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Failure to meet the UN Goals until 2030 Latin America in a wheelchair

From the ashes of neoliberal adjustments, of pandemic social traumas, can an alternative continental model-project really emerge?



- *The same poverty as 27 years ago*
- *Female employment, goes back 18 years*
- *Possible exits only with new political will*

If we continue on the current path, Latin America is moving further and further away from the challenges of the United Nations to eradicate poverty by 2030.

"We are not on track to achieve the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) by 2030 in Latin America and the Caribbean," Amina Mohammed, number two of the United Nations (UN), declared on March 7 from Costa Rica.



Amira Mohammed number two of the UN intervenes in the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development 2022 in San José de Costa Rica. Photo Roberto Sánchez

The UN deputy secretary analyzed the continental reality in the framework of the 5th meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development (<https://foroalc2030.cepal.org/2022/es>), which was held between March 7 and 9 in that Central American country.

The Forum is the regional mechanism established in 2017 – meeting for the first time in Mexico, that same year – to follow up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, a compass developed by the United Nations to guide the eradication of poverty in the world.



UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed at the Forum on Sustainable Development in San José, Costa Rica. Photo: Presidency of Costa Rica.

Getting poorer and poorer

The UN's relatively pessimistic assessment of Latin America only confirms the worrying signs anticipated at the end of January this year. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 5,000,000 Latin Americans and Caribbeans fell into the state of extreme poverty in 2021, thus reaching the 86 million human beings affected.



Adding to the growing poverty in Haiti is the devastating consequences of the earthquake Photo Jonathan Crickx. UNICEF

In its annual report, *Social Panorama of Latin America 2021*,

(<https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/47718-panorama-social-america-latina-2021>),

this regional body argues that, despite the economic recovery of 2021, the estimated levels of poverty and extreme poverty have remained above the indices registered in 2019, reflecting the continuity of the social crisis.

The health emergency remains in force, the report emphasizes, and Latin America and the Caribbean constitute the most vulnerable region in the world. This pandemic reality is manifested in a social crisis that raised the extreme poverty rate from 13.1% of the Latin American population in 2020, to 13.8% in 2021.



The pandemic pushed millions of people into poverty. Irregular settlement, Altos de la Florida in Bogotá, Colombia. Photo Freya Morales, UNDP

It was in Argentina, Colombia and Peru where there were greater increases in poverty, in the order of 7 percentage points. In Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Paraguay it grew from 3% to 5%. In Bolivia, Mexico and the Dominican Republic, less than 2 percentage points. The ECLAC report notes that Brazil was the only country in the region with a decrease in poverty in 2020.

Nearly three decades of regression

According to *Social Panorama of Latin America 2021*, in 2020 the region experienced a significant regression in the fight against poverty for the sixth consecutive year. This rose to levels similar to those recorded 27 years ago, and overall poverty was at a level similar to that of the late 2000s.



The fight against hunger has regressed in Latin America due to the pandemic. FAO photo. Between 2019 and 2020 the Gini Coefficient – which is used internationally to comparatively measure the distribution of income – increased by 0.7%.

In 2020, the proportion of women without their own income also increased and significant poverty gaps in rural areas, indigenous peoples and among children remained.

The economic recovery of 2021, which at the time caused some euphoria in some Latin American countries, however, was not enough to mitigate the profound social and labor effects of the health crisis, closely linked to income inequality, poverty, labor informality, the vulnerability in which the population lives and significant gender disparities.

En femenino: víctimas y protagonistas

El 8 de marzo, un tema central de los debates del Foro de Costa Rica fue la denuncia de la “pandemia en la sombra” de la violencia contra las mujeres. La CEPAL estima que durante 2020 al menos 4.091 mujeres fueron víctimas de feminicidio en 26 países y dos de cada tres mujeres sufrieron violencia a causa del género.

Por otra parte, la participación laboral de las mujeres de América Latina y el Caribe sufrió 18 años de retroceso. Para 2022 se visualiza que esta participación alcanzará solo un 51%, mientras que la de los hombres llegaría al 73,8%. En síntesis, una de cada dos mujeres no participará este año en el mercado laboral. En paralelo, las mujeres dedican actualmente tres veces más de tiempo que los hombres al trabajo doméstico y de cuidados familiares no remunerados.

