

Adulthood^{1,2}

A. Normative framework

Labour market and income are the principal topics addressed in this chapter. Accordingly, the international conventions, agreements and compacts mentioned are mainly to do with these topics.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights refers specifically to the rights to just and favourable conditions of work, social security, an adequate standard of living (including food, clothing and housing), the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and education, including enjoyment of the benefits of scientific progress and cultural freedom (United Nations, 1966a).

Although these rights encompass the whole population, they have particular connotations for the adult age group. For one thing, some rights, such as labour rights, are directly associated with the working-age adult population. For another, adults are allocated the function of providing income to meet the needs of their dependent primary social nucleus.

It is accordingly established that, within the family, children, young people³ and older persons are in a relationship of dependency vis-à-vis adults who provide the income to pay for goods (food, clothing) and services (such as housing, water and sanitation, electricity, health care, education, culture and recreation, and information and communications technologies), that in turn enable all members of the household to exercise their economic, social and cultural rights. All these topics are addressed in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as the instrument that sets forth the normative framework in these spheres.

This interpretation affords a dual role to the adult population in terms of their dependent household members. First, as providers of income for procuring those goods and services that are not fully or partly financed by the State, such as food and clothing, or complementary goods relating to education (school supplies, uniform, meals and transport) and health (mainly in relation to preventive health), and dwelling services (water, electricity, gas and refuse collection).

¹ This chapter was prepared by Humberto Soto de la Rosa, Social Affairs Officer of the Social Development Unit of the ECLAC subregional headquarters in Mexico; and Mustafa Al Gamal, Associate Social Affairs Officer, Elsa Gutiérrez, Research Assistant, and Citlalli Lamotte, Consultant, with the Social Development Unit.

² The approach taken in this chapter is not entirely comparable with that taken in the other chapters, because many of the gaps that affect this age group are dealt with in greater depth in other chapters on specific population groups, who have particular characteristics regardless of their adult status, such as women, indigenous persons, Afrodescendants, rural-dwellers or others. For that reason, this chapter deals exclusively with inequalities within the adult age groups that are not included in other chapters.

³ From a demographic perspective, only those aged under 15 or over 65 are considered dependants, but from a sociological point of view, young people over age 15 can also be considered dependants, especially if they are in education. In fact, many national legislations treat the under-25s as dependants if they are still in education. For the purposes of this chapter, a person is considered an adult when they take on the responsibilities and roles of this stage of the life cycle, so the adult group cannot be determined on the basis of age alone.

With respect to this first role, the normative framework includes some of the fundamental conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) concerning the labour market and income. Among these are the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98), the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105), the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111).

The second role envisaged for the adult population shifts to a non-economic sphere in which adults ensure that dependent persons are guaranteed their rights. These include civil and political rights, with a particular emphasis on children and older persons, and especially when they have a disability or limitation that could affect the fulfilment of these rights. This role confers upon adults the responsibility to ensure that dependants are guaranteed the rights to safety (freedom from violence and mistreatment) and to non-discrimination, for example, all without neglecting the fulfilment of their own rights. In this case, the normative framework is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (United Nations, 1966b).

Beyond the role mentioned above, there are other rights that are important for the adult population, such as sovereignty over their time. The time adults spend on work (including unpaid care work) and travel time can sometimes limit their access to recreation or even to physical activity; this is related to the right to health, especially preventive health, given that this stage of the life cycle is when adequate food, exercise and rest can avert or delay the onset of chronic and degenerative diseases. Mention is also warranted of the right to a life free from violence, as this population group suffers greater levels of exposure, along with the youth population. These rights are set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948).

B. Assessment of inequalities affecting adults



- In 2020, 43% of the population was aged between 30 and 64 years and some countries of the region are currently experiencing a “demographic dividend”.
- Income distribution is highly unequal, with very low labour income in the first quintile. The richest quintile in the region captures around half of disposable income, compared with less than 4% captured by the poorest quintile.
- High levels of informality generate gaps in access to social security, especially in rural areas. According to ILO, the average rate of informality in the region is around 54%.
- With respect to access to social protection, in 2016 only 48.1% of those employed in the region were affiliated or contributing to a pension system. One of the most disadvantaged forms of employment is unskilled own-account work, which represents 64% of the region's employed in quintile I.

1. The “demographic dividend”

In 2000, 34.7% of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean was aged between 30 and 64. Ten years later, this figure had increased to 38.8%, and by 2020 was around 43%. This proportion is projected to continue rising to reach 44.7% by 2030.⁴ This rise, which

⁴ According to estimates, this percentage will peak at 45% around 2040 and decline thereafter (see ECLAC, 2021b).

reflects population dynamics, results in what is known as the “demographic dividend”, where the economically active population —most of it made up of adults capable of generating income— is larger than the rest of the population. This yields a positive scenario, in which dependency represents a smaller burden for the adult population. However, demographic dividends are limited in time and are not a foregone conclusion, as they depend on the ability of the economies of the region to generate productive and decent employment.

This demographic trend will benefit the population in general only if the lighter burden is accompanied by enabling conditions for decent work, so that adults can participate in the labour market in adequate conditions and earn a decent income in order to perform their dual role; however, this is not always the case in the region.

