Territorial Inequality

A. Normative framework

Although there is no global instrument referring to ensuring rights at the territorial level, a number of intergovernmental agreements in recent years have taken a particular perspective on territorial issues. At the global level, these include the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2020b), the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) (United Nations, 2017) and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (United Nations, 2015). The 2030 Agenda affords relatively little weight to the local perspective, but does mention it several times, emphasizing its role in efforts to: build the resilience of the poor to disasters (Goal 1); ensure women’s full and effective participation (Goal 5); support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management (Goal 6); devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products (Goal 8); safeguard cultural and natural heritage, and increase the number of human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, and resilience to disasters in all countries (Goal 11); strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries (Goal 13); increase the capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities (Goal 15); ensure inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (Goal 16); and strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (Goal 17).

In Habitat III and the Sendai Framework the local and the subnational levels are mentioned explicitly and prominently. The New Urban Agenda adopted at Habitat III is especially important for Latin America and the Caribbean, because of its emphasis on inclusive cities and its defence of access in cities and equal enjoyment of them as a human right. The Sendai Framework offers concrete actions that can be taken to protect the benefits of development against the risk of disasters. Throughout the Sendai Framework, the local level is emphasized as the focus of priority actions relating to “understanding disaster risk”, “strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk”, and “enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to ‘Build Back Better’ in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction” (United Nations, 2015, p. 8).

1 This chapter was prepared by Raúl Holz, Consultant in the Social Development Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

2 For further information on Habitat III and the Sendai Framework, see United Nations (2017) and UNDRR (2021).
At the regional level, the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development\(^3\) establishes the most fundamental principles and guidelines for territorial development policies. In the framework of the Consensus, among others, the countries agreed to:

promote the development and well-being of people in all territories without any form of discrimination, and provide full access to basic social services and equal opportunities for populations whether they live in urban or rural areas, in small, intermediate or large cities or in isolated areas or small rural settlements; [...] promote inclusive development of natural resources, avoiding the social and environmental damage that this may cause (ECLAC, 2013, p. 29).

Finally, another regional instance promoting territorial development is the General Assembly of Ministers and High-level Authorities of the Housing and Urban Development Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean (MINURVI). The Assembly is the main forum for political agreement, coordination and regional cooperation on matters of housing, habitat and local and urban development (ECLAC, 2016a).

**B. Assessment of territorial inequalities**

- Territory affects opportunities for the fulfilment of political, economic and social rights and can be a source of discrimination. Living conditions, as well as the probability of being rich or poor, depend, among other factors, on the part of the country people live in.

- Differences by place of residence in the coverage and quality of the social services, employment and public infrastructure to which the population has access mean that gaps in the various social indicators are reproduced structurally.

- One of the main difficulties in measuring territorial inequality is the availability of comparable and updated socioeconomic statistics at the subnational level. What is more, the political-administrative definitions of data do not necessarily align with local socioeconomic realities.

- The data available confirm the existence of large territorial inequalities between major administrative divisions, between rural and urban areas, and between smaller divisions such as municipalities and suburbs. For example, poverty levels in Latin America average 45.1% in rural areas and 26.4% in urban areas. Territorial disparities intersect with other axes of social inequality and are especially evident in the analysis of the situation of indigenous populations.

As has been discussed in numerous ECLAC publications,\(^4\) territory matters and it is a key axis of the matrix of social inequality. Place of birth and residence determines opportunities and socioeconomic conditions, it impacts on the fulfilment of political, economic and social rights, and can be a source of discrimination in itself, as can gender, race or religion (ECLAC, 2012b). Living conditions, like the probability of being rich or poor, depend, among other factors, on

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\(^3\) For further information on the Montevideo Consensus, see ECLAC (2013).

where people live within a country: prosperous or left-behind regions, rural or urban areas, rich or poor suburbs. A proper analysis of inequality should include the territorial level. This level articulates, configures, produces and represents an aspect of social inequality. It is at particular territorial levels that inequalities crystalize and intersect.

Territorial inequalities are also expressed in the access and quality of social services in health and education and the type of work available. In addition, subnational public administrations (at the regional or local level) have different physical, technical, regulatory and financial resources that condition their range of policy action. This is also seen in imbalances in the quality and density of infrastructure —road networks, communication routes in general, communications infrastructure, basic economic facilities (ports, airports) and, obviously, the local basic equipment (drinking water, sanitation, transport)—which constitute a key obstacle to territorial development (ECLAC, 2015).

Lastly, territory not only refers to place of residence, but can also be considered an ascriptive variable. The place where one lives or comes from becomes an axis that structures social relations, it can reinforce the ascription to positive facets of the territorial identity or, alternatively, reinforce processes of discrimination that operate on the basis of stigma and deepen social inequalities.

