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Reconstruction and post-pandemic recovery COVID-19, a key element of Social Cohesion



Mafalda statue in Campo de San Francisco, Oviedo, Spain (Unknown author)

■ One of the questions raised by the pandemic is whether we are entering a period of deglobalisation, p. 4

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Mafalda statue in Campo de San Francisco,
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How to participate in *Reciprocamente*: our interest is to disseminate those materials sent by our readers that may be useful for dialogue and reflection: essays, articles, studies, ongoing project ideas, book reviews, news about events, etc. To know the conditions and characteristics of the texts go to <https://eurosocial.eu/blog-reciprocamente/>.

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We will rebuild better if we adopt a solidarity mindset

■ It is a pleasure for me to introduce with a few words this new issue of the *Reciprocamente* magazine, a regular publication of the European Union flagship programme to support social cohesion and equality in Latin America, EUROsociAL+.

This issue places the emphasis on social cohesion in the context of the COVID-19. It is a timely and relevant choice: The human and economic consequences of the sanitary crisis are still difficult to weigh, but there is no doubt that it has laid inequalities bare. In Latin America, some are already talking about a new “lost decade”.

Every cloud has a silver lining, and these hard times have also triggered, on both sides of the Atlantic, innovations needed to move towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, leaving no one behind. The European Union will strive for a reconstruction which preserves the environment and makes the best of new technologies, while maintaining its strong commitment to social inclusion and justice. The green transition must be fair and inclusive, and the digital gap must be mitigated. We envisage a recovery scenario in which the environmental, technological, productive and social agendas are fully articulated. This applies to internal policies, but also to international partnerships, particularly with a like-minded region such as Latin America. The diversity of experiences of our Member States, our network of partners, and innovative cooperation programmes such as EUROsociAL+ play a significant role to make this vision concrete.

In the following pages, you will find a range of high-level contributions, from both European and Latin American authors. They address key issues for an inclusive and resilient recovery. Indeed, the multidimensional nature of inequalities calls for a diversity of angles of approaches. Some articles deal with the need to expand universal social protection, some address gender equality and women's part as a group and driver of change; others highlight the benefits of regional integration, or stress the importance of betting on inclusive globalization while designing agendas at the local level.

This publication also highlights a number of important issues to consider in any analysis of the current context, and in any attempt at designing future paths through an inclusive lens. Among them, guaranteeing access to information, transparency and good governance, safeguarding sexual and reproductive health, acting at the level of territories and promoting cross-border cooperation, as well as improving care policies.

Finally yet importantly, *Reciprocamente* provides a space for exchange of views from both the European Union and Latin America, on common problems that require shared solutions. It includes contributions at ministerial level on several topical issues, such as access to justice as a central pillar of social cohesion. It advocates that no country shall be left alone to find solutions to emerge from this crisis. On the contrary, it is with a solidary mind set, that we will build back better. Uniting forces, sharing experiences and good practices, finding consensus and shaping together regional and international agendas.

EUROsociAL+ ultimately fulfils with this publication one of its main roles: sharing lessons learned and fostering the dialogue between the European Union and Latin America, to strengthen our strategic partnership. *Reciprocamente* is an open invitation to a joint reflection.

I hope it will give you a lot of food for thoughts and will spark passionate exchanges! I wish you all a good reading, and a good health.



JOLITA BUTKEVICIENE |

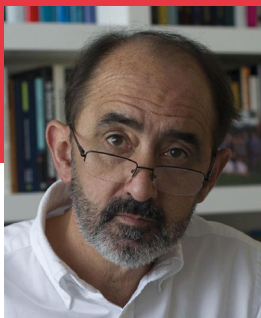
Director for Latin America and the Caribbean of the European Commission's Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development

“EUROSOCIAL+ ULTIMATELY FULFILLS WITH THIS PUBLICATION ONE OF ITS MAIN ROLES: SHARING LESSONS LEARNED AND FOSTERING THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND LATIN AMERICA”





New governance for a sustainable 'glocalisation'



DANIEL INNERARITY |

Professor of Political and Social Philosophy
at the University of the Basque Country

■ One of the unprecedented questions raised by this involuntary social experiment posed by the pandemic is whether we are entering a period of deglobalisation or whether globalisation will continue as before. There is a bit of unreality in this question, as if globalisation were a process that could be stopped, and we had started it with an express decision at some point. Human beings did not decide, at a sort of AGM, to enter the Iron Age or to abandon the Renaissance. Why are people now asking this question, which seems to attribute to us a sovereignty that we do not have? Probably because we allow ourselves to be carried away by the idea of having a high degree of control over reality since we have just done something very similar to deciding to stop the world: the lockdown and halting a good part of the economy. It has not been similar to the recessions or economic crises that we have suffered, which we now have considerable experience of, but a halt to our usual mobility and a hibernation of the economy that result from decisions we adopted, we may have been forced to do so by the health threat, but nonetheless we took these decisions voluntarily. The radical nature of the measures taken to combat the pandemic can

fool us into the illusion that we are capable of controlling everything, including something very similar to stopping the world.

The flip side of thinking that there are sovereign actors is that there must be culprits whose incompetence or evil explains everything. We love to find culprits for crises, and we should curb this urge if we want to make good diagnoses (which will undoubtedly include identifying irresponsible parties). Globalisation now appears to us as the wild card in all our explanations. That the coronavirus has spread globally leads us to think that it has something to do with globalisation, but de-globalisation is not easy, nor is it clear what it might mean. For a start, the virus seems to have spread mainly not through trade, but through tourism. Should we ban pilgrimages to Mecca or tourism in Florence? The idea that the virus is now passing us the bill for disorderly globalisation is a half-truth. There were plagues as early as the fourteenth century and growing interdependence also has very positive aspects when it comes to combating these pandemics (such as scientific cooperation, the agility of information or the communication of successful experiences). If the virus came from China and had such

devastating effects, it was not because of excessive globalisation, but because the virus was globalised while information was nationalised. It is necessary to properly diagnose what type of political constellation the coronavirus comes from and what interactions it obeys. To maintain that it is a virus of globalisation would be a simplification that does not correspond to the fact that we live in a more complex world, in which there are dimensions to our existence that have been globalised a lot, others not so much and some that have even experienced a retraction. The point is that we must balance the risks we are running by sharing the information, technologies and institutions that we need to face them. The goal is a balanced globalisation, something that is within our reach, and not a deglobalisation that is totally out of touch with reality.

As a consequence of the jolt caused by the pandemic, the big issues have returned to the political agenda, even with a touch of grandstanding, I would say, as if the future of the world were in our hands in a way that does not correspond to our limitations. A debate has arisen between two camps, which we might call the contractionists and the expansion-





ists, the former arguing that this crisis calls for de-globalisation and the latter maintaining that globalisation must be promoted by providing it with the appropriate political structures.

The management of the crisis has initially followed a contractionary logic: closing borders, reserving resources for national citizens, confinement, greater demand for protectionism from governments, interruption of global supply chains and mobility. At the same time, after the instinctive withdrawal reaction, there were phenomena that implied a greater openness: configuration of a more unified world public opinion that discusses the same things, advance of digitisation, telework and online education, demands for intervention by the EU, a desperate race to find a vaccine through international scientific cooperation, a comparison of the strategies implemented by various countries that placed us in a framework of good practices or global benchmarking.

The fact that both positions appear to be right, based on the examples given and the perspective from which they are observed, tells us a lot about the nature of globalisation: it is something inevitable, a destiny, but ambivalent and even contradictory, with movements that contradict each other, although the result is an increase in interconnection. The mention of globalisation also evokes its opposite, like our shadow that goes with us. Sometimes, for the globalists to be right again, a step back needs to be taken, in what could be interpreted as a concession to those in favour of blocking their way. A quick glance at the history of globalisation is enough to see that it has always fluctuated between expansion and contraction.

There is a case in the current debate that is adduced as an example of the success of de-globalisation. The economic downturn has had immediate beneficial effects on the quality of the air, rivers and seas, for obvious reasons deriving from the closure of industries and decreased mobility. While it is true that the confinement, the hibernation of many economic activities and the decrease in international trade due to the pandemic have led to a decrease in pollution and greenhouse gas emis-

sions, it would be a mistake to think that this contraction reduces the risks of climate change beyond the immediate horizon. Emissions will rise again when activity recovers and if the pandemic causes a serious economic crisis, a lot of money and a lot of political will be diverted from the fight against the climate crisis. The situation could even worsen because attention to the immediate threats of the pandemic would distract us from climate threats, which are more latent and long-term. Let us also not forget that companies will find it difficult to invest in the transition to sustainable projects; that lower oil prices will make electric vehicles relatively more expensive (as partly indicated by the fall in Tesla shares); the supply chain for renewable energy, which is highly dependent on the production of certain elements in China, could be interrupted; the widespread fear of health and financial risks will focus all the attention and concerns about climate change will be relegated to second place. In any case, the fact that the climate has improved during the pandemic because many people died and work decreased does not seem to be the best procedure for solving the problems of the climate crisis. We should find solutions that make it possible to reconcile all the goods at stake (life, the economy, the planet), beyond the sacrificial promise that stopping the world necessarily fixes the problems associated with its movement.

My conclusion to this debate is that globalisation is not going to stop because we decide to stop it or because governments so decree. However, a set of decisions are in our hands that in fact amount to driving or slowing down globalisation. It will be something similar to the experiment of repairing a ship while it is under way. We do not have a long pause or an intentional interruption to the story and we are forced to reflect while we are in motion. Quarantine is the elimination of contacts for a certain period, but the concept of "deglobalisation" suggests that we must suppress the relationships we have established or at least the way they have been configured since we have been talking about this phenomenon. We should distinguish between those we should limit, those that should be modified and those that it does not seem reasonable to give up.

This collective reflection will not make us deliberate about an emergency lever to stop the world, but instead encourages us to think about its resizing. The great debate consists of resizing the decision areas according to the nature of the risks that threaten us. We have to redefine the scales and appropriate levels of management and production: local, national, international, supranational, transnational, global. This health crisis has mainly revealed the fragility of global openness, both in terms of the mobility that has favoured the spread of the pandemic and certain difficulties in dealing with it when it was necessary to stock up on masks or ventilators, and we realised our enormous dependence on the supply of basic goods and services (things for which we had delocalised production and which did not seem to have a special added value or had less relevance to security than sophisticated military equipment). Our first reaction is to favour regional markets, disrupt global supply chains, go back to classic protections and the local scale; but the cosmopolitanism of the scientific community, the strengthening of a global public opinion and the advantages of digitisation have also come into their own, precisely to avoid everything coming to a halt. Nervous globalisation must be followed by sustainable "glocalisation".

The coronavirus is not going to end globalisation (if this idea makes any sense). The question is, which form of organisation is the most appropriate to rebalance a world that already had many imbalances that this crisis has merely thrown into relief. Even if it were possible, the return to closed worlds would not contribute to providing the world with better governance, but would leave it without counterweights of authorities and actors to balance its uncontrolled dynamics. We will have to distinguish advantageous or unavoidable interdependence from dependencies that pose serious security threats. Instead of lurching between discipline and disorder, regression and acceleration, what this globalisation needs is more regulation. Before and after the pandemic, it remains true that public goods require global institutions, cooperation and global solutions.





Linking recovery to the well-being of the new generations



MARINA SERENI | Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy

■ I am writing these lines at a time - early September - when there are reasonable expectations of being able to control the epidemiological situation. However, we will have to live with the virus for an indefinable time and at the same time we will be forced to make great efforts to reactivate the economy. The accumulated losses throughout these months are enormous. The projection of the contraction of GDP in the EU for 2020 is -8.3%. According to ECLAC, in Latin America the decline will be -9.1%.

In addition to the economic recovery, there is the need to confront the strong social inequalities that the pandemic crisis has laid bare and, what is worse, has exacerbated, especially affecting those groups that were already weak

before. It will not be easy, especially in countries where the capacity of citizens' social protection systems is limited.

In speaking of inequalities, I am going to refer to young people, whom the pandemic has placed at the centre of public interest. On the one hand, the pandemic has had a negative impact on all facets of young people's lives, including socialisation with their peers, who, due to lockdown measures, have had no choice but to practise it from a distance; on the other, the awareness of two realities is leading economic reactivation to be linked to the well-being of future generations¹.

The first has to do with the fact that the pandemic crisis is leading to a rethinking of the very foundations of our development

1. The name of the recovery plan in Europe is very telling: *NextGeneration EU*. In fact, it is proposed as a long-term policy tool. It also links recovery to the axes of the EU's strategic agenda, that is, the green and digital transition. It is a plan understood as a great investment for the future.



“IT IS YOUNG PEOPLE AND FUTURE GENERATIONS WHO WILL HAVE TO BEAR THE BRUNT OF THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY”

model, around which doubts and fears had arisen, even before the pandemic, due to the major trends the outcomes of which are impossible to foresee: climate change, population ageing, globalisation, migration and technological progress.

The crisis has forced us to become aware of the so-called “globalisation of risk”, which depends on the increasingly intense and accelerated flows of people and goods. The presence of undesirable side effects, which are often dramatic, raises the urgent need to slow down, to redesign the economy, to avoid changes that could end up being irreversible (for example, the destruction of natural resources) and that sooner or later we would regret. While the production and consumption systems will have to bear the consequences in future generations, we will have to turn to young people to inject new energy that helps to renew, to engender more resilient societies.

After all – and this is the second aspect to be aware of – it is young people and future generations who will have to bear the brunt of the economic recovery. In fact, in order to recover, countries will have to resort to very large debt, which will presumably take a long time to repay, and it will be the next generations who will have to repay it.

Considering young people and future generations in this context necessarily involves considering the problem of the inter-generational transmission of advantages and disadvantages. There are at least 3 areas where inequalities associated with origins are reproduced and on which policies should focus their efforts and energies:

1. **Training and education** at all levels, from the first years of life and including university training. Well-being depends more and more on the access to and use of knowledge. Quality training and education, with adequate public investments, can make citizenship grow again and make the social elevator work, reducing disparities such as those reflected, for example, in school drop-outs, low educational results, gaps between schools in different regions or neighbourhoods and reduced years of study.
2. **Insertion into the world of work** often means that many young people – especially those belonging to the most disadvantaged classes – remain in the wide area of insecure jobs, low-skilled and more vulnerable to economic shocks. However, the inclusion of young people into the labour market could become a less arduous path if investments were to be made in active labour policies, that is, through guidance, assistance and intermediation services, vocational training and other facilitating measures.
3. **Economic security** to face transitions (work, formation of a family, parenthood, etc.) in conditions of autonomy and to forge, more generally, a path of their own, freely chosen and – for those who have lived in a less favoured socio-economic environment – without the attendant constrictions. Without risk of falling into welfare, there are several ways of endowing young people with resources (the universal child allowance being introduced in Italy may be a useful example in this regard). Without them, the chances of finding good future prospects for those who do not have a family to provide them are rather slim. The issue of economic security should surely be extended to the revision of the most classic of inter-generational pacts: the pact on social security, since the future guarantee of the pension is disappearing due to the reduction of the population of working age, the low fertility rate and increasing longevity.

The foregoing – I will say it here in passing, it is in any case a fundamental aspect for any recovery action that seriously aims to overcome current inequalities – is also valid, and in very similar terms, for women. The demand to remove the obstacles faced by women since before COVID-19 cannot be ignored, and some of these have even been aggravated by the pandemic, starting with the possibilities of access to and permanence in decent work.

When it comes to designing post-pandemic scenarios, it is essential to avoid the danger of consolidating the social configuration whereby wealthy families have the possibility of offering great initial advantages to their children, which also helps them achieve better results. But, as we have seen, in addition to the typically social inequalities, we can no longer ignore the inequality that refers to relations with future generations. In this sense, in addition to the three investment priorities that I have mentioned, it is necessary to go one step further and add the perspective of inter-generational justice to the list of ex ante and ex post evaluation criteria of public policies, as governments have now started to do with gender equality.

Only in this way can we make sense of keywords such as equity, sustainability and resilience, and chart a future horizon for young generations.

*The references of this article are available in our blog: [link](#).

