

## DE LA DESIGUALDAD SOCIAL A LA EQUIDAD SOCIAL: HACIA POLÍTICAS DE BIENESTAR PARA LA JUSTICIA SOCIAL Y AMBIENTAL EN AMÉRICA LATINA

### Resumen

El propio concepto de desigualdad social va acompañado del de bienestar y justicia social y de los conceptos de necesidad y equidad. La desigualdad de las personas sigue siendo una consecuencia determinada no solo por la dimensión económica y el desarrollo, sino también por el contexto político, social y ambiental. Los objetivos del desarrollo sostenible hacen que los conceptos de equidad y justicia se conviertan en una realidad; no sólo porque ésta deba ser tomada como correcta y justa, sino porque busca crear políticas sinérgicas e integradas entre las diferentes dimensiones presentes en el contexto social (económica, ambiental, política y social). En la primera parte, el trabajo examina la desigualdad, la pobreza y la exclusión social en América Latina. En la segunda parte se estudian las posibles políticas de equidad que podrían aplicarse, en relación con los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible.

### Palabras clave

Desigualdad social, justicia de equidad social, desarrollo sostenible, políticas de bienestar.

### Abstract

The very concept of social inequality is accompanied by the concept of social welfare, the concepts of need and equity or social justice. People's inequality continues to be not only a consequence determined by the economic dimension, but also by the political, social, environmental context, and the development. The goals of sustainable development are a reality which allows it to be an expression of fair equity not because it must be considered immediately correct and just, but because it seeks to create synergetic and integrated policies between the different dimensions present in the social context (economic, environmental, political, and social). In the first part, the work examines inequality, poverty, and social exclusion in Latin America. The second part will look at possible equity policies which could be applied, in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals.

### Keywords

Social inequality, social equity justice, Sustainable Development, welfare policies.

\* \* \*

**Referencia:** Cubeddu F. (2022). From social inequality to social equity: towards welfare policies for social and environmental justice in Latin America. *Cultura Latinoamericana*, 36 (2), pp. 210-241 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14718/CulturaLatinoam.2022.36.2.10>

El presente artículo de investigación es resultado de un proyecto de investigación desarrollado en la Università Roma Tre.

Fecha de recepción: 5 de agosto de 2022; fecha de aceptación: 10 de septiembre de 2022.

# FROM SOCIAL INEQUALITY TO SOCIAL EQUITY: TOWARDS WELFARE POLICIES FOR SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN LATIN AMERICA

*Francesca Cubeddu*  
*University of Roma Tre*  
ORCID: 0000-0002-7475-6084  
*francesca.cubeddu@uniroma3.it*

---

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14718/CulturaLatinoam.2022.36.2.10>

## **Introduction**

Western countries use the indicators of modernity and post-modernity to read the social changes dictated by industrial development, the technological process, and the economic dynamics determined by the modalities of development. A development which is dictated by the nature of the indicators and the determined characteristics of the country. Individuals are experiencing a social change, defined by a strong uncertainty about the future and a continuous change of values: individuals have become the cause and effect of their actions as well as an advocate of strong social, economic, and political issues. The modalities of development affect also social development and the policies adopted. Latin America, characterised by different policies in each country, shows different types of mutations of development, and multiple forms of vulnerability. As it is impossible to observe all the countries composing Latin America, we tend to observe which social conditions characterise South America at a national level and in what kind of realities its inhabitants live, not only from an economic but also from a social and environmental point of view. With the Covid-19 pandemic which has involved the entire planet, it is possible



to observe how Latin America, just like Europe, has been affected by this health emergency and how both the percentages of inequality and poverty have gradually increased and become stronger.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also been a cause of the increase in the uncertainty factor (Mangone, 2021) in many Latin American countries. The pandemic risk has replicated and amplified the problems already present in communities, and increasingly intensified fear for present and future choices: education; working conditions; health; social inequality; social inclusion/exclusion. A litmus test of the social and economic conditions of each individual, which highlights the existing inequality.

The needs of individuals merge with the uncertainty of progress and social change brought about by social events. The very concept of social inequality is accompanied by the concept of social welfare, the concepts of need and equity or social justice. People's inequality continues to be not only a consequence determined by the economic dimension, but also by the political, social, and environmental context.

As Sen (1994) states, the idea of inequality contains two different aspects: the actual heterogeneity of human beings and the multiplicity of components of inequality with which it can be assessed and determined. Being able to define inequality depends on the different parameters by which it is measured. It is not possible, in fact, to completely eliminate inequality, but it is possible to know its characteristics so that one can then define the terms for a dimension of equity and thus prepare policies that move towards a fair and equitable, welfare. Therefore, aiming at the achievement of the concept of equity through social and public policies which allow the expression of the individual's potential and the development of his or her autonomy.

Two aspects which can be taken into consideration to analyse inequality and its reduction, both in Europe and in Latin America, are the individuals' potential and the development of their autonomy. The first is expressed through ascribed goods which can be represented by the concept of capabilities (Sen, 1985, 2000; Nussbaum, 2001, 2002); the second is expressed by the attainment of the necessities determined by society and the individuals' needs (Maslow, 1954; Max-Neff 1991; 1992) in order to be independent. These aspects are relevant to fair social equity process, and they must be satisfied by the welfare system policies according to the given social context (Saraceno, 2013; Spicker, 2012). A person's capacity, Sen says, is the freedom of each person to be able to do or be in order to achieve his or her ideal of life. A person's capacity thus indicates his or her freedom and ability to



lead different kinds of lives. As for Nussbaum, he believes that human capacity is what people are able to be and do. The first aspect therefore focuses on combining the individuals' ability to feel free with the ability of expressing their skills and themselves. The second aspect focuses on the possibility of being able to satisfy one's personal needs, from the minimal and essential ones to those which guarantee autonomy and independence. These aspects may seem very similar, but they do not always perfectly coincide. Governments have a great influence on these two principles while carrying out their social policies.

We should respond to just social equity by a Welfare system, but what kind of policies would make it possible to implement it? Contemplating not only the social context but, also, the environmental dimension that potentially entails an application of the concept of reality and a valorisation of the value of the social context. This is also possible through a systemic and integrated approach of social analysis: that is following the change of the entire social system (Maturó, 2012).

A concrete example could be the construction of policies aimed at economic, political, environmental, and social improvement of different countries, according to their organisation and social structure. The goals of sustainable development are a reality that is portrayed at both national and international level (United Nations Organisation, 2015). A reality that allows it to be an expression of fair equity not because it must be considered immediately correct and just, but because it seeks to create synergetic and integrated policies between the different dimensions present in the social context (economic, environmental, political, and social), but also to relate the local dimension to the international one. It brings with it a vision (Rawls, 1971; Sen, 2007; Dahrendorf, 2006, 2010) of freedom and autonomy of individuals within the social system. A utopian discourse of global challenge which aims at being a programme of action in which to achieve certain environmental, economic, social and political/institutional goals for people, planet and prosperity.

The paper will specifically examine the capacity to reduce inequality (Goal 1 and 10 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), which focuses on the expression of social and environmental equity, with precise indicators and dimensions. In the first part, the work examines inequality, poverty, and social exclusion in Latin America. It must be clarified, however, that in a great part of data only Latin America is considered, while others consider Latin America and the Caribbean. The text will include some comparisons with Europe and the condition of inequality, especially during the pandemic years.



The second part will look at possible equity policies which could be applied, in relation to the goals of Sustainable Development. The data used are processed by the author after extrapolating them from the Cepastat International Organisation database for Latin America and the Caribbean, from Eurostat for Europe.

It should also be noted that the data collected do not always refer to all countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

## 1. Forms of inequality in Latin America and its indicators

### 1.1 *Inequality and its expressions: some considerations*

Inequality is the negation of the possibility to develop each individual's own capacities, hence a violation of human dignity (Therborn, 2013). It is the evidence of deprivation in a society of existential needs related to being, having, doing, interacting (Max-Neff 1991; 1992) for several individuals. Therborn (2013) states that inequality is an expression of the socio-cultural order which reduces capabilities and sense of self as well as the resources to participate fully in a social life. Inequality is a social measure determined by possessing or being deprived of certain goods. Rousseau, in the second part of his *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, had already dealt with the origin of civil inequality: an effect of human social evolution and distinguishable from natural inequality determined by physical differences between individuals. Such inequalities have become more defined over the years with the division of labour (already known and presented by Adam Smith in his 1776 text) and the lack of specific welfare policies.

