

Coalition of Latin American and Caribbean cities against Racism, Discrimination and Xenophobia

Regional Perspective Paper

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Cities across the Latin America and the Caribbean: overview and key issues

The Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC region) comprises significant geographical, social, cultural and economic diversity, with about 640 million inhabitants¹ and a land area of more than 20,808,000 km². In the region there are different levels of economic and social development, with considerable variation in growth trajectories and the social policies implemented by different governments.

According to data provided by the World Bank and the Center of Distribution, Labor and Social Affairs (CEDLAS), "Latin America and the Caribbean is the second most unequal region in the world (Gini coefficient 52.9), just below the Sub-Saharan Africa (56.5) and from some distance followed by Asia (44.7) and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (34.7)". According to the Economic Commission for Latin America of the United Nations (ECLAC)'s *Social Panorama of Latin America 2014*, "there has been a stagnation in the decline in poverty: the percentage of people with incomes below the poverty line was 28.1 in 2013, as in 2012, and is projected to drop just one decimal in 2014".²

Currently, according to the findings of ECLAC, "in a scenario of possible reduction of tax resources, greater efforts are needed to underpin such policies, creating a solid foundation in order to fulfill the commitments of the post-2015 development agenda."

This situation of economic decline presents particular difficulties for cities as it is accompanied by numerous challenges, including: growing economic and social inequalities; increasing numbers of people living below the poverty line; high maternal and infant mortality rates; outdated sanitation systems in need of modernization; unequal access to housing, education and health services; and gender inequality in employment and political representation. It is therefore extremely important that governments build more inclusive, tolerant and democratic spaces to advance social cohesion. The non-respect of Human Rights also remains a serious challenge in the region.

The LAC Coalition: advancing understanding and city-level action for inclusion

Latin America and the Caribbean is home to between 33 and 40 million Indigenous Peoples, divided into about 400 ethnic groups, each with its own language, social organization, world view, economic system and production model adapted to its ecosystem. The Afro-descendant population across the region is estimated at 150 million.

¹ United Nations data, 2010.

² Social Panorama of Latin America, Economic Commission for Latin America of the United Nations (ECLAC), 2014.
<http://www.cepal.org/en/publications/type/social-panorama-latin-america>

Ethnic and racial discrimination is mixed with xenophobic sentiments. These feelings arise with reference to migrants, especially if the migrant is not white and comes from countries or regions characterized by a greater proportion of indigenous and Afro-descendant populations.

From the time of the conquest, indigenous and Afro-descendant populations have lived in economic and social conditions of relative exclusion with limited cultural recognition and access to decision-making processes.

In the framework of the General Assembly Meeting of the Coalition of Latin American and Caribbean Cities against Racism, Discrimination and Xenophobia, held in the city of Moron, Argentina in 2010, the Coalition decided to launch an investigation into the situation of anti-discrimination policies in member cities, in relation to the Coalition's 10 Point Plan of Action.

The research was carried out by the following selection of member cities: Belo Horizonte (Brazil), Bogota (Colombia), Montevideo (Uruguay), Quito (Ecuador) and San José de Costa Rica (Costa Rica). The development of the resulting document was funded by UNESCO and coordinated by FLACSO, Uruguay, conducted at the request of the Municipality of Montevideo, as Coalition lead city.

The research focused on three specific communities: People of African Descent, Indigenous People and migrants.

The research highlighted that the problem has different dimensions, some structural, manifesting as various forms of discrimination from colonial times to the present day, whose historical roots continue to manifest themselves through material and symbolic forms of domination. Within contemporary discrimination, discourses often consider the white race as superior to all other racial and ethnic groups. This is linked to a tendency to maintain and normalize discriminatory practices amongst the rest of the population, to the extent that in some cases people come to deny their ancestry in order to feel included by dominant social groups.

This situation of injustice and socio-economic inequality is repeated throughout history and influences cultural models and discriminatory attitudes in the collective imagination. In other cases we find that the invisibility and denial of diversity and plurality conceal a hidden form of intolerance, with these issues not being taken into account by governments when designing public policies.

In order to counteract these tendencies, active policies to address the perspectives and needs of populations facing discrimination are driven by social organizations, which have played a very important role. However, it is necessary that social organizations join forces with politicians and government actors.

The study of comparative politics concludes that beyond the progress that has been made there is much work to be done, especially since research has brought to light a close relationship between poverty and the lack of opportunities. This therefore reflects a structural problem. The subtle forms it takes, incorporated into everyday practices, makes it very difficult to fully understand and overcome prejudices.

Cities' advances in the design of public policies are yet to fully respond to the challenges of discrimination. Cities responses to these challenges are also very varied, as illustrated in the cases studied under the 10 points of the Coalition's Action Plan. It is necessary to monitor these policies in order to understand the commitment and political will of governments, especially given that in addressing such complex challenges, achieving continuity in the long-term is what makes this action effective.

In the LAC region there are very rich experiences and valuable lessons that should be shared amongst Coalition member cities, through forums, workshops for representatives of local governments, technicians and all those who have a prominent role in the design role and implementation of public policies in order to exchange best practice, learn from successes and failures. As recommended in the aforementioned study, "a

continuous exchange between engaged actors in the subject, could generate a collective intelligence, available to all members of the network, as a way to respond to the situation in a participatory and sustained manner, based on the generation and collectivization of knowledge that comes from practice and interaction”.