“MANY YOUNG PEOPLE – ESPECIALLY THOSE BELONGING TO THE MOST DISADVANTAGED CLASSES – REMAIN IN THE WIDE AREA OF INSECURE JOBS, LOW-SKILLED AND MORE VULNERABLE TO ECONOMIC SHOCKS”





The post-COVID era in The Americas

Reinventing ourselves with a focus on women



ALEJANDRA MORA MORA | Executive Secretary of the Organisation of American States (OAS) Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)

■ In the Organisation of American States (OAS) Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) we have been saying it forcefully from day one: the emergency resulting from COVID-19 is causing disproportionate impacts on the lives of women, not only because the already existing inequalities are deepened, but also because it may imply inadmissible setbacks in terms of the rights achieved. The call to stay at home spread through the hashtag # QuédateEnCasa (“stay at home” in Spanish) has very different implications for women, who were ignored in the design of public policies for the pandemic, under the logic of apparent neutrality.

In the Organisation of American States (OAS) Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) we have been saying it forcefully from day one: the emergency resulting from COVID-19 is causing disproportionate impacts on the lives of women, not only because the already existing inequalities are deepened, but also because it may imply inadmissible setbacks in terms of the rights achieved. The call to stay at home spread through the hashtag # QuédateEnCasa (“stay at home” in Spanish) has very different implications for women, who were ignored in the design of public policies for the pandemic, under the logic of apparent neutrality¹:

1. More information on: <https://www.oas.org/en/cim/COVID-19.asp>



Immediately bring about egalitarian participation by women in decision-making

There is abundant evidence that decisions that do not include women tend to be biased, less effective, and even sometimes harmful. We do not have precise data on the effective participation of women; however, we have not seen women in crisis cabinets and many voices have criticised their absence. It is a question of political will to ensure that men and women share decisions and that they do so with the appropriate approach; this is something that can happen instantly, without the need for delay.

Redistribute care work

The CIM and the European Union, through its EUROsocial+ programme, have published the report *The Global Care Emergency*², which establishes that, if there is no government intervention, inequalities will deepen due to the social organisation of care. Legally establishing people's right to be cared for is an essential step to ensuring that states assume their part through social protection systems, that the private sector integrates care into the value chains that link the productive sector and that, in the domestic sphere, men participate on equal terms in care tasks.

Fighting poverty with a focus on women

Studies have warned that, in Latin America, the economic crisis generated by COVID-19 will plunge 118 million women into poverty, 22% more than the number of women who fell below the poverty line in the previous year³. In the most unequal region in the world, addressing the biggest problem resulting from this crisis, which is none other than the extension and deepening of poverty, from the gender perspective will be essential for the responses to be effective.

Guarantee equal access for women to the economy and employment

Women's jobs are generally less secure and more likely to be informal than men's. It has

“THERE IS ABUNDANT EVIDENCE THAT DECISIONS THAT DO NOT INCLUDE WOMEN TEND TO BE BIASED, LESS EFFECTIVE, AND EVEN SOMETIMES HARMFUL”

been estimated that this year the unemployment rate for women will reach 15.2% in Latin America and the Caribbean⁴. It is necessary to address the risks in the most affected sectors, where there is a high concentration of women. Likewise, it is important to see that the care economy will be a critical pathway in economic recovery. Employment promotion measures must ensure the principle of non-discrimination and include affirmative actions to ensure that women are not left behind.

Combat and eradicate violence against women

During the lockdown, an increase in cases of gender-based violence against women and girls

was recorded in various parts of the region, including an increase in the rate of femicides. The CIM and the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belem do Pará Convention (MESECVI) have established priority measures for prevention, care, access to justice and institutional strengthening with the aim of combating “the other pandemic”.

Promote evidence-based public intervention

The absence of gender-disaggregated data and research on the most effective policies to combat gender inequalities makes proper decision-making difficult. The need for evidence-based solutions, backed by quality data, remains paramount.

These priorities must be integrated into the new social pacts aimed at the new normal. To do this, the most important thing is that the people who are making the decisions understand that there is no gender-neutral policy and that if they do not incorporate the principle of equality and non-discrimination, both in the design and implementation of policies, it will not be possible to offer adequate and sustainable responses to get out of what is already considered the worst economic crisis in the last hundred years. The new normal must go hand in hand with equality.



2. Available on <https://www.oas.org/en/cim/docs/CuidadosCOVID19-ES.pdf>

3. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2020

4. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2020



Lessons from the emergency



HÉLÈNE FURNON-PETRESCU |

Head of the Women's Rights and Equality Department, Directorate General for Social Cohesion (DGCS), Ministry for Equality between Women and Men, Diversity and Equal Opportunities, France

ALEXIS RINCKENBACH | Head of the Office of European and International Affairs in the DGCS as above.

Through the Ministry for Equality between Women and Men, Diversity and Equal Opportunities, during this lockdown period which has led to increased gender-based violence, the French government has had and continues to have a clear objective and an unwavering determination: to protect women victims, without exception, by all means.

■ At the beginning of the lockdown, it became obvious that the challenges were on three levels: identify, protect, and prevent. Making the scale of violence more visible, objectifying and analysing it, is a necessary prerequisite for guiding public action and providing effective and adequate responses to better fight against this scourge. In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, we observed a rebound in intimate partner violence as demonstrated by the official national indicators published by INSEE (National Statistics Institute), the ONDRP (National Observatory of Crime and Criminal Justice), the SSMSI (Internal Security Statistical Department), the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Justice and the SDSE (Justice Ministerial Statistical Department): 121 women were murdered by their partners or ex-partners, or one woman every three days; 213,000 adult women claim to have been victims of physical and/or sexual violence inflicted by their spouse or ex-spouse during one year; fewer than one in five say they filed a complaint.

The Ministry for Equality between Women and Men, Diversity and Equal Opportunities has

developed a series of measures, such as adapting the reporting of gender-based violence according to the circumstances. The [arretonsles-violences.gouv.fr](https://www.arretonsles-violences.gouv.fr) platform and the Police emergency number (17) are the preferred channels in case of violence and serious and immediate danger, with the need to intervene on the spot. Throughout the entire duration of the health crisis, the platform for reporting sexual and sexist violence has been fully operational and active 24 hours a day. Since 1 April 2020, a new reporting channel has been available for victims of domestic violence making it possible to send an alert text message to 114 to activate the intervention of the police or gendarmerie.

The 3919 national helpline serves women victims of all forms of violence, as well as their families, friends and relevant professionals and it is run by the National Federation for Feminine Solidarity (FNFSF). In addition to having a hotline, women can find information and an appropriate referral to local care and support services: free and anonymous, open seven days a week.



On 10 June, the FNSF reported that the volume of calls to 3919 had doubled: between April and May, 52,000 calls were received, double the number during the same period in 2019. It can be especially difficult for women to raise the alarm at times of health crisis, especially if their partner is constantly at home. To deal with this, the methods for making themselves known have been adapted, with a complaint system in pharmacies for women and their child victims, in metropolitan France and French overseas territories with the support of the National Order of Pharmacists.

Some groups are taking other initiatives, such as the large retail chains, which carry information on the alert systems in all their outlets. This can be achieved by publicising them in their stores or on companies' websites, or by printing information on each receipt. The application of the new provisions has been the subject of information campaigns on social media and broadcast by various influencers.

To protect the victims as quickly as possible, cases of violence are dealt with by the courts as a matter of priority. Judges in the Family

■ THE ALERT CAN NOW BE GIVEN IN PHARMACIES

In the context of a health crisis, the pharmacist may be required to come into contact with victims or witnesses of domestic violence. This can allow the pharmacist to issue a report. There are several tools available to help them:

- a "reflection sheet" to guide them when they come across a person who spontaneously indicates that they are a victim or witness of violence;
- a brochure from the Ministry of the Interior for public display, which gives the procedure for reporting violence;
- a list of useful contacts.

Furthermore, if her spouse is with her, the victim will be able to use a code, for example "mask 19" when visiting a pharmacy, and she will be given instructions so that the police can intervene.

■ THE EXAMPLE OF THE CITAD'ELLES PROGRAMME IN NANTES

The *Citad'elles* programme, launched by the city of Nantes (Loire-Atlantique) in November 2019, is dedicated to listening to and supporting women who have suffered domestic violence. In addition to the psychologists and nurses present on site, police officers or gendarmes collect the complaints and legal experts inform the victims about the assistance mechanisms available to them.

The *Citad'elles* helpline, which has been kept, has proven particularly popular with women who wanted to know if the place was going to be closed. And if the proximity of the violent spouse prevents the woman from making calls, the programme's website clearly presents the measures to be taken and explains how to erase the browsing traces from her computer or mobile phone.



Courts continue to issue protection orders. These are high-protection measures aimed at ensuring rapid and effective protection for victims of violence, organising the material situation of women and relations with children after separation.

Many of these measures have continued after lockdown and will include long-term public policies whose objective is the protection of victims but also the prevention of violence against women. In addition, the Ministry's priority is promoting the economic role of women, reconciling joint responsibility and the fight against gender stereotypes.





Social protection and COVID-19

What have we learnt in Latin America?



Latin America is one of the regions of the world hardest hit by COVID-19, both in terms of infections and deaths. Although there is still much uncertainty as to how widespread the pandemic will become and when it will be brought under control, it is clear that the high levels of social deprivation and the multiple inequalities that characterise Latin American societies have a strong impact on this worrying situation.

SIMONE CECCHINI | Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

■ In the region, before the pandemic, three out of ten Latin Americans lived in poverty and eight out of ten lived with incomes three times below the poverty line, which makes the region's population very vulnerable to the loss of labour income. 54% of workers belonged to the informal sector and did not have adequate access to social protection. In addition, the region has weak health systems, which in most cases are fragmented and under-financed, with significant barriers to access.

The pandemic has had a discriminatory impact on various population groups and on

their capacity of response. Overcrowded conditions, lack of access to water and sanitation, and the inability to work from home have increased the risk of infection for the poor and vulnerable population. Likewise, the risk of death is greater among the poorest and most vulnerable population due to the higher incidence of pre-existing health conditions such as obesity, pulmonary and cardiovascular diseases and diabetes, as well as due to the lack of adequate access to medical care.

Faced with this scenario, social protection has a very important role to play in controlling

the pandemic, guaranteeing basic levels of well-being and access to various social services for the population. The crisis also leaves us with two important lessons in relation to social protection: i) the importance, urgency and feasibility of incorporating broad sectors of the excluded population, especially informal workers, into universal social protection systems; and ii) the need for far-reaching, up-to-date and interconnected social information systems and recipient registers.

At 6 November 2020, in the face of the abrupt fall in workers' income, especially



informal workers, 32 countries in the region had adopted 263 non-contributory social protection measures, such as cash transfers, transfers in kind and the assurance of provision of basic services so that the poorest, most vulnerable and at-risk households could cope with the pandemic. Cash and in-kind transfers have reached around 84 million households to date, corresponding to 326 million people or 49% of the regional population. Planned spending for six months would correspond to US\$86 billion, about 1.3% of GDP. Likewise, the countries have adopted social protection measures for formal workers, aimed at reducing workers' exposure to the virus and ensuring the continuity of economic activity, as well as guaranteeing income and jobs.

A first lesson that the pandemic leaves us is the need to have a solid and broad floor of non-contributory social protection to satisfy basic needs and sustain consumption, as part of a universal system of social protection. The unfulfilled promise of access to social protection via the labour market in the region was evident before the pandemic. However, the resources allocated to non-contributory social protection were not huge: in 2017, spending on conditional transfer programmes, aimed at poor families with children, represented 0.37% of GDP, while spending on social pensions for older adults and people with disabilities who do not have a contributory pension accounted for 0.93% of GDP. With the pandemic, countries have been able to quickly implement emergency cash transfers. In just six months, additional emergency spending on cash and in-kind transfers has equalled the joint annual spending on CCTs (conditional cash transfer programmes) and social pensions. Many of the programmes, such as Argentina's Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia, Chile's programme with the same name, Brazil's Auxílio Emergencial, and Costa Rica's Bono Proteger, are especially aimed at informal workers, thus including a sector traditionally excluded from social protection.

The second lesson teaches us the importance of having strong social information systems and up-to-date recipient registries.

To the extent that it is necessary to include informal workers and the middle classes in social protection systems and that sudden crises can plunge millions of households into poverty, it is necessary to have social information systems that incorporate broad sectors of the population and are flexible and adaptable enough for rapid updating. At present, in some countries the social registries have a wide coverage of the population, as is the case in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay, where the population coverage of the Social Area Integrated Information System is universal. However, in other countries, such as Bolivia, El Salvador and Haiti, the records contain only a very small percentage of the population. The information in the registries must also be integrated with other adminis-



trative data, allowing cross-checking and rapid updating of the information.

In conclusion, the pandemic has taught us that, if it is not possible to guarantee a basic level of income to the entire population and there are no solid operational mechanisms to achieve it, the consequences can be devastating, especially for the most vulnerable social and age groups.

* The references of this article are available in our blog: [link](#).

“FACED WITH THIS SCENARIO, SOCIAL PROTECTION HAS A VERY IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY IN CONTROLLING THE PANDEMIC, GUARANTEEING BASIC LEVELS OF WELL-BEING AND ACCESS TO VARIOUS SOCIAL SERVICES FOR THE POPULATION”





Mainstreaming gender in EUROsocial+: a challenge accentuated by the pandemic



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■ The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown measures applied show a structural problem since they affect people in different ways: the data indicate that its consequences are increasing the gender gap. In 2021, the number of women and girls living in extreme poverty worldwide is expected to increase by 47 million, to 435 million. In Latin America, by the end of 2020, the female unemployment rate will reach 15.2%, (an increase of almost 6% compared with 2019) and the poverty rate will rise to 37.4%, which means that 118 million Latin American women will be living in poverty. The incompatibility of lockdown measures with paid work worsens the situation of women in terms of wages, unemployment and effective hours of work: 60% of women worldwide work in the informal economy and they have had to close their businesses without access to welfare; at the same time, the lack of public services increases unpaid care and domestic work (UCDW), which favours the dynamics of “withdrawal from the labour market”. UCDW increased during the pandemic, while all other sectors showed sharp falls: internationally, the ILO

calculates that the average contribution to GDP is 9.0%, with great disparities among countries (in Argentina it is 16%, in Colombia it represents 22%). Women also play a leading role in the response to the crisis as domestic and health care workers (they represent 70% worldwide), cleaning, in residences, etc. Domestic workers had to accept wage reductions, increased workloads, lay-offs without payment of benefits and even being detained in their employers' homes during the lockdown. Furthermore, violence against women increased as a result of the lockdown.

The pandemic coincides with the commemoration of 25 years since the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (1995), which promotes the strategy of gender mainstreaming: “It is a strategy to make the experiences and needs/interests of men and women an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, social and economic spheres with the aim of having men and women benefit equally and eradicating inequality”. The incorporation of this cross-cutting focus is reflected in the



EU's programme framework: The *EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025* and that of the *Council of Europe 2018-2023*, with a dual approach incorporating specific measures to achieve gender equality combined with the integration of the gender perspective. In bi-regional relations between LAC and the EU, the Santiago Declaration of 2013 (Point 38), contemplates the incorporation of the gender perspective, on the basis that "the inclusion of this perspective (...) will strengthen gender equality, democracy and promote fair and egalitarian societies". The 17 SDGs of the *2030 Agenda* more or less explicitly define goals related to gender equality (for example, Goal 16 refers to "access to justice for all" and proposes reducing physical, psychological and sexual violence, and putting an end to mistreatment, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against girls and boys).

In the current context, the sustainability of the achievements in gender equality is at stake. The social role played by women, both in paid and unpaid work, has been shown to be essential, so they should also be the key players in the recovery measures. Failure in this area would contribute to perpetuating the "gender paradox of social cohesion" whereby women are the main providers of social cohesion yet they are systematically excluded from policies relating to citizenship rights and equal opportunities and participation. They assume the burden of care, providing a necessary "shield" for social protection, but they do not obtain any type of recognition, either in terms of contribution (income) or public investment (budgetary spending on gender equality policies). Mainstreaming the gender approach in EUROsocial+ guarantees the promotion of public policies that affect gender equality in all spheres: from health and the

economy, to social security and protection. It involves active treatment of gender equality so that the Programme's actions equally benefit women, men, girls and boys. In practice, it involves applying a methodology for an approach that takes into account the different gender needs/interests throughout the cycle of actions, so that their effects in the context of advocacy can have a positive impact on social cohesion in the lives of women and men promoting equitable social models over the medium and long term.