Beck (2011) distinguished social inequality from natural inequality. The former, has a political justification; the latter, is conferred by the state of birth. According to Bordoni (2017), in archaic societies inequality was determined by physical strength, while according to Runciman (1966), in modern societies society we can distinguish three types of inequality: economic, social, and political. Each one is determined by different variables. Bruni (2017) notes that inequality is the natural condition of every human being as each one of them has their own identity and capabilities.

Therefore, deprivation of resources determines economic as well as social deprivation. Inequality is determined and defined not only by the social and political context, but also by the entire cultural system.



Inequality is real but not always detected and revealed. To date, there are several contexts in which inequality is not highlighted and tackled, as it happens not only in developing countries but also in many areas in Europe, where poverty is an underground reality and the number of people who are in difficulty and cannot meet their needs or develop their capacities because they lack autonomy and freedom is not properly defined. Such people, in fact, are constrained, by the lack of necessary resources and the possibility of access to the various services provided by the social system. The real problem is the non-accountability of all forms of inequality, especially those caused by new forms of poverty, such as social exclusion.

As Orwell (1933) also states, «misery always goes hand in hand with secrecy» (p. 43), indeed poverty generates in people living of their salary the need to hide their condition, to 'live in subterfuge' by trying not to show or reveal their condition to outsiders. The condition of poverty is easily seen in the form of income inequality, only later can it be read in social dimensions.

The condition of income inequality as stated by the economist Atkinson (2015) is immediately detectable in the declaration of household income but also in their propensity to consume. In fact, just like in state of poverty, «the economic dimension shows that it is a first indicator of the different forms of inequality which take shape in the other declinations: such as participation in social life and use of different goods by individuals» (pp. 40-41).

Inequality is characterised by a multiplicity of dimensions, among them, known to sociological analysis are: social stratification (Giddens, 2006); social vulnerability (Ranci, 2002); gender inequality (Nussbauman, 2002); inequality of social mobility (Sorokin, 1927; Franzini, 2013); inequality in access to education and vocational training (Ballarino, Bernardi, Requena & Schadee, 2009); inequality in access to welfare (Benassi, 2012); generational inequality (Benvegna, 2015); digital divide (Sartori, 2006; Van Dijk, 2005, 2006).

An immediate analysis of society occurs through the analysis of social stratification, which instantly allows us to understand the type of social inequality its incidence. Sorokin (1927) defines social stratification as the difference of the population into hierarchically constituted social classes. The concrete forms of social stratification are diverse and manifold: «there is an unequal distribution of rights and privileges, duties and responsibilities, social values and deprivations, social power and influence between different members of society» (p. 11). He points out that hierarchy in social space is



determined by political recognition and social value at both economic and social levels.

The condition of inequality changes depending not only on the social system which it belongs to, but also on the type of development existing in a given historical phase. In fact, the type of society and development in a specific time phase are determining factors in the changing condition of each individual.

Each social context, being determined by its own cultural system, defines the form of inequality and thus determines the attainment of one's abilities and the satisfaction needs. In societies with a high degree of inequality between rich and poor, we can observe the impossibility of satisfying people's needs and achieving not only economic, but also social, psychological and political well-being. In fact, Max-Neef (1991, 1992) observes that to be satisfied, individuals must be able to meet multiple needs which encompass the very human condition: *being, having, doing and interacting*.

Four categories which deal with the political, social, economic and psychological spheres of individuals, where the nine needs, as shown by table 1, are: *subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity, freedom*. It should be noted that the categories of needs presented show how individuals have social, physical, psychological, economic, and even environmental needs at the same time.

**Table 1. Max-Neef (1991, 1992) - Needs according to existential categories e Needs according to axiological categories**

Needs according to existential categories				
Needs according to axiological categories	<i>Being</i>	<i>Having</i>	<i>Doing</i>	<i>Interacting</i>
<b>Subsistence</b>	1/ Physical health, mental health, equilibrium, sense of humour, adaptability	2/ Food, shelter, work	3/ Feed, procreate, rest, work	4/ Living environment, social setting
<b>Protection</b>	5/ Care, adaptability, autonomy, equilibrium, solidarity	6/ Insurance systems, savings, social security, health systems, rights, family, work	7/ Co-operate, prevent, plan, take care of, help	8/ Living space, social environment, dwelling



**Needs according to existential categories**

<b>Affection</b>	9/ Self-esteem, solidarity, respect, tolerance, generosity, receptiveness, passion, determination, sense of humour	10/ Friendships, family, partnerships, relationships with nature	11/ Make love, caress, express emotions, share, take care of, cultivate, appreciate	12/ Privacy, intimacy, home, space of togetherness
<b>Understanding</b>	13/ Critical conscience, receptiveness, curiosity, astonishment, discipline, intuition, rationality	14/ Literature, teachers, method, educational policies, communication policies	15/ Investigate, study, experiment, educate, analyse, meditate	16/ Settings of formative, interaction, schools, universities, academies, groups, communities, family
<b>Participation</b>	17/ Adaptability, receptiveness, solidarity, willingness, determination, dedication, respect, passion, sense of humour	18/ Rights, responsibilities, duties, privileges, work	19/ Become affiliated, cooperate, propose, share, dissent, obey, interact, agree on, express opinions	20/ Settings of participative, interaction, parties, associations, churches, communities, neighbourhoods, family
<b>Leisure</b>	21/ Curiosity, receptiveness, imagination, recklessness, sense of humour, tranquillity, sensuality	22/ Games, spectacles, clubs, parties, peace of mind	23/ Day-dream, brood, dream, recall old times, give way to fantasies, remember, relax, have fun, play	24/ Privacy, intimacy, spaces of closeness, free time, surroundings, landscapes
<b>Creation</b>	25/ Passion, determination, intuition, imagination, boldness, rationality, autonomy, inventiveness, curiosity	26/ Abilities, skills, method, work	27/ Work, invent, build, design, compose, interpret	28/ Productive and feedback settings, workshops, cultural groups, audiences, spaces for expression, temporal freedom
<b>Identity</b>	29/ Sense of belonging, consistency, differentiation, self-esteem, assertiveness	30/ Symbols, language, religions, habits, customs, reference groups, sexuality, values, norms, historical memory, work	31/ Commit oneself, integrate oneself, confront, decide on, get to know oneself, recognize oneself, actualize oneself, grow	32/ Social rhythms, everyday settings, settings which one belongs to, maturation stages
<b>Freedom</b>	33/ Autonomy, self-esteem, determination, passion, assertiveness, openmindedness, boldness, rebelliousness, tolerance	34/ Equal rights	35/ Dissent, choose, be different from, run risks, develop awareness, commit oneself, disobey	36/ Temporal/ spatial plasticity



Thirty-six combinations of needs show in their different dimensions how essential each social dimension is for the development of people and how much the cultural, social, psychological, and environmental dimensions are combined. Interaction with the environment is a determining factor of inequality because it is a generator of social change in human capital and in the realisation of the capacities of individuals through the appropriate use of the various resources present (Sen, 1985).

Daniel Bell (1999) and Talcott Parsons (1968) argued that modern society has always developed outside nature: already bearing in mind that the economic process proposed by states has always focused on immediate exploitation and not on the collaboration or management of nature in human life. Allan Schnaiberg's analysis (1975; 1980), on the other hand, shows how a fair use of environmental resources does not lead to negative social and political consequences, but, on the contrary, it can generate improvement over generations.

The environmental dimension which determines human life is another form of social division, since it is a factor of social change which defines the social inequality generated by the possibility or impossibility of access to resources apt to prevent and respond to environmental disasters and risks.

By understanding the origins of inequality, it is possible to analyse its dimension and structure. Most forms of inequality start from the economic dimension, so it has a political as well as an economic origin (Stiglitz, 2012). There is the creation of a polarisation of wealth on one side and of the condition of poverty on the other: such polarisation, studied by the economist Stiglitz (2012) in the United States, is particularly visible in many Latin American countries.