An initial assessment approach is to start with the inequalities in the first territorial division (or major administrative division), which takes different names in the countries of the region (region, province, department or state), then, where possible, to move on to smaller territories (minor administrative divisions such as, for example, districts, communes, delegations and municipalities), insofar as the development of the country's statistical tools allows. A caveat is that, owing to the socioeconomic disparities of the different political-administrative divisions within the countries, subnational comparability between countries is limited. It is therefore difficult to affirm unequivocally that one country is more unequal at the local level than another. For example, at the higher political-administrative level, Ecuador has relatively small divisions compared to the Plurinational State of Bolivia, which has larger divisions.

1. Major administrative divisions

Inequalities between different territories are evident in a first approach looking at the major administrative divisions within the respective countries (see figure XIII.1). Although differences are seen in poverty rates in all the countries, the magnitude of variations around the respective country average is very uneven. Panama shows very large territorial variations in poverty rates between provinces/comarcas. Uruguay, by contrast, shows the smallest percentage of population in poverty and the least variation between its major administrative divisions. In most cases, the territories with the lowest poverty levels are also the territories or metropolitan regions where the capital city, economic and industrial hubs, tourist areas or mining areas are located. On the other hand, the highest levels of poverty are often found in areas with a large indigenous presence, such as the comarcas in Panama, Lempira in Honduras, Chocó in Colombia and Chiapas in Mexico.

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5 Indigenous peoples have an indissoluble link with the land, a practice of territoriality in the physical, social and symbolic senses, and a concept of territory that is not only a geographical and physical place, but also a social and cultural one (ECLAC, 2007).

6 To this are added territorial inequality measurement problems relating to data availability at the subnational level and the way political and administrative divisions are defined. For more information on this topic, see Buitelaar and others (2015).
2. Inequality between territorial entities

The concentration of wealth and population in a few areas is one of the most hallmarks of territorial inequalities. These concentrations generally occur in the largest cities, metropolises and urban regions of each country. In most cases, these areas represent less than 10% of the country’s surface area, but they carry great weight in terms of population and contribution to GDP (see figure XIII.2).

3. Rural–urban inequality

Given the availability of data from household surveys, examining the rural-urban gap is generally one of the easiest ways to analyse territorial gaps in the countries. The rural-urban gap tends to favour urban areas in different socioeconomic indicators. For example, the population living in
The rural-urban gaps tend to show urban areas better off in several socioeconomic indicators. For example, in Latin America the poor population is almost 19 percentage points higher in rural areas.

45.1% RURAL POVERTY 26.4% URBAN POVERTY

The rural-urban gap for various social indicators, 2018
(Percentages)

The population in poverty is calculated on the basis of estimates or projections in the corresponding year for: Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Paraguay, Plurinational State of Bolivia, and Uruguay. The other three indicators are simple averages and include household surveys conducted in the respective countries in the corresponding year, where there is no information for that year, data from the most recent preceding year are used.

4. Urban segmentation

Two thirds of the Latin American population lives in cities with 20,000 inhabitants or more and almost 80% in urban areas (ECLAC, 2012a). Territorial inequality also occurs within cities with residential segregation manifested in the concentration of relatively homogeneous social groups in specific spaces. This segregation is expressed, for example, on the one hand, in the urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing, and on the other, in homogeneous high-level neighbourhoods which are a form of “walled cities” (Pfannenstein and others, 2019). In the first case, figures in the region vary widely, from 74.4% in Haiti to 5.4% in Guadeloupe (see figure XIII.4).

The urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing, 2014
(Percentages)

The figure for Latin America and the Caribbean is a weighted average.
5. Inequality between minor administrative divisions

Social indicators are becoming an increasingly important tool for examining territorial socioeconomic level and for informing social policies. These indicators are used often at the national level, while at the subnational level progress has been slower owing to more limited data availability. Colombia has a municipal multidimensional poverty index (MPI) based on the 2018 census, which allows the analysis of territorial inequality at the municipal level. Inequality between municipalities can vary significantly as shown by the MPI for the case of Colombian municipalities (see map XIII.1), which varies between 0 and 100, where figures closer to 100 indicate greater multidimensional poverty. In Colombia, the highest levels of municipal multidimensional poverty are found predominantly in the Orinoquía-Amazonía and Pacífica regions; conversely, the lowest occur in the municipalities located in the Central and Eastern regions of the country.