The challenges of mainstreaming gender in the EUROsocial+ programme in the new post-COVID-19 scenario will consist of ensuring the actions offset the traditional inequalities, which in many areas of women's lives have been exacerbated, so as to mitigate and halt the growth in the gender gap. From each of the lines of action, this would mean promoting measures such as:

ASPECTS CUTTING ACROSS THE THREE EUROSOCIAL+ AREAS

- Integrating the relevance of the gender approach within the framework of social cohesion.
- Ensuring compliance with international, state and local regulations on gender equality.
- Applying the gender approach in a transversal way across sectors.
- Analysing and producing data disaggregated by sex, to highlight and address inequalities between women and men.
- Promoting the implementation of the principle of equal treatment and equal opportunities between women and men, as well as positive actions.
- Assuming the principle of parity along with the participation/representation of women at all levels of decision-making (e.g. by including women's organisations plans to respond to COVID-19).
- Strengthening inter-institutional collaboration.

SPECIFIC ASPECTS IN EACH AREA



DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE POLICIES

- **Budgetary orientation** towards developing gender equality policies.
- **Financial policy** that directly and indirectly benefits women: **packages and budgeting of resources** for recovery must address the effects of this pandemic in terms of gender.
- Expansion of the **fiscal margin** that recognises and invests in the specific priorities of women as public services that promote the redistribution of the tasks of care and attention to the basic needs of the population.
- **Investment in infrastructure** that takes account of gender (water, sanitation, energy, transport, etc.).
- Socio-economic and territorial **development plans** with a deliberate focus on the lives and futures of women and girls.
- Defence of **women's rights** in the judicial sphere (applying the principle of equal treatment and positive actions).



GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES

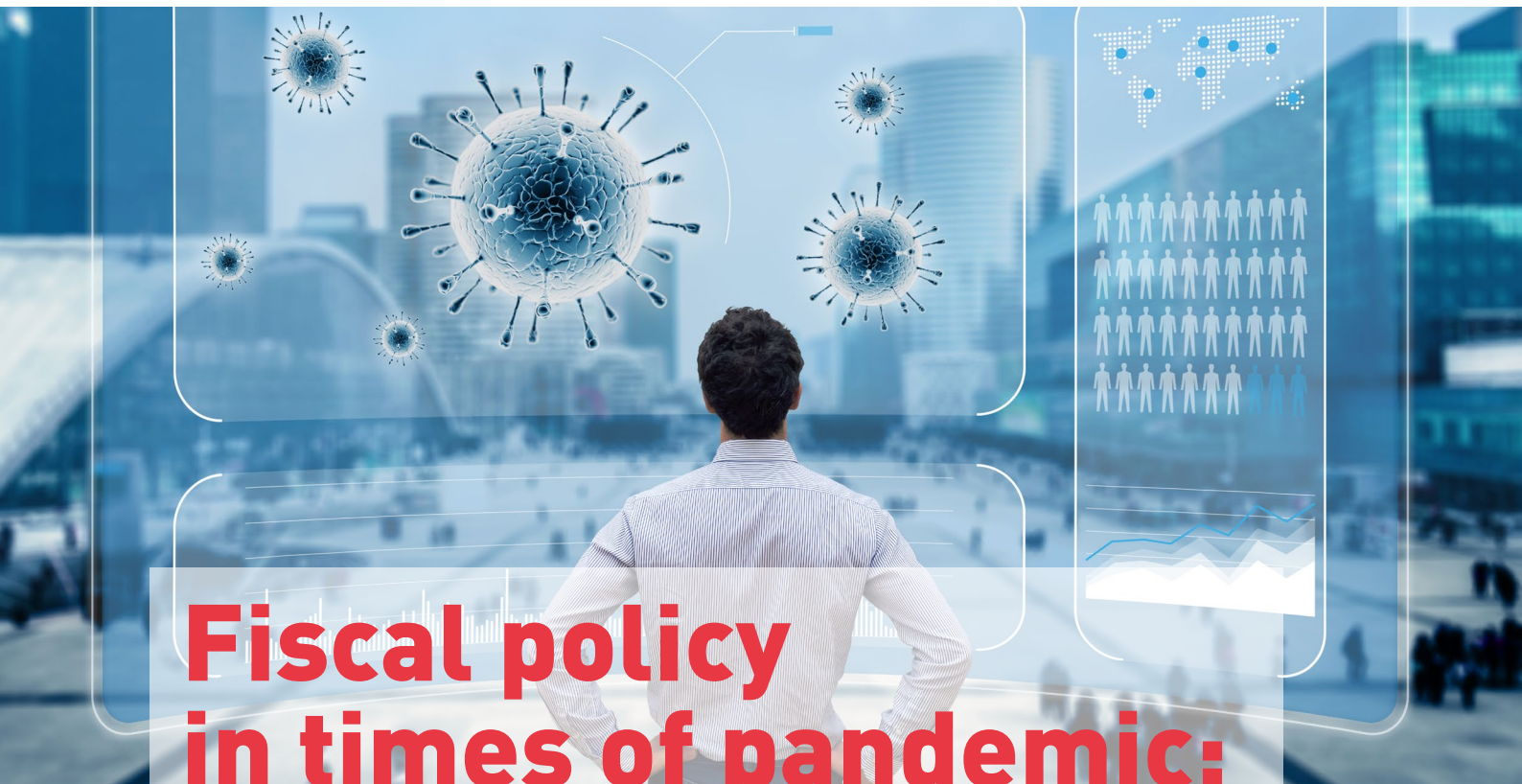
- Acceptance by public institutions of the **strategy to integrate the gender approach** into the policy cycle.
- Strengthening mechanisms for the advancement of women (MAW).
- Services that provide an effective response to **gender violence in the current context** and support for specialised women's organisations (services at the local and regional level).
- Decent and ecologically sustainable **female employment** (public and social infrastructure).
- Revaluation of **work on social reproduction** relative to the model that prioritises the value of the productive sphere (focused exclusively on monetary economic growth and financial profit) and ignores the interdependence of the tasks that sustain life (domestic work and care; natural resources).
- **Satellite accounts** that account for **care**.
- **Care of dependent persons**.
- **Paid parental leave**.
- **Social co-responsibility**.



SOCIAL POLICIES

- **Inclusive care economic policy** (systems for the protection of unpaid work linked to social reproduction, etc.).
- Universal **health systems** and guaranteed access to sexual and reproductive health services.
- **Social security** programmes (pensions, health and unemployment) that reach populations in vulnerable situations, including women and taking into account gender inequalities according to each social profile in difficult situations (older people, young people, etc.).
- **Direct compensation measures** for informal workers, including domestic workers, migrants and those from the sectors most affected by the pandemic (ILO recommendation 204 on the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy and Convention 189 Article 13 and 14 on decent work for domestic workers and Convention 190 on violence and harassment).
- **Inclusive employment with a transversal, cross-sector gender approach** (e.g. youth and digital gender gap).





Fiscal policy in times of pandemic: its role in the recovery and social cohesion



JORGE ONRUBIA | Professor at the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM-ICEI) and FEDEA Researcher

■ The consensus regarding the unprecedented contraction in economic activity that the COVID-19 pandemic is producing worldwide is unanimous, although there are differences in the analysis focusing on the prediction of its duration. It is logical to think that the more successful the combination of healthcare and economic measures, including the timing of their application, the more promising will be the economic and social horizon that each country faces, not forgetting the impossibility of delimiting, at the national level, the consequences of the pandemic.

The health and economic crisis affects everyone, although its impact is not the same, either among countries or among households. In fact, the pandemic is showing its effects more markedly among the most vulnerable groups, and because of their weight in the population, among countries. The consequences of this bias are strongly related to inequality, in

both income and wealth, where households with fewer resources, with more insecure jobs, with greater material deprivation in housing, education or health are the ones who are suffering the harshest effects. The correlation between these vulnerability factors, including age and sex, is proving decisive for understanding both the greater spatial concentration of the disease and its effects on well-being. The result is a huge problem for social cohesion, the duration and intensity of which will depend on the strength of the public action undertaken by governments.

A characteristic feature of this crisis is the vindication of the role of fiscal policy. Fiscal policy, unjustly vilified in previous crises due to its erroneous identification with budgetary indiscipline, has suddenly been brought back into the limelight by the unprecedented fall in tax collection due to the economic shut-down caused by widespread lockdowns, together with



the urgent need to increase spending on health, education and social protection. However, we must not ignore the fact that providing liquidity effectively and efficiently requires combining monetary and fiscal policies. The magnitude of these increases in public spending can only be financed through substantial public debt, which would be practically impossible to source on the markets through private agents. In this regard, the planned action of the central banks to absorb these volumes of debt is essential, as shown by the swift and correct response from the European Central Bank, with its commitments to acquire assets.

But we cannot assume that fiscal policy will have finished its role once the health crisis is over, something that, unfortunately, we do not yet see with any certainty. On the contrary, there is a significant consensus that it should play a major role in the recovery after the pandemic, as well as in the economic reconstruction and social cohesion. In my opinion, without strong and well-designed fiscal policies, it will be impossible to achieve a solid and lasting economic reactivation, also taking into account the great disparity existing in the starting situations of the major world regions and, of course, between countries.

The main objective for “reconstruction” - a term used by the European institutions - is to achieve the recovery of economic activity, in

parallel with an increase in social welfare. But for this to occur it is not enough to simply achieve stable economic growth, it is also necessary to achieve a high degree of social cohesion, which is equivalent to a stable and significant reduction in inequality, in all its aspects. It will, therefore, be necessary to put in place effective inclusive policies in the areas of employment, education, health, housing, social protection and the environment. In addition, it must be borne in mind that we are moving in a scenario of dizzying and unstoppable technological transformation, with everything this means for inequalities.

The European Union has recently launched the pillars for a reconstruction agenda, with the approval of the main lines for the Next Generation EU programme, endowed with €560 billion, of which €310 billion correspond to transfers from the new community budget and the rest being loans. Its distribution among the states will be according to criteria based on the effects of the crisis caused by the pandemic, although always linked to the presentation of projects included in national recovery and resilience plans, defined in accordance with the objectives of the European Semester and oriented to the ecological and digital transitions and the resilience of their economies. Furthermore, additional funding is included until 2022 for the current cohesion programmes and for

the European Aid Fund for the Most Disadvantaged, up to a total amount of €750 billion. For its financing, three European tax resources are being considered: on digital businesses, on cross-border emissions of CO₂ and on the profits of multinationals. These new figures will have to fit in with domestic taxation and with the international tax coordination initiatives led by the OECD. Without a doubt, this presents enormous fiscal challenges that are not easy to solve.

In Latin America, the driving role of fiscal policy in the economic recovery and social cohesion has recently been highlighted by ECLAC in its report Fiscal Panorama for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2020. It argues it is an essential engine for the sustainable development of the region, and that without its proper functioning there will be a significant setback for most economies. In a similar vein, the recent Latin American Economic Outlook 2020 report, published by the OECD, ECLAC, CAF and the European Commission, points out the great challenge that the region faces with the pandemic, highlighting the need to guide public programmes towards digital transformation, as a way to promote more inclusive and sustainable development. We must be aware of the enormous challenge that this necessary policy orientation poses for the countries in the region, whose welfare states are very narrow and where social protection is far behind European coverage levels.



“WITHOUT STRONG AND WELL-DESIGNED FISCAL POLICIES, IT WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE A SOLID AND LASTING ECONOMIC REACTIVATION”





Let's be clear, we also have a **crisis of governance**



SONIA GONZÁLEZ FUENTES |
EUROSociAL+ Governance Area Coordinator

■ They are not the effects of the pandemic. Before it, two alerts warned us of the “malaise of democracy” in Latin America, although it is also observed in other parts of the world. One of them, the political crises and the wave of social protests that shook some countries in the region such as Chile, Ecuador, Colombia and Bolivia in the last months of 2019. The other, the all-time low levels of trust in institutions, as shown by the latest Latinobarometer, with 80% of the population claiming that government is for a minority. The protests no longer come just from the poorest sections of society, and one could sum up the cry of these mass demonstrations as “govern for the majority.” Some experts then wondered whether representative democracy was in crisis, but it does not seem that support for democracy as a form of government is in danger; what was really being questioned was its governance. One year on

from this first wave of social unrest, and after a seven- or eight-month truce granted by the pandemic, the “Latin American spring” seems to be back, as evidenced by recent events in some countries such as Peru and Guatemala. Citizens, especially young people, are once again taking to the streets to denounce and reject inequalities, corruption and the functioning of public services, and further stressing a political system that does not seem to respond to their demands.

The pandemic has aggravated the (structural) problems of the region, and the responses of the various governments to face the humanitarian, social and economic crisis do not appear to have been effective. Different international organisations point to this crisis as the worst that has been experienced in Latin America in the last 100 years, and say that it could mean a 15-year setback in the fight against poverty. Against this back-



ground, improving governance seems essential to have a quick recovery, but also - and above all - for democracy to move closer to a process of building common purposes that leaves no one behind.

Returning to the policies that had been applied before the pandemic seems to be an optimal solution. It is these policies that have provoked the anger of citizens. Nor do sterile discussions about whether we need more or less state or more or less market seem to provide an answer to the crisis. At this moment, what we need are better states and better markets to join hands in generating economic growth and higher levels of social welfare. This pandemic has brought back public, common and collective considerations as imperative demands, which as Daniel Innerarity says, goes beyond the statist dimension and implies a shared sovereignty, also counting on other actors and agents. This is not the time to compete, nor for electoralist and short-term views. Social discontent expresses a perception of democracy that disappoints expectations of a better life and greater well-being, producing a vicious cycle of inequality, frustration and discontent between generations. We have a chance to get it right and break that cycle.

Although I have more questions than answers, I believe that there are some matters that cannot be refuted. It cannot be disputed,

“IMPROVING GOVERNANCE SEEMS ESSENTIAL TO HAVE A QUICK RECOVERY, BUT ALSO FOR DEMOCRACY TO MOVE CLOSER TO A PROCESS OF BUILDING COMMON PURPOSES THAT LEAVES NO ONE BEHIND”

for example, that public policies, all the more so at this time, should put people at the centre. Nor can it be questioned, especially when resources are scarce, that governments have to be effective in their decision-making and must act in a transparent manner. Transparency is the greatest enemy of corruption and a source

for generating a reservoir of trust in institutions. It cannot be said that we are certain because we live under the rule of law, which can only exist if human rights are protected and defended. It is hardly debatable that we are facing a complex environment and that we have to manage it, and that this, perhaps, also requires a more complex governance, which takes into account the plural interests and the different levels of government to face cross-cutting problems such as COVID-19. It is not about competing, but about implementing cooperative strategies. If any government prioritises the general interest, the simplest thing is for each one to make the tools available to it for this purpose. And finally, I think that all of us will agree that this pandemic has once again put fiscal policy at the centre of public debate, because reflecting on possible alternatives for tax reform also implies reflecting on what model of social welfare we want and placing a bet on social cohesion.

And it is in these questions, which are sometimes reduced to the merely technical, that we risk the democratic destiny of our societies. I end with Hannah Arendt, with one of the premises of her thinking: “Politics is about being together, with each other, [even though we are] diverse”, because without ties between equals there is no freedom and, therefore, there is no politics either.





No backtracking; expanding **dynamic alliances**



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■ The COVID-19 pandemic reinforces the need to integrate a gender equality perspective into policies to combat poverty, inequalities and violence. “Not leaving women and girls behind”, not because they are a *vulnerable minority*, but because they are more than half the population, translates into fostering their physical, economic and political autonomy, reducing structural inequalities, substantially improving social cohesion and achieving better progress towards the sustainable development goals. The rights of women to equality are “key” rights that open new doors and contribute to raising material living conditions, changing the quality of democracy and citizenship over the entire population in its diversity, including men. At the request of the Latin American region, the EUROsociAL+ programme has strongly expanded the dialogue and direct cooperation between Europe and the national mechanisms for the advancement of women in the region, helping to reinforce the gender equality architecture of executive, judicial and parliamentary institutions. It has also stepped up its support for authorities and regional networks of public

“NOT LEAVING WOMEN AND GIRLS BEHIND”, NOT BECAUSE THEY ARE A *VULNERABLE MINORITY*, BUT BECAUSE THEY ARE MORE THAN HALF THE POPULATION”

actors that have been pushing a common agenda for decades.