A first restriction is finding work. Not everyone in Latin America and the Caribbean has access to decent work with adequate pay and social security. The labour market is characterized by highly informal conditions, as well as the personal limitations associated with poor preparation and training at earlier stages of the life cycle, as will be seen below.

Unemployment rates have remained in single digits in most of the countries, showing no major variations over the past few years. The average rate for Latin America rose by 1.1 percentage point between 2010 and 2019 (see figure VII.1).

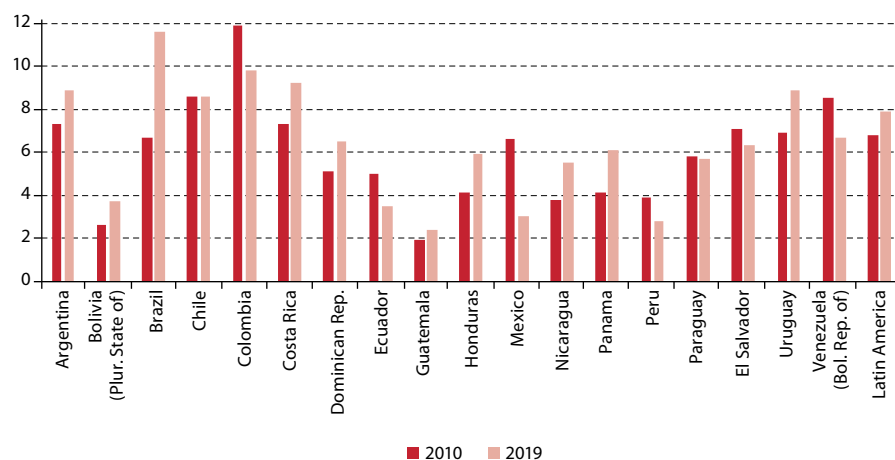
INFORMATION FROM THE WEB



The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) estimates that the region’s demographic dependency ratio will stop decreasing around 2025, and will begin to rise again by 2040, marking the end of the demographic dividend (ECLAC, 2021a).

<https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/type/observatorio-demografico-america-latina-demografico-observatorio-latin-america>.

FIGURE VII.1
Latin America (18 countries):^a unemployment rate, 2010 and 2019^b
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

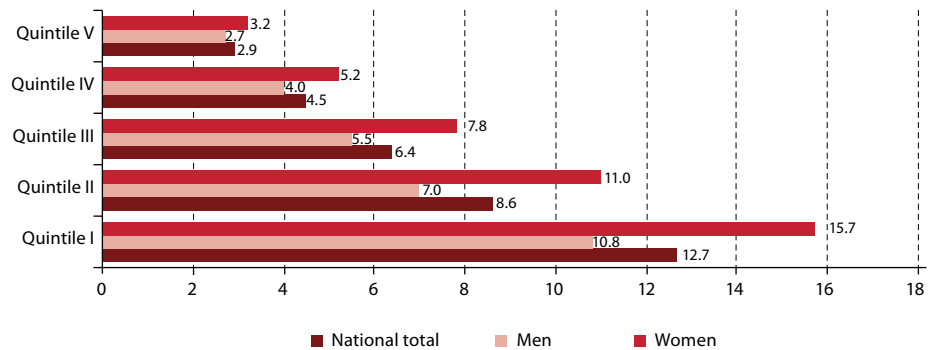
^a Weighted average for Argentina (urban areas), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

^b Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (2014), Brazil (2011), Chile (2011 and 2017), Colombia (2018), Guatemala (2006 and 2014), Mexico (2018), Nicaragua (2005 and 2014), and Plurinational State of Bolivia (2011 and 2018).

Even with low levels of open unemployment,⁵ the lower income strata show the highest level of unemployment (see figure VII.2), which may partly explain their low income. In particular, women are overrepresented among the unemployed.

⁵ Open unemployment is a measurement of people who are in the workforce and have been unemployed for the past seven days, who are available to work immediately and have actively looked for a paid job or independent employment during the past seven days.

FIGURE VII.2
Latin America (18 countries): open unemployment rate
by sex and per capita income quintile, 2018^a
(Percentages)



Source: Prepared by the authors, on the basis of Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), CEPALSTAT [online] <https://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/portada.html?idioma=english> [accessed in 2020].

^a Simple average.

Gaps in access to sufficient income in the adult population have consequences for the rest of the population who depend on this age group.

However, having a job does not ensure its stability. In a survey conducted by Latinobarómetro (2018)⁶ of people between 41 and 60 years of age, 23.3% said that they were very worried about becoming unemployed in the next 12 months, while only 14.2% reported no concern on this score. What is more, having a job does not equate to having decent work. The labour market in Latin America is characterized by low income, high levels of informality and persisting unpaid work in the case of women.⁷ These disadvantageous labour conditions accumulate throughout life, given that those working in informal conditions or outside the labour market have little possibility of having their own income in old age, either directly or through contributory pensions.

