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# Normative framework for equality in adulthood



## 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 people<sup>3</sup> 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).

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<sup>3</sup> 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).

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](http://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, María 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 Huneus 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 Huneus, 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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