MAP XIII.1
Colombia: municipal multidimensional poverty index (MPI), 2018


Note: The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

7 The measure is constructed on the basis of five dimensions (educational status of the household, conditions of childhood and youth, health, work, access to household public services and housing conditions) and 15 indicators. Each dimension counts for 20% and the indicators have the same weight within their respective dimension. Households that have deprivations in at least 33.3% of the indicators are considered multidimensionally poor. Although in this case the mapping refers to the poverty index, it would be possible to map each of the 15 indicators that make up the municipal MPI.
6. Disasters and territorial inequality

Of all the world regions, Latin America and the Caribbean is the second most prone to natural disasters (United Nations, 2020a). Since 2000, approximately 154 million Latin American and Caribbean people have been affected by 1,254 disasters, including floods, hurricanes and storms, earthquakes, droughts, landslides, fires, extreme temperatures, volcanic events and epidemics. Although climate change is a global phenomenon, the type of disaster tends to vary significantly across Latin America and the Caribbean regions. In South America floods are by far the most common type of disaster, followed by landslides, earthquakes and storms. In the Caribbean, the majority of disasters are storms and floods and in Central America and Mexico the order changes, with floods, storms and earthquakes more prevalent (see figure XIII.5).

![Figure XIII.5](image-url)  
**FIGURE XIII.5**  
Latin America and the Caribbean: number of disasters by type, 1970–2019


Disasters are both a cause and a consequence of poverty and vulnerability. These territorial aggregations are very general in terms of disaster analysis and do not allow for the differentiation of specific territorial impacts. The most socioeconomically vulnerable territories are usually also more exposed to disasters. For example, small island developing States face the greatest economic losses in GDP terms (UNDRR, 2017). Likewise, differences exist not only between countries, but also within them; disasters have a greater impact on communities or people who live in poorer areas and suffer increasingly and disproportionately from their effects. In other words, the axes of inequality intersect. Several population groups, such as women, older persons, persons with disabilities, children, indigenous peoples, and subsistence and family farmers are particularly vulnerable. For example, women are more likely to die in these events than men (Trucco and Ullmann, 2016) and it is estimated that economic losses for the population living in poverty are two to three times greater than for the non-poor (Cecchini, Sunkel and Barrantes, 2017), both because of the vulnerability of their assets (Hallegatte and others, 2017) and because of their limited access to disaster risk management tools (Vakis, 2006).

The prospects for recovery also tend to be uneven across territories, again with strong biases by gender, age and disability (ECLAC, 2017b). Disasters can destroy specific local income-generating assets, such as stocks or reserves of commercial products, agricultural
assets (such as livestock), work materials, workshops or means of transport, among others. Unemployment and income loss as a result of a disaster can have significant effects, with a strong territorial bias, on the well-being of individuals or families in the short term (including in subsistence terms), on the ability to recover and on life prospects. In other words, disasters are both causes and consequences of poverty and vulnerability, as has been shown once again by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has highlighted the significance of territorial inequalities (see box XIII.1).

BOX XIII.1
COVID-19 and territorial inequality

Territorial inequalities have shown up strongly amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In the most vulnerable territories, high levels of overcrowding and poverty have made it more difficult for people to comply with the lockdowns and physical distancing decreed in many countries to avoid coronavirus infections. Given the lack of income to cover basic needs, mobility has been seen to be higher in those areas despite the social isolation measures imposed.

The areas that have most socioeconomic lags also have more deficient basic services. Lack of water and sanitation hinders compliance with basic hygiene measures to prevent and control the spread of the disease. Added to this is poorer access to health services and primary care, a strategic local item that is often neglected and thus hinders timely care as well as the possibility of tracing cases.

In the most vulnerable areas, many households lack the logistical conditions they would need to stock up on food for many days, so their members need to go out often, especially to markets and street stalls. In addition, food markets, which are important for vulnerable areas because they offer cheaper alternatives, have continued to function and many of them have become hotspots for the spread of the virus.

Territorial differences are also seen in education, with a higher risk of dropping out of school in areas where poor access to the Internet and the lack of equipment (such as computers, tablets or smartphones) make online teaching and normal education difficult for millions of children during the pandemic. This is in addition to parents’ lack of familiarity with information technologies, which makes it difficult for them to provide support.

Informal work, the source of income for many Latin American households, also has territorial biases. Many informal workers lack access to quality health services and are more exposed to contagion given the nature of their work. They also tend to have lower incomes, fewer savings and no alternative income sources, which forces them to go out and find a way to earn a subsistence income in the absence of comprehensive emergency policies.

Social policies for socioeconomic containment amid the pandemic also face territorial challenges. The lack of banking services for many people living in slums or rural areas and the difficulty of reaching remote areas has complicated the delivery of emergency transfers, food baskets and health services for COVID-19 prevention and care.

Finally, more than ever, the pandemic has highlighted the need for the authority to act at different territorial scales—national, subnational and local—and to do so in a comprehensive and coordinated manner, supported by the various community stakeholders and political and social organizations.

