

# CELAC's Contribution to the 2030 Agenda

## *La contribución de la Celac a la Agenda 2030*

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### **Abstract:**

In January 2020, Mexico assumed the Pro Tempore Presidency of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). In this essay, we analyze the challenges the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic poses to sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean, its social and economic consequences and how CELAC is contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Our findings reveal the benefits of regional cooperation in response to such an extraordinary situation, which can only help strengthen CELAC.



### **Resumen:**

En enero de 2020 México asumió la Presidencia Pro T mpore de la Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribe os. En este art culo se analizan los retos al desarrollo sostenible en Am rica Latina y el Caribe ante la irrupci n de la pandemia por la covid-19 y sus consecuencias econ micas y sociales, y c mo la Celac est  contribuyendo al logro de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible. Con ello se muestran las virtudes de la concertaci n regional para responder a una situaci n extraordinaria que contribuir  a fortalecer a la Celac.



### **Key Words:**

Pro Tempore Presidency, Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, Sustainable Development Goals, COVID-19, regional cooperation.



### **Palabras clave:**

Presidencia Pro T mpore, Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribe os, Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible, covid-19, concertaci n regional.

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## Introduction

Two constants dominate Mexico's foreign policy: support for regional cooperation and the promotion of multilateralism, both of which have crystallized in its Pro Tempore Presidency (PTP) of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). In January 2020, a decade after CELAC was created in Mexico, at the Latin American and Caribbean Community Unity Summit in Playa del Carmen in 2010, Mexico assumed leadership of the Community at a time when the world was calling multilateralism into question and regional fragmentation was posing major hurdles to the work of the mechanism.

CELAC is explicitly mandated to promote sustainable development. Its founding declaration commits it to: "continue joining forces and capacities to foster sustainable development" and "strengthen cooperation and the implementation of social policies to reduce internal social inequalities, with a view to establishing nations capable of achieving and surpassing the Millennium Development Goals".<sup>1</sup> Consistent with this mandate, since 2017 CELAC has supported both the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development created by the Economic

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<sup>1</sup> Declaration of the Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, December 3, 2011, paragraphs 25 and 26.

Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in 2016—the regional mechanism for the follow-up and evaluation of progress on the 2030 Agenda—and the effective implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda agreed to at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda).<sup>2</sup>

In September 2019, the world's heads of state and government met at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit to review progress on the SDGs and launched a “Decade of Action” to accelerate their achievement. The triple health, economic and social crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic will make it much more difficult for Latin America and the Caribbean to achieve the SDGs, but at the same time, it is more urgent than ever they be implemented. Collective multilateral action led by CELAC could contribute to accelerated action in this decade, so the Community can celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2030 with a fairer, more prosperous, more sustainable and democratic Latin America.

This essay discusses some of the concrete actions CELAC is taking to implement the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in a scenario that has undergone the most dramatic socioeconomic changes of recent history.

## Mexico's Pro Tempore Presidency of CELAC in 2020

In 2019, Mexico assumed the Pro Tempore Presidency of CELAC knowing full well the limits imposed on it by the global crisis facing multilateralism and the difficulties inherent to Latin American regionalism, but with the conviction that CELAC is essential as a mechanism for dialogue and cooperation that gives Latin America and the Caribbean a voice on the world stage. As leader, its goal is to strengthen the Community with timely solutions to concrete problems. The work plan agreed to by all members in late 2019 and approved on January 8, 2020 covers the following

<sup>2</sup> See CELAC, “Desarrollo sostenible”, paragraphs 3 and 3bis in “Plan de Acción de la Celac 2017”, and Fifth CELAC Summit, “Declaración Especial 16: Implementación de la Agenda 2030 para el desarrollo sostenible y el cumplimiento de los objetivos de desarrollo sostenible (ODS)”, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, January 25, 2017.

areas, progress on which will be discussed in the section on CELAC's contribution to the 2030 Agenda:

1. Aerospace and aeronautical cooperation
2. Comprehensive disaster risk management
3. Science and technology for societies and the First CELAC Innovation Summit
4. CELAC meetings of university rectors
5. Common consolidated procurement
6. Monitoring of resistance to antimicrobials
7. CELAC anti-corruption methodology
8. China-CELAC Ministerial Meeting
9. Agenda of the 75th General Assembly of the United Nations
10. Governability body
11. CELAC awards for combatting inequality and poverty
12. Regional political dialogue and joint participation in multilateral forums
13. Sustainable management of ocean resources
14. Joint action to promote tourism

As can be seen, even without knowing a new virus was going to turn all reference parameters on their heads, Mexico's PTP had the foresight to include health, science, technology, innovation and sustainability in its plan.

