. Given the evidence and the inexorable nature of emerging sociodemographic risks, adaptive processes are undeniably important.

Adaptation is not a suitable means to deal with risks that are part of economic and sociocultural lag, however, mainly because this could cause more harm than good in the long term. It is therefore important to distinguish between active adaptation and mere resignation, fatalism or passive acceptance of adversities and risks. Passive acceptance, in particular, is a spurious response which must not be encouraged.<sup>20</sup>

Some adaptation alternatives can be used to generate virtuous circles by taking advantage of the opportunities inherent in many sociodemographic risks. A hypothetical example is that of communities with a rapid rate of population growth which also achieve high rates of economic growth and job creation. In practice, however, productive trends are less governable than demographic ones, which means that this ideal adaptation scenario carries no guarantee of long-term sustainability, as it will always be exposed to unpredictable economic fluctuations. Another, less hypothetical, scenario is adaptation to take advantage of the possible opportunities inherent in international migration, as occurs in the cross-border area of the European Union, where the free mobility of productive resources is extended to natural persons. However, this scenario is a historic and very particular situation. It is the fruit of a deliberate effort to reduce economic, sociopolitical and even cultural differences among countries and the development of a widely respected transnational institutional structure. While such differences remain and while the appropriate institutional structure is lacking, transnational forums will be unable to act upon the adversities or potential of migration in any significant manner.

In some cases adaptation does not target the risk itself, but its negative effects. Residential segregation by socioeconomic level is an example of this: although segregation could be mitigated via a number of policy alternatives, active adaptation could also mean measures dealing with the negative effects on the community as a whole or on segregated households and individuals (see box V.9). This is a valid alternative providing that the economic and social costs involved are much lower than those that would be incurred by attempting to revert a situation which is already consolidated, or where day-to-day coexistence, group solidarity and community identity will be facilitated by neutralizing the adversities inherent in the spatial differentiation of socioeconomic groups. Such adaptive and/or compensatory mechanisms include: broadening of forums in which the different socioeconomic groups can interact; the development of a good, socially heterogeneous public school system; promotion of a culture that values social and cultural diversity; and the specification of clear, strict procedures for the redistribution of revenues among local governments.

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<sup>20</sup> Many adaptive mechanisms have harmful long-term effects for the reference units. Examples are child labour, the confinement of women to the home, the use of areas on the outskirts of cities exposed to environmental catastrophes and the transfer of child-rearing responsibilities to grandparents.



## Box V.9

**REDUCING SOCIO-ECONOMIC SEGREGATION: PROPOSALS IN MEXICO CITY  
AND THE EXPERIENCE OF THE NETHERLANDS**

**1. Mexico City.** At least three general policy approaches have been put forward with respect to sociospatial segregation in the metropolitan area of Mexico City.

- (i) improvement of infrastructure and social services in the working-class neighbourhoods that are either growing up or in the process of consolidation, in order to reduce disparities in facilities between areas inhabited by groups of different income levels;
- (ii) consolidation of housing in working-class neighbourhoods and in towns engulfed by the process of conurbation (because of the poor state of many buildings, neighbourhoods that are “in formation” are priority areas of action).
- (iii) conservation and creation of socially heterogeneous types of settlement, especially in the working-class neighbourhoods of the city centre (in particular, policies geared towards the redensification of the oldest urban areas would help to stem the exodus from these working-class areas).

The policy tools for this last proposal are contained in a programme to renew working-class housing stock, which was put in place after the earthquakes of 1985. In this programme, an exceptional measure —the large-scale expropriation of property, together with subsidization of the cost of land for the beneficiaries of the programme— was the key to keeping central areas residential.

**2. Netherlands:** The level of urban residential segregation in the Netherlands is low, and to prevent it from increasing, the Administration has developed a set of policy tools in the areas of urban housing, planning and renovation.