## **1.2. Expressions and forms of inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean**

Latin and Caribbean America is defined as such because it includes both the states that are part of Latin America and the Caribbean region with its geographical area.

In the text, the condition of poverty and inequality in Latin America will be analysed, showing also the data with the entire Caribbean area where necessary.

Today, Latin America tells a story of relatively high inequality, exacerbated also by Covid-19 health emergency.



Historically, such inequality has not always been higher than in Western Europe (Williamson, 2015). In fact, despite various difficulties, according to Williamson, pre-colonial Latin America had modest levels of inequality and only after colonisation did the Gini coefficient rise from 0.23 to 0.35. Estimates suggest a peak of the Gini coefficient of 0.58 around 1790. After 1870, Latin America witnessed a rapid increase in inequality due to the boom in export of raw materials and this growth led to a rise of inequality from the 1920s to the 1970s, while it declined in most of the rest of the world, as well as in Europe.

In Europe, inequality is diversified not only by historical periods, partly related to crises, but also by the condition of individual countries (Ferrera & Hemerijck, 2003; Ferrera, 2007; Immerfall & Thernborn, 2010). With the Covid-19 pandemic, the situation has worsened, so much so that in 2020, according to Eurostat data, there were 96.5 million people in Europe at risk of poverty or social exclusion, or 21.9% of the population, an increase data over the 2019. Specifically, there are very different peaks for the European states, which go from highest levels of poverty or social exclusion recorded in some Member States, such as Romania (35.8%), Bulgaria (33.6%), Greece (27.5%) and Spain (27.0%); to the lowest level of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion which were recorded in 2020 in Slovakia (13.8%), Slovenia (14.3%), the Netherlands (15.8%) and Finland (15.9%). According to Istat, in 2020 in Italy just over two million households (7.7% of the total from 6.4% in 2019) and over 5.6 million individuals (9.4% from 7.7%) lived in absolute poverty. After improving in 2019, absolute poverty increased in the year of the pandemic, reaching the highest level since 2005. These data are still rising sharply.

As regards to the concept of social inequality determined by income inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient<sup>1</sup>, according to Eurostat data, an uneven distribution is observed in the EU countries, i.e: Bulgaria (40.0%), Lithuania (35.1%), Latvia (34.5%) and Romania (33.8%) recorded the highest levels of disposable income inequality in 2020. High coefficients were also recorded in Turkey (43.4%), Serbia (33.3%) and Albania (33.2%), whereas in Slovenia (23.5%) and Slovakia (20.9%), income was more evenly distributed.

As of 1 January 2021, there were 447.0 million people in the European Union. Germany is the most populous state (83.2 million),

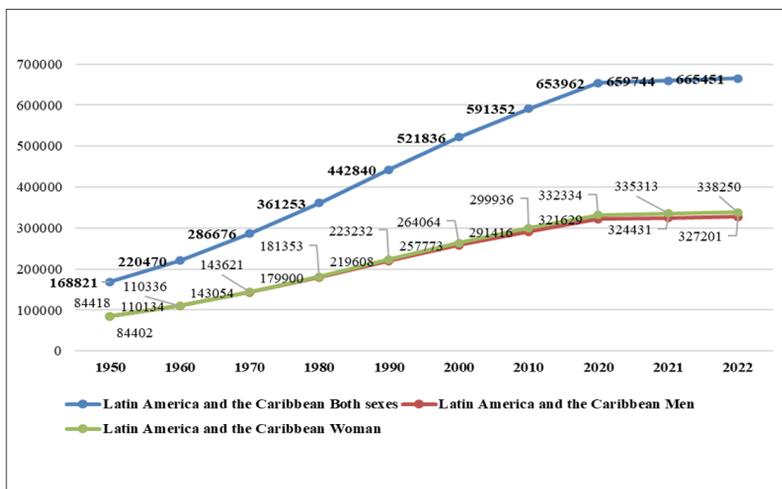
1. The Gini coefficient indicates to what extent the distribution of income within a country deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Gini value of 100% means that only one person receives all the country's income, while a Gini value of 0% means that income is distributed equally among the population.



followed by France (67.4 million), Italy (59.3 million), Spain (47.4 million) and Poland (37.8 million). It should be noted that from 1 January 2020 to 1 January 2021, the European population decreased by 312 thousand people: in absolute values, the largest decrease was observed in Italy (-384 thousand) followed by Romania (-143 thousand) and Poland (-118 thousand).

The area comprising Latin America and the Caribbean, on the other hand, is characterised not only by its population, but also by its vastness: it has, in fact, an area of 20,111,457 km<sup>2</sup>, twice the European area of 10,180,000 km<sup>2</sup>. As of 2022, it has a total population of about 666 million people: since 1950, despite the pandemic, it has been steadily increasing, as can be seen in Graph 1.

**Graph 1. Total population by sex in Latin America and the Caribbean - Thousands of persons for Years**



Source. CEPASTAT - Statistical Databases and Publications: ECLAC

Latin America and the Caribbean jointly comprise about 45 countries between islands and states. Among the Latin American states, the most populous is Brazil (about 215,352 thousand), followed by Mexico (131,563 thousands).

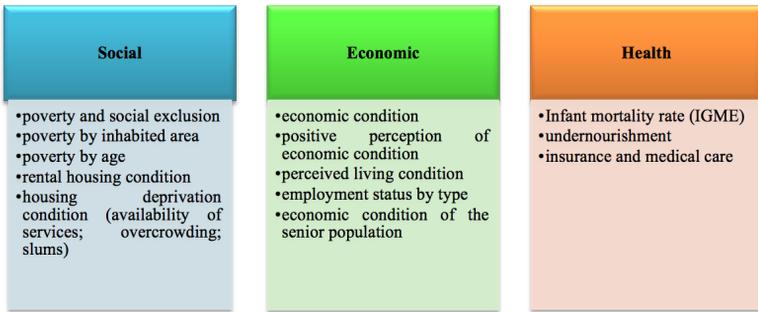
In order to read the dynamics of inequality on the Latin American continent, it is essential to be able to observe multiple indicators concerning both the economic, social and health dimensions.

The diagram below shows the indicators which have been chosen to observe the types of inequality in the different dimensions. The



proposed indicators were chosen following the theory of inequality (Therborn, 2013; Giddens, 2006; Ranci, 2002; Benassi, 2002) and with the intention of being able to observe the starting condition of the subjects to date, and to understand their attainment of the mechanisms of equity, as well as their autonomy and the satisfaction of their needs, divided by the necessary elements of being, having and doing.

**Diagram 1. Indicators for inequality analysis divided into three macro areas**



Developing the analysis from the social context makes it possible to observe how people live and what difficulties they have and to what extent.

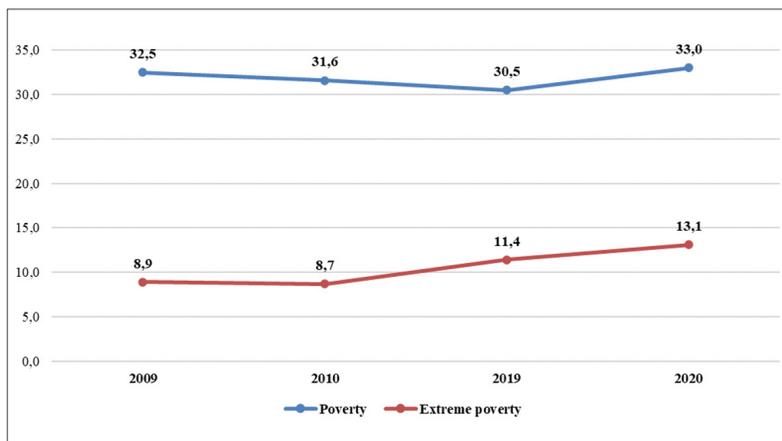
The latest report prepared by Social Development Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (2022), shows how the Covid-19 pandemic caused an economic collapse in all countries. A collapse which caused negative impacts on households and individuals, such as declining employment and labour income. According to the Preliminary Overview of the Economies of Latin America and the Caribbean there was a contraction of a regional average of 7.6% of GDP per capita in 2020, with a high degree of heterogeneity between countries (ECLAC, 2022). In six countries, such as Paraguay, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Haiti, Brazil and Costa Rica, GDP per capita decreased by less than 5%, while in others (Plurinational State of Bolivia, Honduras, Argentina, Cuba, Peru, and Panama), the decrease ranged between 10% and 20%.

