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Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean Background Guide 2026

Written by Noah Escobar Estling, Lillian Newton, Lilia Stefanía Aguilar Medina, and Roberto Israel Terán Duchicela, with support from Steven Vanhulle



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13570 Grove Dr., Suite 294 • Maple Grove, MN 55311
www.nmun.org • info@nmun.org • 612.353.5649

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2026 National Model United Nations New York Conference (NMUN•NY)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Your committee's work is facilitated by volunteer staffers. This year's committee staff are: Director Lilia Stefanía Aguilar Medina and Assistant Director Noah Escobar Estling (Conference A), and Director Roberto Israel Terán Duchicela and Assistant Director Lillian Newton (Conference B). Lilia graduated with a double degree in Law and International Relations from Universidad San Francisco de Quito. She is currently working as a judicial aide to a judge in the National Court of Justice of Ecuador. Noah is originally from Southern California and now lives in Washington D.C. They studied International Relations and Economics at university and previously worked in civil rights and foreign policy non profits. Roberto studies Law at Universidad San Francisco de Quito and currently works at Bustamante Fabara, specializing in corporate M&A Law. Lillian recently graduated with an MA in Security Studies from Georgetown University and previously earned her BS in National Security from the University of New Haven. The preparation of these materials was supported by Under-Secretaries-General Ashlee Ann Rolheiser (Conference A) and Karla Paola Chávez (Conference B) with contributions by Under-Secretary-General for Conference Management Gamaliel Perez (Conference A).

The topics on the agenda for this committee are:

1. Combating Food Insecurity and Malnutrition in All its Forms
2. Achieving Universal Health Coverage

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to explore your Member State's policies in depth and use the bibliography to further your knowledge on these topics. In preparation for the conference, each delegation should submit a Position Paper by 11:59 PM ET on 1 March 2026 in accordance with the guidelines in the [Position Paper Guide](#) and the [NMUN•NY Position Papers website](#).

Two resources, available to download from the NMUN website, serve as essential instruments in preparing for the Conference and as a reference during committee sessions:

- The [NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide](#), which explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism, and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions.
- The [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#), which includes the long and short form of the rules, as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory [NMUN Conduct Expectations](#) on the NMUN website. They include the conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for this committee, please contact the Deputy Secretaries-General at dsg.ny@nmun.org.

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

Lilia Stefanía Aguilar Medina, Director
Noah Escobar Estling, Assistant Director
Conference A

Roberto Israel Terán Duchicela, Director
Lillian Newton, Assistant Director
Conference B



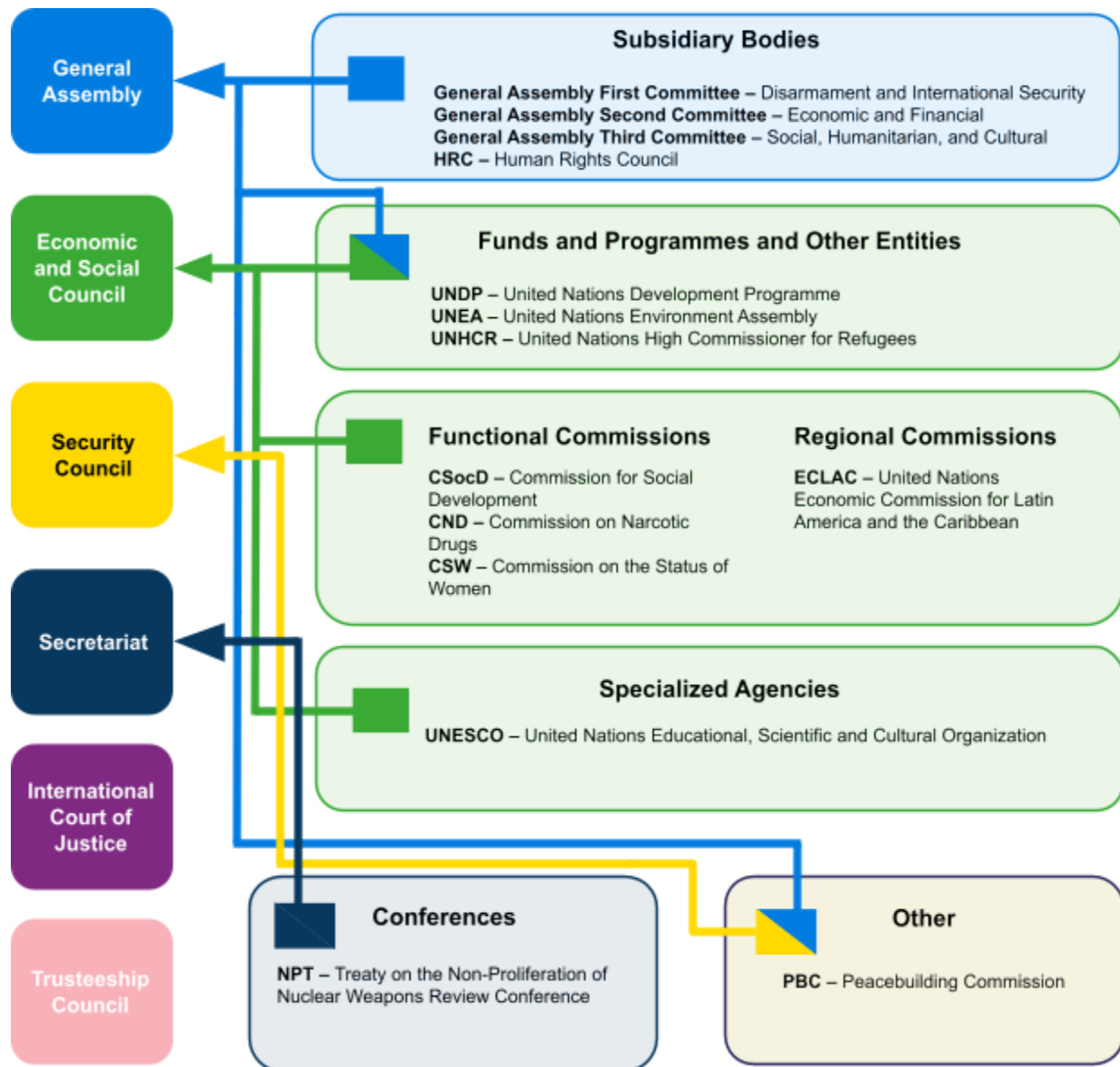
Table of Contents

United Nations System at NMUN-NY.....	1
Committee Overview.....	2
Introduction.....	2
Mandate, Functions, and Powers.....	3
Governance, Funding, and Structure.....	4
Bibliography.....	5
1. Combating Food Insecurity and Malnutrition in All Its Forms.....	8
Introduction.....	8
International and Regional Framework.....	9
Role of the International System.....	11
Improving Food Security and Nutritional Intake for Children and Infants.....	14
Strengthening Agricultural Trade and Accessibility.....	16
Conclusion.....	18
Further Research.....	18
Bibliography.....	19
2. Achieving Universal Health Coverage.....	25
Introduction.....	25
International and Regional Framework.....	26
Role of the International System.....	28
Ensuring Healthcare to Promote Sustainable Development.....	29
UHC in Rural and Indigenous Communities.....	31
Conclusion.....	33
Further Research.....	34
Bibliography.....	35



United Nations System at NMUN•NY

This diagram illustrates the United Nations system simulated at NMUN•NY. It shows where each committee “sits” within the system to demonstrate the reportage and relationships between entities. Examine the diagram alongside the Committee Overview to gain a clear picture of the committee’s position, purpose, and powers within the United Nations system.





Committee Overview

Introduction

As a regional commission, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) falls under the supervision of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).¹ In accordance with Article 68 of the *Charter of the United Nations* (1945), the Economic Commission for Latin America, or the Comisión Económica para América Latina (CEPAL), was established in 1948 by ECOSOC as one of five regional commissions in the United Nations system.² Within their regions, each commission works to foster greater cooperation amongst their Member States, particularly related to economic and social policy.³ Regional commissions play a crucial role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by providing the General Assembly with regional analyses on emerging socio-economic trends and developing roadmaps to implement their policy guidance.⁴

ECLAC's mission is to promote economic integration and coordinated regional development in Latin America.⁵ Originally confined to the Latin American region, ECLAC was renamed in 1984 to recognize its expanded role in the Caribbean sub-region.⁶ ECLAC's current agenda focuses on: sustainable transitions to accelerate the SDGs; impact assessments and social protections for specific populations and vulnerable groups, including youth, women, and disabled persons; eliminating food insecurity; resource distribution; and budgeting and finance for investment.⁷ To do so, ECLAC's methodology focuses on reducing inequalities to alleviate poverty and uses tools like annual economic surveys to conduct program evaluation and oversight.⁸ ECLAC's work supports Member States by conducting research, providing evidence-based policy recommendations, and augmenting the technical expertise of governments in the region.⁹

¹ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Mandate and Mission*. N.d.; New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *United Nations Handbook 2024-25*. 2024. pp. 177-178.