Additionally, the PTP is promoting more dynamic, cross-cutting relations with extra-regional partners. The most institutionalized of these is with the European Union (EU), which dates from the first summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1999, and which has met at this level as EU-LAC in Chile in 2013 and in Brussels in 2015.<sup>3</sup> As regards the 2030 Agenda, CELAC and the EU have a commitment that will prove even more important in surmounting the crisis sparked off by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the declaration following the Second EU-CELAC Ministerial Meeting in Brussels on July 16-17, 2018, the parties

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<sup>3</sup> For more on this bi-regional relationship, see José Antonio Sanahuja and Érika Ruíz Sandoval, *La Unión Europea y la Agenda 2030 en América Latina: políticas de cooperación en una región de "desarrollo en transición"*, Madrid, Fundación Carolina (Working documents, 8/2019), June 2019, at [https://www.fundacioncarolina.es/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/DT\\_FC\\_08.pdf](https://www.fundacioncarolina.es/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/DT_FC_08.pdf) (date of reference: September 10, 2020).

agreed to avail themselves of every cooperation instrument at their disposal to achieve the SDGs. Specifically, they discussed the problems associated with the mid-income country classification and reminded participants that the Addis Ababa Action Agenda calls on financial institutions to consider all aspects of development and poverty, not just criteria like per capita income, which does not reflect a country's capacity—or lack thereof—to achieve development. Consequently, they were gratified to learn that the EU had implemented the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Mechanism for Development in Transition<sup>4</sup> established by ECLAC and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in May 2018.<sup>5</sup> This mechanism takes on particular importance in 2020 when classification as a mid-income country will make it harder for most countries in the region to get international financing based on their payment capacities.

To cooperate with the response to the manifold manifestations of the crisis, CELAC and the EU have a Plan of Action that was approved in 2015 and that covers issues related to science, research, innovation and technology; sustainable development; social cohesion; gender; education and employment; the business spirit and investment. Matters pertaining to science, technology and innovation will be dealt with at the Eighth EU-CELAC High-Level Meeting of the Joint Initiative on Research and Innovation (JIRI) on October 30, 2020.

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<sup>4</sup> Second EU-CELAC Ministerial Meeting, “Building Bridges and Strengthening our Partnership to Face Global Challenges,” July 17, 2018, no. 24-29.

<sup>5</sup> “The concept of *development in transition* takes on special importance in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the majority of countries are attaining higher income levels, but continue grappling with structural challenges” (e.g. inequalities, regional development gaps, extremely low capacity for innovation and low levels of manufacturing and export diversification). On May 7, 2018, the EU, ECLAC and the OECD entered into an agreement to facilitate the development of transitioning countries by helping them improve their capacity to achieve the 2030 Agenda, without sacrificing access to official development assistance and international credit. On the day of the signing, the EU announced an initial contribution of 9.5 million euros, which, together with funds put up by ECLAC and the OECD's Development Center, brought total financing to 16 million euros. ECLAC, “European Union, OECD and ECLAC Sign Agreement to Facilitate the Development of Countries in Transition”, press release, May 7, 2018, at <https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/european-union-oecd-and-eclac-sign-agreement-facilitate-development-countries> (date of reference: September 10, 2020).

China is the second-largest trading partner of a considerable number of countries in the region and has cooperated with the response to COVID-19 since the outbreak of the crisis, one example being the special ministerial video conference with Latin America and the Caribbean on July 22, 2020, during which the Chinese chancellor announced that the vaccine his country is developing will be made universally available as a public good and that his government will put up a one-billion-dollar loan to ensure the region has access to it.<sup>6</sup> To address the food security issue, the chancellor said he would be willing to negotiate urgent transfers from the FAO-China South-South Cooperation trust fund with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).<sup>7</sup>

## Achieving the SDGs: The New Challenges Posed by COVID-19 and Actions Taken by CELAC

In late 2019, China identified an outbreak of pneumonia in the province of Wuhan caused by a new virus that was classified in January 2020 as SARS-CoV-2. On January 30, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a “public health emergency of international concern”<sup>8</sup> and then a “pandemic” on March 11.