In 2020, there was a widespread increase in poverty and extreme poverty throughout Latin America. Extreme poverty has increased from previous years, as can be seen in Graph 2, reaching levels higher than in 2009. So much so that there is a high number of people living in poverty throughout the country: over 200 million more in ten years.



A significant data which shows that there is a sharp drop in income from work, but that at the same time many families still manage to get by with their savings.

**Graph 2. Population living in extreme poverty and poverty by geographical area for year**



Source. CEPASTAT - Statistical Databases and Publications: ECLAC

To date, data show the worst recession in over a century, although there seems to be a slow economic recovery in 2022. Poverty, as well as inequality, have increased.

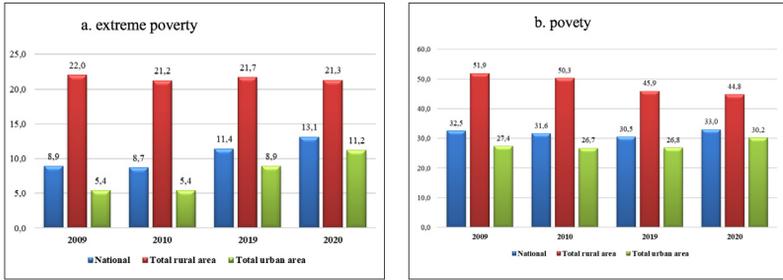
As graph 3 below shows, the geographical area most affected by the increase in poverty and extreme poverty over the years is the urban one. In fact, the poverty line in rural areas has remained constant over the years as for ten years there has not been a significant of a deviation. The increase, which also affects the National level concerns mainly the urban area, where there is a growth of about twice as much in extreme poverty from 2010 to 2020, from 5.4% to 11.2%.

A much lower data for poverty, which has seen a ten-year, and with the Covid-19 pandemic, increase of about 3 percentage points from about 27% to 30%. It is relevant to note that the population most likely to live in poverty is the young population in the following age groups: 0-14 years and 15-24 years (Graph 4a and 4b).

Looking at the single years, we can see that there has been an increase in poverty for certain age groups in 2020 compared to 2010. The condition can also be seen by looking at the total age line in the two graphs, which indicates just that.

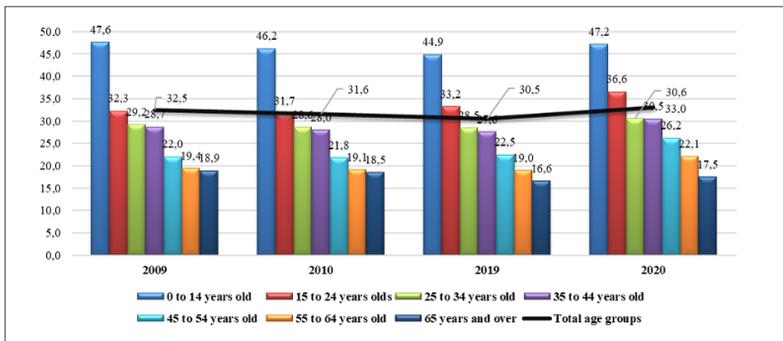


**Graph 3. % Population living in extreme poverty and poverty by geographical area for years**



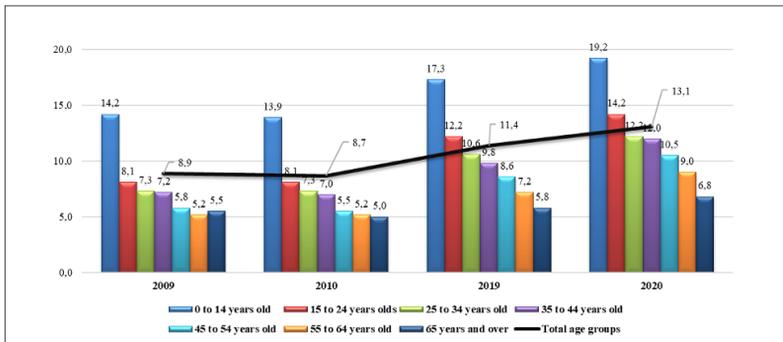
Source. CEPASTAT - Statistical Databases and Publications: ECLAC

**Graph 4a. % Population living in poverty by age in Latin America for years**



Source. CEPASTAT - Statistical Databases and Publications: ECLAC

**Graph 4b. % Population living in extreme poverty by age in Latin America for years**



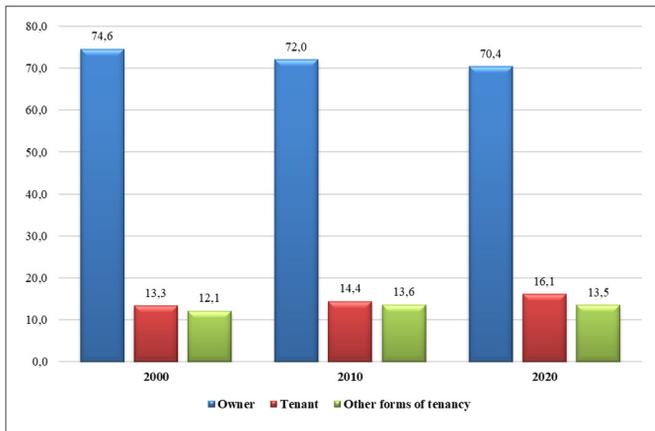
Source. CEPASTAT - Statistical Databases and Publications: ECLAC



If Covid-19 health emergency led to an increase in poverty and extreme social exclusion, World Bank's 2022 data show how inequality and economic and social hardship were also present in previous years. For example, in 2018 24.2% of the population lived on 5.5 dollars a day, 10.4% on 3.2 dollars a day and about 5% on 1.9 dollars a day. These percentages are not very high, but they show that already in 2018, about 40% of the population lived in marginalised conditions and were unable to access services. Continuing with the social analysis, we then observe the housing condition and the availability of services which people access. Housing is an important dimension because it represents the person him/herself, their psychophysical well-being and their position in the social class (Cubeddu, 2019). For this reason, it would be important to focus on the housing dimension as it guarantees individuals the possibility of social integration, as they have the certainty of satisfying not only the need for security (Maslow, 1954), but also the need for identity, affection (Max-Neef, 1991, 1992) in response to one's being and interaction (see Table 1). The living condition indicators reveal the living condition of the subject. In this regard, Tosi (2006) says: the house is the expression of inequality and social stratification. Homes and the dimension of living is essential for individuals and families' well-being, it is the basis for the quality of life in contemporary societies. According to Poggio (2005), the house is at the centre of the dimension of living, so much so as to be considered as an area of welfare, since it responds to basic social, economic and symbolic needs. In Latin America, we observe that from 2000 to 2020 there has been a decrease in the number of people buying houses and an increase in those tenancing. The percentage of homes owned goes from about 75% in 2000 to 72% in 2010 to 70.4% in 2020 (Graph 5). These are significant data which show a decreasing trend of people committing themselves in the long term to a mortgage or loan for the purchase of a movable property. Figures which relate to the dimension of a strong condition of social as well as economic uncertainty.



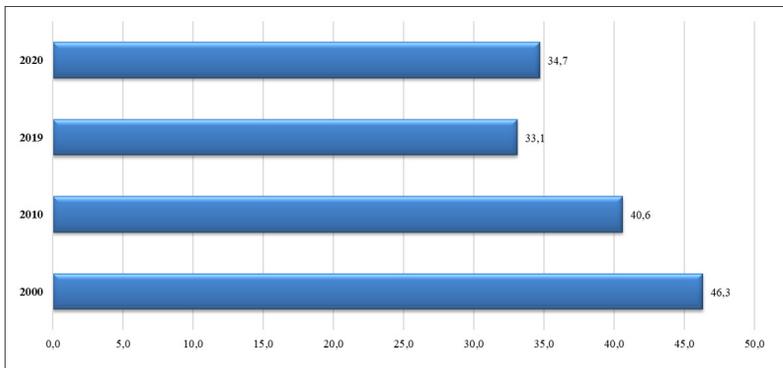
**Graph 5. % Population according to housing tenure status in Latin America for years**



Source. CEPASTAT - Statistical Databases and Publications: ECLAC

In accordance with this data and the health emergency crisis from Covid-19, as we can see in Graph 6 comparing years from 2000 to 2010 and to 2019 a decrease in the overcrowding rate and a gradual increase in 2020: from 33.1% in 2019 to 34.7% in 2020. A slight increase, as the data whose fluctuation is impossible to observe, for the current year is not yet available.

