

Progress in the Implementation of the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018–2027)

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

7 May 2021

Assessment of results and impact, gaps and challenges

In its **Social Panorama of Latin America 2020**,¹ the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a rise in poverty to levels unprecedented in recent decades, sharply affecting inequality and employment. ECLAC has estimated that in 2020 the extreme poverty rate was 12.5% (compared to 11.3% in 2019) while the poverty rate affected 33.7% of the population (compared to 30.5% in 2019). This means that the total number of poor rose to 209 million by the end of 2020, affecting 22 million more people than in the previous year. Of that total, 78 million people found themselves living in extreme poverty, or 8 million more than in 2019. The **increase in poverty and extreme poverty** levels would have been even greater had governments not implemented measures to transfer emergency income to households. Governments in the region implemented 263 emergency social protection measures in 2020, reaching 49.4% of the population, which is approximately 84 million households or 326 million people. Without these measures, the incidence of extreme poverty would have surged to 15.8% and that of poverty, to 37.2% of the population. Moreover, gaps remain between population groups: poverty is greater in rural areas, among children and adolescents; indigenous and Afro-descendent persons; and in the population with lower education levels. Before the pandemic, poverty and extreme poverty also affected women much more than men. In 2019, the poverty rate was 12.7% higher in working-age women than men in a similar age group.²

The severe economic contraction that the region has experienced as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected employment, especially among women and youth. **Women's employment** experienced a setback of more than a decade in terms of the progress achieved in labor market participation. The sharp contraction in economic activity observed in the second quarter of 2020 led to a mass exodus of women from the labor force, many of whom have not returned to search for employment, having to tend to care demands at home in a result of educational establishments' closure and limited care services provisions. Women continue to shoulder the burden of unpaid care and domestic work in a greater proportion in the region: before the crisis, women dedicated triple the amount of time than men did to care work. Women's labour force participation thus fell from 52% in 2019 to 46% in 2020, further widening the gender gap. It was also estimated that the unemployment rate for women reached 12% in 2020 (an increase of

¹ See [online] https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/publication/files/46688/S2100149_en.pdf.

² This gap has remained relatively constant since 2014, when the poverty femininity index reached a value of 113.0. The gap between men and women is greater where extreme poverty is concerned: in 2019, the extreme poverty femininity index reached a value of 115.3.

2.4 percentage points compared to 2019) while that for men reached 9.7%. Paid domestic work (which before the crisis employed 11.1% of women) was one of the hardest hit sectors, since, in addition of being highly precarious, it is a type of work that cannot be carried out remotely.

Key policy messages and recommendations

As part of the response to the pandemic, ECLAC has proposed the adoption of **social protection emergency measures** to fight poverty such as a basic emergency income and an anti-hunger voucher. For the medium and longer term, ECLAC has stressed the urgency of building welfare states, based on rights and equality, to provide access to **universal, comprehensive and sustainable social protection systems** as well as essential public goods, such as quality health and education, housing, care systems and transportation. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the importance of **care** for the sustainability of life. There is an urgent need to consider responses to care needs from a gender perspective, since, it is women who, whether paid or unpaid, bear the greatest care burden.

In July 2020, ECLAC coordinated the preparation of the Secretary General policy brief on “The Impact of COVID-19 on Latin America and the Caribbean”, which analyzed the challenges faced by the region and included key policies recommendations, such as the proposal of “moving towards a permanent and unconditional **universal basic income** to satisfy basic needs” which “could be implemented over time, in accordance with each country’s situation”, prioritizing a universal child grant, given the increasing incidence of poverty among children.³

Key activities

Through its **COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean**, ECLAC has produced several policy briefs on issues related to poverty eradication during the pandemic, often in collaboration with other UN agencies such as UNICEF (social protection for children; violence against children), UNESCO (education), PAHO (health), ILO (child labour, employment) and FAO (hunger). ECLAC has also compiled a repository of measures undertaken by governments in the region to address the COVID-19 pandemic, including those addressing poverty and vulnerability as well as the gender dimensions of the policy response in close collaboration with UN Resident Coordinators in the region.⁴

Through the activities of its Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, such as the January 2021 Fourth Meeting of the Presiding Officers, ECLAC has continued to promote the **Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development (RAISD)**, a technical and political instrument to support countries in the implementation of the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the region, focusing on eradicating poverty and achieving greater levels of equality and well-being. Since the beginning of the

³ See [online] https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/EN_SG-Policy-Brief-COVID-LAC.pdf.