² United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945; United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Report of the First Session of the Economic Commission for Latin America (E/840/Rev.1)*. 1953.

³ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Mandate and Mission*. N.d.

⁴ United Nations Sustainable Development Group. *United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework*. 2019. p. 15.

⁵ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Mandate and Mission*. N.d.

⁶ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *75 years of ECLAC and ECLAC thinking: Origins and creation of ECLAC*. 2023; United Nations Economic and Social Council. *Composition, terms of reference and programme of work of the Economic Commission for Latin America (E/RES/1984/67)*. 1984. pp. 18-19.

⁷ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *About Economic Development*. N.d.; United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *About Social Development*. N.d.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *History of ECLAC*. N.d.; United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Subsidiary Bodies*. N.d.



Mandate, Functions, and Powers

ECLAC has worked with Member States to combat economic inequality and poor growth that exacerbate poverty in the region.¹⁰ ECLAC's recent efforts sought to balance economic growth with inclusive and sustainable green development by promoting strategic mineral extraction and renewable energy investments.¹¹ To address long-term economic underperformance, ECLAC has supported deepening economic integration by mobilizing resources to increase South-South trade flows.¹² ECLAC also functions as a think-tank conducting analytical research to frame global problems in a regional context to guide policy.¹³ ECLAC is required to produce an annual report to ECOSOC, which summarizes their major research efforts and provides Member States with recommendations for future ECOSOC draft resolutions.¹⁴

While the following list is not exhaustive, ECLAC's mandate can be summarized as follows:

- ECLAC will **generally**: make policy recommendations to Member States, associate members, and ECOSOC; initiate studies on emerging issues and evaluate policy effectiveness; collect, analyze, and distribute data through regularly published reports; advise governments on strategies to implement ECLAC programmes upon request; coordinate with other United Nations entities to improve synergies and reduce program redundancy.¹⁵
- ECLAC will **generally not**: act in an enforcement or compliance capacity; report to the Security Council or the General Assembly without prior consultation with ECOSOC; dictate specific steps that governments must take to implement their recommendations; intervene in a country without their permission; make recommendations on situations under consideration by the United Nations Security Council.¹⁶

¹⁰ United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa. *Powering sustainable growth through UN Regional Commissions*. 2025.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² United Nations Economic and Social Council. *Report of the ad hoc Committee on the proposal for an economic commission for Latin America (E/RES/106 (VI))*. 1948. p. 4; United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa. *Powering sustainable growth through UN Regional Commissions*. 2025.

¹³ Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data. *ECLAC - United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2025; United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Thirty-ninth session of ECLAC: What is ECLAC?*. 2022.

¹⁴ United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld Library. *UN Economic and Social Council Documentation*. 2025; United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/G.1403/Rev.6)*. 2008. p. 24.

¹⁵ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Mandate and Mission*. N.d.; United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/G.1403/Rev.6)*. 2008. pp. 5-8; United Nations, General Assembly. *Proposed programme budget for 2023 (A/RES/77/6 (Sect. 21))*. 2022.

¹⁶ Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System. *Review of Management and Administration in the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (JIU/REP/2020/4)*. 2020. pp. v-vi; United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/G.1403/Rev.6)*. 2008. pp. 5-8; United Nations, Security Council. *Relations with Other UN Organs*. N.d.; United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945.



ECLAC must coordinate with other United Nations entities or governments to accomplish its goals and implement its recommendations.¹⁷ Relevant actors include the International Labour Organization, the World Food Programme, and the World Health Organization.¹⁸ Each has worked with ECLAC in the last year to produce joint publications and hold conferences on post-pandemic sustainable recovery in the region.¹⁹

Governance, Funding, and Structure

The membership of ECLAC is made up of 46 Member States and 14 associate members; of the 46 Member States, 33 are countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 13 are countries outside of Latin America with significant cultural or economic ties to the region.²⁰ Associate member status is given to non-independent territories that exist within the region, primarily in the Caribbean.²¹ Regular sessions in ECLAC are held every two years.²² The Chairperson and other officers are elected each session from the representatives of the Commission.²³ Resolutions adopted by ECLAC require a simple majority to pass and are non-binding.²⁴ Each Member State is entitled to one vote, while associate members are limited to a participatory role and cannot vote in substantive matters.²⁵ The majority of its resolutions are adopted by consensus.²⁶ Funding for ECLAC is provided by the United Nations regular budget, but declining contributions have resulted in a greater dependence on extrabudgetary resources to supplement these gaps.²⁷ Liquidity and low reserves are significant constraints on ECLAC programming.²⁸

¹⁷ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)*. 2024.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/G.1403/Rev.6)*. 2008. p. 6; United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Thirty-ninth session of ECLAC: What is ECLAC?*. 2022.

²¹ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/G.1403/Rev.6)*. 2008. p. 6.

²² Ibid. p. 11.

²³ Ibid. p. 13.

²⁴ Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland. *The ECOSOC Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations Economic and Social Council*. 2021. p. 1.

²⁵ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/G.1403/Rev.6)*. 2008. pp. 18-19.

²⁶ United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld Library. *What does it mean when a decision is taken "by consensus"?*. 2025.

²⁷ Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System. *Review of Management and Administration in the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (JIU/REP/2020/4)*. 2020. pp. v-vi.

²⁸ Ibid. p. vi.



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https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/UN-Cooperation-Framework-Internal-Guidance-Final-June-2019_1.pdf



1. Combating Food Insecurity and Malnutrition in All Its Forms

"Lack of income to access a healthy and nutritious diet is among the main causes of hunger and food insecurity in Latin America and the Caribbean[,] in fact, this region has the most expensive healthy diet in the world."²⁹

Introduction

Food insecurity and malnutrition are deeply interconnected: when food access and quality decline, nutrient intake becomes unbalanced, heightening the risk of malnutrition.³⁰ Food insecurity arises from physical, economic, and social barriers that prevent individuals from consistently accessing sufficient, safe, and nutritious food.³¹ The 1996 World Food Summit defines food security as the consistent access to enough, safe, and healthy food to satisfy an individual's dietary needs and their well-being.³² Malnutrition, on the other hand, refers to an abnormal physiological condition resulting from inadequate, unbalanced, or excessive nutrient intake, encompassing both undernutrition (including stunting and wasting) and overnutrition (such as obesity and diet-related diseases).³³ Thus, food insecurity can directly lead to both undernutrition and obesity, as households struggle to access nutritious food or resort to cheaper, calorie-dense diets that lack essential nutrients.³⁴

Food insecurity and malnutrition remain pressing issues in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), where inflation and falling household incomes have eroded the affordability of healthy diets.³⁵ There has been progress regarding moderate or severe food insecurity, with a decrease of 8.2 percentage points to 25.2% or about 167 million people, between 2021 and 2024, but unequal food access persists.³⁶ Undernutrition continues to affect millions, while overweight and obesity are increasingly prevalent, particularly among children and adolescents.³⁷ In Latin America, 30.6% of children under 19 are overweight, while undernutrition still impacts 6.5% of the population.³⁸ For infants, only 62.3% of children under 23 months achieve minimum dietary diversity, meaning many lack the variety of foods essential for proper growth.³⁹ This dual burden of malnutrition, both undernutrition and obesity, reflects structural inequalities in food

²⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2025.

³⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023*. 2023. Chapter 2.

³¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025*. 2025. p. 203.

³² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *An Introduction to the Basic Concepts of Food Security*. 2008. p. 1.

³³ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025*. 2025. p. 178.

³⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023*. 2023. Chapter 2.

³⁵ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025*. 2025. pp. 81-90.

³⁶ Ibid. pp. 14-17.

³⁷ Espíndola et al. United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean et al. *The cost of the double burden of malnutrition Main social and economic impacts in eight Latin American countries*. 2024. p. 9.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 7.

³⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025*. 2025. p. 38.



access.⁴⁰ Rising food costs, poor distribution networks, and limited agricultural productivity in rural regions have deepened vulnerabilities.⁴¹ Furthermore, despite overall improvement, the Caribbean still reports that over half of its population is moderately or severely food insecure.⁴²

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) plays a central role in supporting Member States in strengthening food systems, improving child and infant nutrition, and fostering equitable agricultural trade.⁴³ ECLAC emphasizes that resilient agricultural systems, investment in food supply infrastructure, and coordinated trade policies are vital to stabilizing markets and enhancing food access.⁴⁴ By promoting investment in agricultural research and transport infrastructure, ECLAC contributes to increasing regional productivity and reducing price volatility, both key factors to ensuring that nutritious foods remain accessible and affordable.⁴⁵ Additionally, ECLAC supports regional cooperation and data transparency, enabling policymakers to identify and address structural weaknesses that affect food distribution and dietary quality.⁴⁶ Ultimately, improving food security and nutritional intake for children and infants, while strengthening agricultural trade and accessibility, ensures sustainable development across the region.⁴⁷

International and Regional Framework

Early international frameworks uphold the right to food and nutrition as core priorities of the United Nations.⁴⁸ The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) describes access to food as part of the right to live a healthy life.⁴⁹ Similarly, Article 11 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (1966) confirms individuals' rights to adequate food and freedom from hunger, making the right to food legally binding.⁵⁰ It declares the responsibility of states to ensure improved agricultural systems and trade through increased international cooperation, heightened understanding of problems, and the application of scientific and technical knowledge.⁵¹ Furthermore, the *Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition* (1974) recognized the food crisis in developing countries and promoted the elimination of malnutrition in all forms, highlighting the socio-economic factors and historical

⁴⁰ Espíndola et al. United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean et al. *The cost of the double burden of malnutrition Main social and economic impacts in eight Latin American countries*. 2024. p. 9.