Latin America has made pioneering progress in the global context, by adopting conventions and legislation in the field of parity, in the fight against femicide and gender-based violence, and in including the care economy in national accounts. In the past decade, it had managed to significantly reduce levels of poverty, among women too, raise the level of education and initiate changes towards the development of sexual



and reproductive rights. But at the same time it faced the emergence of forces opposed to the recognition of these rights, forces that are also seen in some countries in Europe. And in recent times, faced with persistent inequalities, the region faced protests, new demands for democracy by civil society, especially feminist movements, bringing forth new issues and forms of expression.

The pandemic has exploded in this context and has exacerbated all the pre-existing difficulties and contradictions, generating an enormous setback in all the progress painstakingly made in the socio-economic field, with an impact probably greater than the financial crisis of the past decade. There is talk of being set back by thirty years. The lockdown resulted in four main types of negative impact: a sharp increase in gender-based violence, particularly in couples and families (the hidden "other pandemic") caused by aggressors and victims being forced to be together with no possibility of escape and the difficulty of accessing assistance or legal services; women's large-scale return to domestic tasks, either due to the loss of their paid activity, or due to the closure of schools and care facilities for dependants, with few examples of co-responsibility from their partners and surroundings; the increase in labour inequalities (43% of women unemployed compared with 23.5% of men in April 2020 according to Mexico's INEGI), together with the over-exposure of women in front-line occupations related to health, food retail and the sale of basic necessities, cleaning and care services; and finally marginalisation when it comes to decisions and analysis, and little mention of the multiple contributions they have made in official documents from the institutions and movements specialising in gender equality and the United Nations system. Differentiated data and detailed analyses are still lacking in the four dimensions mentioned, especially the decline in women in paid work and its repercussions for unpaid care and domestic work.

In Europe, as in Latin America, the challenges to achieving greater equality have multiplied, but new initiatives have also emerged that give cause for hope. Early warn-

“THE PANDEMIC HAS EXPLODED IN THIS CONTEXT AND HAS EXACERBATED ALL THE PRE-EXISTING DIFFICULTIES AND CONTRADICTIONS, GENERATING AN ENORMOUS SETBACK IN ALL THE PROGRESS PAINSTAKINGLY MADE IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC FIELD”

ing systems, digital reports on violence, new forms of refuge, new calls to share the most visible domestic tasks, previously little recognised jobs being appreciated with daily applause, the use of technology to expand consultations and the circulation of initiatives and the creation of new human solidarity networks. A world has collapsed, and we are all being called upon to think about the future with new lenses, resources and tools. Attack-

ing the mechanisms that produce inequalities as opposed to just mitigating their effects is more urgent than ever, and it will be possible if we are able to generate solidarity and new alliances between continents in the face of global risks that will only multiply in the future. Other shocks most likely await us as a result of climate change and uncontrolled and uneven growth. Building societies, continents, global networks based on social, environmental and political resilience, citizen participation, new models of equal education for both women and men, democratic masculinity, recognition of the substantive contribution of unpaid work with co-responsibility in day-to-day life, greater transparency in decision-making and information, means rethinking our categories and ways of cooperating.

The 2020-2030 regional agenda, embodied in the Santiago Commitment, adopted at the fourteenth session of the ECLAC Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, the European Union's new equality plan and the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform will be our compasses. The call for the Generation Equality Forum, led by UN Women, France and Mexico, is emerging as a new scenario to promote thematic coalitions, three of which will be focused on the challenges of the 21st century: climate justice, the technological revolution and the strengthening of feminist movements.





Transforming **active employment policies** for an **inclusive recovery involving work**



FRANCESCO MARIA CHIODI |
EUROsociAL+ Social Policies Area Coordinator

■ In order to face the crisis that hit the European and Latin American economies as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the countries in the two regions have implemented mainly fiscal and social protection measures: cash and in-kind (food) assistance transfers to sustain the consumption of the poorest families; subsidies to protect income; expansion of unemployment cover and schemes whereby the government pays part of the wages of workers in companies forced to reduce or interrupt work activities. Other measures have included the extension of deadlines for tax obligations, state guarantees for loans, the suspension of social security contributions and incentives and subsidies to the business sector, also to prevent closures and lay-offs.

Financial aid has been and still is necessary to prevent the recession from leading to a social crisis of enormous proportions. But such aid is necessarily of a temporary and limited nature, and not only for reasons of fiscal constraint. In this regard, although while the

situation dictates it is necessary to maintain the mechanisms established to preserve employment and replace earnings, it is essential to move to active employment policies, or rather to appropriately coordinate passive and active policies focused on the insertion/reinsertion into the workforce of people who are able to work.

The debate in Latin America on employment policies is not new, but, because it is unresolved, it is an on-going discussion. In most countries, it can be seen that these policies are relatively undeveloped, except, partially, in the field of training. However, the magnitude of the crisis makes it necessary to think of a radical shift to ensure that employment policies have a greater impact on labour markets, and this essentially means two reforms: a substantial increase in investment and the adoption of an organic design to comprehensively address the labour market's variable structural.

I am now going to refer only to the fundamentals of an integrated service system, which



is the foundation of an organic design. These consist of the following services: (1) orientation; (2) training and education, including continuing education; and (3) intermediation.

An employment services system must necessarily have all three components, but it is their interconnection that determines the value of the system. This value also depends on the effective functioning of the services, for which qualified personnel, adequate infrastructure facilities, etc. are needed.

The issue of interconnection is not straightforward. Despite its being one of the most touted principles, putting it into practice is very difficult. Commonly in Latin America, orientation, intermediation and training and education constitute three separate blocks. Furthermore, relative importance is given to one over the others. The first two services are quite modest and are usually managed within the orbit of the Ministries of Labour and their services, which also intervene with specific programmes for employment (first job, training for vulnerable groups, etc.). Training on the other hand has a specific institutional framework and a technical and economic force that gives it a self-sufficiency from the others as a system in itself.

The weakness of the interconnection between the services undermines their potential. Each service provides a partial response that does not take advantage of the resources of the whole system. This happens, to give an example, when a person completes a training course but does not access the service that could provide orientation and accompaniment in finding a job or the service that could intermediate to identify job vacancies and arrange contacts.

Thus, investing in the growth and quality of each service, and in a logical system, clearly seems a pressing need in a context such as the current one in which the main labour indicators are deteriorating. If action is not taken quickly, the risk is that the most vulnerable people will be trapped in a vicious cycle of exclusion.

The services should function as a network, or be reorganised under one centre (e.g. the training system) that is responsible for the whole. However, also due to the multidimensional nature of the current crisis, it is important to add two further strands to the three that we have indicated as fundamental to an

“FINANCIAL AID HAS BEEN AND STILL IS NECESSARY TO PREVENT THE RECESSION FROM LEADING TO A SOCIAL CRISIS OF ENORMOUS PROPORTIONS. BUT SUCH AID IS NECESSARILY OF A TEMPORARY AND LIMITED NATURE”

employment system: (4) connections with businesses; (5) coordination of employment policies with economic recovery plans.

The first involves opening or reinforcing collaboration with businesses. In relation to training, this will cement the range of training opportunities available and plug gaps. In relation to job centres, this will aim to result in an ever-increasing number of businesses turn to them to fill their vacancies. This last point is one of the great problems for the employment services in Latin America (and also in some European countries), taking into account, furthermore, that job providers are primarily micro and small companies, which use informal means to search for personal. In order to gain the trust of many more businesses, job centres must provide prompt and effective responses to their demands for people with particular professional profiles. Thereby, employment and vocational training centres must work together: providing suitable candidates and qualifying the job offer are key aspects of this.

The other strand shifts the employment systems towards the field of productive development. The reactivation and recovery plans that are being developed in the countries represent a space to capture and take advantage of the occupational opportunities that are going to be generated. Another window could be opened as

a result of the processes of geographic and strategic reconfiguration of global value chains. Several European companies, for example, could look with interest to the Latin American countries in their attempt to reduce their dependence on China.

The labour market is the hinge point between economic development and employment. In this regard, active employment policies should be repositioned as labour market policies. The leap to this perspective cannot be taken for granted, because the sector has historically concerned itself almost exclusively with the supply side, seeing economic development above all as a backdrop to be taken into account, and assigning to businesses the role of partners and seeing employers as users. This leap involves the central actors in active employment policies participating in the round tables where development plans, investments, fiscal and economic decisions are defined and discussed. And also conducting permanent dialogues at the regional level with businesses, chambers, training centres, research and innovation centres, as well as intermediate bodies and social agents.

In the post-COVID scenario, with the coexistence of a health emergency and reactivation, we will witness a relocation of many economic activities, inevitably many companies will close and at the same time new vectors of development will come into existence (I'm thinking for example of the green economy and services). A growing mass of people are now in need of public support to find work again or improve their earnings (the self-employed, for example), or to retrain and acquire new skills. Thus, this time of deep crisis is the time to accelerate reforms that at other times would meet insurmountable resistance: in addition to combining passive and active policies, in addition to strengthening and integrating the three essential components of employment systems, employment policies must extend their operations to the business sector and accompany the recovery plans. The vision is that of an ecosystem that seamlessly links social income protection, labour market policies and economic policies.

* There is an extended version of this article on the blog of *Recíprocamente* at this [link](#).



INTERVIEW WITH **DR. NADINE GASMAN**

President of Mexico's INMUJERES

What is the future of Equality Policies?



Interviewer: **EDITH LÓPEZ** |
Gender and Human Rights Expert with
the EUROsociAL+ Programme

Edith López, EUROsociAL+ expert on gender and human rights, interviewed for *Recíprocamente* Dr. Nadine Gasman, president of Mexico's INMUJERES (National Institute for Women), in order to find out what governments' gender agenda should be given the setback that has occurred in this matter as a result of the pandemic.

QUESTION: In the face of the “crisis of care”, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic in both Europe and Latin America, and which mainly relates to the work of women, in both the private and public spheres, what are or what should be the public policies to be implemented by INMUJERES and the Mexican Government, as a priority in order to seek joint responsibility for care in order to mitigate this crisis and recover from it?

■ **Nadine Gasman:** In the first place, it's necessary to point out that the inequalities were there before the pandemic and that they affected women in all social spheres. The health and economic crisis caused by COVID-19 made those pre-existing inequalities more evident and has also created some new ones, by putting women

in the first line of response and with the lockdown situation. From the beginning, the Government of Mexico has maintained a sensitive and transformative outlook, which recognises that our democracy is strengthened with the protection of rights and the inclusion of those who are most affected by poverty, discrimination and inequality. In response to the pandemic, in Mexico we are prioritising support for the 70% of households in which families are most vulnerable by means of a solidarity-based economic policy. We have strengthened and increased support programmes for the population, which directly affect the lives of women. In particular, in INMUJERES, as the guiding axis of the national gender equality policy, we work with a vision for equality that meshes with the feminist view and that focuses on reducing inequality gaps.

QUESTION: “The other pandemic in the shadow”, violence against women and girls, has not stopped, and has even increased with the implementation of some health measures. What preventive measures has Mexico taken to reduce the risk of violence against women and girls?

■ **Nadine Gasman:** On the subject of violence, since the beginning of our administration we have worked on the development of cross-cutting strategies that touch the axes of care, prevention and punishment to eliminate violence against women. With the pandemic, we accelerated and strengthened coordination among Federal Government institutions and also with entities in each region. We committed ourselves to this and created the Driving Group for the National Strategy for the prevention of



violence against women, girls, boys and adolescents. Before international organisations recommended it, one of the first actions was to declare shelters, care centres for women victims of violence, nurseries and child care centres as essential services, and to ensure the functioning of all ministerial, administrative and judicial services that deal with violence against women. The 911 emergency line was strengthened and established as the main point of entry for cases and contact for reporting, identifying, tracking down and caring for women and girls victims of violence. From INMUJERES we coordinate and implement training for 911 operators in matters of sexual diversity to respond to emergency calls with a gender perspective.

QUESTION: Finally, COVID-19 opens an opportunity to build a “new normal”: gender equality and women’s rights are essential to overcome the pandemic. From your point of view, what are the criteria and areas of opportunity for ensuring equal participation of women in decision-making that help to provide an effective and adequate response to the differentiated needs of the population and the needs of women?

■ **Nadine Gasman:** In Mexico, women have waged a sustained struggle to achieve participation in decision-making on equal terms with men, which has led to far-reaching constitutional and legal reforms regarding parity, placing us at the forefront among democratic countries. At INMUJERES we work to promote the full participation of women in politics, in the economy, in all areas of life, because we are convinced that the “new normal” must be more supportive, fairer to women, more feminist, more local and more egalitarian. It is essential to incorporate all women in state and municipal decision-making; to remove the obstacles that women have to entering the formal labour market, with social security and equal pay; to strengthen the exercise of women’s sexual and reproductive rights, guaranteeing their autonomy to decide about their body, their health and their sexuality; to ensure a life free of violence for women and girls; to attack head on all forms of violence in the public and private sphere, femicide, sex trafficking and exploitation. All of this has to be achieved starting from the premise that there can be no peace without justice. We are also working on promoting actions to rethink the organisation of care with the participation of families, communities and

the State to free up women’s time and to ensure that those who so wish can focus on productive or political activities, or simply make use of their time in the way that suits them best, since ultimately the possibility of freely deciding is a political act in itself. Twenty-five years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action and on the eve of the Generation Equality Forum, the women’s agenda has the opportunity to find new answers to the structural problems that we have not yet managed to overcome.

“ONE OF THE FIRST ACTIONS WAS TO DECLARE SHELTERS, CARE CENTRES FOR WOMEN VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE, NURSERIES AND CHILD CARE CENTRES AS ESSENTIAL SERVICES ”





INTERVIEW WITH

Exchange of views between **Colombia and Belgium**

on professional equality between women and men in the context of the pandemic



CARLOS ARANGO

Advisor to the Colombian Ministry of Labour



FRANÇOISE GOFFINET

Associate of the Belgian Institute for the
Equality of Women and Men (IEFH)

Many of the occupations that formed the first line in combatting the pandemic are predominantly female. Now, with the arrival of the economic crisis, women are suffering a greater risk of unemployment and falling into informal employment. *Recíprocamente*, the EUROsociAL magazine, interviewed Carlos Arango, an advisor to the Colombian Ministry of Labour, and Françoise Goffinet, an associate of the Belgian Institute for the Equality of Women and Men (IEFH), to find out what view there is of this problem from both sides of the Atlantic.



Interviewer: **JACKELINE ROJAS** | Senior Technician in the EUROsociAL+ Gender Equality Area

QUESTION: What actions has your organisation implemented to promote work equality in the context of the pandemic?

■ **Carlos Arango:** Towards the beginning of the pandemic, the Ministry of Labour prepared a practical guide on "Labour Alternatives with a Gender Perspective in Times of COVID", with practical recommendations on how to manage work at home from a gender perspective. This guide was distributed by private and public companies and organisations, to take into account the realities of workers during lockdown.

As a result of this guide, some companies with the "Equipares" labour equality certification were able to make adjustments to the

dimensions addressed by the programme, in order to incorporate the new social and cultural reality into the action plans for closing gaps.

Apart from this, in company with the Colombian National Business Association (ANDI), we are carrying out awareness days for companies and organisations, aimed at not lowering our guard on gender equality issues in the business world and managing labour inequities between men and women in a timely manner.

■ **Françoise Goffinet:** The IEFH is a Belgian federal public institution whose mission is to promote equality in attitudes and practices.



One of its roles is to formulate opinions and recommendations. In May 2020, the IEFH sent an opinion report to the Federal Minister of Employment, the Economy and Equality on “the gender dimension in the COVID crisis” to highlight how women are being more affected as they are at the forefront of employment during the pandemic: 80% women in the hospital sector, 88% in homes for the elderly, 96% in nurseries, 95% in the home help sector and 60% in the retail sector. In short, all the sectors that continued to work full time during full lockdown!

The IEFH also worked with affiliated entities, through protocols; for example, in drafting an opinion on its own initiative for the Walloon Council for the Equality of Women and Men (July 2020) and in the formulation of an opinion on the plan for women’s rights by the Wallonia-Brussels Federation.

QUESTION: What actions have been implemented to face or prevent the loss of employment by women in the context of the pandemic, taking into account that women are more exposed to unemployment, informal employment and work in insecure and less productive sectors?