Amina Mohammed indicó en el cónclave de Costa Rica que a menos que se ponga a las mujeres y a las niñas en el centro de los esfuerzos sociales no se podrá alcanzar con éxito los actuales y apremiantes desafíos globales contra la emergencia climática, la violencia de género, las divisiones políticas y a favor de la recuperación sostenible de esta pandemia global.



Por su parte Alicia Bárcenas, secretaria general de la CEPAL, recordó que los nudos estructurales de la desigualdad de género siguen presentes en la distribución desigual del poder, los recursos, la riqueza, el acceso al empleo, así como en la persistencia del patriarcado y la cultura del privilegio. Este 8 de marzo dijo Bárcenas, “es un día para reconocer el valor y la contribución de las mujeres para un futuro sostenible. Pero hay que estar alertas para garantizar que ninguna mujer se quede atrás”. Según ella, la consigna sigue siendo ‘nada sobre nosotras sin nosotras’.

Solución política: un Estado fortalecido y transparente

Precediendo a la reunión del Foro de Costa Rica, la CEPAL publicó el [quinto informe sobre el progreso y los desafíos regionales de la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible en América Latina y el Caribe](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/47745/S2100985_es.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y), voluminoso documento de 186 páginas, con un balance preocupante. Dicho documento destaca que un tercio de las metas definidas por los Objetivos de Desarrollo han retrocedido en los últimos años (https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/47745/S2100985_es.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y).

Los Objetivos no se alcanzarán “con más de lo mismo” y es imprescindible avanzar hacia un nuevo sistema económico y social inclusivo y sostenible, destaca el informe. Y presenta cuatro propuestas: el fortalecimiento del multilateralismo, en particular en materia de financiamiento para el desarrollo, así como la mejora de la implementación de las políticas productivas, sociales y ambientales de alcance nacional y regional. También, el aumento de la resiliencia de las instituciones y la superación de conflictos a través de la implementación de acuerdos y pactos sociales.

Mirando al futuro la CEPAL parte de una crítica histórica: la combinación de la inflación y el reducido crecimiento de los años setenta puso fin al “pacto” social (de inspiración keynesiana) incorporado al sistema monetario y cambiario de las instituciones de Bretton Woods.

Y se interroga: ¿Está el mundo frente a un momento histórico en que podría emerger un nuevo modelo social?

Sin duda, la pandemia golpeó una economía mundial y regional que ya había perdido dinamismo, sobre todo después de la crisis financiera mundial de 2008. El patrón de crecimiento anterior reproducía asimetrías y desequilibrios con costos crecientes, que se hicieron más visibles con la crisis sanitaria. Ésta, en conjunto con las lecciones que dejó la crisis de 2008, puede haber creado una coyuntura crítica favorable a la adopción de reformas profundas.

Although democracy is still perceived as the best possible form of government, ECLAC affirms, its functioning is judged very negatively by the citizenry. This creates a paradox. On the one hand, the need for public goods (global, regional and national) and, on the other, the deficiencies of institutionality in the region.

The weakness of the rule of law, the administration of justice, accountability, insufficient transparency and the inefficiency or poor quality of certain public services, among other aspects, translate into declining levels of institutional trust.

And ECLAC concludes that the idea that the market (with some specific price corrections) could solve these problems on its own is behind us. Public policy with the State as a strategic guide is at the very heart of the new vision. That is why States must strengthen their capacities and strengthen cooperation within the framework of the international and regional system. At the same time, they must become more transparent and willing to be

accountable to their citizens. If they do not, they will not be able to design and implement policies conducive to a new style of development.

From the ashes of neoliberal adjustments, of pandemic social traumas, can an alternative continental *model-project* really emerge? Latin America, on crutches, continues to bet on an adequate post-traumatic recovery. Therapy is called political will.

Sergio Ferrari for La Pluma, from the UN, Geneva, Switzerland

Edited by [María Piedad Ossaba](#)

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