<sup>6</sup> Secretariat of Foreign Affairs (SRE), “Videoconferencia especial entre cancilleres de China y de América Latina y el Caribe para la atención de la pandemia por covid-19”, press release no. 209, June 22, 2020, at <https://www.gob.mx/sre/prensa/videoconferencia-especial-entre-cancilleres-de-china-y-de-america-latina-y-el-caribe-para-atencion-de-la-pandemia-por-covid-19> (date of reference: September 10, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Wang Yi, “Enfrentar juntos los desafíos de la pandemia y promover la construcción de la comunidad de futuro compartido de China y América Latina y el Caribe”, speech, videoconferencia especial entre cancilleres de China y de América Latina y el Caribe para la atención de la pandemia por covid-19, July 22, 2020, available at <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/esp/wjdt/zjyb/t1800354.shtml> (date of reference: September 11, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> According to International Health Regulations (IHR 2005), a *Public Health Emergency of International Concern* (PHEIC) is an extraordinary event which is determined to constitute a public health risk to other States through the international spread of disease and to potentially require a coordinated international response. This definition implies a situation that is: serious, sudden, unusual or unexpected; carries implications for public health beyond the affected State’s national border; and may require immediate international action. World Health Organization

To control the spread of the virus, measures have been taken to restrict contact between people, which have resulted in reduced mobility and lower consumption of goods and services. This, in turn, has affected global value and supply chains, leading to the closure of companies and destroying the livelihoods of half the world's workforce. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicts that the global economy will shrink 4.9% in 2020 and that recovery will take several years. It also refers to "a crisis like no other" due to its global scope and severity,<sup>9</sup> all of which makes achieving the 17 SDGs more difficult, but at the same time, all the more pressing.

Given the very different panorama we are now looking at because of the pandemic, coordinated, accelerated action by multilateral institutions takes on even greater importance. As part of the general debate at the General Assembly of September 2020, the UN will be commemorating the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the SDGs, which will be a very fitting occasion to propose efficient, innovative actions aimed at an inclusive and sustainable economic and social recovery.<sup>10</sup>

CELAC, too, is responding to these new challenges. Since the beginning of the year, the PTP has come to realize that fulfilling its mandate will require flexibility and the ability to adapt to change. The world over, plans, budgets and cooperation have been redirected and stepped up in an effort to understand the virus, acquire medical supplies, research treatments and vaccines, share public health policy experiences, analyze socioeconomic impacts and improve the use of digital technologies.

On March 26, 2020, at the CELAC Virtual Ministerial Meeting for Response and Follow-up of the COVID-19 Pandemic, chancellors, health ministers and other government representatives analyzed the region's health, economic and social situation and requested that ECLAC and FAO evaluate the

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(WHO), "Emergencies: International Health Regulations and Emergency Committees", December 19, 2019, at <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/what-are-the-international-health-regulations-and-emergency-committees> (date of reference: September 10, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> International Monetary Fund (IMF), "World Economic Outlook Update", June 2020, at <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/06/24/WEOUpdateJune2020> (date of reference: September 23, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> ECOSOC, "Accelerated Action and Transformative Pathways: Realizing the Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development", E/2020/59, May 8, 2020, paragraph 42.

situation and make recommendations. In response, ECLAC developed the COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America,<sup>11</sup> which compiles and disseminates the public policies countries are adopting to address the crisis. To date, the Observatory has published seven reports on economic and social impacts broken down by region, country and sector to facilitate decision-making by CELAC members.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, FAO has lent its support by conducting studies on the impact on food systems, which we will be discussing later on.

First, however, we will be looking at the social development situation in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the actions CELAC and its members are taking to palliate the negative impacts of the pandemic and create better circumstances than the ones prevalent six months ago before the outbreak of COVID-19.

### *SDG 8: Economic Growth and Decent Work*

During the first decade of this century, the rising price of basic products fueled GDP growth, especially in South American countries, making it possible to achieve a substantial reduction in poverty and inequality. But between 2010 and 2019, GDP fell from 6.2% to 0.2% just prior to the pandemic. In other words, even before the outbreak of COVID-19, growth in the region in the last five years has been insufficient to achieve the SDGs (see Table 1). And if we factor in the impact of the pandemic, ECLAC estimates the region's GDP will drop -9.1% in 2020, bringing per capita GDP back to 2010 levels (see Table 2).

<sup>11</sup> Available at: <https://www.cepal.org/es/temas/covid-19>.

<sup>12</sup> The titles of the seven special reports are: *América Latina y el Caribe ante la pandemia del covid-19. Efectos económicos y sociales*, April 2020; *Dimensionar los efectos del covid-19 para pensar en la reactivación*, April 2020; *El desafío social en tiempos del covid-19*, May 2020; *Sectores y empresas frente al covid-19: emergencia y recuperación*, July 2020; *Enfrentar los efectos cada vez mayores del covid-19 para una reactivación con igualdad: nuevas proyecciones*, July 2020; *Los efectos del COVID19 en el comercio internacional y la logística*, August 2020, and *Universalizar el acceso a las tecnologías digitales para enfrentar los efectos del covid-19*, August 2020.