⁴ See [online] <https://www.cepal.org/en/topics/covid-19>.

COVID-19 pandemic, ECLAC has held several regional policy dialogues with Government representatives, such as virtual meeting on the role of Social Development Ministries to face the pandemic and to advance towards less unequal and more caring societies, leaving no one behind.⁵

ECLAC has also contributed to strengthen the implementation of gender equality policies in line with the **Regional Gender Agenda** and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to implement the agreements of the fourteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, during which member States adopted the Santiago Commitment.⁶ During the sixtieth meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America held virtually in February 2021, it was agreed that COVID-19 response and recovery policies should incorporate a gender perspective “to include participation by women in their design and implementation and to help to overcome the multiple and intersecting forms of violence, discrimination, exclusion and inequality that disproportionately affect women in all their diversity and are manifest in increased unemployment and poverty, as well as in the overburden of paid and unpaid domestic and care work, and which threaten to widening existing gaps and reverse progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Regional Gender Agenda”.⁷

Further, ECLAC supports the **statistical capacity of the countries in the region to measure poverty and inequalities in wellbeing**. In 2020, technical assistance was provided to several countries to improve the quality of household surveys, as the main source of data for poverty and inequality measurement and analysis. This was particularly important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, for which ECLAC provided recommendations to continue data collection through new modalities. Technical assistance also focused in collaborating with countries to produce disaggregated poverty maps at the municipal level, through the integration of data from household surveys, population censuses and administrative records. This work is being complemented through the development of a georeferenced platform within CEPALSTAT, ECLAC’s main statistical database⁸, to provide access to regional statistical data and geospatial information.

Also, **ECLAC has fostered greater inter-agency convergence and collaboration** in statistical projects: jointly with 10 UN entities, including the five Regional Commissions, ECLAC implemented the Programme on Statistics and Data of the UN Development Account 10th Tranche, in which it led the component on poverty and inequality statistics. ECLAC is also jointly implementing the project “Strengthening Social Protection for Pandemic Response”, where it focuses both on public policies and on developing nowcasting methodologies to produce timely

⁵ See, for instance [online] <https://www.cepal.org/en/news/alicia-barcena-encouraged-caribbean-countries-advance-towards-less-unequal-and-more-caring>.

⁶ See [online] <https://conferenciamujer.cepal.org/14/en/documents/santiago-commitment>.

⁷ See Agreements, paragraph 2 [online] https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/events/files/21-00097_mdm.60_agreements.pdf.

⁸ See online <https://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/portada.html?idioma=english>

estimations of poverty and studying the impact of growth and distribution on poverty and vulnerability.

In the statistics field, some of the joint activities in 2020 included the development of an online course on data disaggregation using small-area estimation methodologies, with UNFPA; technical assistance on household surveys, with ILO; joint webinars on improvements to household surveys, with the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Household Surveys (ISWGHS), online course on phone-based surveys, with the World Bank. Furthermore, the **Statistical Conference of the Americas**⁹ provides a platform for collaboration with different actors, and its working groups count with the support from UNFPA, UNWOMEN, UNEP, UNICEF and UNODC, among others.

Finally, ECLAC has convened an internal working group to advance the discussion on Multidimensional Poverty Indices and generate a regionally comparable **multidimensional poverty index for Latin America**. This work, which is expected to conclude in 2021, will serve as a basis for capacity-building in countries and improving the measurement of non-income forms of poverty.

⁹ See online <https://www.cepal.org/en/subsidiary-bodies/statistical-conference-americas>