2. Low income levels

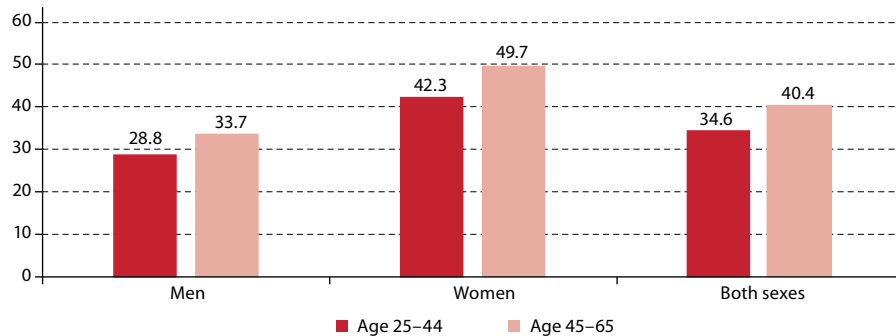
The most direct way of adequately meeting basic needs is to have a secure and sufficient income from work. The levels of income obtained by the adult population are highly unequal in Latin America, owing to poor income distribution whereby a large proportion of people receive very low income, as seen in the chapter on socioeconomic inequality. In the ECLAC data for 2018 (ECLAC, 2021b), the highest-earning 20% of the employed population captured almost half of all disposable income in the region, while the lowest-earning 20% accrued less than 4%.

Close to 40% of the employed adult population receives income below the minimum wage, and among women aged 45–64 this percentage rises to almost 50%, betraying the existence of gender wage gaps (see figure VII.3).

⁶ Samples selected: Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

⁷ In the case of Mexico, for example, according to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, n/d), if unpaid work had been included in GDP in 2017, it would have represented 23.3% of GDP. According to ECLAC (2016), the economic value of unpaid work amounted to 18.8% of GDP in Guatemala in 2014, 15.2% in Ecuador in 2012, 20.4% in Colombia in 2012, and 22.9% in the metropolitan area of Uruguay in 2013.

FIGURE VII.3
Latin America (18 countries): employed population with labour income below the national minimum wage, by sex and age group, around 2016 (Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG) and Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Social Panorama of Latin America, 2018 (LC/PUB.2019/3-P), Santiago, 2019).

Low wages reflect the precarious work that is available to much of the adult population, a scenario that has shown no sign of changing in recent years. In part, it reflects the limited capacity of collective bargaining and the low rate of unionization in the region, which lack the power to achieve pay levels adequate to cover at least basic needs. The unionization rate⁸ in 2016 averaged around 15% in Latin America and the Caribbean and exceeded 30% only in Argentina and the Plurinational State of Bolivia (ILO, 2020).

In the 2018 Latinobarómetro survey,⁹ 50% of those surveyed between the ages of 41 and 60 said that their family's total income was not enough to adequately cover their needs, and another 38.2% said that it was only just enough. Only 8.5% of the population reported having enough income and even being able to save.

In some cases, the lack of sufficient income forces people to work excessive hours, sometimes in a second job, to obtain labour income above the level of the poverty line. In 2016, around 20% of those employed, on average, worked more than 44 hours per week and received labour income below the relative poverty line.¹⁰ This proportion is much higher in rural than in urban areas (35% and 16%, respectively) and there is also a major gender gap. In 2016 the percentage of the employed who were underemployed with excessive working hours was 26.9% for women and 19.1% for men (ECLAC, 2019).

3. Labour informality

Low income is not the only disadvantageous characteristic for the adult population. The region's labour markets typically exhibit a high level of informality. Taking employment in informal conditions is a survival strategy in countries that lack social security nets, such as unemployment insurance, or where wages and pensions are low. Informal work produces large gaps in access to social protection, especially in quintiles with fewer resources.

⁸ The unionization or trade union density rate measures the number of workers affiliated to a trade union as a percentage of all workers. For more information, see [online] https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorers6/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=LR_TUMT_NOC_RT_A.

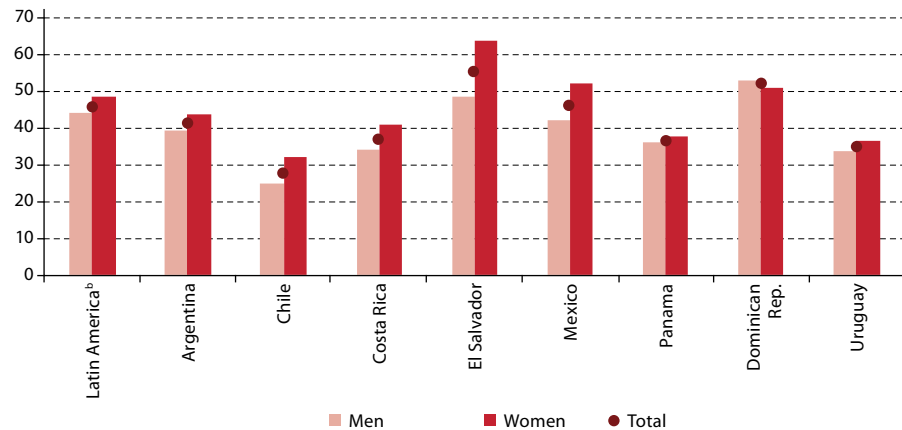
⁹ The survey covers the following countries: Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

¹⁰ If those employed worked 44 or fewer hours per week, their monthly income would fall short of the country's relative poverty line. Relative poverty is defined as 50% of the median value of per capita income, not considering equivalence scales.