**Graph 6. % Population in overcrowded households, by Latin America for years**



Source. CEPASTAT - Statistical Databases and Publications: ECLAC



In addition to observing the use of housing, it is crucial to examine the presence of necessary services, such as water, electricity, sanitation, internet according to its geographical location, in urban, rural, or national areas.

Table 2 shows the percentage of households provided with basic services (water, sanitation, electricity) in Latin America correlated with geographical location. As we can see, only data before the sanitation emergency are available, which are useful for us to observe the percentage of the presence of services in the different geographical areas: rural, urban and national (taking both of the two previous areas as reference). Regarding the urban area, in the specific decade from 2008/2009 to 2018/2019 there have not been any specific situations of deviation, the only significant one is the decrease of households in possession of sanitation from 2018 to 2019 from (67.5% to 65.4%). As for the rural area, there has been an increase in the percentage of households with both drinking water and electricity in the years indicated, but there has also been a decrease in sanitation from 2018 to 2019. The average percentage at national level is in line with that of both the urban and rural areas, as it can be evinced from the same table.

**Table 2. % Households with availability of basic facilities in the dwelling (water, sanitation, electricity) in Latin America by geographical area for years**

National			
	Water	Sanitation	Electricity
2008	85,0	57,1	90,7
2009	83,6	57,4	91,5
2018	87,1	63,1	94,9
2019	87,3	61,7	95,1
Urban			
	Water	Sanitation	Electricity
2008	90,6	63,0	97,9
2009	89,2	63,4	97,9
2018	90,0	67,5	98,7
2019	90,0	65,4	98,7



	Rural		
	Water	Sanitation	Electricity
2008	66,4	40,2	75,5
2009	65,1	41,3	77,7
2018	75,6	53,5	86,8
2019	76,2	52,9	87,5

Source. CEPASTAT - Statistical Databases and Publications: ECLAC

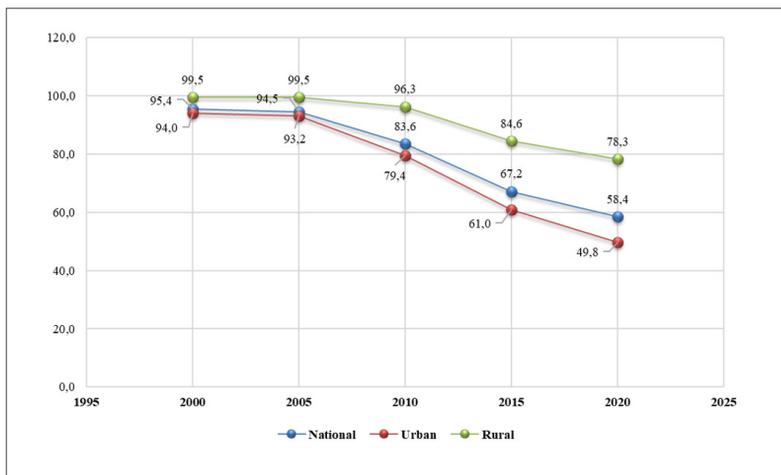
The above data actually show that even with the pandemic, the availability of services follows the trend of previous years. A further essential service is access to the internet: the greater the number of people who do not have access to the internet, the lower the quality of life, connectivity, and level of participation.

With Covid-19 health emergency, the internet has become an essential service for people's lives. Graph 7 shows the percentage of the population without internet in Latin America per Geographical area. Here, in fact, we can observe that there is a decrease of people without internet exactly in 2020: declining nationwide from 67.2% in 2015 to 58.4% in 2020. A process triggered both by an essential personal motivation to continue living one's life and by public incentives to allow students and workers to continue their activities (ECLAC/ UNICEF, 2021).

A significant fact that we want to present as an element of inequality in the social housing context is the presence of the increase in 2019 and 2020 of the percentage of the urban population living in *slums* (Graph 8). This went from 17% in 2016 to 17.9% in 2019 to 17.7% in 2020. A data which shows that we are experiencing a similar situation in recent years as in 2014 (18.4%). Looking at the data, the growth cannot be specifically determined by the health emergency in 2020, as it would be necessary to look at the data for 2021 and 2022 in order to make this assumption. The idea is that there are other incidental factors, which will not be examined here. What is relevant to observe is that there is a growth in these areas where people survive and therefore do not live their lives. They only seek to be able to satisfy an essential need, which is shelter through 'makeshift accommodation', designed to ensure a chance of survival.

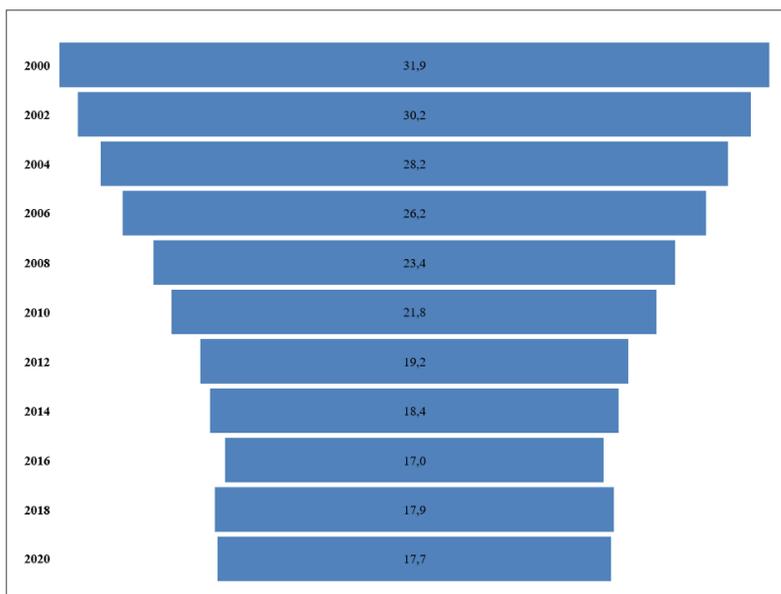


**Graph 7. % Population without internet access at home in Latin America for Geographical area and years**



Source. CEPASTAT - Statistical Databases and Publications: ECLAC

**Graph 8. Proportion of urban population living in slums in Latin America and the Caribbean for years**

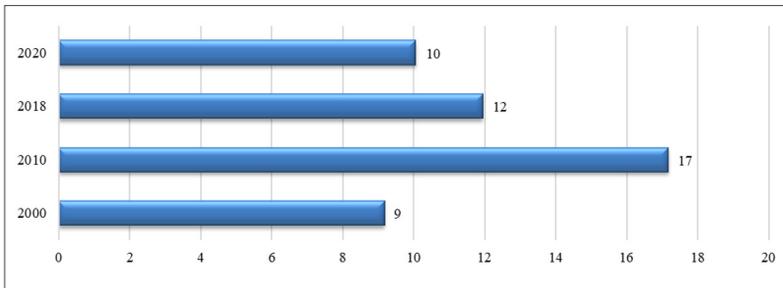


Source. CEPASTAT - Statistical Databases and Publications: ECLAC



Looking now at the economic indicators, we can immediately observe a figure which shows a decline in the positive perception of the country's economy by the interviewees. Only 10% in 2020 compared to 17% in 2010 or 12% in 2018 say that there is a positive economic condition in Latin America. In fact, the perception is the same as in 2000 regarding the living condition (Graph 9).