	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Latin America & The Caribbean	6.2	4.5	2.8	2.9	1.2	-0.2	-1.0	1.1	0.9	0.2	-9.1
Latin America	6.3	4.5	2.8	2.9	1.2	-0.2	-1.0	1.1	0.9	N.D.	N.D.
The Caribbean	1.5	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.4	1.2	-1.7	0.0	1.9	N.D.	N.D.

Source: Data for 2010-2018: ECLAC, *Estudio Económico de América Latina y el Caribe 2019. El nuevo contexto financiero mundial: efectos y mecanismos de transmisión en la región*, Santiago, ECLAC, 2019, p. 200. Data for 2019 is taken from ECLAC, *Informe sobre el impacto económico en América Latina y el Caribe de la enfermedad por coronavirus (COVID-19)*, Santiago, ECLAC, April 2020, p. 8. Data for 2020 is taken from ECLAC, *Enfrentar los efectos cada vez mayores del covid-19 para una reactivación con igualdad: nuevas proyecciones*, Santiago, ECLAC (special COVID-19 report, 5), July 2020, p. 9.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Latin America & The Caribbean	4.9	3.3	1.6	1.7	0.1	-1.2	-2.1	0.1	-0.1	0-1%	-9.9
Latin America	5.0	3.3	1.6	1.7	0.1	-1.3	-2.1	0.1	-0.1	N.D.	N.D.
The Caribbean	0.9	0.2	0.1	0.1	-0.2	0.6	-2.3	-0.5	1.4	N.D.	N.D.

Source: ECLAC, *Estudio Económico de América Latina y el Caribe 2019...*, p. 201.

Unemployment has been on the rise in recent years. In 2020, ECLAC estimates more than 2.7 million formal companies (2.6 million micro-companies and 104,000 small and mid-size companies) will go out of business.<sup>13</sup> The unemployment rate could reach 13.5% and the number of people out of work could rise from 26.1 to 44.1 million (see Table 3).

<sup>13</sup> ECLAC, "Impactos de la pandemia en los sectores productivos más afectados abarcarán a un tercio del empleo y un cuarto del PIB de la región", press release, July 2, 2020, at <https://www.cepal.org/es/comunicados/impactos-la-pandemia-sectores-productivos-mas-afectados-abarcaran-un-tercio-empleo-un> (consulted on: July 2, 2020).

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
LATAM/C	6.4	7.4	6.6	6.4	6.4	6.3	6.1	6.6	7.8	8.1	7.9	8.1	13.5
Men	5.2	6.2	5.9	5.2	5.5	5.4	5.3	5.7	6.9	7.1	6.9	7.1	N.D.
Women	8.0	9.0	7.5	7.9	7.7	7.5	7.1	7.7	9.0	9.3	9.1	9.6	N.D.

Source: ECLAC/ILO, *Coyuntura laboral en América Latina y el Caribe. El trabajo en tiempos de pandemia: desafíos frente a la enfermedad por coronavirus (Covid-19)*, Santiago, ECLAC (Coyuntura Laboral en América Latina y el Caribe, 22), May 2020, p. 57. Data for 2020 is taken from ECLAC, *Enfrentar los efectos cada vez mayores del COVID-19...*, p. 10.

The impact of unemployment is, however, differentiated, with the rate among women exceeding that of men by almost 3% for more than a decade now. Of the percentage of women that are unemployed, between 12% and 66% are unable to work because they care for dependents, compared to 6% in the case of men.<sup>14</sup> The pandemic is wiping out jobs in sectors like commerce, tourism and other services where a higher percentage of women are employed.

More than half the region's economically active population (142 million people) are not covered by a pension system to which they have contributed through a formal job, reason why Latin American countries have been implementing non-contributory plans since the turn of the century. In 2000, these plans covered just 3.7% of over-65s, but by 2015 they covered 23.8% of the population, who receive a pension of between 12% and 38% of a minimum wage.<sup>15</sup>

### *SDGs 1 and 10: Poverty and Inequality*

Reducing poverty requires sustained economic growth, a reduction in informal employment, redistributive policies and targeted, comprehensive social welfare systems with sufficient coverage. Given that there

<sup>14</sup> ECLAC, *Informe de avance cuatrienal sobre el progreso y los desafíos regionales de la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible en América Latina y el Caribe*, Santiago, ECLAC, 2019, p. 131.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122-123

is a recession looming, ECLAC estimates that the number of people living in poverty will rise from 185.5 million in 2019 to 230.9 million in 2020, while those living in extreme poverty will increase from 67.7 million to 96 million (see Table 4).

