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CONCEPT PAPER

Regular meeting of the

Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI)

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(Prepared by the Chair of CIDI with support from   
the Department of Social Inclusion of the Secretariat for Access to Rights and Equity)

TOPIC: **STRENGTHENING SOCIAL SAFETY NETS FOR AN INCLUSIVE, RESILIENT, AND SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY FROM A HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH: Recognizing and addressing the differentiated impact of crises on women and vulnerable groups in the Americas**

1. **Background and rationale**

The COVID-19 pandemic has both revealed and deepened structural inequalities while simultaneously generating new problems globally. The last two years have been defined by high levels of uncertainty caused by a severe health and economic crisis, the grave consequences of which pose unavoidable challenges for states.

Researchers in the area have warned that the consequences of the pandemic have endangered the significant progress that the region had achieved through decades of fighting poverty and strengthening social protection systems, understood as the range of policies intended to guarantee basic economic, social, and cultural rights such as health, education, work, adequate food, and social security.[[1]](#footnote-1)/ At the same time, the new socioeconomic situation seriously threatens states’ ability to advance toward achieving the goals set in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.[[2]](#footnote-2)/

Social protection constitutes an “indispensable mechanism for delivering support to individuals during the crisis.”[[3]](#footnote-3)/ As noted by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), social protection responses must link the short-term measures needed to address the most acute manifestations of the crisis (universal income guarantees; universal access to testing, vaccines, and medical care; basic services and housing; adequate food; education) with other medium- and long-term measures (universal health, labor inclusion strategies during the recovery period) aimed at guaranteeing the exercise of people’s rights by strengthening the welfare state and providing universal social protection.[[4]](#footnote-4)/

To deal with the pandemic, the region’s governments have had to react quickly and have made use of existing social programs, adjusting them to meet the needs of the most vulnerable sectors. These include: social assistance programs (expansion of cash transfers, specific temporary bonuses), programs and initiatives intended to mitigate the drop in informal workers’ incomes, food distribution programs, housing service subsidies, reduced and/or more flexible working hours and/or remote work, and other efforts.[[5]](#footnote-5)/

Accordingly, examining how the pandemic has affected specific groups will help increase the effectiveness of containment efforts and minimize the potential negative impacts. This meeting is proposed to address the progress made and challenges remaining in the implementation of social protection networks and systems aimed at an inclusive, resilient, and sustainable post-COVID-19 recovery with a differentiated focus on women and vulnerable groups.

The Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM/OAS) has published several articles setting out the basic reasons for recognizing the pandemic’s differentiated impact on women’s lives.[[6]](#footnote-6)/ This underscores the importance of implementing deliberate policies and programs to address gender gaps and inequalities that undermine access to opportunities and negatively affect women’s autonomy to freely exercise their basic human rights. This is also the case for vulnerable groups, which are often more harshly affected by crises and are the main beneficiaries of social safety nets.

Social protection instruments must assume a multisectoral approach in the assistance they provide, in the understanding that the COVID-19 outbreak will have different long-term social and economic repercussions for each individual. In order to effectively address the problems faced by the region’s women and other vulnerable groups, social protection that takes those differentiated impacts into account is essential. To that end, states are called upon to: design or expand cash transfer programs that can transform gender relations; implement in-kind assistance services for sexual and reproductive health care; ensure that social protection programs address the risks of gender-based violence; and promote and support the implementation of gender-sensitive, family-friendly, and other kinds of measures by governments and businesses.[[7]](#footnote-7)/

Thus, governments and international organizations face the challenge of implementing policies that guarantee equity in mitigating and recovering from the crisis, and this could represent an opportunity for ensuring that they are appropriate and effective in that they respond to the needs of the population as a whole, recognizing its differentiated impacts in terms of gender, identity, socioeconomic level, ethnicity, race, and other factors.[[8]](#footnote-8)/

The pandemic also offers an opportunity for the region’s governments to explore, review, redesign, and expand their social protection policies—or even to innovate by proposing new responses—in order to build and consolidate comprehensive systems that will enable our societies to recover and to better prepare to face future health, economic, and environmental crises.[[9]](#footnote-9)/

1. **Purpose of the meeting**

This CIDI meeting will provide the member states with an opportunity to discuss actionable priorities for advancing regional cooperation to strengthen social protection comprehensively and sustainably as a fundamental strategy for addressing persistent social needs in the Americas, including those emerging as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The meeting will examine initiatives that can provide for specific actions to improve the use of institutional crisis-response capacities, support the design of increasingly effective social protection policies, and undertake results-oriented programs and interventions capable of strengthening active social safety nets in order to guarantee social well-being, particularly among the most vulnerable populations: women, indigenous and Afrodescendent peoples, persons with disabilities, older persons, and others.

