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Margarita Beneke de Sanfeliú
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Preface

Southern Voice's flagship initiative on the State of the Sustainable Development Goals (SVSS) has generated country-level, evidence-based analysis to enrich the global dialogue on the 2030 Agenda. SVSS is neither a typical data-driven analysis of progress nor a traditional monitoring exercise of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Instead, through this research initiative, we seek to identify the 'second-generation' challenges of the global agenda along with the policy responses to address them.

Our cross-country and regional analyses show that, on the one hand, national governments have made discernible progress in designing policy frameworks aligned with the Agenda. The governments have recognised the importance of not leaving the most vulnerable behind. On the other hand, weak coordination among relevant stakeholders and lack of horizontal coherence remain as challenges in achieving the Goals. Silo approaches continue to undermine national governments' ability to address systemic problems and create the necessary conditions to end poverty for all. The paucity of financial resources, along with no changes in the allocative priorities, are symptomatic of most of the developing countries' drive towards SDGs.

With these challenges in mind, the SVSS report identifies three layers of critical action and analysis. First, we explore who is potentially excluded from deriving the benefits of SDG delivery within the country's contextual realities. Second, we recognise that the Goals are not necessarily additive (even within a holistic agenda) and delve into the links among Goals and their interconnections, to maximise their synergies and fend the trade-offs. Third, we explore the implications of the current conduct of the global institutions and policies for the national efforts to implement SDGs.

This study explores the advances of the 2030 Agenda in Latin America, highlighting the country diversity regarding size, income, poverty level and inequality. It also discusses on the development traps currently faced by the region.

We hope that this piece of Southern Voice's research will enlighten the thought process of the policy community and development practitioners in their efforts towards a fuller realisation of the 2030 Agenda.

Debapriya Bhattacharya, PhD
Team Leader, SVSS
Chair, Southern Voice and Distinguished Fellow, CPD

Abstract

Latin American countries are diverse, both in their size and population and in their level of development. Only four countries have reached high-income status in recent years; the rest are middle-income countries. A key contribution of this survey is its focus on middle-income countries.

The research questions explored are:

- How are national governments and regional entities integrating the 2030 Agenda into their policies, budgets, and initiatives?
- Are governments, international agencies, and non-state actors committing to the success of the 2030 Agenda?
- Are there areas of critical concern for the region that may hinder progress towards achieving the SDGs?

The analysis is based on secondary data and a comprehensive literature review, including 2016 to 2018 Voluntary National Reviews (VNR). This study brings together key findings of the many and diverse efforts (actions, studies and publications, and experiences) that governments, regional and international organisations, and other development partners have made to contribute to achieving the SDGs.

For Latin America, the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda provides a particularly relevant framework to address the multidimensional approaches needed to break the development traps and to turn them into opportunities to achieve a higher level of development.

Authors

Margarita Beneke de Sanfeliú is the director of the Center for Research and Statistics at the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES) with more than 25 years of experience coordinating interdisciplinary research teams and in quantitative and qualitative research.

Andrea Rodríguez is a researcher at the Center of Research and Statistics at the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES). Her areas of interest are entrepreneurship and innovation, and women's participation in society.

Marjorie Trigueros is a senior researcher at the Department of Legal Studies at the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES) with more than 15 years of experience in international trade, democratic institutions, state modernization and competitiveness.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CABEI	Central American Bank for Economic Integration
CIE	Centre for Research and Statistics, FUSADES
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FUSADES	Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
HLPF	High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
IAEG-SDGs	Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
LMIC	Lower-Middle-Income Countries
MIC	Middle-Income Country
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Students Assessment
PISA-D	Programme for International Students Assessment for Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UIC	Upper-Income Countries
UMIC	Upper-Middle-Income Countries
UN	United Nations
VNRs	Voluntary National Reviews

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Introduction

Latin American countries are diverse in their size, population and level of development. Poverty and inequality in Latin American have been decreasing in the last two decades (World Bank, 2019). Despite progress, only four countries have reached high-income status recently; the others have been middle-income countries for a long time; some as early as the 1960s and 1970s. This is known as the middle-income trap (Agénor, 2012), a condition particularly persistent in the region.

Progress in the region is stalled by interacting and reinforcing factors, generating four development traps: productivity traps, social vulnerability traps, environmental traps, and institutional traps (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], Development Bank of Latin America [CAF], United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC], & European Union [EU], 2019). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, conceived as integrated and unified to balance the three dimensions of development (economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection), provides a particularly relevant framework for Latin America to develop the multidimensional approaches needed to break the development traps and to achieve a higher level of development.

A key contribution of this study is its focus on middle-income countries and insights into the advances of the 2030 Agenda. It highlights specific implementation challenges and opportunities for the region in five areas crucial for achieving the SDGs (Bhattacharya, Khan, Rezbana, & Mostaque, 2016): policy alignment, institutional infrastructure to deliver the SDGs, financial resources mobilisation, partnerships and participation, and data for monitoring and accountability.