There must be a review of the Plan of Action, with indicators established to enable the Coalition to visualize achievements so far as a guide for further progress.

The LAC Coalition in action: recent developments

In September 2015, the Fourth General Conference of the Coalition of Latin American and Caribbean against Racism, Discrimination and Xenophobia, was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The conference was held jointly by the Municipality of Montevideo - as Coalition lead city with the current responsibilities of the Presidency of the Executive Committee and the Technical Coordination of the network -, the municipalities of Moron and Quilmes, and the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Montevideo.

The Conference also featured the participation of the President of the European Coalition of Cities against Racism (ECCAR), together with the Mercociudades Human Rights Commission and the, and was organized with the support of the International Center for Human Rights, with the sponsorship of UNESCO, the Latin American and Caribbean Committee for Social Science (CLACSO), and the Ibero-American Network of Agencies and Organizations against Discrimination (RIOOD).

The Fourth General Conference agreed on the strategic importance of strengthening the network as regional device to develop, enhance and improve policies to combat racism, discrimination and xenophobia at the level of our cities, as well to strengthen collaboration with other world regions in the framework of the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities - ICCAR.

The principal themes discussed were: the development of local and regional actions against racism, discrimination and xenophobia and the promotion of human rights, with emphasis on the situation of People of African Descent, migrants and Indigenous Peoples; and institutional strengthening of the Coalition as a mechanism for coordination and learning among cities and partner institutions.

During the conference various topics were discussed, emphasizing the need to deepen the commitments and strengthen cooperation between member cities, the result of which is the work being done today.

Cities have become major centers of ethnic and cultural mixing and are home to a growing number of foreign nationals from all over the world looking for freedom, work, knowledge and to exchange opportunities. However, cities are the places where the daily observation of differences can give rise to competitiveness, conflicts of interests and fears that feed the emergence of discriminatory ideologies and attitudes.

Racism, discrimination and xenophobia consolidate and aggravate inequalities within society. Given the deep roots of racial prejudice inherited from the history and persistence of discriminatory practices in the cities of Latin America and the Caribbean, we must consider the fight against all forms of discrimination as a long-term effort. It is a task that requires the constant revision of strategies and inclusive policies along with coordinated efforts at the international, regional, national and local levels.

Mobilization at regional and global level: future perspectives for the LAC Coalition

Recently, Montevideo, as LAC Coalition lead city, along with the cities of Medellin, Colombia, Mexico City, Mexico, and Quito, Ecuador, presented to the convening of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) a project of the LAC Coalition, which was approved. This project will enable the Coalition to work towards the

long-term goal of providing a joint program of work for local authorities at regional level that allows them to more effectively implement measures against discrimination, racism and xenophobia.

As specific objectives, the Coalition will develop a methodology for assessing the impact of public policies, including the creation of targets and indicators, the systematization of joint and local experiences on key issues, and the generation, coordination and implementation of municipal regulations against racism, discrimination and xenophobia.

The proposed regional mechanism constitutes a more efficient solution than a national intervention, given the breadth of opportunities afforded through the interaction between cities participating in the project. In this regard, the participation of Montevideo - as Coalition lead city - and three further Coalition members (Medellin, Mexico City and Quito) represents an important step in obtaining results through regional level contribution.

The Coalition is committed to advancing this spirit of collaboration and exchange, at regional and international level. Organized by the City of Montevideo, the Uruguayan Embassy in Colombia and UNESCO, the Latin American and Caribbean Coalition is organizing a meeting on 15 October 2016 with Mayors of the region in the framework of the World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders (5th United Cities and Local Governments - UCLG Forum) in Bogotá, Colombia. Participants include Mayors from different cities of Latin America.

As a further illustration of the mobilization of the Coalition to advance international action through the ICCAR platform, UNESCO and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, with the support of the municipalities of Quito, Ecuador, and Montevideo, Uruguay, are organizing an ICCAR panel at the Habitat III Conference to feature perspectives from ICCAR mayors, together with city actors from diverse urban contexts around the world, addressing key themes including the promotion of cultural diversity, the inclusion of migrants and indigenous peoples in cities, the role of youth in advancing inclusive urban development and the potential of data innovation for the promotion of urban inclusion.

Cities are also laboratories for the generation of new forms of urban citizenship and coexistence. They are therefore ideal places for action to combat racism, discrimination and xenophobia, and key sites in the effective implementation of the various instruments adopted by states. Creating a culture of equal treatment and non-discrimination among its inhabitants is amongst the main challenges of public policy. It is essential to deepen human rights policies to ensure the full enjoyment of basic rights by all citizens. Local governments should strengthen all measures and institutional mechanisms to protect fundamental rights, working together with civil society towards building more inclusive, tolerant and sustainable cities.

The International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities - ICCAR has a special role to play in this task, since its members are cities – the level of government closest to citizens, who know better than anyone the needs and demands of the population.

For all Coalitions and for the LAC Coalition in particular, we must encourage city governments to design public policies that promote the acceptance of diversity amongst citizens, the achievement of collective welfare, coexistence in peace, greater social cohesion, and "the right to the city" for all citizens.