■ **Carlos Arango:** At the beginning of April, the increase in cases of violence exceeded 115%. Which is why we began a process of coordination with several actors to generate employment alternatives aimed at overcoming violence against women, especially during these weeks of lockdown. In the first pilot phase, we worked with the Public Employment Service Employment Agencies in Bogotá and Medellín to identify a route for giving women victims of gender-based violence a quick and appropriate opportunity in the labour market, taking into consideration the profile required by each company. With one of the Equipares companies belonging to an essential public service sector, the opportunity to link them to work was identified.

The Presidential Council for the Equality of Women, will provide technical assistance and training to Employment Agencies based on the psycho-social approach, while for businesses and for the women hired, this mechanism will monitor the process of adapting to employment, leveraging the corresponding Women’s Secretariats and branches of the women’s rights organisation Casa de la Mujer.

■ **Françoise Goffinet:** Social partnership is an institution in Belgium that showed just how important it is during the crisis. In 2003, the three unions signed a letter on equality between women and men. In March, the social security system, which is co-managed by the state, trade unions and employers, launched a system of temporary unemployment assistance for workers and temporary financial support for self-employed workers and entrepreneurs.

According to the Belgian Business Federation, the relief measures are working and enabling many companies to get through the crisis. Small businesses that are run by women are suffering proportionately more.

QUESTION: What good practices have you identified that businesses/organisations in the public/private sector

have implemented to prevent the gender gap from widening in the health crisis?

■ **Françoise Goffinet:** I wouldn’t yet refer to “good practices” but rather to promising pointers towards achieving the policies in place since the International Women’s Conference in Beijing in 1995. The vast majority of these heroes in the pandemic are actually heroines, with jobs with one point in common: poorly paid, undervalued, but essential. In the summer of 2020, the Federal Government and the union organisations concluded a revaluation agreement with sustainability and a better endowment of the White Coats Fund for nursing staff.

Parental leave applied in the context of the crisis was implemented, which is not deducted from the number of months to which fathers and mothers have rights. A slight increase in compensation was made, especially for single-parent families (80% of single parents are women) who were usually unable to take leave for financial reasons.

Teleworking (working from home) was discovered in both public services and private sector companies. However, situations that mainly affect women became apparent, such as “digital illiteracy”, conditions in terms of health and safety and an increase in the mental burden of care.

■ **Carlos Arango:** Some of the good practices identified have been related to improvements in the balance between work, family and personal life, from a gender perspective. Therefore, the Equipares Seal, in coordination with ANDI, launched a Work-Life Balance survey which will provide companies with inputs on how workloads and unpaid work are being distributed in workers’ households.

Some organisations have decided to establish flexible work-from-home hours, flexible meeting schemes, which allow working people to better distribute care burdens in their homes, and encourage men to take part in these tasks.

QUESTION: What plan is envisaged to promote the economic autonomy of women and work equality in a context of post-pandemic reconstruction?

■ **Françoise Goffinet:** Since 2007, the IEFH has supported the publication of an annual report on wage gaps and a 2012 law promotes instruments at the inter-professional, sectoral and company levels. But there is still much to do, training the new representatives after each social election, but also improving transparency regarding salaries; which ties in with a current concern of the European Commission.

■ **Carlos Arango:** During this time, we have begun to improve the Employment Route with a Gender Approach with the Public Employment Service. Taking into consideration the economic sectors that are being reactivated, the rates of gender-based violence and the need to provide economic autonomy for women, alliances are being arranged with companies and organisations that are restarting their operations throughout the country, to prioritise the linking of women and thus mitigate unemployment rates.





Ensuring the right to **sexual and reproductive health** in times of COVID-19



FRANCISCA MIRANDA |

Holder of a PhD in Ethnology and Social Anthropology (EHESS), Senior Technician in the Gender Equality Policies Area of the European Union's EUROsociAL+ Programme



SILVINA RAMOS |

MSc, Senior Researcher at CEDES Argentina, Technical Coordinator of Argentina's National Plan for the Prevention of Adolescent Unwanted Pregnancy and EUROsociAL+ Expert.

■ The COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean has erupted in a context of low economic growth, high levels of informal employment, and weak health and social protection systems, which have exacerbated the vulnerability of the region. The crisis will affect women more seriously, because they are overrepresented in the economic activities hardest hit by containment measures and most exposed to infection.

In this context, the sexual and reproductive health and rights of many women have been affected by the lack of continuity of family planning services, as well as services for maternal health and for victims of violence, due to the diversion of resources towards the health emergency. The pandemic intervenes in a region where the unmet need for family planning reaches 10% among women between 15 and 49 years of age married or living with a partner in Latin America, and 17% in the Caribbean. Moreover, the prevalence rate of contraception of any kind is 74% for Latin America and 61% for the Caribbean. The adolescent maternity rate is generally above 12% in the countries of the region. It is both a factor in perpetuating pover-



“THE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS OF MANY WOMEN HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY THE LACK OF CONTINUITY OF FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES ”



ty and, like maternal mortality, a reflection of socio-economic, ethnic and regional inequalities. It is estimated that in the COVID-19 context, 18 million additional women will lose their access to modern contraceptives.

A weakening of family planning programmes and a reduction in the use of contraception could increase maternal mortality and morbidity, increase adolescent pregnancy rates and the incidence of other sexually transmitted infections including HIV. It can also lead to unsafe and illegal abortions, in a region where there are restrictive laws on the matter. Added to this is the persistent challenge of transforming male-dominated cultural patterns that still constitute barriers to women's negotiating power on issues relating to sex.

Some countries in the region have expanded adolescents' access to information, advice and services relating to contraception; such is the case of Peru with the Ministry of Health's Family Planning Standard, Ecuador with the National Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health (2017-2021) and Argentina with the Plan for the Prevention of Adolescent Unwanted Pregnancy (2017). Some countries also incorporate Comprehensive Sex Education into their laws, such as Bolivia with Law 342 on Youth; Uruguay, which incorporates sex education into the General Education Law (18.437), and Argentina (Law 26.150 of 2006).

As part of the implementation and consolidation of public policies on sexual and reproductive health aimed at the adolescent population, the EUROsocial+ programme supports several processes providing technical assistance to governments for the design and evaluation of these policies. In Panama, it supported the Ministry of Social Development in the process of regulating and implementing Law 60 on pregnant minors. In Mexico, work is currently under way to strengthen the National Strategy for the Prevention of Pregnancy in Adolescents, with the National Population Council and INMUJERES, the National Institute for Women. In Uruguay work was carried out to

strengthen the National and Intersectoral Strategy for the Prevention of Pregnancy in Adolescents to reduce the incidence of unwanted pregnancy and to guarantee rights. In Ecuador, in the context of COVID-19, the programme is collaborating with the Judicial Council on measures to ensure access to services for victims of gender-based violence.

The post-COVID recovery will make it necessary to assess the magnitude of the impact of the pandemic and the lockdown on the health and educational services that serve the adolescent population. It will also require the strengthening of health systems to restore sexual and reproductive health benefits, including attention to gender-based violence and safe abortion following the parameters established by the legislation of each country. In schools, attention will have to be paid to the recovery of sexual education and to keeping adolescents in school, which, in addition to strengthening the educational trajectory, operates as a protective factor in preventing teenage pregnancies.

And above all will be the challenge of implementing new interfaces of public policies and services with communities in the regions and new ways of attending to the sexual and reproductive health and maternal health of girls, adolescents and adult women, emphasising the community distribution of supplies, active search in the homes of people in situations of high social vulnerability, maternity homes or residences for mothers, the dissemination of information through social and community networks, the actions of health promoters, mobile clinics and telemedicine. It will also be essential to strengthen the authoritative force of public policies by disseminating and strengthening the application of minimum standards of access and quality of care to ensure that health systems are once again ready to guarantee services and rights. It is also to be hoped that adaptation to this unprecedented context has contributed to putting into operation new and better ways of managing and providing services, of which best use should be made in the future.





Recíprocamente held a conversation with Helen Darbshire, director of Access Info Europe, and Gabriel Delpiazzo, president of the Executive Council of the Uruguayan Unit for Access to Public Information and president of the Transparency and Access to Public Information Network, about how the right of access to information was affected during the early moments of the pandemic, as well as about what efforts has been made by the institutions and by the civil society to restore normality.



INTERVIEW WITH



HELEN DARBISHIRE
Director of Access Info Europe



GABRIEL DELPIAZZO
President of the Executive Council of the Uruguayan Unit for Access to Public Information and President of the Transparency and Access to Public Information Network



Interviewer: **BORJA DÍAZ** | Head of Good Governance of the EUROsocial Democratic Governance Area

QUESTION: What role do you think transparency and the right of access to public information are playing in this pandemic? To what extent is the pandemic threatening this right and to what extent is transparency proving useful in combating the crisis?

■ **Helen Darbshire:** In 2020, we have seen a great demand for information from journalists and the general population, who wanted to have basic data on what was happening. In the last twenty years, in which technological advancement has paralleled the development of access to information, people have been raising their expectations regarding wanting to be informed and we were now used to having immediate access to data, but this trend has become more apparent during the pandemic.

■ **Gabriel Delpiazzo:** Just like using a mask or hand washing, transparency has become one more preventive measure. Even before the pandemic, in many areas we used to say that the right of access to public information saves lives, and we invoked it as an instrumental right for the protection of other rights, such as the right to health - for example we had the case of a

newspaper report leading a school to develop a fire emergency plan - with the pandemic this has become clear.

QUESTION: At the beginning of the pandemic, states of alarm were proclaimed in many countries in Europe and Latin America, which, to a greater or lesser extent, resulted in limitations on the right of access to public information. To what extent did this condition the ability of the bodies that guarantee transparency to respond to citizens' needs?

■ **Helen Darbshire:** This issue divided European countries into two camps, countries that suspended the administrative deadlines and those that did not. The decision to do so or not had to do, mainly, with the seriousness of the situation during the first months of the pandemic. What could not be done in Europe is what did take place in Latin American countries such as Argentina, where the Access to Public Information Agency managed to protect access to information as it was recognised as a fundamental right.



“JUST LIKE USING A MASK OR HAND WASHING, TRANSPARENCY HAS BECOME ONE MORE PREVENTIVE MEASURE ”

■ **Gabriel Delpiazzo:** During the first moments of the pandemic, it was restricted or even threatened. Later, along the way, either because the organisations gradually incorporated the necessary technical means or because of the pressure exerted by citizens demanding the information that was not being disseminated, this threat was gradually mitigated. In Latin America, many countries also suspended the deadlines for the procedures, which meant not responding to the requests for information that were received. I have also seen a threat and a restriction in terms of active transparency, in the daily dissemination of epidemiological data. The situation in Latin America has been quite uneven on this point; there were countries that fulfilled their task of disseminating information on a daily basis and others that made some attempt to restrict the information or, even worse, to provide partial information. Opacity also translated into problems in other areas, especially in emergency purchases of medical supplies. Finally, a general threat, not attributable to governments or specific public bodies, is over information. We have received so much information and so much data - from the media, from governments, from the WHO ... - that a breeding ground for fake news has been created. At this point, active transparency, as a mechanism charged with creating an official, complete and truthful source of information, becomes the basic guarantee to alleviate these threats.

■ **Helen Darbshire:** With regard to public procurement and contracting, the European Union has legislation that allows the use of urgent procurement procedures, but only under certain conditions. The regulations may not be sufficient in terms of transparency, but, at least, they require that when governments use this emergency mechanism to let contracts they have to publish a justification. However, during the worst moments of the crisis they did not do so and contracting was even carried out without having the minimum documentation required by law. We have seen the need to strengthen our control systems for public tenders, as well as the transparency requirements for companies and trade and company registers, to try to prevent governments from being deceived again.

QUESTION: There has been a lot of talk about the use of open data for decision-making by governments. In this regard, both in Latin America and in the EU, we find examples of good collaborations between health systems and the bodies that guarantee and promote the right of access to information, but there have also been bad experiences in this area. What is your reflection on the role of new technologies and open data in the context of this pandemic?

■ **Gabriel Delpiazzo:** Technology has become a fundamental tool. In abnormal situations, it has allowed public offices to function more or less normally, without having to suspend, among many other things, the procedures for access to information. It has also become essential for data

processing, to combine information and generate new data that allow new measures to be taken. Against this, we find the need to preserve the privacy of personal data, especially when talking about data as sensitive as those that have to do with people's health. Here it is very important not to create a false opposition between public transparency and data privacy; these are two fundamental rights that require consideration on a case-by-case basis and a harmonisation that is certainly not simple.

■ **Helen Darbshire:** On the one hand, the immediacy with which we demand data has highlighted shortcomings in terms of digitisation; on the other, problems have been detected in national data recovery systems, especially in large countries such as Spain, France and Germany. Likewise, it is very important to publish these data, for two reasons: first, knowing the basis on which governments make decisions generates trust in the institutions; secondly, it is essential that civil society, academics, scientists, etc., have access to this information so they can reach their own conclusions and even participate in decision-making. Another relevant issue is tracking systems. In this regard, what I did like a lot was the response of the guarantor organisations and civil society in general, which put on the table the need to protect our data. I'm not against tracking apps, but they have to be implemented in a way that protects people's privacy.

QUESTION: You work in reference networks on the matter, the Transparency and Access Network as a public body and Access Info as a civil society organisation. What measures have you taken in the context of the pandemic to deal with it through collaborative projects or specific plans?

■ **Helen Darbshire:** A very positive aspect that I have seen with the pandemic is how strongly the global community has come out in defence of transparency and open government -including civil society, guarantor entities and some governments-, especially in the Americas and Europe. We have been able to organise ourselves quite quickly and, through countless video calls and webinars, we have been able to define the agenda, have conversations with governments, carry out training workshops for journalists, etc. We are in a completely exceptional situation which at the same time represents a great opportunity, given that in recent months we have understood better than ever to what extent it is important to collect, publish and share information, as well as to ensure the participation of society as a whole in taking decisions.

■ **Gabriel Delpiazzo:** The RTA brings together all the guarantor bodies in matters relating to the right to information in Ibero-America, which originated from a Latin American logic but later happily incorporated Spain's Council for Transparency, whose mission is to be an space for collaboration and the exchange of experiences. It has worked very well in good times and I am proud to say that it has also worked in bad times, in which collaboration between countries has actually intensified. For example, with the help of Eurosocial+, a workshop was held to collect and preserve these reaction experiences in times of crisis, generating added-value material that will undoubtedly serve to resolve other types of eventualities in the future.

* There is an extended version of this interview on the blog of *Recíprocamente* at this [link](#).





INTERVIEW WITH

Recíprocamente interviewed both the Chilean and the Spanish Ministers of Justice, who told us how they have reacted to the pandemic from their scope of action, as well as what are the challenges that justice systems are going to face in the near future.



HERNÁN LARRAÍN FERNÁNDEZ
Minister of Justice and Human Rights of Chile



JUAN CARLOS CAMPO MORENO
Minister of Justice of Spain



Interview coordinated by: **MARIA LUISA DOMÍNGUEZ SUÁREZ** | Senior Technician, Head of the Justice line in the EUROsociAL Governance Area

QUESTION: How has the justice sector reacted in this difficult situation and what lessons does it give us for the future?

■ **Juan Carlos Campo:** During the state of alarm, it was necessary to act with almost zero response times and take measures to face a reality that changed every day. This meant “express learning” for all the members of the ministerial team, who had to face the crisis, starting with learning from their own mistakes, but also, of course, from those measures adopted that worked well, such as covering essential services, working from home and electronic communication. As a result of all this experience, if we should ever face such an emergency again, which I hope we will not, many of the measures to be taken would already be prepared in an emergency protocol that we must agree with the General Council of the Judiciary, the State Attorney General’s Office and the autonomous regional governments and it would only be necessary to activate them. As a result, the impact would be infinitely less than that experienced during the previous crisis.

■ **Hernán Larraín:** Our country has actively faced the arrival of the coronavirus, and it has fallen to this ministry to establish guidelines for the operation of the public services related to the justice sector, which includes the agencies dependent on and administratively related to this secretariat of state, acting in the face of the needs and

requirements that a health alert of this type entails. In this context, I would highlight the speed of our actions, because, after the proclamation of the State of Alarm on 18 March 2020, actions were soon implemented at the legislative and executive level, seeking to establish mechanisms that would guarantee due access to justice by citizens with respect to the courts and the defence and legal assistance services, and adapt the operating conditions of the dependent agencies, giving continuity to the public function and ensuring the due protection of children and adolescents under the tutelage of the state, as well as of persons deprived of liberty.