Informality is the situation of the majority in the region, with an average informality rate of around 54%, according to estimates by ILO (2020). A complementary approach shows the large proportion of those employed in low-productivity sectors (see figure VII.4).¹¹ Notably, in most of the countries, with the exception of the Dominican Republic, a higher percentage of women than men are employed in low-productivity sectors.

FIGURE VII.4
Latin America (selected countries): urban employed in low-productivity sectors of the labour market, by sex, around 2019^a
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), CEPALSTAT [online] <https://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/portada.html?idioma=english> [accessed in 2020].

^a Persons aged 15 and over. Data refer to 2017 for Chile, to 2018 for Mexico, and to 2019 for the other countries.

^b Weighted average for Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

4. Lack of access to social protection

In 2016, only 48.1% of employed workers were affiliated or contributing to a pension system (over half were not) (ECLAC, 2019). For example, in 2017 18% of those employed in the Plurinational State of Bolivia were affiliated to a pension system, compared with 87.8% in Chile that same year (data from 2020, ECLAC, 2021b). This is important in both the present and the future, since those who are not paying into a pension system today will not be entitled to a contributory pension in their old age nor, in many cases, to health services provided through contributory social security (ECLAC, 2016). Pension amounts are also low, either because not enough payments have been made into defined benefit systems or because too little has been contributed to individual capitalization accounts.

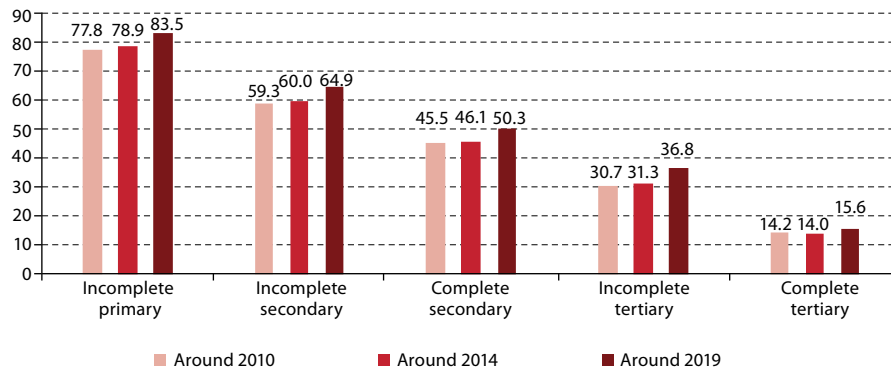
5. The importance of education for labour integration

The possibilities of entering the labour market and obtaining better income are directly related to the capacities and skills people acquire at earlier ages. Thus, the higher the level of education, the less the entry into low-productivity sectors (see figure VII.5).

¹¹ Refers to the proportion of non-agricultural employment; a proxy for informal employment.



FIGURE VII.5
Latin America (15 countries)^a: percentage of employed aged 15 and over in low-productivity sectors, by education level, around 2010, 2014 and 2019
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

^a Weighted average for Argentina (urban areas), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

In many cases, on-the-job training can make up for gaps in qualifications and skills from earlier stages, but access to this type of facility is also highly uneven and often exacerbates equality gaps.

6. Emerging challenges

Ongoing technological changes are transforming the world of work. Up till now, employment destruction and creation processes have not reduced employment levels, but there is nothing to say that these effects could not be more drastic in the future. There is a fairly broad consensus that many jobs existing today will disappear as a result of new technologies, that even more jobs will be changed and that new ones will emerge that cannot be anticipated today (Weller, Contero and Campbell, 2019).

Technological changes will have a different impact on the labour market in the region than in Europe or the United States, owing to the higher prevalence of informality and low wages. Introducing new technologies also entails the costs of acquiring it, making adjustments, installing it, training people to use it and making workplace modifications, as well as the cost of maintaining and updating it. These costs, which are moreover higher in the region than in advanced countries (owing to import costs, for example), prevent productivity gains from being transferred to wages in the short run.

According to some estimates, this means that the risk of technological substitution is small, especially in worse quality jobs (Weller, Contero and Campbell, 2019). Accordingly, in less advantaged social sectors, such as first nation peoples, wages in the first income quintile and among the less educated are likely to suffer more than they gain from automation (Katz, 2018).

Forty-nine per cent of the employed in the region work in jobs that are at potential risk of automation and just under 33% of all occupations are at high risk. This percentage falls to under 22% in the primary sector and rises to 35.4% and 34.1% in the secondary and tertiary sectors. These variations are due to the degree of structural heterogeneity of the activity sectors in each country, including level of informality, the size of the low-productivity segment, the number of self-employed and the prevalence of micro- and small enterprises, among others (ECLAC/OEI, 2020) (see table VII.1 for estimates by country).

STATISTICS

Less than half of those of adult age pay into pension systems.