⁴¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025*. 2025. p. 79.

⁴² Ibid. p. 17.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 96.

⁴⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *Financing for food security and nutrition in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024. p. 14.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 14.

⁴⁶ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)*. 2022.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*. 1948; United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966; World Food Conference. *Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition*. 1974.

⁴⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*. 1948.

⁵⁰ United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966. p. 4.

⁵¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966. p. 4.



circumstances that result in varying levels of food insecurity.⁵² The Declaration also underscores gaps in agricultural development, food production, and the stability of the global food system that remain ongoing global challenges.⁵³ In 1989, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* defined children as vulnerable individuals under the age of 18, granting them special protections regarding their youth and development, including access to and awareness of nutritious food.⁵⁴

The international community sets goals for reducing hunger and malnutrition.⁵⁵ In 1996, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) published the *Rome Declaration and the World Food Summit Plan of Action* (1996 Rome Declaration), reaffirming the right to safe and consistent access to food of nutritional value.⁵⁶ The Declaration outlines international and national efforts related to sustainable and fair global food production, trade, and related investments.⁵⁷ This framework complements the *Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition*, pledging to reduce the number of undernourished individuals worldwide by half by 2015.⁵⁸ In 2014, FAO and the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted the *Rome Declaration on Nutrition* (2014 Rome Declaration) to combat malnutrition in all its forms.⁵⁹ It expands the 1996 Rome Declaration by recognizing the importance of balanced and cooperative global solutions and commits to closing gaps in international response.⁶⁰

The United Nations system has worked to achieve measurable progress towards global sustainable development, driving regional progress through clear commitments and increased awareness of issues regarding food security and malnutrition.⁶¹ In 2015, the General Assembly adopted the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda), which established the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), many of which are critical to increasing LAC food security.⁶² Under SDG 2 (zero hunger), target 2.2 aims to eliminate all forms of malnutrition, with a particular focus on traditionally vulnerable populations.⁶³ There are synergies between SDG 2 and SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 3 (good health), and SDG 10 (reduce inequalities), as they minimize the socio-economic factors that worsen food insecurity and malnutrition globally.⁶⁴

⁵² World Food Conference. *Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition*. 1974.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*. 1989. pp. 1-2, 7-8.

⁵⁵ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *Rome Declaration and the World Food Summit Plan of Action*. 1996; United Nations, World Food Program, United States of America. *The State of Food Insecurity in the World in 2015*. 2021.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *Rome Declaration and the World Food Summit Plan of Action*. 1996; United Nations, World Food Program, United States of America. *The State of Food Insecurity in the World in 2015*. 2021.

⁵⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *Conference Outcome Document: Rome Declaration on Nutrition (ICN2 2014/2)*. 2014.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. pp. 6-7.

⁶² Ibid. pp. 6-7.

⁶³ Ibid. pp. 15-16.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 14.



Regional frameworks have played a significant role in coordinating LAC Member States' efforts to increase regional food security.⁶⁵ In 2023, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) released the *Buenos Aires Declaration*, emphasizing the need to align efforts to minimize food insecurity, improve agricultural systems, production, and trade, and limit the socio-economic factors leading to nutrition-related disparities.⁶⁶ The Declaration additionally led to an update of CELAC's Plan for Food Security, Nutrition, and the Eradication of Hunger 2025 (FSN Plan 2025), which aligns with previously made global commitments, such as SDGs, and strives to improve four pillars (availability, access, utilization, and stability) for combating malnutrition and food insecurity.⁶⁷ The new plan for 2030 expands on these by considering the impact of new global crises and the diverse subregional obstacles that Member States face in ensuring food security.⁶⁸

Role of the International System

ECLAC plays a key role in fostering collaboration and coordination among LAC Member States, working to enhance agricultural development, mitigate the impact of food-related crises, and ensure adequate nutrition for individuals.⁶⁹ Both broadly and in relation to major socio-economic events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, ECLAC provides Member States with recommendations and policy dialogue based on data and trend assessments curated by the Commission, advocating that Member States prioritize certain actions to increase regional food security.⁷⁰ Since 2003, ECLAC's Social Development Division has led analysis efforts to understand the regional gaps and inequalities in food security.⁷¹ The Division has focused on understanding how population demographics, vulnerabilities, habits, and larger health phenomena result in varying levels of food insecurity and types of malnutrition across states.⁷²

ECLAC often works in conjunction with other United Nations organizations, such as the World Food Program (WFP), to conduct studies and produce reports on the issues of food security and malnutrition.⁷³ In 2017, WFP and ECLAC's report *The Cost of the Double Burden of Malnutrition* found that malnutrition results in billions of dollars lost in revenue within LAC Member States, primarily due to decreased productivity.⁷⁴ Moreover, WFP's LAC Regional Office focuses on innovative solutions to end hunger, assisting Member States in capacity-building and data-collection efforts.⁷⁵ WFP fosters regional and local collaboration on the issue of hunger by hosting regional forums and providing both direct emergency

⁶⁵ Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. *CELAC Plan for Food Security, Nutrition, and the Eradication of Hunger 2030*. 2024. pp. 12-13.

⁶⁶ Ibid. pp. 1, 5.

⁶⁷ Ibid. pp. 1, 5.

⁶⁸ Ibid. pp. 5-6.

⁶⁹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)*. 2022.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Food and nutrition security*. N.d.

⁷² Ibid.; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *Financing for food security and nutrition in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.

⁷³ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *FAO and ECLAC Sign Cooperation Agreement to Jointly Advance on the Sustainable Development Goals*. 2024; United Nations, World Food Program, United States of America. *Double Burden of Undernutrition and Obesity Cost Latin America Billions, Says New Report*. 2017.

⁷⁴ United Nations, World Food Program, United States of America. *Double Burden of Undernutrition and Obesity Cost Latin America Billions, Says New Report*. 2017.

⁷⁵ United Nations, World Food Program. *Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.



assistance and indirect capacity-building support to states.⁷⁶ WFP programs focus on assisting the most vulnerable populations within national territories, including refugees and individuals affected by disasters.⁷⁷

FAO Regional Office for LAC and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) assist governments in maintaining food security, supporting efforts to make agricultural systems and development sustainable, resilient, and adaptive.⁷⁸ Within the United Nations, FAO remains the primary expert on food and hunger-related issues, working to increase the nutritional intake and standard of living for all, especially by focusing on improving production and assisting rural communities.⁷⁹ Under FAO's *Strategic Framework 2022-2031* (2021), it highlights four priorities for its work in the region known as the four betters to streamline its contributions to SDGs: better production, better nutrition, better environment, and better life.⁸⁰ In conjunction with PAHO, WFP, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development, FAO annually publishes the *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition* to assess food and nutrition trends and indicators, with a focus on the achievement of SDGs.⁸¹ For instance, the 2024 edition highlights the impacts of climate change and extreme weather patterns on food security and nutrition accessibility.⁸² PAHO is the specialized international health organization for LAC and serves as the Regional Office for WHO.⁸³ It is responsible for monitoring regional nutrition, food safety, and obesity trends, and has long worked to provide relevant knowledge to citizens of the Americas and their governments.⁸⁴

Combating food insecurity and malnutrition across LAC requires bridging the gap between adopted proposals and their need for funding.⁸⁵ The 2024 *Financing for Food Security and Nutrition in Latin America and the Caribbean* report, published by FAO, ECLAC, WFP, and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture, assesses solution cost estimates for Member States.⁸⁶ The report highlights data from a 2023 ECLAC study that estimates that LAC states need to allocate 0.24% of their gross domestic product to addressing extreme poverty.⁸⁷ More broadly, the report analyzes how funds, in

⁷⁶ 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Knowledge Management Platform. *World Food Program*. N.d.; United Nations, World Food Program. *Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.

⁷⁷ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Mandate and Mission*. N.d.; United Nations, World Food Program. *General Regulations, General Rules, Financial Regulations, Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board*. 2025. pp. 5-6.

⁷⁸ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2025.

⁷⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *Basic Texts of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Volumes I and II*. 2017.

⁸⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *FAO's four priorities for Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.

⁸¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2024: Statistics and Trends*. 2025. pp. 1-2.

⁸² Ibid. p. viii.

⁸³ Pan American Health Organization. *Who We Are*. N.d.

⁸⁴ Pan American Health Organization. *Food Safety*. N.d.; Pan American Health Organization. *Nutrition*. N.d.; Pan American Health Organization. *Obesity Prevention*. N.d.