(a) The Netherlands housing policies are built on three strongly anti-segregationist pillars:

- (i) housing corporations, which are private, sometimes profit-making, agencies that date from the nineteenth century. They build the bulk of public housing, for which they receive government financing and are subject to state oversight. Their housing is geared towards vulnerable groups and, beyond the operation of genuine market factors, they are not allowed to discriminate among the demand;
- (ii) subsidies to offset low income are calculated using an equation that includes a maximum cost per dwelling and a threshold amortization payment (low-cost dwellings are of good quality and the private supply of housing for higher-income groups is regulated);
- (iii) a municipal housing allowance in the framework of policies agreed between the State and the municipalities, which effectively places a ceiling on prices for rents and sales (in general the municipalities oversee the real-estate market).

(b) Urban planning. A number of provisions and incentives are employed to concentrate urban growth in areas close to the main cities, and thus avoid disorderly and segregational suburban development such as has occurred in the United States. Likewise, efforts are made to associate construction sites to workplaces, with public housing quotas established in pieces of land earmarked for new housing.

(c) Urban renovation. This consists of demolishing old post-war housing units in poor repair to make way for new housing and avoid non-planned suburban development.

**Source:** Teule, 2001, available at: <http://www.lincolnst.edu>; CONAPO, 1998.



Active adaptation is a suitable approach to the risk of population ageing because, unquestionably, communities, households and individuals must learn, in the long term, to live with older adults within a “society of all ages” (Guzmán, 2001; ECLAC, 2000g and CELADE, 1997). Some adaptation policy options are combined with capacity-strengthening responses, such as insurance, but others are geared towards acknowledgement of old age as a natural state of affairs and older people as important actors, which means working from a strategic perspective at the levels of knowledge, associativity, perceptions and social policies, culture and legislation (see box V.10). In institutional and legal terms, the constitutions of a number of the region’s countries make explicit reference to older adults, but this tends to be from a traditional, welfare-orientated point of view —the obligation of children to respect and assist their parents, or the right of older adults to receive special protection from the State ([www.elportaljuridico.com.mx](http://www.elportaljuridico.com.mx); HPP/OPS/OMS, 1999)— which is indicative of an essentially reactive and non-adaptive vision of ageing. An exception to this is the constitution enacted in Brazil in 1988, which emphasizes community participation and appreciation of older people as matters that should be guaranteed by the family, society and the State.<sup>21</sup> Although formal recognition in legislation is not always matched in practice, the provisions and limits of the institutional structure must be consistent with the panorama of social risks. Thus, to lay all the responsibility for the care of the elderly at the door of their children is inopportune and dilutes individual and public responsibility. The welfare bias, in turn, though inevitable to some extent, helps to perpetuate an image of the older adult that is defined in terms of weaknesses and limitations.

With respect to the risks associated with the second demographic transition, which have a strong institutional component —particularly those relating to consensual unions and to divorce— legal and normative aspects are crucial to adaptation. For example, many of the adversities of consensual unions derive from their lack of recognition under the law. Something similar occurs in the case of divorce, because the legislation that regulates it can sharpen its adversities or distribute them in an unfair manner between the parties. These risks therefore require firm institutional measures. The reasoning used with respect to ageing would dictate that it is time to update legislation and standards to adapt to the emerging scenario, which is marked by an increase in the number of consensual unions and divorces. For example, the institutional recognition of consensual unions must be broadened, in order to avoid discrimination against children born outside marriage (Arriagada, 2001, pp. 39-40). Likewise, the central pillar of legislation on divorce must encompass the empowerment of women and children and psychosocial support following separation. In these examples, the priority is not to eradicate the risk, but to avoid the adverse consequences it may bring. A latent tension therefore exists between action aimed at prevention and measures geared towards adaptation, not only in terms of logic, but in practice too, in that adaptive measures may encourage the assumption of risk, which openly clashes with preventive efforts. The challenge is therefore to design policies and laws that acknowledge the sovereign rights of couples with regard to divorce and consensuality and the existence of objective “modernizing” forces that drive such decisions (which in many cases may even be the only option) without actually encouraging them. In short, this is a complex domain which does not admit categorical statements or unanimous conclusions; as with so many other types of risk, however, the worst policy is to ignore them or expect them to solve themselves without intervention.