C. Priority policies for reducing territorial inequalities

The priority policies for reducing territorial inequalities include:

- Proximity governments are crucial for bringing opportunities and rights to individuals, families and communities in the territories that are furthest behind.

- Family accompaniment is one of the most concrete ways in which social policy can be brought closer to citizens, and it is where efforts to resolve social policy fragmentation are most successful at the territorial level.

- The participation of individuals, families and communities in the design and oversight of policies and programmes that concern them is fundamental both for the success of the policies and for the legitimacy of the process. Programmes where communities co-manage resources and open municipalities are two examples.

- Greater disaggregation of statistical data is key to the visibility of territorial inequalities and their intersections with vulnerable groups. In this regard, progress has been made in the region in the development of synthetic indices and territorial observatories for different socioeconomic data and administrative levels.

Local governments are increasingly considered critical spaces for debating policies and promoting participation in public management, given their proximity to citizens and their territorial scale. Local governments’ possibilities of playing an important role depends, among other things, on the degree and type of decentralization of the respective country. The link between central and subnational governments, the functions or attributions of subnational governments vis-à-vis the central government, and the use and collection powers of public resources strongly affect the radius of action of local governments (see box XIII.2).8

Territorial inequalities in Latin America and the Caribbean are just one more manifestation of the inequality that characterizes the region in general. They also relate interdependently and cumulatively to economic, social and environmental inequalities. This means that territorial inequalities are structural in nature and reducing them requires policy efforts that are relevant and sustained over time. Four territorial policies identified as priorities are outlined below: (i) proximity government; (ii) family accompaniment; (iii) citizen participation and (iv) territorial visibility.

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8 A detailed analysis of these topics, though very important, exceeds the scope of this document.
Decentralization processes in Latin America have occurred across very different political and economic frameworks and have implied reforms to very different administrative systems. What is understood by decentralization and local government autonomy does not necessarily carry the same connotation in all the countries. An analysis of decentralization in basic education and primary health care carried out for seven countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Nicaragua and Plurinational State of Bolivia) highlights different initial motivations and different sequences of implementation, as well as the diversity of territorial and institutional levels involved in the transfer of provision functions and responsibilities between countries. The evidence from these experiences suggests that territorial gaps widened for education and health indicators (Di Gropello and Cominetti, 1998). Although the diversity of situations limits the scope for making generalizations about the distributional impacts between territories, Finot (2001) qualifies the widening of education and health gaps, observing that coverage was in fact increased albeit amid ongoing economic concentration. In other words, decentralization has enabled strides in the coverage of social services and even of political participation, but it is creating pressure on the fiscal balance and has not helped to ease economic concentration.

These experiences do not invalidate the potential benefits of decentralized social policies, but they do draw attention to the dangers of forms of decentralization that reproduce and deepen territorial disparities. They also represent a call to safeguard the role of the State as guarantor of rights that should be strengthened by the decentralization processes. Effective autonomy to provide social services at local levels, having resource transfer systems that promote greater efficiency and equity, directly transferring greater responsibilities to educational and health establishments, and having adequate local capacities are some of the necessary conditions for advancing towards a gap-reducing model of decentralization.


1. Proximity government: territorial coordination policies

The territorialization of social policy poses a major challenge of vertical coordination —i.e. between the different levels of government, from the central to the local—and of horizontal coordination, which refers to cross-sectoral coordination between the government entities responsible for social policy at each level. In this regard, a prominent initiative in terms of developing a more comprehensive approach to social policy at the local level is that of proximity government. The term “proximity government” is broad and supports a comprehensive approach to social policy in the domain of local governments (Blanco and Comà, 2002 and 2003). At least four key elements can be identified in a proximity government: social assistance, prevention and promotion, participation, and networking and leadership.

An example of a territorial approach to social institutionality is the Social Assistance Referral Centres (CRAS) of Brazil, which act as a gateway to social assistance at the territorial level. These Centres provide the full range of social and assistance services and manage basic social protection at the territorial level, within the framework of the Single Social Assistance System of Brazil. They organize and coordinate social assistance networks through a local public office where social assistance services are offered and they are located, as a priority, in areas of greatest social vulnerability. The professional staff can coordinate with the communities to develop solutions to face shared problems, such as lack of accessibility to services, violence in the neighbourhood, child labour or lack of transportation. The CRAS Centres offer a Comprehensive Family Support Programme (PAIF) and a social relationship and integration support service (Serviço De Convivência e Fortalecimento De Vínculos, SCFV). At

Proximity governments can foster a comprehensive social policy approach within the territory of local governments.

This topic is developed in greater detail in the social institutionality toolkit.
POLICIES

2. Family accompaniment

Family accompaniment is one of the most commonly used territorial intervention strategies in the region. Family accompaniment fulfils different roles and is given different names in different countries. One way to describe the role that family accompaniment plays in social policy territorialization strategy is to characterize its role in the social programme of which it forms part. In this regard, at least three models may be identified that describe how family accompaniment is coordinated and embedded within social programmes. A caveat is that not all family accompaniment programmes can be clearly categorized in one of the three models identified here.