⁸⁵ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *Financing for food security and nutrition in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.

⁸⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *Financing for food security and nutrition in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.

⁸⁷ Ibid. pp. 4-5.



practice, translate to the development of agricultural systems and the minimization of food insecurity and malnutrition, which is often overlooked in the initial adoption of plans and programs.⁸⁸

SDGs have continued to remain a focal aspect of food security-related conferences, including the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), follow-up review meetings to assess progress (stocktaking meetings), and the 2024 and 2025 LAC Sustainable Development Forums.⁸⁹ UNFSS focused on improving the world's agricultural systems, particularly SDG 2, and emphasized national-level efforts and food-system developments.⁹⁰ In 2025, during LAC Regional Preparatory Meeting for the second UNFSS Stocktaking meeting (UNFSS+4), stakeholders discussed best practices, technical guidance, and key regional lessons on the role people in local communities play in innovation, as well as production and trade, as these sectors relate to food security.⁹¹ LAC Member States followed up on both UNFSS and SDGs at the 2024 LAC Sustainable Development Forum, particularly emphasizing SDG 1 and SDG 2.⁹² The 2025 LAC Sustainable Development Forum focused more broadly on achieving SDGs through scientific and sustainable means, and highlighted combating inequality, poverty, and hunger as one of four main priorities in preparation for the Second World Summit for Social Development in November 2025.⁹³

CELAC facilitates dialogue and cooperation among LAC Member States on issues including family farming, food security, and the eradication of hunger and poverty.⁹⁴ CELAC was founded in 2011 and currently comprises 33 Member States.⁹⁵ CELAC, with the assistance of ECLAC, promotes regional cooperation through notable events, including the Meeting of the Ministers and Authorities Responsible for Social Development for the Eradication of Extreme Poverty and Hunger (2013) and the 2024 Meeting of CELAC Ministers of Agriculture.⁹⁶ ECLAC, among other United Nations entities, has additionally

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *United Nations Food Systems Summit +4 (UNFSS+4)*. 2025; International Institute for Sustainable Development. *2024 Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Forum on Sustainable Development*. 2024; International Institute for Sustainable Development. *2025 Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Forum on Sustainable Development*. 2025; United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub. *Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Preparatory Meeting of the UN Food Systems Summit +2 Stocktaking Moment*. N.d.

⁹⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *United Nations Food Systems Summit +4 (UNFSS+4)*. 2025; United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub. *Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Preparatory Meeting of the UN Food Systems Summit +2 Stocktaking Moment*. N.d.

⁹¹ United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub. *UN Food Systems Summit +4 Stocktake (UNFSS+4)*. N.d.; United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub. *Americas and the Caribbean Unite for Food Systems Transformation at UNFSS+4 Regional Meeting*. 2025.

⁹² International Institute for Sustainable Development. *2024 Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Forum on Sustainable Development*. 2024.

⁹³ International Institute for Sustainable Development. *2025 Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Forum on Sustainable Development*. 2025; United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Summary of the work of the Economic Commission of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2024-2025 (E/2025/19)*. 2025.

⁹⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States and FAO: Partnering for Food Security, Sustainable Development and a Future Free from Hunger*. 2015. p. 2.

⁹⁵ Caribbean Community. *The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)*. 2025.

⁹⁶ Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. *CELAC Plan for Food Security, Nutrition, and the Eradication of Hunger 2030*. 2024; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *Meeting of Ministers of Agriculture of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) 2025*. 2025;



supported CELAC's food security initiatives, such as the FSN Plan 2025, and regional sustainable development efforts, relying on CELAC to promote collaboration to eliminate hunger.⁹⁷ For instance, in 2015, CELAC FSN Plan 2025 aimed to align regional food and nutrition-related efforts through four pillars: strategic policies, food accessibility, nutritional diversity, and factors impacting food production, setting out action recommendations for Member States.⁹⁸ Alongside the implementation of CELAC FSN Plan 2025 and FSN Plan 2030, the Food Security and Nutrition Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean was established to improve oversight of progress towards the goals outlined in both plans.⁹⁹

Improving Food Security and Nutritional Intake for Children and Infants

Poor nutrition often results in long-term negative impacts on children's development and society at large, both through undernutrition and overnutrition.¹⁰⁰ While undernutrition remains a consistent concern in LAC, especially among Indigenous youth, overnutrition is steadily rising as a prominent health issue due to the often lower costs of high-sugar diets.¹⁰¹ Nearly seven million children under the age of five in LAC face stunted growth as a result of undernutrition, and nearly four million are overweight or obese.¹⁰² A child's ability to obtain a nutritious diet and maintain access to secure food sources is essential within the first 1,000 days of their life, as these early years are critical for long-term physical and cognitive development.¹⁰³ Within the realm of education, improper nutrition may lead to developmental issues such as an inability to concentrate.¹⁰⁴ Children may be forced to retake classes or repeat years of education, resulting in lower levels of educational completion throughout regions suffering from food insecurity.¹⁰⁵ As a result, these early effects can extend into adulthood, as lower educational attainment and chronic nutrition-related illnesses reduce productivity and employment outcomes.¹⁰⁶ Recent global and regional crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbate malnutrition in children by worsening food inequalities in LAC.¹⁰⁷ For instance, trends showcase changes in consumption patterns in lower-income households, with families eating cheaper and less nutritious diets or skipping meals altogether.¹⁰⁸

United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Opening of the seminar to support the CELAC Plan for Food and Nutrition Security and the Eradication of Hunger 2025*. 2015.

⁹⁷ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Food and Nutrition Security and the Eradication of Hunger CELAC 2025: Furthering discussion and regional cooperation*. 2016. p. 9.

⁹⁸ Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. *The CELAC Plan for Food and Nutrition Security and the Eradication of Hunger 2025*. N.d.

⁹⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *CELAC moves forward with the consolidation of the Food Security, Nutrition and Hunger Eradication Plan*. 2025.

¹⁰⁰ Gie. United Nations, World Food Programme. *5 ways that malnutrition is costing Latin America billions*. 2017.

¹⁰¹ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Malnutrition among children in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2018.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Early childhood in post-pandemic Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2023.

¹⁰⁴ Gie. United Nations, World Food Programme. *5 ways that malnutrition is costing Latin America billions*. 2017.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Early childhood in post-pandemic Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2023.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.



Global and regional organizations and frameworks continue to play a key role in reducing food insecurity and malnutrition for children in LAC, starting with the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.¹⁰⁹ The Convention declares that states must ensure children are provided nutritious meals and access to nutrition and health-related knowledge, both directly and through assisting parents.¹¹⁰ On a regional level, PAHO adopted the five-year Plan of Action for the Prevention of Obesity in Children and Adolescents (2014), aiming to help Member States adopt national policies and laws that promote proper nutritional intake for infants and school-age children, physical activity for youth, regulation of food marketing, and provide trend insight and adjacent health-related actions.¹¹¹ More recently, ECLAC's *Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development* (2020) reflects children's right to food, which describes protecting children through comprehensive services, including those in early childhood, that focus on children as a vulnerable group and take nutritional welfare into account alongside their social, educational, and health needs.¹¹²

Regional solutions have aimed to both secure the food systems children rely on and ensure children's access to healthy diets and proper nutrition.¹¹³ In 2017, ECLAC and WFP collaborated to produce the 2007 *Model for Analyzing the Social and Economic Impact of Child Undernutrition in Latin America*, a joint study that has allowed the international community to better understand the underlying causes of youth malnutrition in the region.¹¹⁴ The model enabled cost estimates of the economic burden that undernutrition in children at different stages of development would have on countries in the region, allowing Member States to target efforts to both the causes and long-term effects of the phenomenon.¹¹⁵ Direct action initiatives to end hunger have also benefited youth.¹¹⁶ In 2022, regional school feeding programs assisted around 80.3 million children in 31 LAC states.¹¹⁷ While the programs' primary goal is the provision of nutritious food to school-age youth, they also enhance local agricultural systems, provide dietary and nutrition-related education to children on consumption and habits, and reduce regional inequalities through increasing nutritional accessibility.¹¹⁸ While data indicate regional progress in reducing the prevalence of stunting of children, with 11.5% of children under the age of five being stunted compared to 22.3% globally, this trend has slowed significantly.¹¹⁹ While regional programs and interventions continue to aid millions, LAC region remains off track to meet childhood stunting goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda.¹²⁰ Stunting and obesity trends, combined with children's increased vulnerability to malnutrition and food insecurity in areas of LAC most impacted by climate change and extreme weather, showcase

¹⁰⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*. 1989. pp. 7-8.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 7-8.

¹¹¹ Pan American Health Organization. *Plan of Action for the Prevention of Obesity in Children and Adolescents*. 2014.

¹¹² United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development*. 2020. pp. 31-32.

¹¹³ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2024: Statistics and Trends*. 2025. pp. 130, 141.

¹¹⁴ Fernández et al. United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Model for Analysing the Social and Economic Impact of Child Undernutrition in Latin America*. 2007.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2024: Statistics and Trends*. 2025. p. 130.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p. 130.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p. xxiv.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. pp. 21-22.