In legislative matters, on 2 April Law No. 21,226 was promulgated, aimed at suspending hearings, extending deadlines and giving the Supreme Court powers to adapt the judicial processes to the reality of the lockdown and restriction of movements that the pandemic has demanded. Another relevant piece of legislation promoted by this ministry, following the recommendations of the IACHR (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights), was Law No. 21,228 ordering a commutative general pardon in mid-April for people belonging to vulnerable groups from a health perspective, such as the elderly and pregnant women, establishing requirements for granting the pardon related to the percentage of the sentence served and the possibility of completing the remaining balance



“AMONG THE LESSONS LEARNT FROM THIS PAINFUL EXPERIENCE, WE SAW CLEARLY THE IMPORTANCE OF COORDINATED ACTION, NOT ONLY BY THE VARIOUS POWERS OF THE STATE, BUT ALSO FROM THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK THAT OVERARCHES THE JUSTICE SECTOR”

through house arrest or other control mechanisms. As a general rule of action, an Action Plan for the entire justice sector was established, facilitating the coordination and planning of each of the services dependent on and related to this ministry, with the clear objective of preventing the spread of COVID-19 among the population and informing our officials, users and beneficiaries regarding the guidelines for action.

In the case of the National Service for Minors, along with having strict health protocols for the management of residences and the limitation of visits to protect the health of the children and adolescents living under the protection of the state, we put in place means of remote connection with their families of origin and with the legal teams handling their cases, while private individuals made donations consisting of personal protection equipment and electronic devices to facilitate their connectivity and internet services.

In the case of the prison population, similar measures were also adopted, segregating the cases of infection detected, which has so far allowed the few outbreaks that have occurred to be controlled. In addition, a messaging and video visit system has been put in place so that they can maintain contact with their families.

In the legal assistance and criminal defence services, we are experiencing a rapid transition towards virtual attention through different platforms, adapting to our users' connection possibilities and participating virtually in the judicial hearings of the prioritised processes. This has been a positive experience that has even led to awards for good practices, through which we wanted to highlight initiatives promoted by officials in the sector, who, in a participatory and innovative way, have developed digital applications, service strategies and legal advice aimed at guaranteeing access to justice for the most vulnerable people.

Therefore, among the lessons learnt from this painful experience, we saw clearly the importance of coordinated action, not only by the various powers of the state, but also from the institutional framework that overarches the justice sector, allowing us to understand our role and the shared responsibility that we have for meeting the social and legal needs of the population, but safely, with the protection of people's lives and health coming first.

Another relevant lesson is the establishment of remote assistance mechanisms, virtual hearings and, in general, undertaking judicial and extrajudicial actions that until recently were carried out exclusively in person, but their transition towards digitisation has allowed us to maintain the functioning of the administration system of justice, even though certain proceedings have been suspended or postponed. In this area, a Government Bill working its way through the National Congress addressing the operation of the justice system after the state of exception has ended, so we are working in advance to ensure that when the health emergency ends, actions are quick and efficient, guaranteeing due process.

QUESTION: Access to justice, understood in the broadest sense as a key right without which it is not possible to guarantee other rights (health, education, housing, etc.), is crucial to fighting inequalities and promoting social cohesion, especially in a situation like the current one. What concrete measures does the Justice 2030 Plan contain in the strategic area of access to justice?

■ **Juan Carlos Campo:** Firstly, I would like to point out that I fully agree with the definition that access to common justice as a key right, a right that allows other essential rights to be guaranteed. Secondly, I want to explain that JUSTICE 2030 was born with the objective of establishing, in a coordinated and programmed manner, the actions of the Ministry of Justice, with the aim of transforming judicial administration over the next four years and establishing the bases that allow for a continuous process of transformation culminating in 2030.

Finally, one of the essential blocks of JUSTICE 2030 is, exactly that, access to justice. To summarise very briefly, it is intended to ensure easy access to justice for everyone by bringing the legal language up to date making it easier to understand and making it digitally accessible around the clock.

QUESTION: In its last public report, the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights presented a novel initiative to create a National Service and a National Plan for Access to Justice, with the technical support of the European Union's EUROsociAL programme. What is the objective of this National Service for Access to Justice, and of the National Plan for Access to Justice?

■ **Hernán Larraín:** The National Plan for Access to Justice constitutes one of the two strands that serve as a framework for the public policy guidelines on the matter and that have been implemented by this Administration. This initiative arises from the previous diagnoses and the work carried out to date with the public services that grant legal assistance to the most vulnerable population and specialised defence to priority groups. It also incorporates the technical assistance granted by the EUROsociAL Programme for the diagnosis of the situation and the design and implementation of the plan. In this context, our challenge consists of designing and preparing a National Plan for Access to Justice that is capable of providing a coordinating framework for the public and private actors that are part of the access to justice system, positioning the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights as the technical and political reference





in charge of it. Consistent with the Plan, there is also the desire to create a National Service for Access to Justice which, as well as improving the coordination and granting of services, is aimed at promoting rights, preventing conflicts, providing guidance and counselling on legal matters, collaborative conflict resolution and judicial sponsorship in different areas of conflict, also granting special protection and defence for people belonging to vulnerable groups and, in particular, victims of crime. This involves not only legal services, but also psycho-social components that promote comprehensive and interdisciplinary care, professionally and free of charge for those who do not have the ability to arrange assistance themselves.

QUESTION: One of the most serious consequences of this pandemic is the economic crisis being felt at all levels and the effects deriving from it (increased unemployment, closure of companies, deployment of social programmes, minimum living wage, etc.) How can justice contribute to the revitalisation and reactivation of economic activity?

■ **Juan Carlos Campo:** Justice must respond to social problems and it is undoubted that economic crises are a problem of the first order. The problem is especially sensitive in the social courts, with jurisdiction to resolve workers' problems, and the commercial courts, with jurisdiction to resolve business insolvency proceedings; also in the courts of first instance, which will have to deal with bankruptcy proceedings relating to individuals. In this situation, the judicial administration must provide legal security and speed. This type of process must be resolved in a reasonable period and giving the most unambiguous response possible in the face of similar situations. Legal certainty encourages investment and helps the economy. The Ministry of Justice has launched an ambitious project to strengthen social jurisdiction and commercial bodies, to avoid the foreseeable increase in litigation entailing an unacceptable delay in the resolution of disputes. A draft law on Sustainable Justice is also being prepared, which will be sent to Parliament in the coming weeks, and which, among other measures, includes the promotion of appropriate conflict resolution measures, promoting negotiated and extrajudicial solutions.

■ **Hernán Larráin:** There are different levels at which our sector can make significant contributions. In our case, I believe that legislative initiatives aimed at the timely judicial resolution of conflicts not only contribute to a more just society, but also to peaceful national coexistence, which is essential if we want to overcome the conflicts that affect us, the basis of which is in the differences, inequalities and disagreements at the family, work and neighbourhood level. For this reason, justice is essential for social cohesion and for rebuilding trust among the community.

Apart from this, there are also specific examples in which our actions also contribute to economic reactivation, when we are able to guarantee the fulfilment of rights. In this line, our country, in addition to the different social and economic benefits implemented by the Government, and like others in the region, allowed part of workers' pension funds to be used, to promote consumption and the satisfaction of essential needs that could not be covered because of the loss or signifi-

cant reduction of income. In this order, our Ministry played an essential role in ensuring that these funds were used to pay overdue child support, which generated a strong impact, since, unfortunately, there are many cases in which people evade this type of basic obligation towards their children and it was vital to safeguard their rights and interests through such a law.

QUESTION: The pandemic has highlighted the need to promote the use of digital media in justice, as a quick and effective mechanism to improve access to justice for citizens. How is the European, the Spanish and the Chilean justice system fairing in relation to the Digital Agenda?

■ **Juan Carlos Campo:** The European Commission has set as a priority for the period 2019-2024 achieving "a Europe adapted to the digital age". The European Council, in its conclusions of 9 June 2020 on shaping Europe's digital future, recognises that the digitisation of Member States' judicial systems can facilitate and improve access to justice throughout the EU. In this regard, the EU is undertaking specific actions and studies aimed at promoting the use of innovative technologies in the field of justice and digitisation. Among other things, a study has recently been carried out analysing Member States' projects that use innovative technologies (AI, blockchain, etc.) as a means for improving justice. Work is currently being carried out on the draft conclusions on "Access to Justice and Digitisation at the European Level".

As a result of specific actions aimed at the digitisation of justice, we find the European electronic justice portal (Portal e-Justice), through which access to information on justice is facilitated for citizens in relation to procedures, judicial authorities, professionals, legal operators and legislation. The portal also facilitates access to information in the case of judicial and extrajudicial processes in cross-border situations.

In order to achieve communication between the European judicial authorities, work is being carried out to create direct communication tools allowing rapid and efficient international legal cooperation - projects such as e-Codex and e-Evidence -, as well as technological tools for cooperation between judicial authorities such as ECRIS, for the exchange of criminal records between Member States. The Spanish Ministry of Justice is participating actively in all these activities.

At the national level, and in line with the EU, the digital transformation of justice is a priority for the Ministry of Justice. The implementation of the Digital Agenda aims to improve the quality and efficiency of public justice services through ICT. Some technological advances made in this regard are noteworthy; the LexNET system -which has been a definitive step towards a electronic judicial file-, the Electronic Judicial Auctions Portal -which allows bidding electronically by any interested party regardless of their geographic location-, the Judicial Records System (SIRAJ) and the interconnection with databases of other administrations through the Judicial Neutral Point are clear examples of the digitisation process in which we are immersed. The main challenge facing us at both the European and national level resides in the diversity of information and procedural management systems that operate in the field of the administra-



“THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF JUSTICE IS A PRIORITY FOR THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DIGITAL AGENDA AIMS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY OF PUBLIC JUSTICE SERVICES THROUGH ICT”

tion of justice. It is necessary to strive for interoperability and interconnection among the different information systems, digital services and technological tools in the justice sector that operate throughout the national territory, and in turn, achieve their connection through interoperable and secure platforms with European systems. Another element to take into account is the challenge posed by the necessary adaptation of information systems, digital services and technological tools to the current regulations on data protection. In both cases, vigorous work is being carried out, at both the legislative and the technological level, to achieve this with all the necessary guarantees. It is worth highlighting here the important work carried out by the Electronic Judicial Administration State Technical Committee (CTEAJE), a body with important powers aimed at promoting compatibility and ensuring the interoperability of the systems and applications used in the judicial administration, as well as ensuring cooperation between the different administrations.

■ **Hernán Larraín:** Chile has a 2020 Digital Agenda, which is structured around five areas: Rights for Digital Development, Digital Connectivity, Digital Government, Digital Economy and Digital Skills. Each of them establishes strategic guidelines that are embodied in more than sixty measures, which, of course, present different levels and scopes. In the area known as Rights for Digital Development, the adaptation of the current regulatory framework is contemplated, in view of new social phenomena relating to popular participation thanks to the development of information and communication technologies.

Regarding the impact of digital media on justice, it is important to note that, since 2016, our country has had an electronic processing law that establishes general principles for the processing of legal proceedings and the mandatory use of the computer system for the support and preservation of resolutions and procedural actions.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, holding hearings through telematic means constituted an innovation imposed as a result of the pandemic, which we hope can continue while we move towards the normalisation of judicial activity, and, if necessary, even after it, since, to date, it has allowed jurisdictional work to continue, providing access to justice for citizens.

QUESTION: Finally, EUROsociAL is a European Union Programme that promotes the exchange of experiences and good practices

between counterparty institutions in Europe and Latin America, What added value do you think a programme like this has in terms of strengthening bi-regional dialogue in an area as important as justice?

■ **Juan Carlos Campo:** From the Ministry of Justice -and also from the rest of the institutions in the justice sector in Spain, such as the General Council of the Judicial Power and the State Attorney General's Office- we work with a multitude of cooperation programmes financed by the EU that aim to exchange experiences between European and Latin American institutions. The peculiarity of EUROsociAL is that, unlike most of these programmes, it does not focus on the more “traditional” activities of international cooperation in the field of justice, such as the fight against organised crime, terrorism or corruption. In these matters, Europe and Latin America are already aligned in strengthening a solid rule of law that protects the legal security and freedom of its citizens.

EUROsociAL, however, calls on Europe and Latin America -and also, logically, the participating institutions- from the perspective of social cohesion, demanding a shift in the focus of the administrations towards public policies that seek a more democratic and transparent governance, the reduction of inequalities and the development of citizens' capacities. Therefore, the added value provided by EUROsociAL in the framework of this Euro-Latin American vision of justice is to propose a shift in the position that justice -as a sector, as a sum of institutions, as a framework for dialogue even- adopts towards citizens, making it into a public service aimed at meeting the targets of SDG 16.

■ **Hernán Larraín:** The dialogue between our regions is, obviously, of special importance, in view of both its history and its scope. That is to say, added to the inter-American dialogue, our relationship of reciprocal support with the European Union has great relevance today, in the face of the pandemic and other global challenges and, in the specific case of Chile, taking into account that we are negotiating an Association Agreement 2.0 between Chile and the European Union.

That said, the EUROsociAL programme, now in its third stage, has been a catalyst for greater synergies and joint work. In other words, its contribution has been substantive, giving greater scope to the bi-regional dialogue, contributing to the development of sectoral public policies whose maturation challenges both our region and Chile.

As I argued previously, the pandemic revealed various dimensions, and, for sure, international cooperation is one of them. Nurturing our internal public policies with foreign experiences is logical, considering that a global problem such as COVID-19 knows no borders and demands joint and coordinated efforts.

All in all, considering the high impact of the justice sector on the population and because justice is indexed to the essence of the state's functioning, the technical assistance and support of a programme such as EUROsociAL becomes of special value due to the nature of the public goods on which the collaboration focusses.

* There is an extended version of this interview on the blog of *Recíprocamente* at this [link](#).



Without crossing borders
there is no possible integration:

Countries + integrated, people + protected



NAHUEL ODDONE |

Head of Promotion and Exchange of
Regional Social Policies at the Social
Institute of MERCOSUR (ISM)¹

■ COVID-19 has led the MERCOSUR member states to decide to close their borders to prevent the transmission of the virus among their population. This was an exceptional measure, unprecedented in democratic history. The first political responses have focused on bringing down the rate of infection, both in circulation within countries and at border crossings. Little by little, people returned to their countries to “work on their biographies” as Ulrich Beck would no doubt indicate if he were still with us. But for how long can this measure be extended? Especially since without crossing borders there is no possible integration.

Territories can be understood by the types of relationships they express. Border relations in the Southern Cone existed before MERCOSUR². The border relations of kinship, friendship and work and commercial, cultural, sporting and even political relations pre-existed the process of regional integration. MERCOSUR played a key role in making the border reality visible and accompanying the design and financing of regional instruments for cooperation.

“Borders are interstate spaces where relationships between local populations and the different levels of the state are condensed. This conception makes it possible to differentiate the border lines from the border areas. While

1. The opinions expressed here are strictly personal.

2. Especially relevant are the “twin cities”, they are pairs of urban centres, face to face on an international boundary, whose interdependence is often greater than that of the city with its administrative reference region or its own national territory.



border lines are the responsibility of national governments, in border areas the competencies are shared or concurrent between national and sub-national governments. Also, border lines refer to a political division that is not necessarily related to the agro-ecological regions or the historical and socio-cultural characteristics of the border territories. Precisely therein lies the importance of considering border areas as a unit of analysis, when designing and implementing regional integration policies” that recognise borderisation.

Borderisation refers to cooperation and coordination activities that seek to create order and inclusion regimes and to establish the idea of a separate identity with the aim of improving border interactions and, in this way, the well-being of their populations. MERCOSUR has contributed, through different mechanisms, to strengthening border cooperation:

- Residence Agreement for Nationals of the MERCOSUR Member States
- Multilateral Agreement on Social Security
- MERCOSUR Socio-Labour Declaration
- Action Plan of the Citizenship Statute
- Strategic Social Action Plan
- Linked Border Localities Agreement

This structure of agreements has sustained multi-level bilateral dialogues and exchanges, either accompanying the Integration Committees (formerly border committees, which in some cases have existed since the 1980s) or the Border Development Commissions, as well as dialogue with international cooperators that have sought through programmes and projects to leverage border cooperation. MERCOSUR has recognised in its borders an important pillar for the stimulation of regional integration since the creation of Working Subgroup No. 18 on Border Integration, which coordinates the thematic agenda.