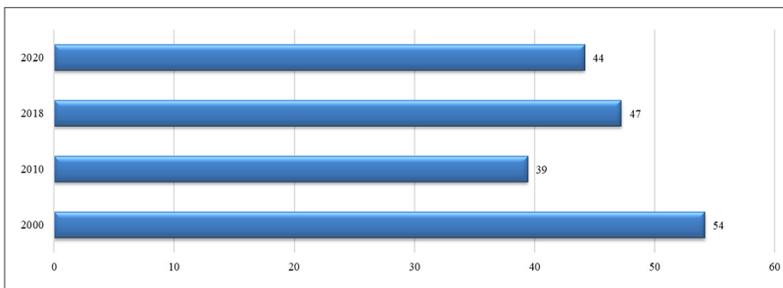
**Graph 9. % Positive evaluation of the country's economy by both sexes - Latin America for years**



Source. CEPASTAT - Statistical Databases and Publications: ECLAC

At an economic level, we can remark a situation which is worse than in the years before the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, even in the perception of the future of their children's lives (Graph 10) only 44% compared to 47% in 2018 say that their children will live better in Latin America: data reflecting poor living conditions and perceived malaise.

**Graph 10. Percentage of citizens who believe that their children will live better in Latin America for years**

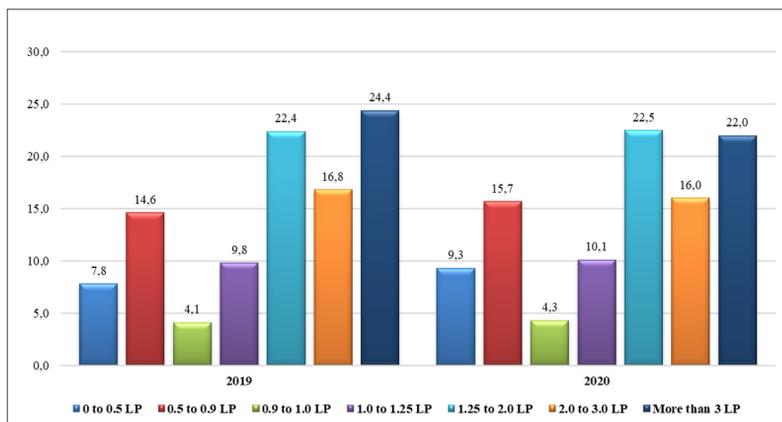


Source. CEPASTAT - Statistical Databases and Publications: ECLAC



Graph 11 indicates the distribution of people according to per capita income segments from 2019 to 2020. Here we can observe that the percentage values of the poverty line in Latin America are different and relatively lower in income values.

**Graph 11. Distribution of people according to per capita income segments, in terms of the % value of the poverty line in Latina America for 2019-2020**



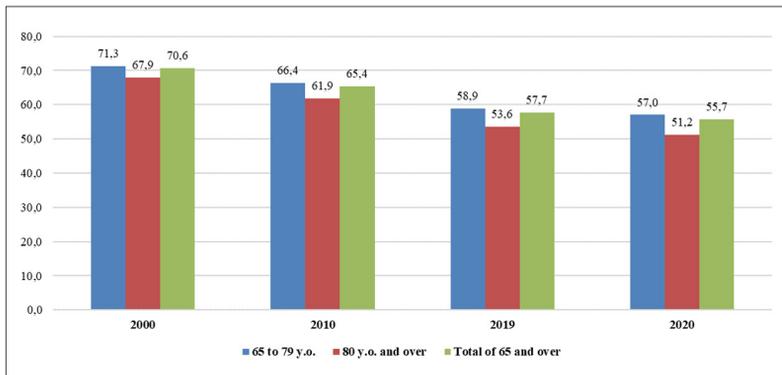
Source. CEPASTAT - Statistical Databases and Publications: ECLAC

In 2020, 23.9% is the percentage of the employed population whose average income per capita was below the poverty line and 9.1% is in extreme poverty. This data grew from 21.4% and 6.7% in 2018 to 22.2% and 7.8% in 2019, respectively.

It is important to note that a value which has remained constant over the years is the condition of the elderly who receive pensions that are insufficient for their living conditions. The percentage in the years from 2000 to 2010 is rather stable as well as that from 2019 to 2020. The deviations there are perhaps also due to the absence of people in the different age groups, which is given by death and age slippage.



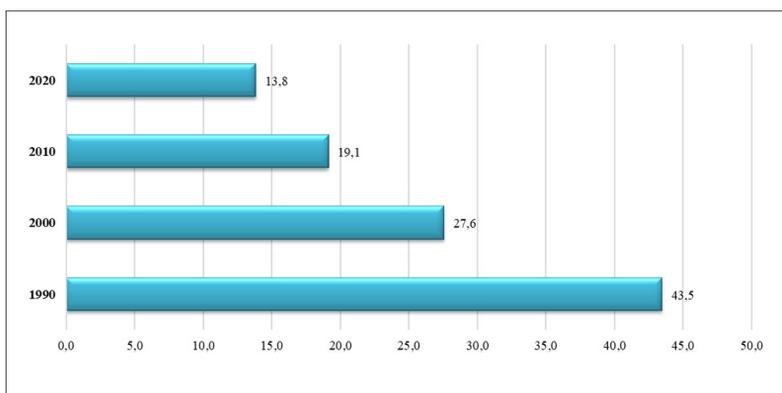
**Graph 12. % Older adults who receive insufficient pensions for quintile, by age group in Latin America for years**



Source. CEPASTAT - Statistical Databases and Publications: ECLAC

Analysing now the health status, we can observe that the infant mortality rate has been steadily decreasing over the years. It went from 43.5% in 1990 to 19.1% in 2010 and to 13.8% in 2020, as can be seen in graph 13.

**Graph 13. Infant mortality rate (IGME) in Latin America and the Caribbean for years (Deaths per 1,000 live births)**

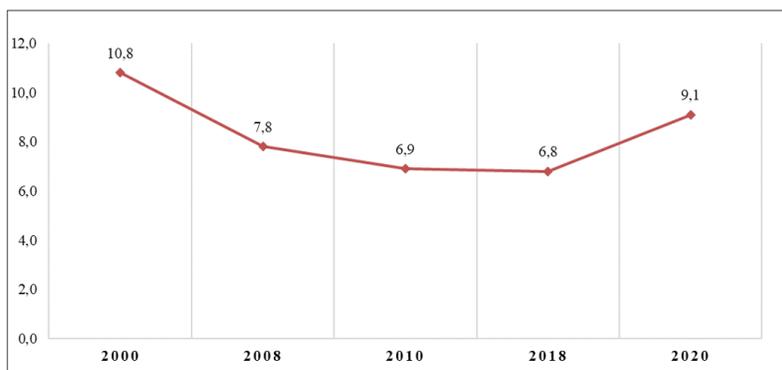


Source. CEPASTAT - Statistical Databases and Publications: ECLAC

The living condition of those living in conditions of undernutrition is different: since 2008, there has been an increase in the prevalence rate, returning to the values of 2000. The percentage of undernourished people increased from 6.8% in 2018 to 9.1% in 2020 (Graph 14).



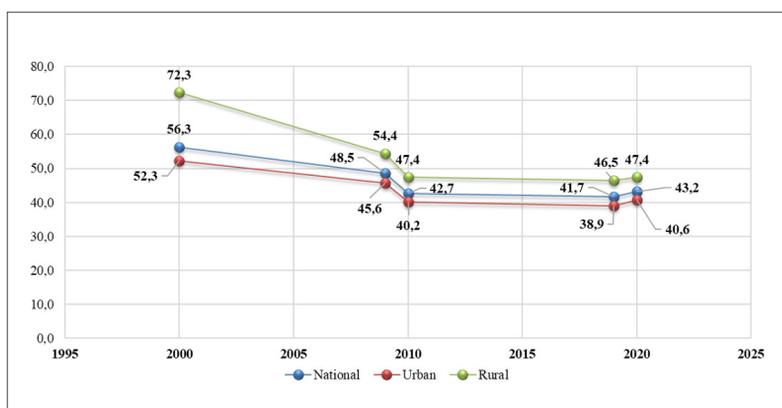
**Graph 14. Prevalence of undernourishment (%) in Latin America and the Caribbean**



Source. CEPASTAT - Statistical Databases and Publications: ECLAC

Related to the two previous data we can find the percentage of the population without medical insurance, which shows that from 2019 to 2020 the number of people without insurance in Latin America increased at National, urban, and rural level. Between 2019 and 2020, we can observe an increase of percentages at National level from 41.7% to 43.2, at urban level from 38.9% to 40.6%, and finally from the highest rural rate of 46.5% to 47.4%, as evidenced by Graph 15. A percentage value in 2020 which is equal to that of 2010, a full ten years ago.