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 23.



important gaps ECLAC and other organizations will have to bridge in the future to protect youth food-related health.¹²¹

Strengthening Agricultural Trade and Accessibility

LAC states lead in agricultural exports but fall behind in ensuring food security and the availability of proper nutrition for their citizens.¹²² Agriculture has driven the region's economy by leveraging LAC's advantages in food production to strengthen international and regional food security.¹²³ LAC accounts for 17% of the world's food exports, with 40% of food produced exported abroad.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, families in rural communities depend on income derived from smallholder family farming, while wider agricultural market accessibility and involvement often remain out of reach.¹²⁵ Moreover, LAC has the highest cost associated with eating nutritious meals compared to other regions, making it increasingly difficult for families to afford healthy diets.¹²⁶ Combined with regional inequalities and loss of income, rising food prices have turned food insecurity into a structural problem tied to socio-economic factors.¹²⁷ Food inaccessibility and insecurity have worsened in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change's impact on food systems and production, and the effects of global conflicts on international agricultural trade.¹²⁸

LAC states have made an effort to emphasize trade and accessibility, making progress towards achieving food security in the region while strengthening wider agricultural trade opportunities.¹²⁹ As early as the 1996 Rome Declaration, the global community recognized the intersection of income, market instability, and both regional and international incidents in limiting food accessibility, even when food production is high.¹³⁰ More recently, efforts to achieve SDGs have helped to advance sustainable agricultural practices and systems in LAC.¹³¹ Conferences such as the first UNFSS Stocktaking meeting (UNFSS+2) have emphasized the intersection between food systems and the achievement of the SDGs, with LAC Preparatory meeting for UNFSS+2 focusing on the economics of broader food systems transformations,

¹²¹ Ibid. pp. 26, 97-98; Pan American Health Organization. *Nutrition*. N.d.; Pan American Health Organization. *Obesity Prevention*. N.d.

¹²² Inter-American Development Bank. *Food Security in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024; United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Summary of the work of the Economic Commission of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2024-2025 (E/2025/19)*. 2025.

¹²³ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *International Trade Outlook for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2024: Reconfiguration of global trade and options for regional recovery*. 2024. p. 89.

¹²⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Latin America and the Caribbean 2022*. 2023. p. 5.

¹²⁵ World Bank Group. *Enhancing the Competitiveness of Family Farms: The Power of Productive Alliances in Latin America and Africa*. 2025.

¹²⁶ Inter-American Development Bank. *Food Security in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.

¹²⁷ Ibid.; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Latin America and the Caribbean 2022*. 2023. p. 2.

¹²⁸ Inter-American Development Bank. *Food Security in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.

¹²⁹ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *International Trade Outlook for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2024: Reconfiguration of global trade and options for regional recovery*. 2024. pp. 20-24.

¹³⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *Rome Declaration and the World Food Summit Plan of Action*. 1996.

¹³¹ United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub. *Advancing sustainable development through food systems transformation in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.



related trade policies, and both economic and consumer entities in supporting national initiatives.¹³² Furthermore, recent ECLAC reports have continued analyzing the intersection between sustainable development, trade, and food security, including the *International Trade Outlook for Latin America and the Caribbean* (2024).¹³³ This document details trends affecting regional imports and exports, including slow global and regional trade growth.¹³⁴

In recent years, the region has taken a new approach to the nexus between trade and food security, shifting attention to intraregional and sustainable efforts.¹³⁵ As suggested by FAO and the Inter-American Development Bank, strengthening intraregional trade would not only advance food security on a regional scale, increasing regional food accessibility and economic opportunities.¹³⁶ Currently, LAC states import an estimated 40% of their products from neighboring LAC states, especially processed foods.¹³⁷ The processed food industry often has more positive economic impacts for development, such as increased revenue and more jobs, than direct agricultural product trade.¹³⁸ Building sustainable and shock-resistant agricultural trade systems in LAC is equally important for increasing food security in the region and strengthening overarching food systems.¹³⁹ Solutions must focus on both commercial trade, including the assembly, transportation, distribution, and processing of agricultural products, and more localized systems.¹⁴⁰ Regarding the latter, CELAC and FAO have jointly worked to facilitate the Family Farming and Rural Territorial Development Regional Initiative, working to reduce extreme poverty for almost a third of LAC's rural population, many of whom are smallholder family farmers deeply impacted by inequality, by enabling rural and social development through a state and province-focused approach.¹⁴¹

¹³² United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub. *Food Systems Stocktaking Moment 2023: Regional Preparatory Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean Executive Summary of Key Messages*. 2023. p. 3.

¹³³ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *International Trade Outlook for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2024: Reconfiguration of global trade and options for regional recovery*. 2024. p. 11.

¹³⁴ Ibid. p. 11; United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Summary of the work of the Economic Commission of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2024-2025 (E/2025/19)*. 2025. p. 6.

¹³⁵ McNamara. International Food Policy Research Institute. *Report Launch: The key role of trade in strengthening food security in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2023; United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub. *Advancing sustainable development through food systems transformation in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.

¹³⁶ Opertii et al. Inter-American Development Bank. *The Potential of Intraregional Trade for Improving Food Security in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ McNamara. International Food Policy Research Institute. *Report Launch: The key role of trade in strengthening food security in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2023; United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub. *Advancing sustainable development through food systems transformation in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.

¹⁴⁰ World Bank Group. *Future Foodscapes: Reimagining Agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2020.

¹⁴¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States and FAO: Partnering for Food Security, Sustainable Development and a Future Free from Hunger*. 2015. p. 19.



Conclusion

Despite LAC being greatly relevant for the global food supply chain, challenges have led to an increase in under- and overnutrition.¹⁴² It is important to tackle food insecurity and malnutrition as it addresses both health disparities and social development.¹⁴³ Key actors such as FAO, WFP, and PAHO collect information and suggest policy changes to address the challenges of malnutrition.¹⁴⁴ However, external factors such as climate change, international conflicts, and regional distribution struggles exacerbate these challenges.¹⁴⁵ Achieving food security in the region will depend on reinforcing sustainable, inclusive, and resilient food systems, ensuring that nutritious diets are physically and economically accessible to all, and maintaining coordinated action at both regional and international levels.¹⁴⁶

Further Research

As delegates conduct further research and consider how to address this topic, they should consider: How can ECLAC better support intraregional trade? How should ECLAC work with other organizations on combating this issue? What other social and economic issues should be considered when discussing food security? How does internal migration from rural to urban areas disrupt food chains and food production? How can climate change affect food systems and impact malnutrition?

¹⁴² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025*. 2025.

¹⁴³ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *Financing for Food Security and Nutrition in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024. p. 12.

¹⁴⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025*. 2025.

¹⁴⁵ Espíndola et al. United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean et al. *The cost of the double burden of malnutrition Main social and economic impacts in eight Latin American countries*. 2024.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.



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<https://www.fao.org/americas/about-us/fao-in-the-region/en>

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2. Achieving Universal Health Coverage

“The world is off track to make significant progress towards universal health coverage (UHC) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target 3.8 by 2030.”¹⁴⁷

Introduction

Health is a human right and a key part of economic growth and social progress.¹⁴⁸ UHC attempts to guarantee that every person can access essential, high-quality health services whenever and wherever needed, without facing obstacles.¹⁴⁹ UHC includes the full range of essential health services, such as health promotion, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care throughout an individual's life.¹⁵⁰ Proper health coverage is a fundamental aspect of inclusive and sustainable social development in societies.¹⁵¹ The World Health Organization (WHO) defines primary healthcare (PHC) as investing in health and ensuring universal access to health coverage, which represents a concrete step towards inclusive and sustainable social development.¹⁵² Health coverage in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is a cornerstone of the region's broader commitment to the SDGs, in particular SDG 3 (good health and well-being).¹⁵³ The main regional healthcare challenge is a lack of resources, as national economies in LAC spend just 6% to 7% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on healthcare, while the global average is 9%.¹⁵⁴

With a population of more than 650 million, the region has substantial health inequities and poor access to high-quality healthcare.¹⁵⁵ The three main issues causing LAC to experience a development crisis are: insufficient institutional capacity and ineffective governance; high inequality and low social mobility; and low growth capacity.¹⁵⁶ Public services are under stress due to the region's increasing health burdens, which also result in high out-of-pocket costs for individuals and deteriorating public health and well-being.¹⁵⁷ Attempts to achieve UHC are disrupted by the structural characteristics of the region, marked by high rates of poverty, inequality, and informal employment.¹⁵⁸ The low levels of productivity and economic growth, together with social protection systems, face various structural and institutional capacity

¹⁴⁷ World Health Organization. WHO. *Universal health coverage*. 2025.

¹⁴⁸ Arenas de Mesa Alberto. CEPAL Review No. 141. *Universal, comprehensive, sustainable and resilient social protection to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality and move towards inclusive social development*. 2023. p. 180.