	2002	2008	2012	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Poverty	44.5	33.6	28.8	27.8	29.1	30.2	30.2	29.7	30.3	37.3%
Extreme poverty	11.2	9.1	8.1	7.8	8.7	9.9	10.2	10.3	11.0	15.5

Source: Compiled by the authors based on ECLAC data taken from *Informe de avance cuatrienal sobre el progreso y los desafíos regionales de la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible en América Latina y el Caribe*, Santiago, ECLAC, 2019; complemented with ECLAC data taken from *América Latina y el Caribe ante la pandemia del covid-19. Efectos económicos y sociales*, Santiago, ECLAC (special COVID-19 report, 1), April 2020, p. 16; ECLAC, *Enfrentar los efectos cada vez mayores del COVID-19...*, p. 10.

As a region, Latin America and the Caribbean are classified as having the greatest inequalities in the world, based on wealth concentration and income inequality indicators. However, closing these gaps requires us to take a broader view of equality that encompasses equality of means (income and productive resources), opportunities, conditions (education, health, basic services, connectivity and digital technologies) and rights. Given its cross-cutting nature, this paper attempts to reflect the differentiated impact of the pandemic by socioeconomic level, ethnicity, gender and rural-urban location, based on an analysis that takes income, poverty, health, nutrition and education levels into consideration.

As regards income inequality in the region (see Table 5), the quintile with the most resources (V) accounts for 45% of income, while the quintile with the least resources (I) receives just 6%. In 2018, the regional Gini coefficient was 0.465,<sup>16</sup> but ECLAC predicts the pandemic will push it up by between 1% and 8% in 17 Latin American countries.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Alicia Bárcena, Speech at the High-Level Meeting on Trends, Options and Strategies in Poverty Eradication across the World, July 30, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> ECLAC and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), *Salud y economía: una convergencia necesaria para enfrentar el Covid 19 y retomar la senda hacia el desarrollo sostenible en América Latina y el Caribe*, Santiago, ECLAC, July 2020, p. 9, at [https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45840/1/S2000462\\_es.pdf](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45840/1/S2000462_es.pdf) (date of reference: September 14, 2020).

Quintile I	Quintile II	Quintile III	Quintile IV	Quintile V
6	11	16	22	45

Source: ECLAC, *Informe de avance cuatrienal sobre el progreso y los desafíos regionales de la Agenda 2030...*, p. 119. The most recent data available is used for each country, which ranges from 2014 in the case of Nicaragua and Venezuela to 2017 in the case of 11 countries.

Socioeconomic mobility will decline. In 2020, 37.6 million people who were in the “low income, but not poor” bracket in 2019 will fall below the poverty line and 4 million will sink into extreme poverty. Likewise, 33.5 million people in the middle income cluster (13% of people in this group) will cross over into the low-income cluster.<sup>18</sup>

The region’s social protection systems are weak and insufficient. In response to the economic impact of the pandemic, ECLAC reported that, as of July 3, 2020, 30 countries in the region had adopted 190 social protection measures, such as unconditioned transfers and the provision of basic services. The organization recommends extending a “basic emergency income” to those living in poverty, which would take the form of a transfer equivalent to a poverty line for a period of six months.

## *SDG 2: Zero Hunger*

In 2019, hunger affected 47.7 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean. Instead of declining, 9 million joined their ranks between 2015 and 2019. This is the region in which food insecurity increases at the fastest rate. Based on pre- COVID-19 trends, FAO estimates that 66.9 million people (9.5% of the population) will face hunger by 2030 (see Table 6).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> ECLAC, *Enfrentar los efectos cada vez mayores del COVID-19...*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Program (WFP) and WHO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020: Transforming Food Systems for Affordable Healthy Diets*, Rome, FAO, 2020, p. xxi, 9, 15-6, at <http://www.fao.org/3/ca9692en/CA9692EN.pdf> (date of reference: September 14, 2020).

**Table 6. Percentage of the Population Living with Hunger and 2030 Projections, based on Pre-COVID-19 Trends**

	2005	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2030
Latin America & The Caribbean	8.7	6.7	6.2	6.7	6.8	7.3	7.4	9.5
The Caribbean	21.3	17.5	17.3	17	16.6	17	16.6	14.4
Central America	8.1	7.9	7.9	8.6	8.3	8.4	9.3	12.4
South America	7.6	5.1	4.4	4.9	5.2	5.8	5.6	7.7

Source: Compiled by the authors based on FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO data taken from *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World: Transforming Food Systems for Affordable Healthy Diets*, Rome, FAO, 9 & 15.