48.1%
OF ADULTS
pay into
pension systems

TABLE VII.1
Latin America (17 countries): percentage of employed
in jobs at risk of automation, total
and high-risk occupations
(Percentages)

COUNTRY	YEAR	TOTAL POTENTIAL	OCCUPATION AT HIGH POTENTIAL RISK OF BEING AUTOMATED			
			TOTAL	PRIMARY	SECONDARY	TERTIARY
Argentina	2018	39.0	32.9	58.0	38.4	30.4
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	2018	31.5	15.7	4.8	26.1	18.6
Brazil	2018	62.9	44.0	39.6	46.0	44.1
Chile	2017	39.5	34.3	30.0	32.7	35.1
Colombia	2018	52.4	22.7	20.1	30.9	21.0
Costa Rica	2018	59.6	47.5	59.1	46.5	45.9
Dominican Republic	2018	56.6	34.5	19.8	39.6	35.0
Ecuador	2018	34.3	21.4	12.7	31.2	22.8
El Salvador	2018	38.5	29.3	20.7	38.1	28.4
Honduras	2018	62.2	32.2	32.3	38.0	29.8
Mexico	2018	38.2	27.0	12.3	29.1	29.7
Nicaragua	2014	44.7	31.0	37.2	30.9	27.0
Panama	2018	50.6	36.0	25.0	27.6	40.7
Peru	2018	34.9	19.0	5.0	29.5	22.9
Paraguay	2018	39.3	22.3	10.5	33.7	22.6
Uruguay	2018	46.6	37.9	36.6	37.4	38.2
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	2014	40.4	24.1	36.2	10.8	26.2
Latin America		49.0	32.6	21.6	35.4	34.1

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean/Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura (ECLAC/OEI), "Educación, juventud y trabajo: habilidades y competencias necesarias en un contexto cambiante", *Project Documents* (LC/TS.2020/116), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2020.

Technological progress and the modifications it produces in value chains, together with diverse short-term events, lead to the creation of new types of jobs and the destruction of others. This raises challenges, on the one hand, of certain skills becoming obsolete and new capabilities being needed and, on the other, of some labour regulations becoming unable to fulfil their purpose of ensuring decent work in all spheres.

At the same time, in terms of the need to adopt a development sustainability perspective, recently the idea has gained strength that more effort should be devoted to creating jobs related to environmental protection under the "green job" concept. This refers to decent jobs that contribute to preserving and restoring the environment either in traditional sectors such as manufacturing or construction or in new emerging sectors such as renewable energies and energy efficiency. Like in the case of jobs based on new technologies, this requires a transition process that in turn entails training and skills transfer.

New employment modalities

Changes in the world of work have ushered in what is known as the "gig economy", where work tends to be project-based and sought for short periods. It is very common among the younger generations and those who lack the skills necessary to participate in the formal economy.



The new forms of employment arising from this process include figures such as remote workers, especially those known as “digital day labourers”, who have relatively flexible working hours bound by employers’ open availability requirements, and often have to use their own capital equipment. These correspond to a group of occupations that sit on the boundary between wage and independent work, often highly informal and falling outside any regulations that could ensure labour rights (ECLAC/ILO, 2019).

With close links to the digital economy, one of the greatest advantages of this type of work is the flexibility it affords the worker, as it can be performed anywhere there is an Internet connection, provided the worker has the necessary tools, e.g. a bicycle or a car.

However, this type of work also has major disadvantages associated with the lack of regulation, resulting in a lack of social protection, precisely for one of the groups that most need it given the instability of the work. This adds new layers of informality to those already existing, and in some cases generates a new form of invisible work in remotely performed digital tasks, for example, in software programming for gig economy platforms. In other cases, it worsens precarious labour conditions, since people doing this kind of work often put in excessive hours in order to secure sufficient income, or they are exposed to higher risk, for example, those working in delivery of online purchases.

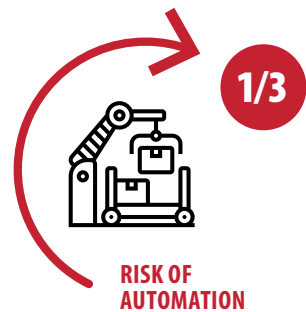
It is increasingly important how enabling technologies are managed in a world tending towards automation, particularly in relation to information and communications technologies (ICTs) and Internet use as a baseline, as major access gaps exist in these areas. In Latin America and the Caribbean, in 2017 only one in two households had access to the Internet (2020 data, ECLAC, 2021b). One possibility for improving this situation is to close skills gaps and foster transferable skills through on-the-job training.

The risks of automation and job loss are heightened in situations of crisis. For example, in the context of the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is estimated that 42.4% of jobs in the region are at high risk and 16.5% are at medium-high risk (ECLAC/ILO, 2020). Although this risk becomes more evident in times of crisis, the fact remains that it is also a function of the changing situation of the labour market. The two aspects exacerbate each other and make skills acquisition all the more important.

STATISTICS

One in every three people works in a job at risk of automation.

The new employment modalities can widen gaps in the adult population.



BOX VII.1

COVID-19 and its impact on the adult population

Virtually all the Latin American and Caribbean countries were forced to implement social distancing measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The world of work was particularly impacted by these measures. ILO (2020) estimates that, compared with pre-COVID-19 levels, working hours in the region fell by 1.7% in the first quarter of 2020, and by 13.3% in the second quarter. These data were equivalent to 4 million lost jobs in the first quarter (calculated on the basis of a 48-hour working week) and 26 million jobs in the second quarter of 2020. This scenario was worse in countries where the services sector has grown in importance, as this sector was the worst affected in this regard. Among the adult population, women are worse affected by job losses, partly because they are overrepresented in the services sector—in all the countries, over two thirds of employed women work in the services economy, a much higher proportion than men.