This study explores the following questions:

- How are national governments and regional entities integrating the 2030 Agenda into their policies, budgets, and initiatives?
- Are governments, international agencies, and non-state actors committing to the success of the 2030 Agenda?

- Are there areas of critical concern for the region that may hinder progress towards achieving the SDGs?

This study focuses on Latin America. According to the United Nations' geographical classification, this region includes 20 countries in two subregions: eight in Central America (Mexico, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, and Belize), and 12 in South America: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, Guyana and Suriname. The analysis presented here includes the 17 Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries; they represent almost 99% of the total Latin American population[1]. Despite their differences, these countries share similar historical, political, economic and social processes. They were conquered and colonized by the Spanish and Portuguese empires. They achieved political independence around two hundred years ago and went through processes of authoritarian regimes, populism, and democratic institutionalization. They moved from mostly being exporters of commodities to a process of import substitution industrialization, and a process of trade liberalisation. Finally, slow social progress, poverty, and high-income inequality are common denominators in the region[2]. This study does not focus on progress within each country but seeks to identify regional trends and challenges, including processes of adoption, delivery, and follow-up of the SDGs.

The analysis is based on secondary data and a comprehensive literature review of primary and secondary sources. The study brings together key findings of the many and diverse efforts (actions, studies and publications, and experiences) that governments, regional and international organisations, and other development partners have made to achieve the SDGs.

The study is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the methodological approach. Section 3 presents a general overview of Latin America, highlighting the country diversity regarding size, income, poverty level and inequality. This section contains a discussion on the development traps currently faced by the region. Section 4 explores the pre-SDG period, as well as trends and challenges in the achievement of quality education (SDG 4), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), Goals in Latin America from the 1990s to the present. Given its relevance to the region, SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (partnerships for the Goals) have also been included in the analysis. Section 5 examines the implementation challenges

1 Belize, Guyana and Surinam are not included in this survey. This survey also excludes Caribbean countries.

2 See Landes (1998), chapters 20 and 28; Diamond (1997), chapters 3 and last section of chapter 18; Acemoglu and Robison (2012).

in the region in five critical areas: policy alignment, institutional arrangements, resource mobilisation, partnerships, and data and accountability. In section 6, critical concerns that may create obstacles to achieving the 2030 Agenda are discussed. Finally, section 7 summarises the main findings and present some conclusions and recommendations.

Methodological approach

The analysis presented here includes the 17 Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries in Latin America since they represent a large proportion of the regional population and share similar historical, political, economic and social processes. Belize, Guyana, and Suriname, which share similar historical, political and economic contexts with the Caribbean, and are member states of the Caribbean Community (Nelson, 2014), are not included in this survey; together they represent less than 0.3% of total Latin American population.

This study explores the actions that countries are taking to implement the 2030 Agenda and the challenges faced in five key areas: policy alignment, institutional infrastructure, financial resources, partnerships and participation, and data for monitoring and accountability. The analysis is based on secondary data and a comprehensive literature review, including the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) presented to the United Nations High Level Political Forum (HLPF) between 2016 and 2018 (Table 1). This review also includes shadow reports presented to the HLPF by civil society organisations in nine countries, that offer perspectives on the implementation process and its results. Text analysis was conducted using NVIVO, which is a qualitative data analysis software, to detect common trends and limitations for implementation of the Agenda and achievement of the SDGs.

The 2030 Agenda provides a particularly relevant framework for Latin America to develop the multidimensional approaches needed to break the development traps.

To complement the analysis, a review was conducted of published literature, policy documents, and reports produced by several international institutions and research centres which follow the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Additional information comes from the Regional Observatory on Planning for Development of the ECLAC, as well as webpages of national, regional, and international institutions related to the SDGs.

Table 1. Voluntary national reviews and shadow reports on sustainable development 2016-2018

Indicators	VNRs			Shadow Reports		
	2016	2017	2018	2016	2017	2018
Argentina		x				
Brazil		x			x	x
Bolivia**						
Chile*		x				
Colombia	x		x	x		
Costa Rica		x				x
Ecuador			x			x
El Salvador		x			x	
Guatemala*		x		x	x	x
Honduras		x				
Mexico	x		x	x	x	x
Nicaragua						
Panamá		x				
Paraguay			x	x		
Peru		x		x		x
Uruguay		x	x			
Venezuela	x					

* Countries that presented VNR in 2019: Chile and Guatemala; Brazil and El Salvador were scheduled to do so but declined to present.

**Bolivia is scheduled to present its first VNR in 2020.

Source: VNRs, compiled by authors.

Latin America: poverty, inequality and middle-income traps

Latin American populations range from 3.5 million in Uruguay to 209 million in Brazil (see Table 2). According to the World Bank classification[3], most countries in the region are upper-middle-income; only four are considered lower-middle-income, and another four are upper-income countries (UICs). Since the SDGs were launched, only the status of a few countries changed. In 2017, Panamá reached the upper-income level, and Guatemala reached upper-middle-income status[4].