Hunger in the region is due to poverty, not lack of food, and since the number of people living in poverty could rise to 230.9 million as a result of the pandemic and its economic impact, there is the risk the health crisis will spark off a food crisis. The Caribbean requires special attention because it is a net food importer and depends on tourism and remittances, both of which have declined. Two other points will require attention: the Central American Dry Corridor and the humanitarian situation in Venezuela.<sup>20</sup> To address this issue, CELAC has recourse to its 2025 Food Security, Nutrition and Hunger Eradication Plan (Plan SAN CELAC) adopted at the Third CELAC Summit of Heads of State and Government in 2014, and the 2025 Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative (IALCSH). On April 27, FAO submitted its first report to CELAC's PTP,<sup>21</sup> in which it recommends reactivating a version of the Plan SAN CELAC adapted to the new context created by the pandemic. In its second report,<sup>22</sup> FAO proposes that, in addition to the basic emergency income

<sup>20</sup> FAO estimates 9.3 million Venezuelans faced chronic food insecurity in 2019 in the country's provinces and 1.2 million in Colombia and Ecuador. See FAO, *Seguridad alimentaria bajo la pandemia de covid-19*, Rome, FAO, April 2020, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> FAO, *Seguridad alimentaria bajo la pandemia...*

<sup>22</sup> FAO and ECLAC, *Cómo evitar que la crisis del covid-19 se transforme en una crisis alimentaria. Acciones urgentes contra el hambre en América Latina y el Caribe*, Santiago, ECLAC, June 2020.

recommended by ECLAC, governments consider providing people living in extreme poverty with a hunger bonus for a period of six months.

During the emergency, the functioning of food systems needs to be guaranteed, reason why the PTP convened virtual meetings between the region's ministers of agriculture. On April 2, 2020, Mexico's Agriculture Minister presided over the meeting with Central America and the Dominican Republic, and with South America on April 4, during which measures to guarantee food production and distribution during the health emergency were discussed.

Following the July 23 video conference "Multilateral Action to Prevent the Health Crisis Becoming a Food Crisis", CELAC's PTP adopted FAO's proposal to set up a regional program with the technical assistance of the latter and ECLAC. The program will potentially have a multiplier effect on the implementation of other SDGs and will have four goals: promote intra-regional trade in food; keep agricultural and fishing companies active; guarantee people in extreme poverty access to sufficient food; and draw up transformative reconstruction policies for a better future.

### *SDG 3: Health and wellbeing*

Latin America and the Caribbean are far from Target 3.8 of the 2030 Agenda: "Achieve universal health coverage (UHC), including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health care services, and access to safe, effective, quality, and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all". Health services are split up into public-sector services for people living in poverty, social security services for people with formal jobs and private services, with glaring differences in quality standards. Coverage in the region improved between 2002 and 2016, albeit unequally. The percentage of people in the poorest decile with health coverage was 34.2%, compared to 71.2% in the wealthiest, which translates into a difference of 37 percentage points.<sup>23</sup> To extend coverage, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) has recommended increasing government spending on health from 3.7% to 6% of GDP and has warned that, in Latin America, the high percentage of direct out-of-pocket payments (34%) puts

<sup>23</sup> ECLAC, *Informe de avance cuatrienal sobre el progreso y los desafíos regionales de la Agenda 2030...*, p. 128.

12 million people at risk of falling below the poverty line. The region has 20 doctors for every 10,000 inhabitants and two hospital beds for every 1000. In OECD countries, these figures stand at 35 and 4.8, respectively.

The pandemic has highlighted inequalities and differentiated health and social impacts. Those who live in urban zones (80% of the region's population) are at higher risk of being infected, especially poor communities employed in the informal sector that face greater restrictions when it comes to self-isolating or social distancing and that have limited access to health services.

Meanwhile, the availability of healthcare services not related to Covid-19 has declined during the pandemic, due to the need to reassign staff, infrastructure and resources, and out of fear of people becoming infected at health centers. As a result, PAHO is predicting an increase in the prevalence of diseases other than Covid-19 and higher mortality rates, among other impacts.<sup>24</sup>

The leadership of CELAC's PTP has been especially important in the area of health. Chancellor Marcelo Ebrard has declared that "Latin America and the Caribbean have a history of fraternity, solidarity and mutual friendship. This pandemic affects us all, regardless of our political or ideological stance. It is a challenge that demands the region set aside its differences and work in the common interest, for the good of our nations".<sup>25</sup>