The labour-market responses to the COVID-19 pandemic included an accelerated trend towards teleworking, especially in large and medium-sized companies and corporations. This transition to teleworking showed up the gap in access to technology and technological knowledge, which is more obvious in the lower-income population. Given the heterogeneity of the region, teleworking is not an option for small firms and for the informal economy, which make up most of the region's economy.

In this scenario, a high proportion of adults are at risk of losing (or have already lost) their source of income and, given the limited access to social protection, have no possibility of receiving social protection assistance. This has further widened the equality gaps between those who can and those who cannot easily make the shift to teleworking.

The trends of job generation, transformation and destruction seen before the pandemic are expected to continue and even increase from now on. Online sales, goods delivery and remote digital services, among other activities that have increased their share of the economy, are expected to continue to expand.



One group that has experienced mixed repercussions (with both positive and negative effects) from the pandemic is that of people engaged in areas of employment that have emerged recently as a result of the technological revolution, in (often poorly paid) work linked to the digital economy, such as those engaged in private passenger transport (for example, Uber, Cabify, DiDi and others) or home delivery of food or packages (for example, Rappi, SinDelantal and others). The increase in these activities as a result of the pandemic may reduce the risk of job loss for those involved, but it also increases other types of risk insofar as they are unlikely to have access to medical insurance—but they also have the greatest exposure to risk of contagion after doctors, nurses and other health workers, and they have thus been one of the groups most affected both directly and indirectly by COVID-19.

COVID-19 has had a differentiated impact on adult women, who form a majority in the front line of direct response, as doctors and nurses in the health sector most exposed to risk, or as teachers facing the challenges of adapting to communications technologies with little opportunity for training and reskilling (ECLAC/UN-Women, 2020).

The measures taken by most of the countries in the region in response to the COVID-19 crisis have been geared chiefly towards benefiting the adult population group and particularly towards avoiding harm that would prevent them from performing their dual role as providers of income and co-guarantors of other rights within the family. These measures have included the introduction of benefits for workers and/or dependants, the increase of credits or other budget allocations, the flexibilization or suspension of eligibility criteria or conditionalities, the expansion of coverage, the increase of assistance amounts, the introduction of wage subsidies, access or administration improvements, and the introduction of new entitlements or increase of existing ones.

Given the scale of the effects of the pandemic, which have made informality unviable as an option, the measures that continue to be implemented in the recovery phase must include support for the informal sector, which has tended to fall outside the scope of public policy.

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of International Labour Organization (ILO), *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the World of Work, Fifth Edition*, 30 June 2020 [online] https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_749399.pdf; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)/International Labour Organization (ILO), "Employment trends in an unprecedented crisis: policy challenges", *Employment Situation in Latin America and the Caribbean*, No. 23 (LC/TS.2020/128), Santiago, November 2020; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), "Universalizing access to digital technologies to address the consequences of COVID-19", *COVID-19 Special Report*, No. 7, Santiago, 26 August 2020; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)/United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), "Care in Latin America and the Caribbean during the COVID-19: towards comprehensive systems to strengthen response and recovery", Santiago, 2020 [online] <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/45917-care-latin-america-and-caribbean-during-covid-19-towards-comprehensive-systems>; J. Weller, "La pandemia del COVID-19 y su efecto en las tendencias de los mercados laborales", *Project Documents* (LC/TS.2020/67), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2020.

C. Priority policies for reducing inequalities among adults

POLICY PROPOSALS



The priority policies for reducing social inequality among the adult population include:

- Basic income security, such as policies on employability with guarantee of sufficient income, basic income and unemployment insurance.
- Decent working conditions, including access to social protection and protection of labour rights.
- Training in the framework of changes in the world of work, including dual education policies.
- Care services and preventive programmes for health, access to culture, sport and a life free from violence.

The assessment given reflects the need to implement measures to close equality gaps in terms of participation in the world of work with a view to a gender equality, ensuring work in decent conditions with secure and adequate income and free from vulnerabilities. In addition, steps must be taken to avoid informality, provide certainty in the event of economic risk or natural or health disasters, recognize unpaid work and move towards public care systems, regulating the new modalities of work and planning for adult training and updating needs.