¹⁴⁹ World Health Organization. *Universal health coverage*. 2025.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Health*. N.d.

¹⁵² World Health Organization. *Primary health care*. N.d.

¹⁵³ 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean. *Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*. N.d.

¹⁵⁴ Inter-American Development Bank. IDB Lab. *Health Innovation & Technology In Latin America & The Caribbean*. 2024. p. 13.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 10.

¹⁵⁶ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *ECLAC and PAHO Call for Prioritizing Investment in Health to Reduce Inequality and Achieve the SDGs in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.

¹⁵⁷ Inter-American Development Bank. IDB Lab. *Health Innovation & Technology In Latin America & The Caribbean*. 2024. p. 10.

¹⁵⁸ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *ECLAC and PAHO Call for Prioritizing Investment in Health to Reduce Inequality and Achieve the SDGs in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.



challenges.¹⁵⁹ In the healthcare sector, systemic problems of chronic underfinancing, fragmentation, and segmentation of health systems are a challenge.¹⁶⁰ There is a great need to hasten beneficial, systemic changes in LAC's health and well-being, particularly for disadvantaged individuals.¹⁶¹ Over the last two decades, positive examples of recent progress include that many LAC countries have expanded access to health services through national health insurance schemes, integrated primary care systems, and rights-based health reforms.¹⁶²

Social determinants of health (SDH) play a critical role in shaping the effectiveness and equity of UHC in LAC.¹⁶³ SDH refers to the socio-economic circumstances that affect an individual's ability to access wealth and social services, and they hold a significant role in shaping health inequalities.¹⁶⁴ Addressing persistent health inequalities and financing gaps is central to overcoming the barriers to achieving UHC in LAC, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).¹⁶⁵ One of the most pressing issues is the unequal access to health services across different population groups, especially among Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, women, and rural communities.¹⁶⁶ Health is not only a right for individuals, but also makes it possible for people to receive an education, find respectable employment, and create inclusive economic growth.¹⁶⁷

International and Regional Framework

In LAC countries, healthcare is widely recognized as a fundamental human right.¹⁶⁸ The 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR), one of the foundational texts of human rights, mentions health as part of the right to an adequate standard of living in Article 25.¹⁶⁹ The 1966 *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* states that every citizen has the right to enjoy life to the highest standard of physical and mental health.¹⁷⁰ In 1969, 24 Latin American nations signed the *Pact of San José*, or *American Convention on Human Rights*, which recognized the right to life and physical, mental, and moral integrity, which are linked to health.¹⁷¹ The *Declaration of Alma-Ata* (1978) asserts the importance of UHC as being crucial for LAC to reach standards of health where individuals can lead socially and economically productive lives, thus leading to higher overall health standards.¹⁷² Moreover, in 1988, the Organization of American States (OAS) signed the *Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights*, colloquially known as

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Inter-American Development Bank. IDB Lab. *Health Innovation & Technology In Latin America & The Caribbean*. 2024. p. 10.

¹⁶² Ibid. p. 12.

¹⁶³ International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The World Bank. *Toward Universal Health Coverage and Equity in Latin America and the Caribbean: Evidence from Selected Countries*. 2015. p. 22.

¹⁶⁴ World Health Organization. *Social determinants of health*. 2025.

¹⁶⁵ Pan American Health Organization. *ECLAC and PAHO call for prioritizing investment in health to reduce inequality and achieve the SDGs in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.

¹⁶⁶ Bustelo et al. IBD. *Unequal Opportunities for Indigenous Peoples and African Descendants*. 2023. p. 1.

¹⁶⁷ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Health*. N.d.

¹⁶⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Right to Health*. N.d.

¹⁶⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217(III))*. 1948.

¹⁷⁰ United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200A)*. 1966.

¹⁷¹ Organization of American States. *American Convention on Human Rights*. 1969.

¹⁷² World Health Organization. *Declaration of Alma-Ata*. 1978.



Protocol of San Salvador.¹⁷³ The Protocol recognizes health as a fundamental human right and affirms that every person is entitled to the highest possible level of physical, mental, and social well-being.¹⁷⁴

The United Nations and various regional bodies have passed resolutions and partnered with organizations, reinforcing the notion of the right to health and the goal of achieving UHC.¹⁷⁵ Articles 21, 23, 24, and 29 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) (2007) discuss the rights that Indigenous peoples have to adequate health standards.¹⁷⁶ The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015) outlines the role of UHC in SDG 3 and promotes healthy lives for all at all ages.¹⁷⁷ SDG target 3.8 specifically discusses “achieving universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.”¹⁷⁸ Target 3.c on “substantially increasing health financing and the recruitment, development, training and retention of the health workforce in developing countries, especially in least developed countries and small island developing States” is of additional relevance.¹⁷⁹ World Health Assembly resolution WHA58.33 (2005) on “Sustainable health financing, universal coverage, and social health insurance” urges Member States to develop health financing systems to achieve UHC.¹⁸⁰ WHO and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) partnered to publish the *Agenda for the Americas on Health, Environment, and Climate Change* (2021), highlighting policy challenges and proposals to achieve UHC in the region.¹⁸¹

The relatively high costs of building and financing healthcare infrastructure, especially in least developed countries (LDCs), where citizens mostly have to pay out-of-pocket until it is established, are a significant barrier in achieving UHC.¹⁸² Member States are strongly encouraged to find ways to finance healthcare infrastructure projects, such as public-private partnerships, public options for health insurance, and grants and loan-based financing from international and regional financial institutions.¹⁸³ In 2023, the General Assembly adopted resolution 77/28 on “Community-Based Primary Health Care for Universal Health Coverage,” emphasizing how community-based PHC is pivotal in achieving UHC.¹⁸⁴ In 2022, the fifteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, put together by ECLAC, adopted the *Buenos Aires Commitment*, which recognizes health as a pillar of the social protection systems needed to achieve UHC.¹⁸⁵

¹⁷³ Organization of American States. *Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights*. 1988. pp. 1-2.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 13.

¹⁷⁵ United Nations. *International Universal Health Coverage Day, 12 December*. N.d.

¹⁷⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. 2007. pp. 19-20.

¹⁷⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. p. 14.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p. 16.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p. 17.

¹⁸⁰ World Health Organization. *Sustainable health financing, universal coverage and social health Insurance (WHA58.33)*. 2005.

¹⁸¹ Pan American Health Organization. *Agenda for the Americas on Health, Environment, and Climate Change*. 2021.

¹⁸² World Health Organization. *Sustainable health financing, universal coverage and social health Insurance (WHA58.33)*. 2005.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *Community-based primary health care: a participatory and inclusive approach to universal health coverage (A/RES/77/L.69)*. 2023.

¹⁸⁵ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Buenos Aires Commitment*. 2023.



Role of the International System

ECLAC has partnered with PAHO and other organizations to encourage healthcare systems to achieve the SDGs.¹⁸⁶ Addressing persistent health inequalities and financing gaps is central to ECLAC's analysis of the barriers to achieving UHC in LAC.¹⁸⁷ In 2024, ECLAC and PAHO released *The urgency of investing in health systems in Latin America and the Caribbean to reduce inequality and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*.¹⁸⁸ The report states that there is a pressing need to focus on PHC and strengthen the health systems in the region, especially given the COVID-19 setbacks that caused a 32% regression in fulfilling SDG targets in LAC.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, the report discusses how the pandemic made it evident that sustainable development cannot be fully realized without ensuring health, as it helps reduce inequality and poverty, and strengthen educational, labor, and economic growth.¹⁹⁰ Key components of PHC include addressing broader socioeconomic issues that indirectly lead to health issues in communities, ensuring healthcare is available and affordable to individuals throughout their lives, and promoting social participation in healthcare and individual self-care of their health.¹⁹¹

WHO's Universal Health Coverage Partnership (UHCP) works with governments to strengthen national healthcare systems to promote UHC.¹⁹² The partnership supports more than 125 nations worldwide, including 19 LAC countries, and has impacted more than 3 billion people with its work.¹⁹³ For example, in Bolivia, UHCP worked with the government and 64 Indigenous communities to work towards the inclusion and engagement of Indigenous populations in health policy planning, as well as improving access to health services, as they are disproportionately affected in LAC by a lack of access to healthcare systems.¹⁹⁴ The partnership has also worked with the Bahamas to ensure they prioritize strengthening the regulatory process of the importation of medicines and other health technologies, and strengthening COVID-19 vaccine regulations to ensure safety.¹⁹⁵

WHO founded the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All (SDG3 GAP) to help accelerate the health-related goals of the SDGs.¹⁹⁶ Created in 2019 due to the lack of progress made to fulfill SDG 3 by 2030, the SDG3 GAP partnership between 13 multilateral agencies is committed to information sharing and cross-collaboration on best practices for accomplishing the health-related SDGs.¹⁹⁷ In 2021, SDG3 GAP was implemented in Colombia to lower the high infant mortality rate in Indigenous communities, where it stands at 5 times higher than the national average.¹⁹⁸ SDG3 GAP partnered with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF),

¹⁸⁶ Pan American Health Organization. *The urgency of investing in health systems in Latin America and the Caribbean to reduce inequality and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*. 2024.