**Graph 15. % Population without medical insurance by geographic area and per capita in Latin America for years**



Source. CEPASTAT - Statistical Databases and Publications: ECLAC



The data presented in this section show that there is a higher rate of inequality in Latin America than in Europe, also due to its size and number of inhabitants. It is essential to note that in Latin America both poverty and hardship in 2020, are affected by the health emergency and that the percentage values are the same as ten, twenty years ago.

By way of description only, we wanted to take a snapshot of the condition of Latin America to date in order to observe how it is possible, through the mechanisms of sustainable development policy and social equity, to support social improvement, but above all to support the development of the autonomy of individuals and the satisfaction of their needs.

## **2. Towards social policies focusing on just and environmental equity**

The condition in which Latin America finds itself today is the expression of a form of strong inner inequality. Specifically, it would be necessary to analyse the different countries in order to understand what the different internal conditions are in order to then be able to carry out more precise and stable analyses.

The examined data show a condition of poverty and social deprivation. This reality, together with the economic and health situation, as well as people's perception of their condition cause the detection of a situation of inequality. Poverty does not represent a form of social inequality but describes the context of not only economic hardship but also of social exclusion which induce people to not feel part of the community and therefore to live a life conditioned by the pursuit for their own well-being and autonomy.

Frankfurt (2015) states that poverty and deprivation of people are the real problem determining inequality, since, in order to live, individuals need society to offer them a satisfying life. This implies offering equal opportunities to subjects, preserving them from poverty and extreme inequality dictated mainly by economic capital.

The capacities (Sen, 2011) of subjects can be expressed by following a process of equality which targets individuals and their social development.

As Therborn, (2013) states, inequality is the denial of the possibility for each individual to develop his or her capacities and thus, achieve autonomy as well as satisfy his or her needs. Furthermore,



inequality is an expression of the socio-cultural order which reduces capabilities and sense of self, but also the resources to fully participate in social life. In fact, inequality is a social measure precisely determined by owning or being deprived of certain goods.

The freedom to be able to express oneself is a starting condition for defining what are the dictates of forms of equality.

Data from Latin America allowed us to see that inequality not only is determined by income, but also by social and cultural capital, age, and inhabited area. In the work, however, gender-related mechanisms were not considered since the data examined differed more according to age. At the same time, the nationality of origin was not observed as it was considered unnecessary to go into more detail for the analysis was only at a general level and not at an individual country level.

The indicators under analysis are a very narrow example, to be elsewhere expanded and studied in greater detail.

According to the Enlac report (2022), employment has partially recovered. Moreover, due to the enormous efforts made to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable sectors, governments have exhausted their fiscal reserves and debt and macroeconomic imbalances have increased.

The latest estimates for 2021 indicate that the GDP of Latin America as a whole has increased by 6.7 per cent. Nevertheless, according to the data observed, Latin America is experiencing a situation of serious marginalisation and social inequality that, without the adoption of social inclusion, employment and equity-focused policies, will only return to a situation it has experienced before. Moreover, without examining every single country we cannot include the analysis of the political dimension experienced and its impacts.

Speaking of social policies of fair social equity also means being able to identify a fair equality of opportunities and thus of the possibility of expression of the ability of all citizens to live their lives independently and in being able to satisfy their needs, not simply related to having but to being according to social mechanisms, masters of their lives, and not subjects (Fitoussi, 2013).

The idea that countries can set up and comply with policies centred on fair social justice is determined by the need to be able, today, to guarantee not only all individuals in Latin America a chance to live their lives fairly, but also to guarantee their families better living conditions and a better future. Therefore, ensuring a chance of growth and future means having a homogeneous world in which social stratification is naturally possible.



Talking about social equity in political and social mechanisms is not easy, notably on a universal dimension. Giving a sociological definition of the very meaning of social equity entails recognising the indicators and factors we wish to examine. Economists have been the first to realise this essentiality, in fact, paraphrasing Somaini (2002), «*Sen himself states that the recognition of equal dignity to all, represents a postulate of the modern theory of justice, which would imply that each person should be recognised as having an equal right to what has a proper value*» (p. 26).

That is a social value of recognition of people's very capacity for existence and social living.

A motion of recognition by policies which, according to Rawls' *Theory of Justice* (1971), must be based on two principles at the same time: the fundamental freedoms of citizens and the distribution of income and wealth.

The mechanisms of fair social equity must be adopted by social policies in order to guarantee a fairness determined by the recognition of the social value of individuals and not purely economic. New welfare policies.

The sociological meaning which can be given to the concept of social justice is the idea that it contains the term equity by analysing the social issue defined by inequality, poverty, and social exclusion. The interpretation of the concept of social justice itself proposes the responsibility of each state for guaranteeing social policies for citizens: policies aimed at equity, distribution of present resources, guaranteeing opportunities (Solomon, 2019; Nussbaum, 2008).

Planning specific policies focused on social equity is also difficult to propose to Latin America. What seems most possible, in line with a viable element of equity, is the policy of equity for present and future generations determined by the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The intention is not to deprive Latin American States of their own social policy, but the aim is to focus on the Goals and Targets of the UN Sustainable Development Agenda as a guide in showing a possible path to development in an equitable manner. A guide focusing not only on the economic dimension but also on the social and environmental dimension. Data show that it is not easy to reach and meet all the proposed Targets and Goals by 2022. The same 2022 report for the evaluation of the UN Agenda to 2030 showed that from 2020 there is an increase in social and economic fragility at the national level of Latin America, also dictated by the impossibility of being able



to observe all and the same indicators, given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Sustainable Development Goals are achievable through a change of economic and social system that is inclusive and sustainable. Working towards the goals means a change in domestic policies: changing the development finance sector; improving the implementation of national and regional production, social and environmental policies; strengthening the resilience of institutions; overcoming conflicts with agreements and pacts.

Latin American countries face a major challenge in achieving the social goals of the 2030 Agenda, especially in relation to poverty, health and education, social protection and access to drinking water, electricity, and sanitation. They are, in fact, those for which the least resources are allocated to social spending, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of GDP.

The high levels of inequality in Latin America are, as stated, high, and represent a challenge for the targets of Goal 10 (*Reduce inequality within and among countries*). In order to reduce inequality, it is necessary to understand the complex social and economic processes which cause it, from the perspective of individual equity. With regard to Goal 1 (*End poverty in all its forms everywhere*), as the data also show, the extreme poverty rate has decreased since 1990, but one in five people in the most fragile areas still live on less than 1.25 dollars a day. In addition, many people are also at risk of falling back into poverty due to the Covid-19 health emergency. Hunger, malnutrition, limited access to basic services, discrimination and social exclusion, as well as lack of participation in decision-making processes show and mark great poverty. Policies focusing on inclusive economic growth which provides sustainable jobs, promoting equity, and eliminating poverty, including extreme poverty, must be envisaged.

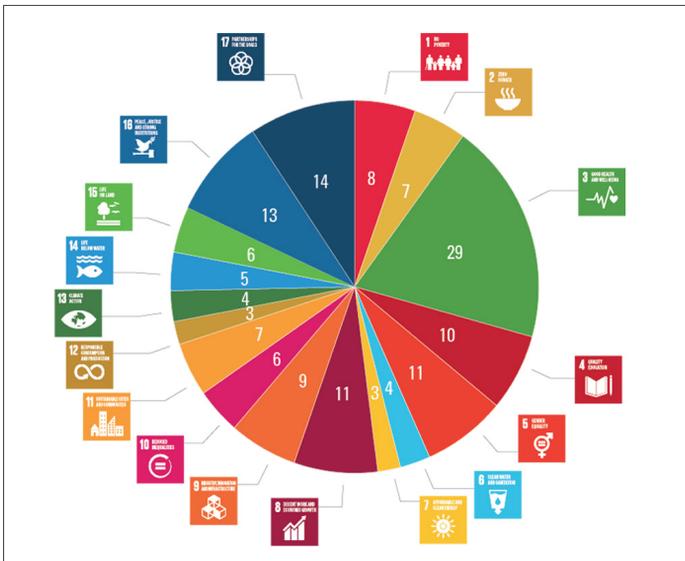
These are processes which also require an assessment of the environmental and territorial dimension. Focused on the concept of a careful assessment of environmental practices linked to new forms of social development (Solomon, 2019). A change in the vision of development which improves people's lives with a fair and equitable exploitation of resources by also conceiving new work activities.