Several of the aspects mentioned above are addressed in other chapters, so the following section looks in particular at measures to ensure work with decent income taking into account diverse risks, labour conditions for achieving decent work with social protection, on-the-job training and public care systems.¹²

1. Security of work and of decent income

Having a continuous, uninterrupted stream of income is key to well-being for this population group and extends to the other groups who are economically dependent on it. Is it therefore important to promote basic income security through:

- *Policies for employability and employment generation*,¹³ as Costa Rica did, for example, during the 2014–2018 period through its “National Employment and Production Strategy” and its *Empléate* programme, aimed at broadening opportunities for men and women in poverty through training for employability, and employment promotion in the framework of the social and solidarity economy.¹⁴ Chile is another example, with *ProEmpleo*, a public policy on employment administered by the Under-Secretariat for Labour, aimed at improving employability for those in vulnerable situations. This policy has five programmes; one provides emergency employment and the other four are employability support programmes.¹⁵
- *Wage policies aimed at ensuring sufficient income*. In this sphere, ILO (2016) has produced a guide on minimum wage policies, which provides information on effective practices for implementing these. Brazil, for example, made increasing the minimum wage a key public policy for years and was able to raise it from 2000 to at least 2017.¹⁶ Minimum wage policy is addressed greater detail in the chapter on socioeconomic inequality.
- *Unemployment insurance and subsidies*. For example, in the case of Uruguay, the Social Insurance Bank provides formal workers with an unemployment subsidy lasting 72 working days —i.e. six months— subject to having worked at least six months before employment separation.¹⁷ In the case of Mexico, at the subnational level, Mexico City has implemented an unemployment insurance programme for wage workers who have become involuntarily jobless, aimed mainly at women fired owing to pregnancy, repatriated or returned Mexican migrants or temporary residents in Mexico City, persons released from detention in Mexico City and unemployed persons from indigenous communities.¹⁸

¹² The chapter on socioeconomic inequality examines policies on social and labour inclusion in greater detail.

¹³ See ILO (2012).

¹⁴ See Costa Rica (2014).

¹⁵ See Under-Secretariat for Labour (2014).

¹⁶ This point is discussed in greater detail in the chapter on socioeconomic stratification.

¹⁷ See Social Insurance Bank (2017).

¹⁸ See [online] <http://www.segurodedesempleo.cdmx.gob.mx/>.

- *Basic income:* In the context of the pandemic, ECLAC has proposed providing an emergency basic income for crisis situations in which the continuity of labour income is in jeopardy. This proposal also opens the way to reflection about the implementation of basic income across the board in the future.

ILO also draws attention to the importance of policies that have an indirect impact on wages and wage distribution as important elements in the overall response to structural and short-term labour market challenges. These policies, which have been mentioned in greater detail in previous sections, include quality education, ongoing programmes to build up the skills of the economically active population and better matching between jobseekers and the jobs available. But they also include measures to resolve wage differences affecting those working in non-traditional forms of employment (in particular, seasonal workers and workers provided by *outsourcing and crowdsourcing agencies*), whose numbers are increasing in the industrialized countries, as well as in developing countries in segments of the labour market that used to be associated with more standard jobs. The proposals for addressing the challenges of the future of work in this area include the promotion of investments in key areas for decent and sustainable work, and the reshaping of business incentive structures to encourage long-term investments that in turn lead to more secure employment (ILO, 2019).

2. Decent working conditions and social and labour protection

Social protection and the protection of labour rights are fundamental pieces in ensuring well-being and guaranteeing human rights. This topic is covered by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially in Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 8. Measures to achieve social and labour protection may include:

- *Ensure the protection of the labour rights of the entire population, but especially of vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons; and indigenous persons, among others.*¹⁹ An example is the effort by the National Council for Disability Equality jointly with the Labour Integration Service for Persons with Disabilities of Ecuador to coordinate a programme jointly with the Chamber of Industry of Guayaquil to increase the number of quality jobs available for persons with disabilities, in order to obtain skilled employees for members of the Chamber on the one hand, and to increase access to employment for persons with disabilities, on the other.²⁰ The programme has an impact on decision-making and disability sensitization in the working environment. It also contributes to fostering autonomous income generation for employees with disabilities, and to building their self-confidence.
- *Increase access to social security in particularly excluded occupations, such as informal jobs or sectors, or new employment modalities that are not sufficiently regulated.* Examples are paid domestic workers, workers in the gig economy and those in the digital economy. It is important to include all these workers in social security systems and to fulfil other rights by means of effective policies on minimum wages and on limitations on usually excessive working hours. For example, Mexico has recently launched a pilot programme to ensure access to social security for paid female domestic workers.^{21,22} This subject is addressed in greater depth in the chapter on gender inequalities.



¹⁹ There are more specific examples for each of the vulnerable groups in the corresponding chapters.

²⁰ The gaps found show that persons with disabilities lacked the skills and capacities required by the respective jobs, so a free training programme was launched for persons with disabilities in 2010, then broadened to include the possibility of job placement.

²¹ See [online] <http://www.imss.gob.mx/personas-trabajadoras-hogar>.

²² In 2018 ECLAC published a document with proposals for principles and elements of a household labour contract in Mexico. See Arcos García (2018).

- Egalitarian labour protection for men and women through, for example, similar maternity/paternity leave payments to promote responsible fatherhood. An important reference in this regard is Sweden, where men and women have the same number of days' leave. These aspects are also addressed in greater detail in the chapter on gender inequalities.
- Regulation of the new forms of work (gig economy). The recommendations put forward by the Global Commission on the Future of Work in this area include the establishment of universal labour guarantees with a minimum social protection floor, ensuring an adequate living wage, maximum limits on working hours, protection of safety and health at work, time sovereignty, dialogue (to afford a greater role to unionization) and the use of information technologies to promote decent work for the whole population (ILO, 2019).

POLICIES



Social protection policies are key to closing gaps in adulthood: from efforts to increase access to social security to measures to ensure labour rights and decent income.