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<sup>21</sup> Article 230 of the Constitution of Brazil states that the family, society and the State have a duty to care for the elderly, ensure that they participate in the community, uphold their dignity and protect their wellbeing, and guarantee them the right to life. In addition, programmes of care for the elderly are to be implemented as far as possible in their homes and those over the age of 65 are guaranteed free urban public transport ([www.elportaljuridico.com.mx](http://www.elportaljuridico.com.mx)).

## Box V.10

**ADAPTING TO AGEING: SOME BASIC LINES OF ACTION**

- 1. Research and studies**
  - Analytical research, case studies and other types of study in order to learn about, analyse and interpret the problem of the older adult population.
  - Systematization of experiences on ageing in other parts of the world.
  - Promotion of technical and professional specialization in areas related to older adults (medical and social gerontology, care of the elderly, etc.).
- 2. Organization of older adults**
  - Support for organizations and networks of older adults (at local, provincial, national and international levels).
  - Promotion of associativity among older adults.
- 3. Design of public policies**
  - Positive discrimination for older adults.
  - Positioning of older adult affairs as cross-cutting public policy issues.
- 4. Empowerment of older adults**
  - Socialization and dissemination of coverage, access to and ways to use the existing services.
  - Training that takes into account the recovery of skills and requalification of labour.
- 5. Cultural revaluation of the older adult**
  - Public awareness-raising with respect to old age and ageing, and older adults as players in development.
  - Promotion of change in older adults' self-perceptions and dissemination of their rights.
  - Promotion of values that encourage positive self-esteem among older adults.
  - Encouragement of a culture of respect for older adults.

**Source:** A. Viveros, *Envejecimiento y vejez en América Latina y el Caribe: políticas públicas y las acciones de la sociedad*, Población y desarrollo series, No. 22 (LC/L.1657-P), Santiago, Chile, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2001. United Nations publication, Sales

The institutional and legal slant of the foregoing arguments is a necessary part both of technical considerations with regard to future trends and of the conceptual importance of rights as regards measures taken in response to sociodemographic vulnerability. This is consistent with the thesis that population and development policies should be founded on the rights of the individual, as reaffirmed in the Programme of Action adopted by the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994 (United Nations, 1995). Indeed, the institutional structure has been adapting to emerging rights and risks in relation to a number of population and development issues. But rather than simply identifying risks and defining policies to deal with them, the rights-based approach should enshrine a more analytical vision that targets the objective effects or average consequences of demographic trends. Any institutional change from a rights-based point of view must therefore go beyond the formal aspects and the discourse to deal

with the issues in practice. For example, a recent study conducted in Central America on responsible parenthood issues—one of the backdrops to many sociodemographic risks—stated that:

*“The States of the region have made progress in the enactment of laws that directly regulate the responsibilities and obligations of fathers and mothers with respect to their sons and daughters. Many legal instruments have assimilated the recommendations of international forums that seek to build greater equity between men and women and ensure observance of the rights of the child and of adolescents. States have also been making commitments to protect and regulate the relationship between men and their sons and daughters. The need remains, however, to fill the gaps, do away with contradictions and create legal procedures to put the legislation into effect”* (Alatorre, 2001, p. 48).

The conclusions of the same study affirm that:

*“Individuals are often prevented from enforcing their rights by economic or sociocultural barriers. It is therefore necessary to educate the community in order to get institutions to broaden the law and respect the rights of the members of that community. Moreover, broadening the law should start with the recognition of gender inequities, since complicity within the legal, household, labour and community spheres enables men to avoid complying with their legal obligations and places women at a disadvantage in enforcing their own rights and the rights of minors”* (Alatorre, 2001, p. 60).



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