

Thirty-ninth session of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Report from the Chair of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (25-10-22)

Within the framework of the current Presidency of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, chaired by myself (Dean Jonas, Minister of Social Transformation and the Blue Economy of Antigua and Barbuda), I inform on the advancements since the Fourth Meeting of the Conference, held virtually in October 2021. Furthermore, this report informs about the ongoing processes and organization of the Fifth Regional Conference in 2023.

Regarding the actions developed since the Fourth Meeting of the Regional Conference, following the commitments that Resolution IV (4) mandates and the Agreements reached during the Fourth Meeting of the Presiding Officers, the Presidency of the RCSD has been leading the implementation process of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development. The changes experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic led to the halt of progress towards meeting the goals of the 2030 Agenda. As a result, it led us to rethink priorities from this meeting point of the social development ministries.

Activities carried out

1. Realization of the Fourth Conference on Social Development in a virtual format in October 2021, where the document "Disasters and inequality in a protracted crisis: Towards universal, comprehensive, resilient and sustainable social protection systems in Latin America and the Caribbean" was presented. This position document was commissioned to the Technical Secretariat to highlight the need for universal, comprehensive, resilient and sustainable social protection systems, which can respond to situations of high uncertainty in a region where poverty and structural inequalities persist.
2. Based on the agreements held during the Fourth Meeting held virtually under the Presidency of Antigua and Barbuda in October 2021, the Presiding Officers comprised the following countries in the vice presidency: Bahamas, Barbados, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominica, Paraguay and Uruguay.
3. Resolution 4(IV) reiterated the commitment to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development implementation in the region, including its social dimension, considering that the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development (RAISD) contributes to this process. The Technical Secretariat was also requested to assist countries in implementing

working groups on issues and policy areas identified for advancements in a transformative recovery process.

4. The deliberations held at the Fourth Meeting of the Conference also identified common places in the design of public policies to strengthen social protection and disaster risk management systems. Countries highlighted the different capacities to address the situation of vulnerable groups, which needed to be addressed through a specific and integrated approach to policy design and formulation, with greater coordination and mobilization of institutional resources to achieve universal, comprehensive and resilient social protection systems. The multidimensional, intersectoral and long-term nature of natural hazards and exogenous disturbances and their impacts was highlighted. The countries discussed the fiscal and economic problems of the region to advance the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development, where the call is made to have fiscal space and increase resources to improve social protection and disaster risk management systems.
5. Countries also stressed the need to consider: (i) mental health as a problem affecting well-being, mainly due to the effects of lockdown measures to address COVID-19; (ii) the difficulties of the most vulnerable households in meeting their basic needs; (iii) the consideration of GDP per capita in the classification of middle- and high-income countries and the impossibility of accessing financing and international cooperation; (iv) the challenge of developing a vulnerability index in the region; (v) the capacity of the social protection and emergency institutions at the local level with the particularities of the territories.
6. In the same resolution, the countries agreed to request support from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean to provide technical assistance to the working groups on issues and policy areas identified by countries to advance in the process of transformative recovery towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, through the exchange of experiences, the elaboration of common agendas, participation and dialogues with institutions, local governments and civil society organizations. The Secretariat was also asked to deepen the analysis of public policy challenges and alternatives to advance toward universal, comprehensive, sustainable and resilient social protection systems, particularly about the vulnerability of middle strata, labour informality and the new challenges of the labour market;
7. In March 2022, a meeting of the Presiding Officers' members was held to discuss areas of work to address the issues prioritized at the IV Meeting of the Conference and guide the programming of activities with countries and working groups during 2022-2023 period. The meeting discussed priority challenges at the regional and country level to advance the institutionalization of social protection and disaster risk management systems.

8. It has been a priority for the Presidency to address issues concerning transformative recovery. These are: Employment protection measures and labour inclusion after disasters; Challenges for regional trade and food security; Tackle the social exclusion of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, leaving no one behind; Resilient and accessible housing; Public health issues, including access to vaccines, mental health and psychosocial support, Access to financing for sustainable disaster protection measures.
9. In the conclusions and recommendations of the governments gathered at the Fifth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, the countries recognized the importance of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development to promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, face the current multidimensional crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and move towards a transformative recovery, inclusive and resilient with equality. The Director of the Division for Social Development presented at the Fourth Session of the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean the contributions and synergies of the Regional Conference on Social Development in the implementation of the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development.
10. As President of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, I participated as a commentator at the 62nd Meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in the panel "Gender equality, women's autonomy and disaster risk reduction policies" where the position document "Towards Gender Equality and Women's Leadership for Resilience to Disaster Risks in Latin America and the Caribbean" was presented, held virtually between January 26 and 27, 2022. I also participated in the Special Meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, held on June 22 and 23, 2022, in a hybrid format. On that occasion, I commented the high-level panel on the Contribution of the Regional Gender Agenda to policies on gender equality and women's autonomy in Latin America and the Caribbean.
11. In preparation for the Presiding Officers meeting, two workshops were held. The first was directed for Latin American countries on August 12, 2022, with 40 attendees from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Panama, Peru and Uruguay. The second preparatory workshop was organized for the Caribbean countries, on August 25, with the participation of 21 attendees from Antigua and Barbuda, Anguilla, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Dominica and Guyana. The objective of these workshops was to discuss, within the framework of RAISD, the challenges of social institutions and regional cooperation to move towards transformative recovery in the region. These workshops provided inputs to prepare the technical note to be presented at the Fifth Meeting of the Presiding Officers.

12. Antigua and Barbuda participated on August 30 2022, in the Second Regional Seminar on Social Development in the Panel "An opportunity for a strengthened welfare state in the region: towards the construction of universal, comprehensive, resilient and sustainable social protection systems". On that occasion, I highlighted the opportunity to move towards welfare states, where in particular for the Caribbean, the need to have contingency funds to respond to unforeseen social security and health needs.
13. Finally, I chaired the Fifth Meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference held in Cuenca, Ecuador, on September 29th, 2022. That meeting was a fitting occasion to share experiences, analyse challenges, highlight opportunities and propose alternatives to make the proposals of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development a reality. Participants discussed "Challenges of Moving Towards Universal, Comprehensive, Sustainable and Resilient Social Protection Systems". Progress in expanding the capacity of social public policy is more pressing today than in recent years, and there is a consensus on the importance of social policy for getting back on track to achieve the SDGs. In particular, the current complex situation, marked by crises in succession and high uncertainty, poses specific challenges for institutional frameworks for social policies and cooperation and integration among social development ministries and equivalent entities of the region. Lastly, the members of the Conference agreed that the Fifth Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean will be held in Chile in the second half of 2023.