The PTP has contributed to the regional response since the first outbreaks in Wuhan. CELAC's Network of Experts in Infectious Agents and Emerging and Reemerging Diseases (originally Meeting of Experts for the Monitoring of the Coronavirus) has met three times. On January 30, 2020, a network of experts was established to cooperate on research to combat transmissible diseases. On February 19 and April 16, virologists and CELAC public health experts shared the most recent information on COVID-19, research on treatments and the development of vaccines and their experiences in the therapeutic management of the disease. Epidemiological surveillance,

<sup>24</sup> ECLAC and PAHO, *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> SRE, "México y Argentina encabezan reunión virtual de la Celac sobre acceso a la vacuna experimental contra covid-19", August 17, 2020, at <https://www.gob.mx/sre/articulos/mexico-y-argentina-encabezan-reunion-virtual-de-la-celac-sobre-acceso-a-la-vacuna-experimental-contra-covid-19-250537> (date of reference: September 14, 2020).

they confirmed, is essential to adapting decisions on how to best control the spread of the virus.

An additional complication in the region has been the decision of certain countries to restrict exports of medical supplies. Less than 4% of imports by Latin America and the Caribbean come from within the region. Ending the health, economic and social crisis hinges on the development, production, financing and equitable, universal distribution of diagnostic tests, treatments and vaccines, reason why Mexico submitted the resolution “International Cooperation to Ensure Global Access to Medicines, Vaccines and Medical Equipment to Face COVID-19”<sup>26</sup> to the UN General Assembly, which was passed with the unprecedented sponsorship of 179 member States—93% of the UN—, including a majority of CELAC members.

Capitalizing on its participation in multilateral initiatives for the development of these vaccines and access to them, Mexico has also promoted cooperation among Latin American nations for a fairer distribution of medical supplies.<sup>27</sup> For instance, in May 2020, it urged CELAC members to support the call of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) to finance research projects that have the potential to discover a vaccine for the new coronavirus, with a view to accelerating the process.

On July 22, 2020, at a meeting on COVID-19 between China and Latin America and the Caribbean, the Chinese chancellor announced that the vaccine his country is developing will be a universally accessible public good and that his government will put up a loan of one billion dollars to ensure it is made available to the region. On August 5, Mexico and the United Kingdom presided over a meeting at which the organizations leading the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator initiative explained the workings of COVAX, a mechanism for the financing, development, negotiation, procurement and access to vaccines (see Table 7).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> UN General Assembly, “International Cooperation to Ensure Global Access to Medicines, Vaccines and Medical Equipment to Face COVID-19”, A/RES/47/274, April 21, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> SRE, “México presente en la alianza internacional para el desarrollo, producción y distribución de la vacuna contra COVID19”, press release no. 208, July 21, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> For more information on ACT and Covax, see WHO, “Update on the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator”, press release, June 26, 2020.



Three tools and a support area	Partners
1. Diagnostic tests	The Fund for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND) and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
2. Treatment	Wellcome Trust
3. Vaccines and immunization	The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) mobilizes research financing and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) contributes its financial and logistics capacities.
4. Strengthening of health system capacities and infrastructure	The World Bank and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

*Source:* Compiled by the authors based on WHO information, "Update on the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator", press release, June 26, 2020.

Likewise, on August 17, 2020, Mexico and Argentina, along with the Carlos Slim Foundation of Mexico, met with CELAC chancellors and health ministers to explain how AstraZeneca plans to produce the active substance of its vaccine at the mAbxience lab in Argentina. The vaccine itself will then be developed at Liomont of Mexico for sale to the rest of CELAC member countries. This synergy meets several of the Community's goals—the transfer of technology, the development of the pharmaceutical sector's industrial capacity and public-private collaborations—, but above all, this collaborative effort by Latin America and the Caribbean will help save lives and offers us a light at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel.

In the mid to long terms, another CELAC initiative that could contribute to the development of health inputs is the creation of a regional accelerator for patents and technological developments. This initiative was proposed by Mexico at the Third CELAC Meeting of Rectors of Latin American Universities on Innovation and Patents held on August 6, 2020.

#### *SDG 4: Quality Education*

In Latin America and the Caribbean, 95% of children of primary school age attend school. The remaining 5% are mainly children living in extreme poverty, in rural areas, indigenous peoples and communities of African descent. This figure rises to 9% in the case of secondary education.

As regards technical education, the biggest challenge is getting potential employers involved in the development of study programs to improve

the employability of students. In higher education, the number of students of university age enrolled in the region rose from 22% in 2000 to 46% in 2015, yet this percentage remains low, at 1% to 10%<sup>29</sup>, among the poorest sectors of the population.