A complex concept which is also even more difficult to understand given the Covid-19 health emergency.



Figure 1 measures the commitment made to each Goal through the number of indicators chosen on which to contribute. It is evident that Goal 3 (*Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*) and Goal 17 (*Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development*) are those with the largest number of indicators and on which most work is being done and invested in as a priority.

**Figure 1. Set of indicators prioritized by the Statistical Coordination Group for the 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean**



Source: <https://agenda2030lac.org/> (Number of indicators selected per Sustainable Development Goal)

## Conclusion

Inequality is a mechanism which cannot be completely cancelled and nullified in the social system, as it guarantees its stratification (Sorokin, 1927). It is impossible to undo social inequality, but it is possible to guarantee social equity.

Rawls (1971) states that the social system is not an immutable order beyond human control, but it is a model of human action. Therefore, subjects accept their social condition and share their path.



Poverty mechanisms behind individuals' behaviour summarise precisely this acceptance as well as the concealment from the prevailing social system. Fitoussi (2013) asserts in *The lamppost theorem* that we live in a time when the greatest misery lives next to the greatest wealth, moreover, each country depicts a scaled model of the world, divided into different levels of poverty. Levels which entail the greatest social inequality for Latin America, an inequality made visible by the deprivation of not only material but social and psychological goods such as autonomy, the freedom to express one's abilities, to take care of oneself and one's future generation, and mutual respect.

In social inequality we can observe that substantial lack and deprivation which subjects experience and conceal. Not being able to have or be because one cannot have equal access to services and goods that other subjects enjoy.

A convoluted mechanism, as Therborn (2013) stated, which needs to be cracked, especially in Latin American countries. In this way it will be possible to make room for social innovation policies focused on fair social and environmental equity. A development which follows the track of the principles of sustainable development at a social level by determining the decrease of poverty, social deprivation and by applying social policies providing interventions determined to decrease inequality. Such goals can be achieved through a new development approach linked to labour and public environmental policies, where redistribution and employment mechanisms are in accordance with environmental dynamics and aim at preserving existing resources for a health improvement of the present and future condition.

For social change and a decrease of inequality, it is crucial to envisage new welfare policies centred on fair social and environmental justice.

## Bibliography

- Atkinson, A.B. (2015). *Inequality. What Can Be Done?* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Ballarino, G., Bernardi, F., Requena, M. & Schadee, H. (2009). Persistent Inequalities? Expansion of Education and Class Inequality in Italy and Spain. *European Sociological Review*. 1, pp. 123-138.
- Benassi, D. (2012). Disuguaglianze nell'accesso al welfare. En D. Checchi (ed.). *Disuguaglianze diverse* (pp. 255-286). Bologna: il Mulino.



- Benvenaga, L. (2015). Il conflitto generazionale. *Diacronie*. 22(2), documento 8, online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/diacronie.2047>.
- Bordoni, C. (2017). *Uguaglianza. Crisi di un'utopia moderna*. Roma: Lit Edizioni.
- Children's Fund) (2021). *Challenges Bulletin, No. 24, forthcoming*. United Nations: United Nations.
- Cubeddu, F. (2019). Indicators of Poverty. Comparison between two Regions. *Friulian Journal of Science*. *Friulian Journal of Science*. 28, pp. 59-74.
- Dahrendorf, R. (2006). *Quadrare il cerchio. Benessere economico, coesione sociale e libertà politica*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- Dahrendorf, R. (2010). *Homo sociologicus. Uno studio sulla storia, il significato e la critica della categoria di ruolo sociale*. Milano: Armando editore.
- delle politiche. *La rivista delle politiche sociali*. 3.
- ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean). (2022). *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2021*. Santiago: ECLAC.
- ECLAC/UNICEF (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean/United Nations
- Ferrera M. (2007). Trent'anni dopo. Il welfare state europeo tra crisi e trasformazione. *Stato e Mercato*. 3, pp. 341-376.
- Ferrera, M. & Hemerijck, A. (2003). Recalibrating Europe's Welfare Regimes. En Zeitlin, J. & Trubek, D.M. (ed.). *Governing Work and Welfare in a New Economy: European and American Experiments*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fitoussi, J.-P. (2013). *Il teorema del lampione*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Frankfurt, H. (2015). *On Inequality*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Franzini, M. (2013). *Disuguaglianze inaccettabili. L'immobilità economica in Italia*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- Giddens, A. (2006). *Sociology*. New York: Polity Press.
- Immerfall, S. & Therborn, G. (2010). *Handbook of European Societies*. New York: Springer.
- Maslow, A.H. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harpers.
- Maturo, A. (Ed.). (2012). *Teorie su equità e giustizia sociale*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
- Max-Neef, M. (1991). *Human scale development. Conception, application and further reflections*. New York: Apex Press.



- Max-Neef, M. (1992). Development and human need. En P. Ekins & M. Max-Neef. *Real-life Economics: Understanding Wealth Creation* (pp. 197-214). London: Routledge.
- Nussbauman, M. C. (2001). *Diventare persone. Donne e universalità di diritti*. Bologna: il Mulino.
- Nussbauman, M. C. (2002). *Giustizia sociale e dignità umana*. Bologna: il Mulino.
- Nussbauman, M. C. (2008). *Giustizia e aiuto materiale*. Bologna: il Mulino.
- United Nations Organisation (2015). *Risoluzione adottata dall'Assemblea Generale il 25 settembre 2015. Trasformare il nostro mondo: l'Agenda 2030 per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile*. UNO: United Nations Organisation.
- Parsons, T. (1968). *Sociological Theory and Modern Society*. New York: The Free Press.
- Poggio, T. (2005). La casa come area di welfare. *Polis*.19, pp. 279-308.
- Ranci, C. (2002). Fenomenologia della vulnerabilità sociale. *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*. 4, pp. pp. 521-552.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of Justice*. Cambridge: Belknap press of Harvard University.
- Salomone, M. (2019). *Giustizia sociale e ambientale*. Napoli: Doppia-voce.
- Saraceno, C. (2013). *Il welfare. Modelli e dilemmi della cittadinanza sociale*. Bologna: il Mulino.
- Sartori, L. (2006). *Il divario digitale. Internet e le nuove disuguaglianze sociali*. Bologna: il Mulino
- Sen, A.K. (1985). *Commodities and Capabilities*. OUP India: Oxford University press.
- Sen, A.K. (1994). *La disuguaglianza. Un riesame critico*. Milano: Mondadori.
- Sen, A.K. (2000). *Lo sviluppo è libertà*. Bologna: il Mulino.
- Sen, A.K. (2007). *La libertà individuale come impegno sociale*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- Smith, A. (2006). *La ricchezza delle nazioni*. Torino: Utet (original edition of 1776).
- Somainsi, E. (2002). *Uguaglianza. Teorie, politiche, problemi*. Roma: Donzelli Editore.
- Sorokin, P. A. (1927). *Social Mobility*. University of Michigan: Harper & Brothers.
- Spicker, P. (2012). *The Welfare State: A General Theory*. New York: SAGE Publications Ltd.



- Stiglitz, J.E. (2012). *The Principle of Inequality. How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*. London-New York: W. W. Norton & Co Inc.
- Therborn, G. (2013). *The Killing Fields of Inequality*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Tosi, A. (2006). Povertà e domanda sociale di casa: la nuova questione abitativa e le categorie delle politiche. *Riviste delle politiche sociali*. 3, pp. 68-71.
- Van Dijk, J.A.G.M. (2005). *The Deepening Divide: Inequality in the Information Society*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Van Dijk, J.A.G.M. (2006). Digital divide research, achievements and shortcomings. *Poetics*. 34 (4-5), pp. 221-235.
- Williamson, J. (2015). *Latin American Inequality: Colonial Origins, Commodity Booms, Or A Missed 20th Century Leveling?*. Cambridge: National bureau of Economic Research.