In the first model, family accompaniment is secondary to the main component of the programme. For example, in social programmes whose main pillar is conditional transfers, family accompaniment basically tends to revolve around verifying fulfilment of the co-responsibilities by transfer-recipient families.

CRAS Centres people can also sign up with the Federal Government Single Registry for Social Programmes, a data collection and information tool used to identify low-income families so that they can be included in social programmes. The social assistance work of CRAS in the territory is complemented by Social Assistance Specialized Referral Centres (CREAS), which cater to families and individuals in situations of social risk or whose rights have been infringed, for example persons who have experienced physical or sexual violence, individuals who are homeless, victims of neglect or those who have suffered discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (Cunill-Grau, Repetto and Bronzo, 2015). One of the key tools for facilitating access by the population in remote or scattered areas has been the creation of mobile teams, whose work around the territory includes dissemination of the services offered, contact with local social actors and the collection of information for other social assistance and sectoral services.

A different sort of proximity government is the experience of Uruguay with the Cercanías national strategy for strengthening family capabilities,11 the youth network scheme Jóvenes en Red (“Networked Youth”)12 and Uruguay Crece Contigo (“Uruguay Grows with You”).13 Cercanías is an interinstitutional strategy for family interventions in situations of extreme social vulnerability through various ministries and public bodies. Jóvenes en Red promotes rights access and fulfilment for young people aged 14–24 who are outside the education system and the formal labour market. Lastly, Crece Contigo is aimed at consolidating a comprehensive protection system from early childhood. Although the programmes target different population groups, they all have the intersectoral and proximity principles at their core, with support as a key mechanism in their design and implementation (Baráibar Ribero and Paulo-Bevilacqua, 2019; Ministry of Social Development, 2019a).14

A third example is Panama’s “Hive Strategy: Panama free of poverty and inequality, the Sixth Frontier”, whose purpose is to connect up public policy implementation at the territorial level through multisectoral provision. To reach the territorial level, plan implementation is organized through the provincial governments and provincial technical offices. Because they are closer to communities, these bodies are responsible for aligning and prioritizing their basic needs. Initially, priority was given to 63 districts and 300 townships on the basis of multidimensional poverty data.15

For more information, see Ministry of Citizenship (2015).
11 For more information, see [online] http://guiaderecursos.mides.gub.uy/28489/programa-cercanias.
12 For more information, see [online] https://www.gub.uy/ministerio-desarrollo-social/politicas-y-gestion/programas/jovenes-red.
13 For more information, see [online] https://www.gub.uy/ministerio-desarrollo-social/primera-infancia.
14 For more information, see Ministry of Social Development (2019b).
15 For more information, see Social Cabinet (2016).
16 This topic is developed in greater detail in the social institutionality toolkit.
17 Some of the names translate approximately as “social co-managers” (Colombia, Costa Rica), “support assistants” (Ecuador), “social promoters” (Panama) and “facilitators” (Peru).
In the second model, family accompaniment is a component in its own right in a larger programme and works in conjunction with other components. An example of this is the family accompaniment provided through Chile’s Securities and Opportunities scheme, which is a subsystem of the Intersectoral Social Protection System of the Ministry of Social Development and Family. Securities and Opportunities provides support for the most vulnerable persons and households via three components: (i) accompaniment programmes; (ii) social benefits (grants and cash transfers); and (iii) access to State social services. The accompaniment programmes are: (i) *Programa Familia* (*Family Programme*), which consists of psychosocial and psycho-occupational support for families in extreme poverty and vulnerability; (ii) *Programa Vínculos* (*Linkages Programme*), which provides psychosocial and occupational support through a community monitor for persons over 65 years of age who live in poverty, alone or with one other person; (iii) *Programa Abriendo Caminos* (*Opening Paths Programme*), for children and adolescents aged 0–18 with a significant adult deprived of liberty; caregivers are included in the programme as beneficiaries and each family is accompanied by a professional team comprising social workers, psychologists and teachers, among others; and (iv) *Programa Calle* (*Street Programme*) for adults living on the streets; this consists of psychosocial and psycho-occupational support from a multidisciplinary professional team.18

In the third model, family accompaniment is the main component of the programme, as in the Territorial Family Care Teams (ETAF) of the *Cercanías* interinstitutional strategy in Uruguay. In *Cercanías*, Territorial Family Care Teams handle the proximity work and the restitution of rights for family groups whose rights have been infringed, as well as coordination with other local interinstitutional actors. In this case, family accompaniment functions clearly as an effort to avoid social policy fragmentation at the territorial level.19

3. Social participation

From a rights perspective, it is essential to expand arenas for participation towards communities and families as key actors in the design and control of policies and programmes that concern them, both for the success of the policies and for the legitimacy of the process. Prioritizing links with families, individuals and community organizations in the process of identifying and addressing structural conditioning factors in the territory can improve social policy for several reasons. Among others:

- Social policy gains greater legitimacy by involving people in the development of the place where they live and the development processes that affect them.
- Social policy becomes more relevant as its diagnosis, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation are brought closer to its recipients.
- Highly structured programmes are less effective and efficient in very small and/or remote communities.