During lockdown, a historic number of students were left without access to education. The authorities and educational institutions have responded creatively and promptly, as evidenced on July 5, 2020 at the CELAC University-Ministerial Meeting on “Post-Pandemic Challenges Facing the Educational Sector”, organized in conjunction with the Union of Latin American Universities (UDUAL). Here, rectors, academics and professors commented that, to ensure the continuity of educational services during the pandemic, the countries of the region have resorted to distance learning via radio, television and Internet. These experiences will be drawn on in the “new normality” to design mixed educational methods, both physical and remote. The first step will be to improve connectivity and close the digital gap, so this does not translate into unequal access to education.

### *SDG 13: Climate Action*

Urgent, global measures need to be adopted to combat climate change. The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean are not among the main emitters of greenhouse gases, but they are more exposed to both natural and anthropogenic climate change risks—geological hazards like volcanic eruptions and earthquakes; hydro-meteorological ones like hurricanes, floods, drought and tsunamis; biological ones like red tide and epidemics; and manmade ones like industrial pollution, desertification and soil degradation—, reason why CELAC’s work plan includes training in resilience and adaptation skills.

At the March 5 meeting of national coordinators, UDUAL offered a Master’s degree in Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management via its online higher-education platform known as Eceselie. Components of the Master’s include project design and evaluation, participation in risk management efforts organized by the local community, territorial planning, sustainable

<sup>29</sup> ECLAC, *Informe de avance cuatrienal sobre el progreso y los desafíos regionales de la Agenda 2030...*, p. 139.

post-disaster refurbishment and reconstruction and the design of risk management public policies.

### *SDG 14: Life Below Water*

CELAC has 33 members, 25 of which have a coast on the Caribbean Sea. Many of these are small island States that are vulnerable to climate change due to rising sea levels and more frequent, more intense hurricanes. Hence, CELAC's decision to sit in on the preparatory UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030: Western Tropical Atlantic Regional Workshop on April 28 and 29, 2020. Participants in the workshop agreed to compile uniform indicators to diagnose the health of the Caribbean Sea that is so vital to the tourism and fishing-based economies of these coastal nations.

### *SDG 17: Means of Implementation and Development Financing*

To address these new challenges, the region's countries will have to do more with less. Internally, governments need to invest in health and social protection systems, maintain expansive fiscal policies, improve tax collection and reactivate their domestic economies. The IMF, the World Bank and regional development banks are making resources available, but, as the rules of the financial system currently stand, it has been acknowledged there will be no means of addressing the debt insolvency problems of middle-income countries and that these could potentially jeopardize the stability of the global economy. At the CELAC University-Ministerial Meeting "Toward a New Post-Pandemic Global Economy" on May 28, UDUAL rectors and academics made some useful national and international recommendations on these issues.

### *Space Development. Cross-Cutting Impact on the SDGs*

One area in which CELAC's work has an impact on SDGs 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14 and 15 is satellite cooperation, which entails disaster preparedness, security and surveillance, meteorological, environmental, ecological

and climate change benefits, as well as supporting agricultural productivity, oil and mining exploration, urban intelligence and mapping, and driving connectivity and the Internet, distance learning and the use of communications infrastructure to make health services available to isolated parts of our countries via telemedicine. Hence, on July 2, 2020, CELAC called a meeting of the region's space agencies and related institutions to discuss opportunities for working together, including the possibility of launching a regional nanosatellite. The meeting adopted a declaration under which member countries committed to maintain the use and exploration of outer space for peaceful ends and to strengthen regional capacities.

## Conclusions

The health, economic and social crisis triggered by COVID-19 will have serious consequences, whose import cannot be fully assessed until the pandemic is under control worldwide. Latin America and the Caribbean will be hit particularly hard due to the region's characteristics: insufficient economic growth in recent years, greater inequalities, weak institutions, high debt levels and the crisis of confidence in its institutions, all of which existed prior to the pandemic.

The 2030 Agenda remains a useful roadmap and the Decade of Action initiative to accelerate the process has come at a timely moment. CELAC will continue to work toward achieving the SDGs throughout the remainder of 2020 via virtual dialogue focused on concrete goals that brings together policymakers, experts, foundations and corporations. The most tangible example of this are coordinated actions by CELAC that will guarantee Latin America and the Caribbean access to one of the COVID-19 vaccines developed in the future under the best possible terms of availability, price and quality, and as soon as possible, based on timely efforts to avoid distribution bottlenecks, enabling us to save lives and accelerate reopening. The crisis has illustrated how regional dialogue can improve the response to an extraordinary situation and established CELAC as a facilitator of such dialogue in the region.