



**“ONLINE HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE: IMPACTS AND CHALLENGES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CRISIS
IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN”**

Date: Thursday 10 September 2020
from 5:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. (UTC+2)

CONCEPT NOTE

The world is experiencing an unprecedented in the last century health, human and economic crisis that keeps evolving. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, economies are closing and paralysed and societies are entering in more or less severe quarantines. Although it is not known how long the crisis will last or what form the recovery might take, the faster the response, the less the negative effects will be.

Policy measures to address the crisis are constantly changing. Beyond any predictive model, governments are taking actions to address the crisis based on its progression and complexity. In some cases, the health crisis has acquired elements of a political crisis. Moreover, the lack of protection for the poorest segments of society and the difficulties they face in obtaining essential and basic goods have already led to social disruptions.

The economic measures adopted to deal with the crisis have been insufficient. Governments have become an indispensable actor to intervene with their public policies, not only in health care, whose systems have shown serious shortcomings, but also in economic and social sectors in order to reactivate the economy, the employment as well as the most affected sectors such as Small and Medium Enterprises, tourism industry and food production. The Education Sector has been severely impacted. More than 800 million children have interrupted their schooling and distance education cannot and will not completely replace face-to-face learning.

In Latin America and the Caribbean the impact of the crisis has been dramatic. According to data from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the region will see a 9.1% decrease in gross domestic product (GDP) in 2020. According to the same report, the fall in economic activity is such that by the end of 2020 the level of GDP per capita in Latin America and the Caribbean will be similar to that observed in 2010, resulting in a 10-year decline in per capita income levels. (Special Report COVID-19 N° 5 of 15 July 2020, “Facing the growing effects of COVID-19 for a recovery with equality: new projections”).

In social terms, the following problems stand out: weak and fragmented health systems, which do not guarantee the universal access necessary to face the coronavirus health crisis. The disruption of activities in educational institutions will have significant effects on learning, especially for the most vulnerable. Education facilities also provide food security and care for many children, allowing their parents to work. The suspension of classes will have an impact beyond education on issues like nutrition, care and participation of parents (especially women) in the labour market. In addition, there are disparities in access to digital devices and broadband Internet

between countries, urban and rural populations, genders, populations that do or do not speak the official language, and between populations with or without disabilities. Given the economic and social inequalities in the region, the effects of unemployment will disproportionately affect the poor as well as the vulnerable middle-income class. The crisis is likely to increase informal employment as a survival strategy. In 2018, 53.1 per cent of the workers in Latin America and the Caribbean were working in the informal sector (ILO, 2018). Poor families are likely to send their children into the labour market, which will increase child labour rates. The ILO estimates that 7.3% of children aged 5 to 17 (around 10.5 million children) in the region are currently working. Due to the direct and indirect effects of the pandemic, the current rates of extreme poverty (11.0 per cent) and poverty (30.3 per cent) are very likely to increase further in the short term.

Under these conditions, governments, international cooperation organizations and civil society are acting to address the urgent needs created by those issues. In the face of this highly complex world scenario, reflections are emerging in each of these areas. The most comprehensive questions address "normality" as the world that we knew before the pandemic and that today raise an infinite number of uncertainties about how the world will be shaped by the effects of this crisis.

The biggest challenge is the future. UNESCO considers it essential to contribute to the reflection on CHALLENGES AND POST-PANDEMIC ALTERNATIVES.

OBJETIVES

A) To bring together in an interactive dialogue senior panelists who, because of their knowledge, scientific and moral authority and leadership, can offer analysis and suggestions for public policies to address the critical problems faced by Latin American and Caribbean countries with a vision for the future.

B) To emphasize key issues such as: reducing social inequality, boosting employment, serving the most vulnerable, maintaining social cohesion and recovering health and well-being.

C) To invite reflection on the social transformations that the pandemic will cause, with emphasis on a positive vision for the region.

METHODOLOGY

To give everyone the opportunity to speak, each intervention will be limited to a maximum of 7 minutes. Guests will have the opportunity to speak via the platform's chat.

The moderator will identify the panelists who will answer the chat questions.