Likewise, the Meeting of Ministers and Authorities of Social Development and the Coordination Commission of Ministers of Social Affairs of MERCOSUR defined action in border areas as a transversal axis of work. In line with this impulse, the MERCOSUR Social



“CURRENTLY, WE SEE A NEED TO PROMOTE AN ORDERLY AND GRADUAL OPENING OF THE INTERNAL LAND BORDERS OF MERCOSUR ”

Institute is implementing the *Citizenship on MERCOSUR borders projects*, co-financed by the MERCOSUR Structural Convergence Fund; *Youth and borders: What is it like to grow up on the borders?* co-financed by the United Nations Population Fund; and *Cross-Border Cooperation in health matters with an emphasis on facilitating patient mobility*, with the support of the EUROsocial+ Programme for Social Cohesion in Latin America. It is noteworthy that all three projects have been modified in their implementation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 has posed a huge challenge in comprehensive border management. First of all, guaranteeing supply and food security through distribution channels has been key in the context of the pandemic. Despite time constraints and relative cost increases, prod-

ucts crossed borders. However, the mobility of people remains closed. This has caused significant difficulties in the daily lives of the populations of the twin cities, where there is a strong cross-border trade and the use of public services without differentiating one or the other side of the border based on their supply and quality. This situation has led many local and provincial governments to demand that their central state recognise their particularity as a border area. Currently, we see a need to promote an orderly and gradual opening of the internal land borders of MERCOSUR, as well as the establishment of a shared supervisory health mechanism that guarantees human mobility. An example is the agreement to create the Binational Technical Commission between Rivera (Uruguay) and Santana do Livramento (Brazil), whose objective is to function as an indivisible epidemiological health unit for COVID-19 cases, a case that was later replicated between the cities of Artigas and Quaraí and between Bella Unión and Barra do Quaraí.

Borders are not timeless, they are a moment resulting from historical constructions and, therefore, it corresponds to the social forces of the present to take advantage of the border territory for the social experimentation of regional integration and to give political responses according to the specific demands of the time. COVID-19 calls for a transnational public leadership under the slogan “Countries + integrated, people + protected.”



Cross-border cooperation in times of pandemic:

What solutions can regional territories offer?



FLORENCE JACQUEY |

Manager with the EGTC Summit Secretariat of the Greater Region¹

The Greater Region: multi-level governance and Little Europe

Born as an initiative between nation states, the Greater Region is a unique example of the slow process of consolidating cross-border ties and interregional dialogue. The need to formulate a concerted response between France, Germany and Luxembourg in the so-called “mining triangle” gave birth in 1971 to the Franco-Luxembourg-German intergovernmental commission. Representatives of regional institutions participated as observers. The founding legal act of cooperation came in 1980 with the Bonn agreement on cooperation in border areas. It responds to the desire to institutionalise cross-border cooperation and provides a legal basis for the activities undertaken by the

Intergovernmental Commission and the Regional Commission “SaarLorLux-Trier-Rhineland Palatinate”. In the following years, the involvement of regional leaders in the work undertaken by the regional commission increased and the first summit at the level of the heads of the regional governments in the Greater Region took place in 1995. The structures of the Regional Commission and the Summit of Executives of the Greater Region were merged in 2005 and since then institutional cooperation has been carried out at the regional level. Made up of five regions from four countries, the Greater Region is often called the “laboratory of Europe”. The challenges at the governance level are numerous. The coexistence of very different administrative

1. The opinions expressed in this article are strictly personal.



systems is a permanent challenge and, at the same time, it enriches the interregional dialogue. In this cooperation space of 65,401 km² located less than 300 km from Paris, Brussels, Rotterdam and Frankfurt, three languages and a multitude of subregional cooperation institutions coexist.

Pandemic and retrogression

With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe, the question of borders has once again had a strong resonance, especially in border areas. The Greater Region is no exception and the sudden closure of the European Union's external borders on 17 March 2020, followed by the closure of national borders between EU countries², has caused a shock wave in a space known for having the highest cross-border professional mobility in the EU. About 250,000 people cross its borders every day to go to work. With the closure of national borders without prior notice, other frontiers, of a social or cultural nature, have reappeared. Sad memories of another time in the area where the Schengen area was born.

Cooperation in action: trust and dialogue as engines of regional integration

After the first moment of surprise at an unprecedented situation, the living forces have

mobilised on both sides of the borders. Faced with complex and sometimes surreal situations in areas of life so interwoven, and often separated from neighbours by just a bridge, local and regional political leaders have sought new forms of dialogue.

In order for national states' perceptions regarding border spaces to evolve, it is necessary for border regions to demonstrate they can function as "nuclei of life." The crisis has made it clear that the relationships of trust established over the years and a good understanding of their neighbours is a foundation solid enough that, in a border region, the joint action between actors at different levels yields concrete results. The mayors of the border towns have joined voices to advocate the reopening of the borders, as have regional parliamentarians and European deputies. Civil society and academia have mobilised to contribute new perspectives. The heads of the regional executives have intensified their contacts and acted to implement pragmatic solutions. The establishment, among other measures, of a "COVID-19 Task Force" at the Greater Region level has been key to monitoring and tracking the evolution of the pandemic. It has, thus, been possible to evacuate patients with COVID-19 to hospitals in Germany and Lux-

embourg to prevent the saturation of ICU facilities in eastern France. The constant dialogue between regional leaders and their national governments has made it possible to negotiate the opening of some border points for the passage of cross-border workers. And more recently, prevention measures can be highlighted at a cross-border level, such as the mass test campaign and the contact tracing promoted by Luxembourg at the cross-border level, allowing chains of infection to be followed in the border region.

However the goal of achieving cross-border harmonisation of regulations in crisis situations remains far off. The structuring of governance and the dialogue between the different decision-making levels is still insufficient, but the maturity of cooperation in the Greater Region, as well as in other European cooperation spaces, has made it possible to quickly start a dialogue at a technical level. One lesson has become clear: Closing the borders is not a solution! In this sense, it would be highly interesting to open a dialogue at the level of the European Union and MERCOSUR, where internal borders remain closed. The full range of the ways in which cooperation has been experienced as a result of COVID-19 could be shared with other non-community regional spaces.



“THE COEXISTENCE OF VERY DIFFERENT ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS IS A PERMANENT CHALLENGE AND, AT THE SAME TIME, IT ENRICHES THE INTERREGIONAL DIALOGUE ”

2. Luxembourg is the only state that has never closed its borders.

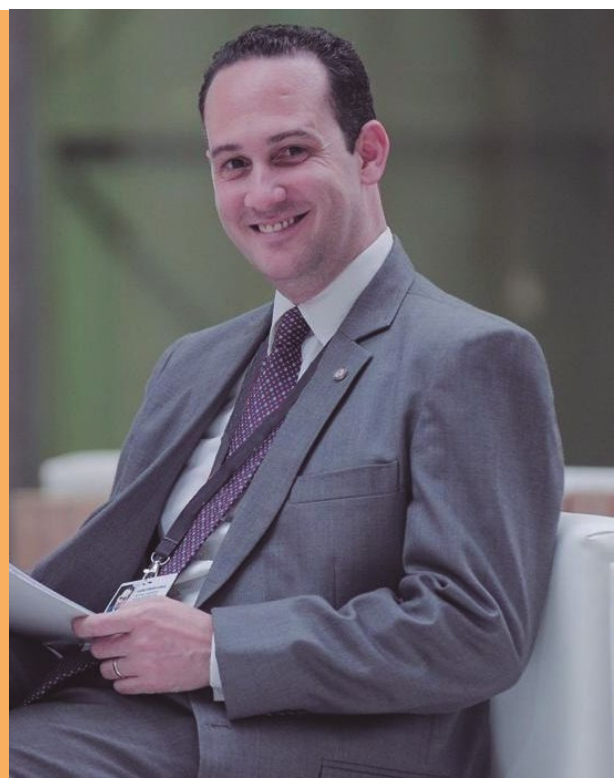




INTERVIEW WITH **ALFREDO SUÁREZ MIESES**

Secretary General of the Secretariat for Central American Social Integration

“Solutions proposed from an exclusively national perspective will not have favourable results in the medium-long term”



Viruses do not understand borders, so governments have had to work together to face the pandemic in all parts of the world, which has highlighted the importance and challenges of regional integration systems. EUROsociAL's magazine *Recíprocamente* interviewed Alfredo Suárez Mieses, Secretary General of the Secretariat for Central American Social Integration, in which he tells us how the crisis has been experienced and what the future prospects are for the Central American region.



Interviewer: **MASSIMO MECCHERI** | Local Technician in Central America for EUROsocial Social Policies Area

QUESTION: The health emergency caused by COVID-19 has shone a light on weaknesses that, to varying degrees, were already present in almost all SICA (Central American Integration System) countries: weak social protection systems, largely informal labour markets and low investment in health, among others. Do you think that the current crisis has contributed to generating a reflection at the regional level on structural responses to these problems and towards a greater role for public policies to face these gaps?

■ **Alfredo Suárez Mieses:** Once the crisis arrived, the countries had to take very quick

measures to contain the epidemic, especially at the health level. In that first moment, countries such as Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic, which have much more consolidated social protection systems than the rest and with better coordinated public sector intervention, had more capacity to respond in the short term. We can, thus, say that the existing social policies, based on a territorial planning dynamic, made it possible to reduce the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis. Apart from this, the SICA countries announced packages of fiscal measures to face the health emergency and mitigate the social and economic damage to

some extent. These measures imply a considerable fiscal effort which, on average, ECLAC puts at around 3.9% of the GDP of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Given the situation, the region has intensified dialogue and reflection, showing that problems such as poverty and inequality still require significant effort and substantive changes in how public policy is carried out. Furthermore, as a result of the crisis, it has become more common to reflect on regional strategies to confront situations like this, accepting that solutions proposed from an exclusively national perspective will not have favourable results in the medium-long term. The crisis deriving from



the pandemic has also highlighted the importance of multilateralism to combat crises such as these, as well as the need to strengthen integration spaces. As proof of this, debates have been taking place and a wide range of spaces for joint reflection have been developed, some promoted by civil society and others by the integration bodies themselves. The Secretariat for Central American Social Integration (SISCA), with the support of EUROsocial+ and United Nations agencies, organised a series of web forums among the countries in the region in which we sought to reflect, in an intersectoral manner, on the measures to be taken to confront the crisis and the efforts being made at the country level.

QUESTION: How can we move forward, within a framework that seeks to achieve resilience, so that social issues take on more significance, alongside economic ones, leaving behind their residual weight and their welfare-based character?

■ **Alfredo Suárez Mieses:** In a crisis situation like the current one, social protection is an instrument for protecting the poorest and most vulnerable population, which faces the loss of livelihoods, low availability of income, vulnerability in terms of health and education and, not least, greater food insecurity and even malnutrition. In this regard, ECLAC forecasts increases in the Gini index, which measures income inequality, of between 1.0% and 8.0% for the countries in our region and estimates that the percentage of the population living in poverty

will increase, on average, by 4.3% compared with 2019.

The experiences of the countries in relation to the implementation of programmes within the framework of social protection systems show that these are key aspects in the social reconstruction of countries, given their contribution to reducing risk and social and economic vulnerability, as well as in alleviating extreme poverty and deprivation, with an equitable approach sensitive to population differences and inequalities. In this regard, moving towards a more comprehensive social policy, which goes beyond this welfare-based approach, requires the consolidation of social policies under a social protection system, promoting intersectoral coordination within the governments themselves and ensuring a life cycle and rights-based approach, and also seeking to develop policies with a universal character that take into account the inequalities in each country.

QUESTION: How did the initiative for the Recovery, Social Reconstruction and Resilience Plan for Central America and the Dominican Republic emerge and what are the expectations of the countries regarding this Plan?

■ **Alfredo Suárez Mieses:** Given that the policy is a long-term instrument, the CIS calls for the emergency to be addressed by asking SISCA, supported by the EUROsocial+ programme and United Nations agencies, to make a start on formulating a regional

recovery, social reconstruction and resilience plan for Central America and the Dominican Republic. This plan, which must play a part in contributing to fulfilling the SDGs as well as also helping countries overcome the crisis, has been structured around three lines of work: social protection, employability and urban settlements.

QUESTION: It is not the first time that the region has had to face disastrous situations (wars, natural events, etc.) that require the definition and implementation of reconstruction plans. Do you think this could be the occasion to move towards greater regional integration?

■ **Alfredo Suárez Mieses:** Definitely, yes; the situation and the dynamics make it clear that greater integration and cross-sector interaction are required. At a general level, there is recognition of the potential for multilateralism and the regional integration spaces to contribute to enhancing the recovery processes that the countries undertake. Likewise, there is pressure to favour participation by different actors that can contribute to these integration processes.

The preparation of the reconstruction plan will be a practical exercise on how integration is approached from two routes: from the national to the regional, through the implementation of national social policies converging at the regional level; and from the regional to the national, by implementing integration strategies and ensuring regional cooperation, impacting on national efforts.

Through this plan and with the help of social policies, it is hoped that integration will become a true instrument of regional development; but not only that, it is also hoped that a new vision of integration will be adopted, a broader vision that contributes to legitimising it socially and politically. Furthermore, efforts such as these allow progress towards social integration as the coordinating hub for human development within a process of integration.



* There is an extended version of this article on the blog of *Recíprocamente* at this [link](#).





Regional health services

What progress has been made and what challenges do we face in Latin America in developing efficient health services in order to face risks such as epidemics?



EDUARDO MISSONI |

Specialist in tropical medicine, expert in global health issues and international cooperation; professor at Bocconi University in Milan and other universities and research centres in Italy and Mexico

■ In the fight against the COVID-19 epidemic, the main objective has been to “flatten the curve”, that is, to prevent the concentration of patients requiring hospitalisation and intensive care from exceeding the capacity of existing hospital infrastructures. Despite the conversion of many hospitals into structures dedicated specifically to the treatment of patients affected by COVID-19 and the speed with which new facilities were made available, hospitals finally suffered an overflow, with many of them becoming sources of infection and with large groups of non-COVID chronic and surgical patients being denied medical care as a result. Experience suggests that by focusing the response on the first level of care and the early isolation of infections at the community level, it is possible to reduce hospital overload and mortality.

In most of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, health is recognised as a

constitutional right; however, these pronouncements are not always reflected in effective priority being assigned to the health sector.

With few exceptions, the priority given to health and its determinants, as well as public spending on health, has been persistently low. Neo-liberal public policies of austerity, budget cuts, and privatisations have systematically limited the development of public health and social protection systems, increasing inequalities and hindering the solution of historical problems that the pandemic is exposing and exacerbating.

Prominent among other shortcomings that reduce the capacity of health systems to respond to the needs of the population in the face of major public health emergencies are the sector's fragmentation and segmentation, its inadequate governance and weak coordination with other sectors. Human resources in



health are insufficient and their training rarely responds to countries' socio-economic and cultural realities. There are profound inequities in the level of care available, between the public and private sectors, and between urban and rural areas. The lack of security in working conditions and limited incentives have prevented the expansion of services, especially primary care, and also encouraged the emigration of health personnel.

The diversity of health and social protection systems in Latin America has also been reflected in countries' response to the emergency. Analyses carried out in the region, also seeking to retain lessons learnt in Europe, have shown that the effectiveness of the response depends on the ability of health systems to act in a united and coordinated manner in accordance with national plans with a systemic scope.

In Latin America, the countries that best responded to the pandemic were those with public, universal health systems and a good level of primary care, endowed with the necessary human resources and supplies, and which were capable of a united and comprehensive response, calling on all actors in society, with a solid, consistent strategy for communicating with the population, as in the exemplary cases of Cuba and Uruguay. Having a well-informed population with adequate social protection allowed a prolonged and effective quarantine in the control of the epidemic.

This was not the case in Brazil, which, although it has a national health system with universal, comprehensive and free access, did not implement a coordinated public health response. The population received mixed messages, which affected compliance levels and the country's ability to contain the spread of the virus.