Presentations by the government authorities and experts attending the meeting will focus on providing an overview of the role that social safety nets have played in mitigating the effects of crises, as well as possible strategies for concerted action to expand their coverage and sustainability from a human rights and gender equality perspective.

Member states will share good practices, public policy innovations, and initiatives and instruments that have proved useful in dealing with the crisis, highlighting lessons learned during the process; they will identify the gaps and needs detected in those areas; and they will share opportunities for solidarity-based cooperation to promote social development at the regional level.

1. **Relevance to the OAS General Secretariat and its mandates**

The topics proposed for this meeting are aligned with those addressed by Working Group 2 (“Social protection systems that lead to social development, through the reduction of poverty and inequality and expand social protection with a comprehensive approach”) established within the framework of CIDI’s social development ministerial process,[[10]](#footnote-10) which is currently coordinating a virtual training and experience-exchange workshop on “Policies and innovations in social protection to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

In addition, one of the strategic lines for integral development set out in the 2016-2020 OAS Comprehensive Strategic Plan, adopted by the member states on October 31, 2016, through General Assembly resolution AG/RES. 1 (LI-E/16), is “fostering social inclusion with equity to contribute to sustainable development in the Americas.” Thus, this meeting is intended to contribute to the fulfillment of one of the strategic objectives set out in that plan (7.2): “Contribute to strengthening member states’ capacities in the area of inclusive, equitable development.”

The resolution **“Advancing hemispheric initiatives on integral development: Promoting resilience”** [AG/RES. 2967 (LI-O/21)], adopted by the General Assembly at its fifty-first regular session, held from November 10 to 12, 2021, encourages member states to “continue strengthening their social protection systems toward universal access in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and take into account the needs of low-income and vulnerable populations that have been the worst affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, to streamline and update their social protection databases and statistics for measuring multidimensional poverty as appropriate, in order to achieve social inclusion consistent with the new reality.” It also urges member states to actively participate in the Working Groups and in the implementation ofthe activities organized by the Secretariat for Access to Rights and Equity in pursuit of the implementation of the 2019 Plan of Action of Guatemala ([CIDI/REMDES/doc.6/19 rev. 3](http://scm.oas.org/IDMS/Redirectpage.aspx?class=XLVIII.4%20CIDI/REMDES/doc&classNum=6&lang=e)).

1. **Meeting structure**

The meeting will bring together various speakers to explore the main challenges and opportunities involved in leveraging and bolstering social safety nets in the Americas and to discuss the formulation and implementation of more inclusive and accessible responses from a human rights and gender equity perspective. The member states will have the opportunity to participate in an interactive dialogue led by the Chair of CIDI.

**PART ONE:** Remarks by high-level social development authorities, with presentations limited to a maximum of seven minutes.

* Panama: Ministry of Social Development, Pro Tempore Chair of the Central American Social Integration Council (CIS).
* Barbados: Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs.
* Uruguay: Ministry of Social Development.

Guiding questions for the high authorities’ remarks:

1. What are the main challenges your country faces in closing social protection gaps?
2. What opportunities for joint work or technical support could your country offer for regional cooperation in this area?

**PART TWO:** Technical panel session in which participants will initially have a maximum of five minutes to present their main ideas and then two minutes to answer focus questions formulated by the moderator.

After the question-and-answer session with the guest speakers, the delegations will be invited to share best practices, needs, potential challenges and opportunities, and/or specific demands for hemispheric cooperation in this area.