3. Training for employment in the framework of changes in the world of work

- *Implement work training programmes* to ensure that changes in skills needs do not require a change in staff, but rather open the opportunity for existing workers to acquire new skills or capacities to continue working and meeting the challenges of the labour market. Progress in this direction has been made for a number of years now with the promotion of technical and vocational training, where national training services have been set up separately from ministries of education, in order to promote the acquisition of work skills among youth and adults with lags in that area. Examples are institutions such as the National Industrial Apprenticeship Service (SENAI) in Brazil, the National Apprenticeship Service (SENA) in Colombia, the National Apprenticeship Service (INA) in Costa Rica and the National Technical and Professional Training Institute (INFOTEP) in the Dominican Republic. Technological support plans in schools help to support this effort. For example, the Basic Computer Connectivity for Online Learning (Ceibal) Plan in Uruguay is aimed at aligning educational content with digital content from primary through to secondary school (Rodríguez, 2020).
- *Promote dual adult education programmes*, in other words, strengthen strategies of training for work, mainly bringing skills and capacities up to date in line with the evolution of the labour market. An example is the programme that the State of Mexico has been running at the subnational level for almost 20 years, which focuses on skills training in a combined classroom-workplace format, in areas such as production, technologies, transport and tourism.²³

The ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work emphasizes investment in people's capabilities with lifelong learning as a right that supports the entry of young people into work, but also supports adult workers through labour market transitions as occupation changes, with an emphasis on gender equality (ILO, 2019).

4. Care services

It is imperative to broaden public care services to provide the opportunity for decent work in the performance of these services and to eliminate gender gaps to enable the female population to enter the paid labour market. This is, in fact, one of the emerging areas that can offer opportunities for reskilling in the context of the future of work and demographic trends.

²³ For further information, see CONALEP (2018).

Changes in the world of work and the care economy pose the need to regear policies aimed at the adult population.

Most of the countries of the region have policies on care services, with varying degree of progress and scope; however, they generally do not form part of an integrated system. In this regard, Uruguay is benchmark, as the only country in the region identified by ILO (2018) as having an integrated national care system.²⁴ Other important initiatives exist, for example in Costa Rica, which established a National Network for Child Care and Development,²⁵ and Chile, which has a National Support and Care System.²⁶ This type of care network fosters the re-entry into the labour market, especially for women and preferably in conditions of decent work, with social security and adequate income. This topic is addressed in greater depth in the chapter on gender inequalities.

The implementation of public policies that provide care services also promotes the creation of jobs in care for the child population, as well as for persons with disabilities and older persons, for example, through policies that support care training. In this regard, it is important to give consideration to professional training for caregivers, in order to increase the professionalization of this activity and, therefore, the associated income and benefits.

5. Other aspects (violence, preventive health, culture)

Although the foregoing considerations are priorities for building a milieu in which the adult population has secure income through the possibility of decent work with fair working conditions, there are additional aspects which are important for fulfilling the right to a decent life. These include preventive health, a life free from violence, and access to culture, sport and recreation, among other topics that support adults' realization and fulfilment beyond their role as providers. Measures for this include:

- *Implement preventive health programmes* involving aspects such as adequate nutrition, physical activity and prevention of substance abuse, with a view to maintaining a state of physical health that minimizes the risk of premature onset of chronic or degenerative disease. At the regional level, the Wellness Week, a campaign by the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), is focused on promoting preventive psychological health.²⁷
- *Ensure a life free from violence* making a priority of prevention policies that foster a culture of peace and ensuring justice especially for the most disadvantaged populations. An example is the global citizenship education model developed in partnership by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which seeks to form new generations in a culture of legality and respect for the rule of law, through formal education.²⁸
- *Implement programmes of free access to culture and sport*, and the performance of these activities, including in work settings, as a way of fostering physical health. An example is the Arts and Trades Factory (Faro) project in Mexico City, an arena for arts and trades that promotes cultural activities open to the public.²⁹

²⁴ See [online] <http://www.sistemadecuidados.gub.uy/>.

²⁵ See [online] <https://redcuidoinfantil.go.cr/>.

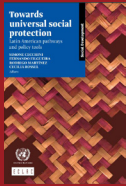
²⁶ See [online] <http://www.chilecuida.gob.cl/>.

²⁷ See PAHO (2020).

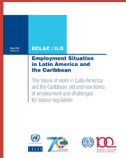
²⁸ See UNODC (n/d).

²⁹ See [online] <https://www.cultura.cdmx.gob.mx/recintos/faro-oriente>.

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E. Questions

- What are the largest gaps as regards the guarantee of labour rights for the adult population in your country /region/district?
- Analyse what labour policies your country, region or district has for groups that are in a vulnerable position and identify which groups are unprotected.
- Propose a public policy that your country, region or district can feasibly implement to protect the labour rights of one of the groups in a vulnerable position.
- Identify the main challenges of the future of work in your country. In particular, analyse the gaps in labour rights produced by the increase in the gig economy and the digital economy, and in relation to the prevalence of informality and unpaid domestic work.
- Given the emerging challenges of the work of work in your country /region/district, what type of training is a priority? How should that training policy be implemented?

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