Three medium- and long-term strategic spheres have been identified for the recovery of health systems and the construction of human societies that prioritise health: 1) promote social cohesion and an inclusive and sustainable economy; 2) prioritise investment in health and social development; and 3) transform and strengthen health systems to ensure preparedness for external threats and ensure universal access to health.

Cross-cutting these strategic lines is action on the determinants of health. The effective



sustainability of development objectives and health systems requires, among other things, a drastic change in the current consumption model, starting with the food and production system. National and global policies must prioritise health over economic indicators, ensuring market regulation to reduce the population's exposure to all kinds of environmental pollutants and promote healthy diets and lifestyles. It is essential to reduce the incidence of chronic diseases, which, on the one hand, overload health systems and, on the other, are a contributing factor to high mortality in epidemics.

Without detracting from the importance of hospital and intensive care services in cases of very seriously sick patients, for health services to be able to face risks such as epidemics, much will depend on the work in local communities and the first level of care.

There is an urgent need to move from patient-centred models of care to a community-based approach, with a specific emphasis on home care. In the face of epidemic outbreaks, the rule is the proactive screening of potentially infected persons and their contacts, ensuring the quarantine of those who test positive, emphasising diagnosis and care at home. Naturally, for this, it is essential to reorient and privilege the training of health personnel towards primary care and to strengthen that level of care.

It is at the regional level that health services are better coordinated with other institutions

“WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS, THE PRIORITY GIVEN TO HEALTH AND ITS DETERMINANTS, AS WELL AS PUBLIC SPENDING ON HEALTH, HAS BEEN PERSISTENTLY LOW”

and social actors, creating spaces for consensus, preparing strategic supplies (for example masks and other personal protective equipment) and ensuring the effectiveness of the communication strategy. It is also at the regional level that the comprehensive nature of the response takes shape, with the organisation of communities around the objectives of solidarity economy, the valorisation of local resources and skills, education and social services that value health as a common good, to build healthy environments and behaviours. Organisation and community participation have always represented the basis of emergency preparedness and the premise of an effective response.



INTERVIEW WITH **LOURDES BERMEJO**

SEGG's Vice President of Gerontology

“What citizens living in old people’s homes want and need on a daily basis has not been taken into account in the decision making”



Recíprocamente, the EUROsociAL magazine, interviewed Lourdes Bermejo¹, with a PhD in Educational Sciences she is an independent consultant who currently holds the position of Vice President of Gerontology in the Spanish Geriatrics and Gerontology Society (SEGG). In the interview she explains all about two of the groups most affected by the COVID-19 crisis, the elderly and people with disabilities.



Interviewers: **VIRGINIA TEDESCHI** | Local Technician in the Southern Corn for EUROsociAL Social Policies Area
y **ANDREA MONACO** | Senior Technician for EUROsociAL Social Policies Area

QUESTION: What are the main lessons learned from the emergency regarding support and care for older adults and people with disabilities?

■ **Lourdes Bermejo:** Considering the complexity and gravity of the situation, the first mistake we made was not anticipating what was coming; for this, policy makers are certainly to blame, although many of us citizens had also developed a somewhat arrogant vision, a certain lack of humility that led us to think that something that was happening in other parts of the world couldn't happen here.

Secondly, and in relation to the foregoing, it has been shown that the political-administrative

governance of our institutions is not designed to provide satisfactory responses to a situation like this. Often the administrative structures present defects that were already known and that have to do with the very essence of the system: entrenched departmentalisation, excessive bureaucratisation and the lag between decisions being taken and implemented, among others. The least efficient public administrations, in which these problems are more recurrent, are finding it more difficult to face the situation. In this regard, the difficulty in coordinating political decisions has also been evident, with the multiplicity of bodies providing services to people who need support and care (companies and for-profit entities, pub-

lic foundations, civil society organisations, etc.). This difficulty, which we thought would improve once the difficulties, errors and results of the response systems had been analysed, sadly persists in many regions, despite the nine months that have passed since the onset of the pandemic.

The third lesson we've learnt is that the success of contingency plans depends largely on how appropriate they are to the region and its resources, the community or organisation through which they are to be applied, and the characteristics of the people who need them. Similarly, issues relating to building such as occupation, size, structure or distribution and

1. <https://www.lourdesbermejo.es/>



matters relating to human resources are crucial factors that must be taken into account when designing – for example - an isolation plan. We need to bear in mind that some of these measures often undermine fundamental rights. Right now, as a second wave breaks over us, we're continuing on the same basis, which shows two things: that we've hardly learnt anything since the beginning of the health emergency, and that the quality of life, and indeed the health and lives of these people, is not a priority.

Another lesson we can draw is that, beyond institutional plans and directives, behind any successful management there are always competent and committed professionals. Setting an example is very important; if a leader doesn't demonstrate commitment to their work and people, whether technical or administrative, the performance of that leader's team will never be optimal. Technical competence and material capacity are not everything; in this regard, many in Spain could learn from the capacity for anticipation, leadership and commitment shown by some professionals and managers from Latin American countries with much more limited material resources.

There are also concerns about language and communication. People need information, transparency and trust building institutions. Citizens need to trust their political leaders and the technicians in charge of managing and leading this crisis at different levels. However, we need to examine the language used by the politicians, because it has been discriminatory, ageist and paternalistic. How many times have we had to hear about "our" senior citizens? Furthermore, lumping them all together, without regard to their great differences: people with a 30-year age difference, widely diverse circumstances and conditions... And people with functional or cognitive disabilities living in shared accommodation have been made invisible.

QUESTION: What are the biggest challenges for long-term care systems in Europe once the emergency is over?

■ **Lourdes Bermejo:** In some European countries, we already had pending a review of the models with which we treat people who need support and care. There are some European countries that have not built old people's homes

for 30 years, because they consider they are not appropriate spaces to promote a decent life; instead they have many supports making it possible to live at home. When this is no longer possible, they have developed alternative accommodation systems that are smaller, more homelike, more personalised and integrated into the community. During the pandemic, we have seen that the organisational systems of the residences have very negatively affected the ability to respond to people who fell ill. This challenge, that we already had pending, has become more urgent. The necessary review of these models will put our political-administrative governance institutions to the test, and will reveal whether or

“GIVING SUPPORT AND PROVIDING SERVICES TO PEOPLE IS NOT ONLY AN EXPENSE, IT IS ALSO A SOURCE OF EMPLOYMENT AND WEALTH IN COUNTRIES”

not there is the political and technical will to guarantee the health, quality of life and rights of people who need support. In the medium term, we will need to develop a social pact that leads to a new model for long-term care.

It's important to draw conclusions from what's happening: ageism and discrimination towards the elderly and people with disabilities. A large part of this at-risk population has not been offered the resources they would have needed as defined by their living conditions and health risks. I don't venture to say that this has been the case throughout Europe, since many countries are much more advanced, but in Spain this has been the case, and no service providers -companies, foundations, NGOs- or scientific societies were involved in the decision making.

We have a pending challenge: to raise awareness and educate citizens to make them willing partners in a new social pact. This long-living society that we are (let's stop saying ageing)

means people have the opportunity to live many years, in dignified conditions and with rights until the end. We really can't and mustn't make anyone feel guilty for being old. It is, after all, cooperation that has made us prosper as a species and created the conditions for people to enjoy long and dignified lives.

QUESTION: What recommendations do you feel would be useful for the Latin American countries that in recent years have made great progress in the construction and strengthening of public policies for the care of dependent people but where the recent crisis could have a negative impact on this advance?

■ **Lourdes Bermejo:** The first thing would be to carry out a detailed analysis of each particular national situation, in order to assess not only what has been lost in terms of support and care during the pandemic, but also the successes that had previously been achieved. Valuing the progress that had been made will be very important, because, in the immediate future, an ethical and ideological rearmament will be necessary within the framework of the development agenda in the face of voices that may arise trying to take advantage of this contingency to replace the public policies relating to support and care with a rhetoric that places the full burden of care in the private and family sphere onto women.

It will also be necessary to prioritise and establish governance adapted to each situation. It will be necessary to determine the areas into which it will be necessary to look more in depth and those that will have to be propped up so they do not collapse; and if emergencies have arisen relating to people in situations of exclusion or poverty where there were none before, they will also have to be taken care of.

Another key issue will be optimising sources of financing. Giving support and providing services to people is not only an expense, it is also a source of employment and wealth in countries. In this regard, in addition to the public budget, plural and creative forms of financing, collaboration and external support must be sought, either through private companies or through cooperation programmes such as EUROsociAL.

* There is an extended version of this article on the blog of *Recíprocamente* at this [link](#).



JUAN MANUEL SANTOMÉ |
Director of EUROsocial Programme

In praise of links

(or social cohesion as the keystone of international cooperation for development in which no one is left behind)

Has it ever occurred to you that if it weren't for everyone, no one would be anyone?

Joaquín Salvador Lavado —Quino— (in memoriam)

■ 2020 is drawing to a close. The year in which the impossible happened and a global pandemic affected us all, leaving hundreds of thousands of deaths, a global economic crisis of enormous proportions and an exponential increase in inequalities. And also, as if he decided to withdraw from the future of the world, we lost Joaquín Salvador Lavado, alias Quino, the creator of Mafalda and so many other endearing characters who for decades from the southern hemisphere illuminated the ideals of justice, freedom, solidarity, equality and peace for the rest of the world. To him and to these values we dedicate this issue of Recíprocamente, the magazine from EUROsocial+, the EU's flagship cooperation programme with Latin America and the Dominican Republic for the improvement of social cohesion. One objective, that of strengthening social cohesion, the pertinence of which is reinforced more than ever as a compass to ensure that the post-COVID-19 recovery and reconstruction process is resilient and inclusive, with no one left behind.

Social cohesion then, to respond to these difficult times. Because a wave of protests is spreading across Latin America (Chile, Guatemala, Peru, etc.), demanding an end to corruption, less inequality, access to decent employment, quality justice and social protection and to be citizens under the rule of law. And this movement is mainly headed by young

people; young people interconnected through the social media, young people who were not born under dictatorships and who are therefore fearless, young people who know that it is they that (as Marina Sereni says in her article) will have to repay the enormous debt that is being contracted to defray the expenses of the post-COVID-19 contingency and recovery. Young people who are raising their voices and casting their votes to demand new social contracts...

The global response to the civilisational challenges that lie ahead are crystallised for the moment in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, certainly a common and inclusive agenda, which should operate as a framework to ensure the consistency of policies, also in the phase of post-pandemic reconstruction that lies ahead. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that encompass the green and digital agenda and undoubtedly inspire hope, but to which the compass of social cohesion reacts by alerting us to the need for a just transition to a new energy and economic model, and moreover the need to reduce the already huge digital gaps as a matter of priority. A 2030 Agenda that recalls and also insists that there will be no sustainable development (or social peace) if inequalities are not reduced (SDG 10), if there is no commitment to gender equality (SDG 5), if there is no decisive choice for democratic governance with efficient and transparent institutions at the service of citizens (SDG 16), if there is no guaranteed universal baseline social protection, employment and work allowing young people to pursue projects while leading a decent life (SDG 8). However, the compass of social cohesion reminds us that development is a multidimen-



sional process and that, therefore, there is a risk of fragmentation in the 2030 Agenda itself if its implementation is not addressed by linking some SDGs with others. The social cohesion compass is offered as a mechanism to identify SDG combinations with an accelerating effect on the 2030 Agenda. In the European Union, the response to the current crisis has been given concrete expression in the Next Generation EU Recovery Plan (well named in that it includes at least nominally the inter-generational vector referred to above), which involves the mobilisation of financial resources and the largest joint effort in the history of the European integration process. Social cohesion is a substantive part of the EU "acquis" and gestation process, as well as a necessary (although not sufficient) condition for its present and future feasibility. And therefore, the compass of social cohesion should logically guide the use of recovery funds (much of them in the form of loans that our children will have to repay).

So much for the WHAT. Social cohesion with a rights-based approach as a compass and a "vaccine" in the face of global challenges. Now comes the HOW. There are multiple challenges, some of a domestic nature, others of a regional and global nature. In his article, Daniel Innerarity pointed to "sustainable glocalisation" as a strategy, linking the local dimension with globalisation; he rightly indicated that global public goods require global institutions, global solutions, and also cooperation. Let us therefore focus on a very specific aspect of this last-named - international development cooperation, which is the area that concerns us. In particular, here, we would like to briefly share some reflections arising from the process of systematising the lessons learnt that is currently being carried out at EUROsociAL on the occasion of the programme's 15th anniversary. Fifteen years in which the programme's design has gradually evolved and new features have been introduced in its architecture and intervention toolbox, and in which it has continued to be a benchmark for EU cooperation with Latin America, inspiring new instruments that have appeared and other regional programmes. HOW then, will development cooperation help us face the challenges that lie ahead? Some of the lessons we have learnt ourselves give us some possible answers, namely: 1) The relevance and validity of a commitment to social cohesion as a strategic response to the multidimensional nature of inequalities and development; the wisdom, therefore, of maintaining social cohesion as an objective (and as a means), as an overarching umbrella that links the different dimensions: social, governance, gender equality, labour, environmental, productive, etc. 2) The relevance of multi-level cooperation, operating concurrently at the national, regional and bi-regional levels (EU/LAC), activating an honest dialogue which at the same time strengthens Euro-Latin American partnerships, networks and common practices (links), favouring regional integration and accompanying public policy reforms at the national level. 3) The importance of cooperation focused on the knowledge held by public servants, based on exchange between peers (links); knowledge that should logically guide and be coordinated with financial cooperation, opting for the principle of "policy first". 4) Faced with the multitude of actors and instruments that directly affect the effectiveness of the ODA (harmonisation), it is committed to complementarity and partnership for development (links) in line with SDG 17. The "Team Europe" focus recently proposed by the European Commission, therefore, assumes full relevance for providing a harmonised and coherent EU response to the challenges faced by its partner countries. 5) Faced with the general trend towards

fragmentation, sectoralisation, "departmentalisation and the difficulty in coordinating the provision of a large number of services" (as Lourdes Bermejo said in her article), it is important to opt decisively to strengthen inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms and open spaces for multi-dimensional dialogue (links), especially the commitment to multi-level, multi-actor, horizontal and partner-to-partner dialogue. 6) Flexibility and agility in the response, mobilising Latin American and European expertise at the highest level through triangular and bi-regional cooperation mechanisms, appropriately combining the range of tools available (study visits, public technical assistance, consultancies, forums, networking, etc.). 7) In the current context of COVID-19, and since it is a pandemic, logically more than ever the priority is to protect people, save lives and ensure the chain of care ("people first").

Based on this way of doing things, EUROsociAL has managed to create a platform for the exchange of learning and knowledge made up of thousands of European and Latin American officials and it has been able to accompany hundreds of public policy reforms that generate social cohesion in the region, many of them high impact. Based on these premises and this way of doing things, EUROsociAL has built up a relational capital of trust robust enough to support the gestation of new social contracts in some countries (for example, the current ongoing accompaniment of the constitutional process in Chile and the provision of good European practices for social dialogue to the government of Costa Rica through the Economic and Social Councils). Based on these lessons and with this accumulated know-how, a comprehensive response to COVID-19 with a gender approach is being achieved, for example in Central America through the Social Recovery, Reconstruction and Resilience Plan at both regional and national levels. With this approach, we are facilitating the formation of broad regional consensuses, for example, the recently approved Inter-American Legal Framework regarding the Right of Access to Information (from the OAS) or the recent approval by the Plenary Assembly of the Ibero-American Judicial Summit of an international agreement on access to justice for vulnerable people based on the 100 Brasilia Rules. These are just some examples.

However, the narrative of the previous lessons and suggestions on the HOW from the EUROsociAL experience and the good results achieved does not capture or make visible an aspect that is possibly the really essential point (something which is usually invisible to the eyes as Saint-Exupéry said). What is, actually, essential has to do with the logic of care, with the care and respect with which EUROsociAL addresses the dialogue processes, with the attitude towards the transversality and closeness shown, it has to do with the availability and flexibility to give suitable responses to each country and institution, with the commitment of the teams, with the continuity over time that ends up generating the necessary trust and results in cooperation that is highly valued by the friendly countries of Latin America (to the entire EUROsociAL+ dream team, thank you!)

Weave, coordinate, complement, exchange, coordinate, discuss. Discuss. Discuss. Strengthen ties of belonging, spread trust, build social cohesion. Twenty-first century cooperation. In praise of links. Let's not forget them in these times when we have to comply with social distancing.





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