Two forms of participation are presented below: the first focused on local governments and exemplified through participatory budgets, open governments and citizen oversight; and the second illustrated by social programmes that include participation as a central pillar of implementation.20

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18 For more information, see [online] http://www.chileseguridadesyopportunidades.gob.cl/.
19 See Ministry of Social Development (n/d), for an example of the terms of reference of Territorial Family Care Teams.
20 Although the following section describes experiences of social participation in a markedly positive manner, the obstacles to effective citizen participation must not be disregarded. Among others, these are: power asymmetry between the State and citizens (and among citizens, between those who are organized and those who are not) and as a specific facet of this, information asymmetries between public officials and participating citizens. These issues can also be linked with and made more complex by resistance from political authorities, problems in accessing public information and, possibly, lack of social commitment and public apathy.
Participation in proximity governments

Participatory budgeting basically consists of community participation in the prioritization of the public budget. This has been most successful at the municipal level. Participatory budgets began to flourish at the municipal level in 1989 with the experience of Porto Alegre. From there, similar initiatives have been repeated around the world and in many parts of Latin America, including in areas of Argentina, Uruguay, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, El Salvador, Peru, Chile, Brazil and Mexico. Participatory budgeting initiatives have also been promoted from the central level in Guatemala, Peru and Nicaragua. Participatory budgets do not tend to be explicitly designed for redistributive purposes and their distributive impacts have been little evaluated. However, the pioneering experience of Porto Alegre has stood out, among others, for its positive redistributive impacts, both through the progressiveness of rates and taxes charged by the municipal government and through the prioritization and targeting of resources in the poorest neighbourhoods (Navarro, 1998 and 2005; De Soussa Santos, 2002). To increase distributional impact, recent experiences in Peru suggest the need to facilitate engagement by the poorest people in participatory processes and improve the capacity of the technical cadres of the municipalities responsible for the process (Jaramillo and Alcázar, 2013).

Open governments are another experience reflecting the importance of participation in social policies at the territorial level. In Paraguay, more than 50 municipalities have committed, in alliance with the Open Government Partnership (OGP), to create municipal councils that ensure citizens have a say and a vote in how budgets are spent and how families that most need support are prioritized. Another example of open government is the department of Nariño in Colombia, which drew up an Action Plan 2019–2021 that envisages increasing the participation of civil society representatives in formulating commitments and generating solutions. In a context of violence and attacks on social leaders, the Plan sets up mechanisms and spaces for the construction of collective proposals for territorial development. For example, the civil society platform Alianza Nariño Decide, is a citizen participation mechanism that organizes open dialogues to facilitate participation, among other things. The purpose is for citizens to identify and prioritize the needs of their territory, by means of workshops, and make them available to candidates to include in the territorial development plan.

Citizen oversight offices are another mechanism for citizen participation in local government decisions. In this case, community participation is channelled through the users of social policies, thus fulfilling an oversight and assessment role. An example is citizen oversight of conditional cash transfer programmes. Peru has experiences with Citizen Monitoring Committees, which use surveys and complaints channels to identify implementation issues with the Juntos National Programme of Direct Support to the Poorest, and makes recommendations to the Programme’s executive board. In another experience, civil society and local government representatives from local groups in the framework of the Brazilian programme Bolsa Familia, the region’s largest conditional cash transfer programme by coverage. Citizen oversight in this case contributes to reducing errors of inclusion or exclusion of recipients and ensuring sufficient and adequate health and education services to cope with additional demand.

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21 Most studies have focused on the analysis of the institutional design and the forms of participation. For a review of the academic literature, see Suárez Elías (2015).
22 Localities that have implemented participatory budgeting have sometimes produced manuals. Some examples are: “Instrucciones presupuestarias participativas” of Colombia (Ministry of the Interior, 2016); Guía del presupuesto participativo basado en resultados of Peru (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance, 2010); “Manual de presupuesto participativo” of Rosario, Argentina (Grey, n/d); “Manual operativo para la implementación de presupuestos participativos (PP) of Chile” (Salinas and Abalos, 2006).
23 For more information, see ECLAC (2021 and 2019a).
24 For more information, see OGP (2021) and Escotto (2018).
25 For more information, see OGP (2019).
From a rights perspective, it is essential to expand arenas for participation towards communities and families as key actors in the design and control of policies and programmes that concern them, both for the success of the policies and for the legitimacy of the process.

