

The challenges of equality for Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and diaspora women

The current situation of Afro-descendant women in Latin America and the Caribbean shows the persistence of deep inequalities regarding other social groups. They remain ignored when defining policies compared to the rest of the population, they are underrepresented in the decision-making processes and they see their rights and that of their communities to live lives free of violence more violated. This is compounded by the absence or weakness in the official statistics of the countries, a situation that hinders the development of gender equality policies that could transform and pay off the historical debt of the States and societies of the region with this population.

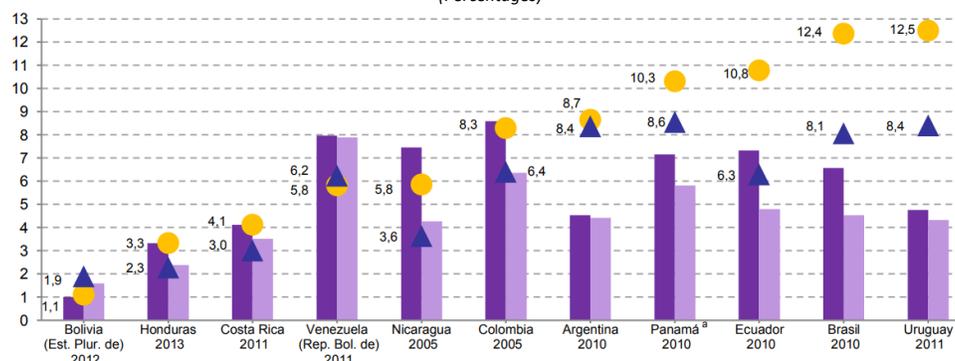
The average total incomes of Afro-descendant women, estimated at 1.9 poverty lines, barely exceeds the poverty vulnerability line defined by ECLAC (1.8 poverty lines); which in the recessive context that the region currently lives shows the probability of an imminent fall in poverty.

Young Afro-descendant women between 18 and 24 years of age represent the group with the lowest tertiary education enrolment rates in six countries in the region (Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Uruguay and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), after the Afro-descendant males. At the same time, among persons with a higher level of education (eight or more years of schooling), they are placed, after indigenous men and women, at the lower extreme of the income scale, which shows that the achievements in educational matter are rewarded in the labor market in an asymmetrical way due to ethno-racial and gender biases.

The group most affected by unemployment in five of the 11 countries in the region with available data is made up of Afro-descendant women, and in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, they are at least twice as many as non-Afro-descendant men in this same situation (Graphic 1).

Graphic 1

Latin America (11 countries): unemployment rate among the population aged 15 years and older, by gender and ethno-racial status, last available year
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of special processing of census microdatabases.

Notes: The non-Afrodescendant population does not include people who self-identify as indigenous or whose ethnic-racial status is unknown.

Afro-descendant women, along with the indigenous women are located in lower-value and less recognized branches of production in the labor market, as is the case of paid domestic work, which employs between 13 and 21% of the total Afro-descendant women over 15 years old in countries such as Brazil, Costa Rica and Ecuador. Afro-descendant women, along with the indigenous women are located in lower-value and less recognized branches of production in the labor market, as is the case of paid domestic work, which employs between 13 and 21% of the total Afro-descendant women over 15 years old in countries such as Brazil, Costa Rica and Ecuador. They also present lower rates of affiliation to a pension system than non-Afro-descendant men and women for all

countries with data (Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay), which exposes them to lower degrees of social protection and greater vulnerability, mainly during old age.

The observed differences in maternal mortality ratio attest to the fact that the ethno-racial status affects the physical autonomy of women in a decisive way. In Brazil, the maternal mortality ratio of Afro-descendant women is 1.4 times higher than that of non-Afro-descendants; while, in Colombia and Ecuador, this is superior to the national average in 2.3 and 4 times, respectively. Ecuador, in addition, is the country in the region that presents the highest maternity rates among the young Afro-descendants: a quarter of teenagers between 15 and 19 are mothers in this country. It is followed by Nicaragua, Venezuela and Colombia, where about one fifth of the Afro-descendants girls have had children.

At the same time, racist and gender-based violence exposes Afro-descendant women to higher levels of vulnerability in the different areas of their lives. In Uruguay, the levels of violence suffered by Afro-descendant women in the educational sphere are overt twice those observed among non-Afro-descendant women. In Brazil, homicides of black women observed a rise of about 54% between 2003 and 2013, while the figure for white women perceived a decline of almost 10% in the same period.

Political violence against women, a patriarchal expression that seeks to perpetuate the concentration of power and hierarchical relations in the public sphere, is evident in recent years and acts seeking to stop the leadership of Afro-descendant women, obstructing their social and political action. The persecutions, threats and assassinations of black women occupying elective positions in Brazil, or social leaders in Colombia are recent examples of this phenomenon, which most directly affects those women working at the local level.

This is particularly serious given that, in seven of the countries with the largest Afro-descendant population in Latin America, there is a low presence of Afro-descendant women in national parliaments, which goes from their absolute absence in Colombia, Costa Rica and Uruguay to a maximum of 3.7% in Ecuador in the year 2013.

The study “Mujeres afrodescendientes en América Latina y el Caribe. Deudas de igualdad” offers evidence that will allow progress towards transformative policies that account for one of the great challenges of the 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean: the achievement of gender equality in an intersectional perspective, that recognizes and values the existing ethno-racial diversity in the region. The study also recognizes that, despite the complex discriminations they experience, these women are agents of their history, and that with their daily struggles against injustice and inequality they have played a fundamental role in the processes of national formation and contribute in a substantive way to the development of their communities and collectives.

Recommendations for transformative public policies

- Advance in the incorporation of the ethno-racial self-identification questions in all national statistics, making it possible to document the situation of Afro-descendant women.
- Implement concrete measures for the sustained inclusion of Afro-descendant women in formal employment, which should also allow specific progress in the legal protection of paid domestic workers in the region, so as to guarantee their social protection and their right to a dignified old age.
- To define priority interventions in the health field given the real problems affecting Afro-descendant women in different contexts.
- Invest in policies that promote the inclusion and participation of Afro-descendant women in decision-making spaces at all levels of the State, guaranteeing both their physical integrity and that of their communities.

Without gender equality, sustainable development is neither development nor sustainable

ECLAC Division for Gender Affairs

<http://www.cepal.org/en/work-areas/gender-affairs>

<http://oig.cepal.org/en>

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