¹⁸⁷ Pan American Health Organization. *ECLAC and PAHO call for prioritizing investment in health to reduce inequality and achieve the SDGs in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.

¹⁸⁸ Pan American Health Organization. *The urgency of investing in health systems in Latin America and the Caribbean to reduce inequality and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*. 2024. p. 1.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 2.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 3.

¹⁹¹ World Health Organization, *Primary health care*. N.d.

¹⁹² Universal Health Coverage Partnership. *About*. N.d.

¹⁹³ Universal Health Coverage Partnership. *Countries*. N.d.

¹⁹⁴ Universal Health Coverage Partnership. *Bolivia strengthens social participation in health for indigenous populations*. 2024.

¹⁹⁵ Universal Health Coverage Partnership. *The Bahamas: Protecting the population with safe and effective medicines and vaccines*. 2022.

¹⁹⁶ World Health Organization. *SDG3 Global Action Plan*. N.d.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ World Health Organization. *Ensuring equitable access to maternal health services in Colombia*. 2021.



World Food Programme (WFP), and PAHO to help further train medical professionals in Indigenous communities on maternal and neonatal healthcare in Colombia.¹⁹⁹

The World Bank works to help finance programs to foster more developed national healthcare systems.²⁰⁰ Over the past 10 years, the International Development Agency (IDA), the World Bank's branch focused on LDCs, has financed more than \$13.5 billion to support healthcare for more than 770 million individuals.²⁰¹ In Yemen, for example, the IDA established the Yemeni Emergency Health and Nutrition Project, providing cash to Yemenis in vulnerable areas to pay for food and necessities, helping over 9 million people since 2017.²⁰² Also, in Central and Western Africa, IDA established the Regional Disease Surveillance Systems program, aimed at financing and expanding surveillance and laboratory capacity in 16 countries in the region.²⁰³ The World Bank also launched the Health Impact Investment Platform (HIIP) in 2023, working with the African Development Bank, European Investment Bank, and Islamic Development Bank to finance approximately \$1.75 billion in loans for the purpose of developing PHC services.²⁰⁴ The Inter-American Development Bank is also considering joining to extend loan and grant programs to LAC.²⁰⁵ LAC institutions have the potential to further partner with the World Bank to achieve impressive results in the region, or use projects as potential blueprints to achieve successful outcomes; many of the issues the IDA and HIIP deal with, especially financing, are prevalent in LAC.²⁰⁶

Ensuring Healthcare to Promote Sustainable Development

Universal healthcare is fundamental for reducing inequality and ensuring equitable development in LAC.²⁰⁷ LAC is one of the most financially unequal regions in the world, with access to health services usually reflecting larger socioeconomic gaps.²⁰⁸ The wealthiest 10% of the population in LAC earn approximately 12 times more than the bottom 10%.²⁰⁹ For members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), generally regarded as highly developed with larger economies, the ratio drops to 4 times more.²¹⁰ Only 61% of health spending in LAC is through the government, and placing the burden to pay the remainder on citizens leads to further impoverishment, inequality, and reduces access to healthcare.²¹¹ UHC aspires to ensure that every person has access to basic healthcare services without experiencing financial hardship, irrespective of their origin, income, or region.²¹² By investing in equitable healthcare systems, LAC nations may reduce out-of-pocket costs, which push

¹⁹⁹ World Health Organization. *Ensuring equitable access to maternal health services in Colombia*. 2021.

²⁰⁰ World Bank Group. *Universal Health Coverage*. 2025.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² World Bank Group. *Yemen Emergency Health and Nutrition Project*. 2019.

²⁰³ World Bank Group. *Health*. N.d.

²⁰⁴ World Health Organization. *Multilateral development banks and WHO launch new investment platform to strengthen primary health care services*. 2023.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ World Bank Group. *Health*. N.d.

²⁰⁷ Pan American Health Organization. *Toward Universal Health Coverage and Equity in Latin America and the Caribbean: Evidence from Selected Countries*. 2015. p. 10.

²⁰⁸ United Nations Children's Fund. Pan American Health Organization. *Health Inequalities in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Sustainable Development Goal baseline assessment for women, children, and adolescents*. 2022.

²⁰⁹ Inter American Development Bank. *The Complexities of Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Pan American Health Organization. *ECLAC and PAHO call for prioritizing investment in health to reduce inequality and achieve the SDGs in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.

²¹² World Health Organization. *Universal health coverage*. 2025.



millions into poverty every year.²¹³ The 2019 United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on UHC discussed how achieving UHC aids in achieving the other SDGs, and improved health outcomes are an indicator for improved educational, environmental, and societal development.²¹⁴

UHC promotes long-term stability and improves the region's capacity to endure crises by reinforcing healthcare systems.²¹⁵ There are glaring deficiencies in LAC health systems, including underfunding, fragmentation, and a lack of universal access, which limit effective response operations.²¹⁶ Under the UHC framework, countries can identify and address health concerns early on, reducing their social and economic impacts, by establishing efficient PHC systems.²¹⁷ The health systems of many LAC nations are fragmented with little or no coordination between public, private, and social security providers, which results in inefficiencies and uneven quality of care.²¹⁸ Without adequate financing and workforce planning, the region cannot meet the demands of a universal, resilient, and equitable health system.²¹⁹ In some LAC countries, public health spending remains below the recommended 6% of GDP, limiting spending on human resources, infrastructure, and necessary medicines.²²⁰ UHC offers a pathway to achieve the three dimensions of sustainable development: inclusive social development, economic development, and environmental sustainability.²²¹ To achieve the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda, holistic work is necessary, as laying the groundwork and workforce for one goal aids in achieving the others.²²² SDG 3 is intrinsically linked to SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), as well as SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 2 (zero hunger), and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth).²²³ The SDGs are all intrinsically linked and one SDG cannot be fulfilled without the fulfillment of the others, reinforcing that UHC correlates to positive economic, social, and environmental development.²²⁴

Within LAC, Costa Rica represents a model of insurance guided towards UHC.²²⁵ Costa Rica is considered by WHO and the World Bank as one of the most successful insurance models in LAC to advance towards UHC.²²⁶ Costa Rica has been able to achieve this through a unified national health insurance system that avoids the inefficiencies of fragmented models and ensures protection for the poorest people.²²⁷ A key factor behind its effectiveness is the early decision to focus on delivering a basic

²¹³ Pan American Health Organization. *ECLAC and PAHO call for prioritizing investment in health to reduce inequality and achieve the SDGs in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2024.

²¹⁴ SDG Resources. RELX. *Access to Health Care*. N.d.

²¹⁵ World Health Organization. *Universal health coverage (UHC)*. 2025.

²¹⁶ Pan American Health Organization. *The urgency of investing in health systems in Latin America and the Caribbean to reduce inequality and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*. 2024. p. 3.

²¹⁷ World Health Organization. *Universal health coverage (UHC)*. 2025.

²¹⁸ International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The World Bank. *Toward Universal Health Coverage and Equity in Latin America and the Caribbean: Evidence from Selected Countries*. 2015. p. 72.

²¹⁹ Pan American Health Organization. *Strategy for Universal Access to Health and Universal Health Coverage*. 2014.

²²⁰ World Bank Group. *Latin America & the Caribbean countries need to spend more and better on health to be better able to face a major health emergency like COVID-19 effectively*. 2020.

²²¹ Pan American Health Organization. *The urgency of investing in health systems in Latin America and the Caribbean to reduce inequality and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*. 2024. p. 3.

²²² United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. *Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*. N.d.

²²³ United Nations Development Programme. *What are the Sustainable Development Goals?*. N.d.

²²⁴ Pan American Health Organization. *The urgency of investing in health systems in Latin America and the Caribbean to reduce inequality and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*. 2024. p. 8.

²²⁵ International Labour Organization. *Costa Rica: Ensuring universal health protection*. 2022. p. 1.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.



set of PHC services and essential public health interventions, prioritizing prevention and health promotion for the entire population, including those working outside the formal economy.²²⁸ The Ministry of Health further strengthened the universal insurance model by shifting its role from service provider to regulator, translating many of its health service functions, such as inpatient and primary care, to its social security system.²²⁹ This shift places more of healthcare's financial burden on the State, rather than the patient, ensuring that patients can be properly treated, regardless of their financial situation.²³⁰ This emphasis on comprehensive PHC has played a crucial role in Costa Rica achieving some of the best health outcomes in LAC.²³¹ Achieving these positive health outcomes, especially with the investments in the social-based health systems, will contribute to Costa Rica further achieving the other SDGs in the future.²³²

UHC in Rural and Indigenous Communities

Health disparities persist in Indigenous populations in LAC, reflecting historical marginalization and inequalities.²³³ Many of the same issues that prevent adequate healthcare in rural populations mirror Indigenous populations, as Indigenous people account for 40% of the rural population in LAC.²³⁴ Reasons for these disparities include systemic poverty and inequality throughout the region, as well as geographic isolation.²³⁵ Around 43% of the Indigenous population in LAC lives in poverty, more than twice that of non-Indigenous people, while 25% live in extreme poverty.²³⁶ In Mexico, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Indigenous populations had, on average, 3.45 medical offices and 9.34 hospital beds, while non-Indigenous areas had 5.31 medical offices and 15.52 hospital beds.²³⁷ As a result of this disparity, the Indigenous infant mortality rate during the pandemic was 5%, compared to 2.3% for the non-Indigenous population.²³⁸ The Indigenous mortality rate during the pandemic was 9.8%, opposed to 5.1% for the non-Indigenous population.²³⁹

Rural populations in LAC are disproportionately affected by the lack of health services.²⁴⁰ OECD defines a rural area by a population density of less than 150 people per square kilometre.²⁴¹ During the COVID-19 pandemic, rural populations in LAC faced a 10% higher disruption in health services compared to urban populations.²⁴² Isolation from healthcare systems and proximity to healthcare facilities are two of the most

²²⁸ Ibid. p. 2.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid. p. 3.