**MODERATOR:** Ms. Maricarmen Plata, Secretary for Access to Rights and Equity, OAS

**Guest panelists:**

* Mexico: Secretariat of Well-being and Chair of Working Group 1 for the implementation of the Plan of Action of Guatemala within the Inter-American Committee on Social Development (CIDES)
* Dominican Republic: Social Policy Coordination Cabinet, Chair of CIDES Working Group 2, and host of the Fifth Meeting of Ministers and High Authorities of Social Development (V REMDES) to be held in 2022
* Representative from ECLAC

Guiding questions for remarks:

1. What are the most important challenges and priority areas for action in the post-pandemic phase?
2. ECLAC: From a regional perspective, what role have social safety nets played in mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 crisis?
3. Mexico and the Dominican Republic: How do you think the OAS could contribute to strengthening social protection in the Americas?
4. **Meeting outcomes**

The meeting is expected to:

1. Showcase information on the main trends, challenges, and specific opportunities for OAS member states to expand and improve their efforts toward universal social protection capable of providing prompt and timely responses to crises and disasters.
2. Identify priorities for action and opportunities for solidarity-based cooperation to strengthen protection networks in order to drive development and social inclusion across the region.
3. To encourage member states to share good practices, policies, and programs with positive results that address the shortcomings in access, coverage, and sustainability of social protection systems in the Americas, with special attention to the most vulnerable.
4. Raise the member states’ awareness of the differentiated impact of health and socioeconomic crises on women, and promote human rights through gender equality in the protection measures adopted by governments.

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1. . ECLAC (2020), press release. Available at: <https://www.cepal.org/en/topics/protection-social-security>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. . ECLAC (2020), [COVID-19 Special Report No. 3](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45527/5/S2000325_es.pdf), “The social challenge in times of COVID-19.” Available at: [https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45544/1/S2000324\_en.pdf](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45527/5/S2000325_es.pdf).

   Social protection systems feature prominently in the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/). (SDGs). SDG target 1.3 calls for the implementation of “nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. . International Labour Organization (2020), “Plug social protection gaps in developing countries to prevent future crises, ILO says.” Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\_744708/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_744713/lang--es/index.htm). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. . ECLAC (2020), “The social challenge in times of COVID-19.” Available at: [https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/45544-social-challenge-times-covid-19](https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/45527-desafio-social-tiempos-covid-19). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. . ECLAC (2021), “Social protection tools for addressing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Latin American experience” (in Spanish). Available at: [https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/47412/1/S2100613\_es.pdf](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjUyJDTr631AhVgrJUCHQPHAZEQFnoECAkQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Frepositorio.cepal.org%2Fbitstream%2Fhandle%2F11362%2F47412%2F1%2FS2100613_es.pdf&usg=AOvVaw1ymCsbi3pF-jdKuVgDRZt7). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. . CIM-OAS (2020-2021), publication series “COVID-19 in Women’s Lives.” Available at: [https://www.oas.org/en/cim/COVID-19.asp](https://www.oas.org/es/cim/COVID-19.asp). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. . UNICEF (2020), “Gender-responsive social protection during COVID-19: Technical note.” Available at: [https://www.unicef.org/documents/gender-responsive-social-protection-during-covid-19](https://www.unicef.org/media/68641/file/Gender-responsive-social-protection-during-covid-19-SP.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. . SARE-OAS (2020), “Practical guide for inclusive and rights-based responses to COVID-19 in the Americas” (in Spanish), in which Alejandra is the lead for the first chapter, “Women, gender equality, and COVID-19.” Available at: <https://www.oas.org/es/sadye/publicaciones/GUIA_SPA.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. . Nora Lustig and Mariano Tommasi, ECLAC (2020), “COVID-19 and social protection of poor and vulnerable groups in Latin America: a conceptual framework.” Available at: [https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/46939-covid-19-and-social-protection-poor-and-vulnerable-groups-latin-america](https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/46836-covid-19-la-proteccion-social-grupos-pobres-vulnerables-america-latina-un-marco). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. . Created in 2019 for the implementation of the Plan of Action of Guatemala as agreed on by the Fourth Meeting of Ministers and High Authorities of Social Development (REMDES), March 2019, Guatemala City. See: [https://scm.oas.org/IDMS/Redirectpage.aspx?class=XLVIII.4%20CIDI/REMDES/doc&classNum=6&lang=e](https://scm.oas.org/IDMS/Redirectpage.aspx?class=XLVIII.4%20CIDI/REMDES/doc&classNum=6&lang=s). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)