Another example is the Network of Community Defenders for the Right to Health of Guatemala, which is made up of leaders chosen by their communities to identify needs and problems arising in health services in the communities. When a problem is identified, representations are made to the relevant authorities to resolve it. Information campaigns are also carried out to inform the population of this channel for reporting infringements of their right to health.27

Under the leadership of its Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Colombia has built up Adolescent and Youth Friendly Health Services (SSAAJ) as a social oversight strategy, scaled for local level implementation. This scheme pursues differentiated responses for the population aged 10–29 in order to guarantee their sexual and reproductive rights. In this framework, one of the ways in which health services and adolescent and youth participation are anchored at the territorial level is through youth-friendly health centres, in which the District Secretariat of Health supports the municipalities to set up youth oversight bodies and foster and ensure sexual and reproductive rights. Key social organizations for population development are identified, such as youth organizations, community-based organizations, youth centres and churches and work plans are drawn up in consultation with them.28

Social programmes in which participation is a key pillar

One example is the Cuna Más home visiting programme in Peru, which promotes early childhood development. It was set up by the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion in 2012 and is aimed at supporting the development of infants up to age 3 in poverty and supporting parenting behaviours. It operates at three levels: central, regional and local. In rural areas it works through family accompaniment. Cuna Más is based on a co-management model between the government and the communities at the local level, with the latter empowered to participate in decision-making, oversight and general operations. The community or communities form management committees that sign cooperation agreements with the government. The committees main tasks and responsibilities include: the administration of financial resources; keeping the community informed; inviting families to participate in the programme; nominating, together with the community, the facilitators who will carry out weekly family visits; tracking the early childhood development indicators of the families participating in the programme; and sensitizing the community about early childhood development in coordination with other territorial actors (Josephson, Guerrero and Coddington, 2017).

A second example is the School Feeding Programme (PAE) for Indigenous Peoples in Colombia, which aims to strengthen nutritional knowledge from within the worldview of indigenous peoples, prioritizing the use of produce grown and prepared in the region and contributing to the autonomy of indigenous peoples’ own governments. Programme implementation is coordinated by the respective territorial entity and includes an “indigenous operator”—an indigenous authority, council, protection agency and/or association of traditional authorities. Indigenous peoples determine the menus to be provided in educational establishments under the modality of a community kitchen. The community selects members to promote the programme and carries out follow-up, monitoring and oversight, in order to help ensure that it works properly in their respective communities.29

Finally, a third example is the School Feeding Act in Honduras,30 which came into effect 2017. In this case, parents are actively involved in implementation of the scheme through school feeding committees. Municipal Development Councils (COMDES), School Development Councils (CED) and parents’ associations from each educational establishment jointly provide

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27 For more information, see [online] https://vigilanciasalud.com/.
28 This is framed under Resolution 518 of 2015 issued by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, which permits engagement by the population in social oversight for establishing policies, plans, programmes, projects and strategies for preventive health and treatment of illness. For more information, see [online] https://www.minsalud.gov.co/salud/publica/ssr/Paginas/Servicios-de-salud-amigables-para-adolescentes-y-jovenes-SSAAJ.aspx.
29 For more information, see Ministry of National Education (2018).
30 Decree No. 125-2016.
social oversight to ensure that the National School Feeding Programme fulfils the objectives established by the law and evaluate the results-based management of the programme from the economic, financial and social perspectives.31

4. Shedding light on territorial inequalities: the importance of statistical disaggregation

A social policy that is relevant at the territorial level needs to be made visible through data disaggregation. The inclusion of territory-specific questions on vulnerable populations in censuses, household surveys and administrative records is, therefore, crucial to improve the sources of information and indicators used for assessments and to design, implement, follow up and monitor social policies aimed at reducing gaps between territories. Data disaggregation at this level should build in information on the intersection between the territory and the other structural axes of inequality, such as gender, ethnicity and race, and the different stages of the life cycle, among others. This information should be able to be crossed with economic, social and environmental data that describe the well-being of families, individuals and communities, such as work, social protection, income, health, education, housing, basic services and exposure to disasters, as well as variables concerning social participation. If it is possible to collect it, information on social participation at the local level should be cross-cutting across each of the structural axes. This way, statistical disaggregation at the territorial level can support the construction of well-being indicators that may be critical for achieving a better understanding of local poverty and inequality. These indicators, in turn, speak to the options for action by social services and programmes in relation to vulnerable populations.