²³² Ibid. p. 2.

²³³ International Journal for Equity in Health. *Health disparities among indigenous populations in Latin America: a scoping review*. 2025.

²³⁴ World Bank Group. *Indigenous Latin America*. N.d.

²³⁵ International Journal for Equity in Health. *Health disparities among indigenous populations in Latin America: a scoping review*. 2025.

²³⁶ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples*. 2013.

²³⁷ International Journal for Equity in Health. *Health disparities among indigenous populations in Latin America: a scoping review*. 2025. p.13.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. *Health at a Glance: Latin America and the Caribbean 2023*. 2023.

²⁴¹ United Nations Development Programme. *Defining and measuring rurality*. 2013.

²⁴² Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. *Health at a Glance: Latin America and the Caribbean 2023*. 2023.



pressing issues; 23% of rural populations in LAC live more than 2 hours from a healthcare facility.²⁴³ During the COVID-19 pandemic, 21% of rural households were unable to access any healthcare services, compared to 16% in urban areas.²⁴⁴

UNDRIP discusses Indigenous Peoples' right to health and access to healthcare.²⁴⁵ Articles 21, 23, 24, and 29 of UNDRIP specifically focus on Indigenous populations' right to health, as well as advancing their economic and social wellbeing regarding health.²⁴⁶ Articles 21 and 23 state that Indigenous populations have the right to improve their own economic and social conditions, including developing their own healthcare and health plans.²⁴⁷ Article 24 discusses how Indigenous people have the right to lead healthy lives and access to healthcare.²⁴⁸ Article 29 states that it is the responsibility of the State to take effective measures to restore and maintain the health of Indigenous populations.²⁴⁹ Disparities in healthcare access in these populations are often worsened by Indigenous language barriers, geographic isolation, and individual concerns of discrimination by healthcare professionals.²⁵⁰ UNDRIP also states that Member States are responsible for fulfilling the Indigenous populations' right to healthy lives.²⁵¹ Therefore, achieving UHC will contribute to the upholding of UNDRIP in addition to raising health standards, and significant work is underway in LAC to achieve these goals.²⁵²

Significant progress has been made in advancing healthcare in rural and Indigenous areas.²⁵³ As of 2017, 12% of Chile's Indigenous population lived in rural areas, which have disproportionately less access to healthcare services.²⁵⁴ 30.8% of Chile's Indigenous population lives in poverty, compared to 19.9% of its non-Indigenous population, which represents a large gap in healthcare coverage that the country is addressing by expanding it to more rural and impoverished areas of the country.²⁵⁵ In 2023, the World Bank approved a \$200 million loan to Chile that will allow the nation to build more health clinics and expand telehealth services in rural areas.²⁵⁶ The project is scheduled for completion by the end of 2027, with the desire to reach the 50% of Chilean citizens who do not use the nation's healthcare systems.²⁵⁷ Doctors Without Borders (DWB) is another organization with multiple projects in LAC advancing rural healthcare infrastructure.²⁵⁸ In Venezuela, DWB works in Indigenous communities to combat the spread of

²⁴³ World Health Organization. *Health and the environment*. 2002.

²⁴⁴ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. *Health at a Glance: Latin America and the Caribbean 2020*. 2020.

²⁴⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. 2007. pp. 21-24.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. pp. 19-20.

²⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 20.

²⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 23.

²⁵⁰ International Journal for Equity in Health. *Health disparities among indigenous populations in Latin America: a scoping review*. 2025.

²⁵¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. 2007. pp. 21-24.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ World Bank Group. *Chile moves towards universal and resilient primary health coverage with support from the World Bank*. 2023.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs. *Indigenous peoples in Chile*. 2025.

²⁵⁶ World Bank Group. *Chile moves towards universal and resilient primary health coverage with support from the World Bank*. 2023.

²⁵⁷ World Bank Group. *Chile: Program for Universal Primary Healthcare Coverage and Resilience*. 2023.

²⁵⁸ Médecins Sans Frontières. *Tracking mosquitoes to prevent malaria in Venezuela*. 2021.



malaria.²⁵⁹ DWB has worked to provide emergency healthcare in post-conflict rural areas in Colombia.²⁶⁰ The situation could continue to worsen due to cuts to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), as 183,000 people have already lost access to assistance and a further 638,000 are at risk of being affected.²⁶¹ USAID cuts will be of significant importance to LAC.²⁶²

International partnerships exemplify opportunities for strategic investments in health systems to enhance resiliency.²⁶³ For example, Saint Lucia, in collaboration with the World Bank, launched a Performance-Based Financing Pilot Program to combat diabetes and hypertension, the leading causes of death in the nation, in rural areas.²⁶⁴ Under the Saint Lucia Health System Strengthening Project, the program is meant to provide higher-quality health services to individuals, as well as reward health centers for providing preventative care and proper treatment services.²⁶⁵ The program began with services in eight health centers on the island, and beginning in 2024, began expanding to all 17 centers, ensuring that people, regardless of socioeconomic background and location, have access to quality care.²⁶⁶ Nahum Jn. Baptiste, collaborator of the program, discusses how its effectiveness lies in looking at the whole population as one entity, and not dividing by sick and healthy individuals.²⁶⁷

Conclusion

In addition to being a fundamental human right, UHC is also a key component of inclusive and sustainable development throughout LAC.²⁶⁸ Although UHC is essential for lowering poverty, enhancing population well-being, and promoting economic progress, there are substantial social, financial, and structural obstacles to its implementation throughout the area.²⁶⁹ Inequitable access to high-quality care is nevertheless hampered by enduring disparities and underfunded health systems.²⁷⁰ This challenge is further exacerbated by the marginalization of rural and Indigenous communities and by fragmented service delivery.²⁷¹ The region also provides success stories, such as Chile's focused rural health programs for the Indigenous population.²⁷² Costa Rica's solidarity-based model shows that advancement is achievable with robust political will, primary care funding, and inclusive government.²⁷³ Achieving UHC in LAC is closely linked to the broader realization of the SDGs, specifically SDG 3, and must be pursued

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Médecins Sans Frontières. *Worsening conflict leaves tens of thousands without essential care in Colombia*. 2025.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Meyer, P. Library of Congress. *U.S. Foreign Assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean: FY 2025 Appropriations*. 2025.

²⁶³ World Bank. *Saint Lucia's Quest to Reduce Hypertension and Diabetes through Performance-Based Financing*. 2024.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Pan American Health Organization. *Toward Universal Health Coverage and Equity in Latin America and the Caribbean: Evidence from Selected Countries*. 2015. p. 10.

²⁶⁹ World Health Organization. *Universal health coverage (UHC)*. 2025.

²⁷⁰ World Health Organization. *Historic resolution calls for action to improve the health of Indigenous Peoples*. 2023.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs. *Indigenous peoples in Chile*. 2025.

²⁷³ International Labour Organization. *Costa Rica: Ensuring universal health protection*. 2022. p. 1.



through resilient, rights-based, and community-driven health systems.²⁷⁴ SDG 3 has high amounts of synergies with other goals.²⁷⁵

Further Research

Delegates should keep the following questions in mind when conducting further research: How can ECLAC overcome the three traps limiting UHC in LAC? How can ECLAC help the region recover regarding universal healthcare, especially in a post-COVID-19 world? What measures can be taken to make healthcare systems more resilient when faced with issues like the COVID-19 pandemic? What existing organizations exist that ECLAC can partner with on this issue? To what extent should Member States, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations play in achieving universal healthcare in LAC? How can Member States guarantee and improve access to the healthcare system for vulnerable groups, such as women, children, and Indigenous peoples? Which successful policies can be extended to Member States in the region?

²⁷⁴ Pan American Health Organization. *Toward Universal Health Coverage and Equity in Latin America and the Caribbean: Evidence from Selected Countries*. 2015. p. 10.

²⁷⁵ Wong. Earth.org. *Exploring the Interconnectedness of Sustainable Development Goals*. 2021.



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