

“Equity and Social Inclusion: Overcoming Inequalities for More Inclusive Societies”

Executive Summary

What is the purpose of this publication, and its launch?

To help position the OAS as a reference point for issues related to equity and social inclusion. To proffer operating definitions for key concepts in this subject, including equity, inequality, social inclusion, and rights approach.

The book is intended to be an *annual* publication covering key topics on the OAS rights and equity agenda.

Key ideas:

- Over the last few years, the region has taken **major public policy action on equity and social inclusion**. Among highlights of the last 15 years were the implementation of innovative poverty-reduction programs to reduce and measure poverty, mindful that it was multidimensional and intersectoral in nature. Latin America can furthermore be considered trail-blazers in terms of designing and implementing non-contributory social protection programs to tackle the inter-generational transmission of poverty. Hand in hand with this, expansion of access to education and health ensured that populations historically excluded now had access to these services. Lastly, the role of a robust and inclusive labor market was critical to ensuring a decent and legitimate source of livelihood.
- **But we still have a long way to go. The region remains the most unequal in the world.** The book documents the challenges attendant to inclusion of vulnerable groups and full exercise of human rights, including how to reduce poverty and inequality through social programs such as conditional cash transfers; how to ensure that public policies are designed with a rights focus - that is, with an approach to establish a direct link to the obligations contained in human rights legal instruments; and the scope and content of public policies designed and implemented; or how to deal with particular problems facing persons with disabilities, people of African descent, indigenous peoples, or LGBTI people, in accessing employment and education, among other rights.
- The volume advances the concepts of inequality and social inclusion and how they are defined by ECLAC and the World Bank, among others, as well as how the OAS defines them. What are we at the OAS proposing? That we cannot measure inequality just in terms of income but rather in terms of other inequalities stemming from gender, age, sexual orientation or identity, etc., which nullify prospects for persons to exercise rights (in every domain).
- **Social inclusion** is defined as the process whereby equality is achieved and the process to close gaps in productivity, skills, education, employment, labor segmentation, and informality - factors that turn out to be the main causes of inequity.
- The volume also puts forward some trends related to the evolution of poverty rates in the region, structural inequality, and incorporation of the rights approach in designing social policies.

- It shows how, for example, between 2014 and 2015 the ranks of Latin America's poor grew by 7 million,^{1/} or how income inequality is one of the region's most serious structural problems, with 50% of income concentrated in the hands of the wealthiest one tenth of the population.^{2/} If we were to add the inequalities suffered by millions of people as a result of age, ethnic, religious, language, and gender discrimination, then the inequality picture becomes even worse. The volume documents, for instance, a higher prevalence of disability among individuals in the poorest quintile.^{3/} Besides, those in rural areas are at greater risk of getting and living with a disability than those in urban areas, given that access to all types of public as well as health services are limited and because of the precarious socioeconomic conditions both men and women face in those areas.

Topics covered (compiled from the chapters in the volume)

- The argument advanced in several of the articles included here is that the rights approach reminds states of their obligations to rights holders that are the citizens of the region.
- A rights approach therefore provides the governments of the region with a methodology to directly link the obligations contained in the human rights legal instruments, in order to define the scope and content, as well as recommendations as to how best to fulfill the positive and negative obligations that each right entails.
- Poverty reduction and social protection from a rights perspective are also covered, from a **multidimensional perspective** and from an intersectoral perspective. The articles emphasize social protection as a public policy measure to break the cycle of intergenerational transmission of poverty and to create better welfare conditions for citizens throughout their life cycle. Given the nature of poverty and its multiple dimensions, there must be an emphasis on the need to articulate the progress made on social protection and the need to move towards social protection systems. On this subject, conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs and next generation programs serve as models. As an example, several governments of the region are already implementing "second generation" graduation programs (social protection) in order to move from protection to social promotion or to "graduate" CCT recipients toward building a livelihood. As documented in the volume (Rincon), certain initiatives in existence today are "Producing for my Future" by *Prosperidad Social*, which in 2015 started a second cohort that now reaches 10,000 families in various Colombian communities. Another initiative, specifically for Colombian armed conflict victims wanting to invest their reparations in productive initiatives, has been in operation since 2014. It is called "Transforming my Future." In Mexico, *De la Mano con Prospera* (Thriving by Hand) is being tested with 400 *Otomi* families. In Paraguay, *Sembrando Oportunidades Familia por Familia* (Spreading Opportunity, One Family at a Time) started with a pilot in 2015 and now involves 13,000 additional families. And in Honduras, with Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) support the government will also begin implementing a pilot in 2017. These programs are being evaluated using an evaluation platform led by *Universidad de los Andes* and financed by the Ford Foundation and IDRC Canada.

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1. ECLAC, (2016) <http://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/eclac-calls-protecting-progress-and-preventing-social-rollbacks-light-potential>.
 2. ECLAC, (2015).
 3. World Health Organization and World Bank (2011): *World Report on Disability*. World Health Organization, Geneva, p. 9.

- The authors agree, in many cases, that public policies on equity needs to be approached from an intersectoral standpoint to lead players and sectors to interact and coordinate, given the numerous factors and dimensions to poverty, social exclusion, discrimination, and inequality.
- The publication explores how **the countries of the region have evolved in terms of their focus on poverty and the lead role they play in fighting poverty, inequality, and social exclusion.** Several cases studies are included on how fiscal policy has contributed to moving forward this agenda of access to rights such as education.