Latin America has made progress in the disaggregation of territorial data in the socioeconomic sphere. This progress is reflected in: (i) synthetic socioeconomic indicators, and (ii) territorial information observatories. One specific socioeconomic indicator is the multidimensional poverty index (MPI). This is available, for example, at the municipal level in Colombia for 2018,32 and in Mexico for 2010 and 2015. A similar index is the multidimensional poverty index for children and adolescents in Panama, which is available at the level of provinces and comarcas.33

Another is the Gini index, available at the municipal level in Mexico for 2010 and 2015.34

Observatories that combine sources of territorial information for various indicators are also increasingly available. Examples are the Territory Observatory Uruguay (OTU) that includes data on 14 different areas including income, health, education, territorial cohesion, generations, gender and race, for regions, departments, municipalities and localities,35 and the City System Observatory of Colombia, which includes variables on basic services, overcrowding, GDP of construction and the homicide rate, among others.36 In Brazil, the SDG Mandala chart shows the degree of development of municipalities in four dimensions: economic, social, environmental and institutional. It offers a dropdown menu of statistics and synthetic indicators such as the municipal human development index (HDI).37 There is also a growing number of portals that summarize information on progress towards the SDGs, such as the Information System of Sustainable Development Goals of Mexico, which groups data at the national, federal and municipal levels, depending on the indicator.38

31 For more information, see Honduras (2017).
32 For more information, see DANE (2020).
33 For more information, see MPPN (2019).
34 For more information, see CONEVAL (2017).
35 For more information, see Office of Planning and the Budget (2019).
36 For more information, see DNP (2019).
37 For more information, see CNM (2021).
38 For more information, see INEGI (2019). For information on other observatories, see ECLAC (2019b).
Today a great deal of information on the economy and society is available in digital format. Big data comes from various sources and is found in different formats such as social networks, website content and electronic transactions. These data offer great potential to collect, process, analyse and visualize information for social and economic studies at the territorial level.

D. Suggested references


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E. Questions

- Do you believe that there are spheres of attention that should be a priority in the territories of your country that are furthest behind (for example: health, education, housing, nutrition and decent work)? Why? Is there a difference from one territory to another?

- Investigate social policies aimed at specific territories in your country. To what extent do you believe they respond to the priority spheres of attention identified in the first point? If there are no such policies, what would you propose?
• Are you aware of any social policy that reproduces territorial inequalities by failing to take into account specific local situations at the design or implementation stage? What measures would you propose to solve this problem?

• Can you give an example of a social policy that has included participation by the target community in its assessment, design or implementation? How successful was the participation? What problems arose and how could they be solved?

• Can you identify a programme that includes a family accompaniment component? What are the main characteristics of that family accompaniment? How successful has it been? What problems and challenges can you identify that should be resolved? How would you propose to solve these problems and challenges?

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This text is part of a United Nations publication coordinated by Simone Cecchini, Senior Social Affairs Officer of the Social Development Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Raúl Holz, Consultant of the same Division, and Humberto Soto de la Rosa, Social Affairs Officer at ECLAC’s subregional headquarters in Mexico. The document contributes to the activities of the project “Leaving no one behind in Latin America and the Caribbean: strengthening institutions and social policy coherence and integration at the country level to foster equality and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”, financed by the eleventh tranche of the United Nations Development Account. More information on the project, including other relevant materials, is available at: igualdad.cepal.org/en

The authors are grateful for the valuable comments of Fabián Repetto to an earlier version of this document and Nicole Bidegain, Fabiana Del Popolo, Andrés Espejo, Maria Luisa Marinho, Malva-marina Pedrero, Leandro Reboiras, Claudia Robles, Lucia Scuro, José Ignacio Suárez, Varinia Tromben, Daniela Trucco and Heidi Ullmann on specific chapters, as well as the support of Daniela Huneeus in the preparation of the document. They also thank all the participants in the discussions at the training workshops “Que Nadie se Quede Atrás en la Senda del Desarrollo de Panamá” (Panama, November 15-16, 2018) and “Políticas Sociales para que Nadie se Quede Atrás” (Santiago de Veraguas, April 9-10, 2019, and Panama, April 11-12, 2019), organized by the Social Development Division and ECLAC Subregional Headquarters in Mexico, in collaboration with the Social Cabinet of the Government of the Republic of Panama. Thanks are due to María Elisa Bernal, Simone Cecchini, Raúl Holz, Daniela Huneeus, Francisca Miranda, Beatriz Morales, Marcelo Munch, Amalia Palma and Daniela Trucco for their generous contribution of photographic material for this publication.

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United Nations publication
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This publication should be cited as: S. Cecchini, R. Holz and H. Soto de la Rosa (coords.), A toolkit for promoting equality: the contribution of social policies in Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/TS.2021/55), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2021.

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