Table 2. Classification by income level, 2017*

Country	Subregion	Year-current status achieved	GNI per capita, in PPP-adjusted dollars	GNI per capita, Atlas method in current USD	Population	% population (countries included in study)
Upper-income (UIC)						11.85%
Uruguay	South America	2012	19,400	14,900	3,436,646	0.58%
Chile	South America	2014	21,415	13,290	18,470,439	3.12%
Panama	Central America	2017	20,066	13,260	4,106,771	0.69%
Argentina *	South America	2014	18,462	13,120	44,044,811	7.45%
Upper-middle-income (UMIC)						82.50%
Costa Rica	Central America	2008	14,619	11,090	4,949,954	0.84%
Mexico	North America	1990	17,533	8,940	124,777,324	21.10%
Brazil	South America	1989	13,975	8,670	207,833,831	35.15%

3 The World Bank classifies countries according to their per-capita income, in current US Dollars, as follows: lower-middle-income, USD 996–3,895; upper-middle-income, USD 3,896–12,055; high-income, > USD 12,055 See https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/new-country-classifications-income-level-2018-2019

4 In its classification scheme published in 2019, the World Bank reclassified Argentina as an upper-middle income country; however, since most statistics described in this survey are not available for 2018 or 2019, Argentina is considered as a UIC in this study.

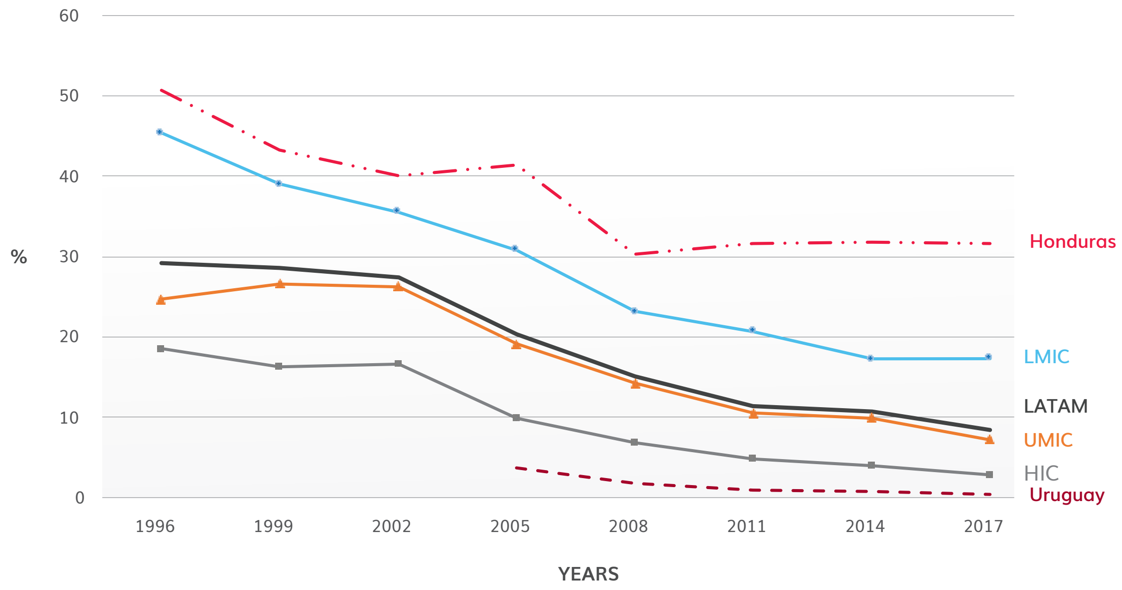
Peru	South America	2008	11,987	6,060	31,444,297	5.32%
Colombia	South America	2000	12,963	5,930	48,901,066	8.27%
Ecuador	South America	2010	10,220	5,860	16,785,361	2.84%
Paraguay	South America	2014	11,430	5,390	6,867,062	1.16%
Guatemala	Central America	2017	7,283	4,060	16,914,936	2.86%
Venezuela **	South America	2015 (from UIC)	-	-	29,390,409	4.97%
Lower-middle income (LMIC)						5.65%
El Salvador ***	Central America	< 1987	6,832	3,600	6,388,122	1.08%
Bolivia ***	South America	< 1987	6,640	3,090	11,192,854	1.89%
Honduras	Central America	1999	4,148	2,200	9,429,013	1.59%
Nicaragua	Central America	2005	5,025	2,090	6,384,855	1.08%

* In the latest revision (2019), Argentina was reclassified as UMIC.
**Income data for Venezuela is not available.
***The World Bank had classified Bolivia and El Salvador as LMIC in 1987, which is the first year this information is available.
Source: World Bank (2019); compiled by authors

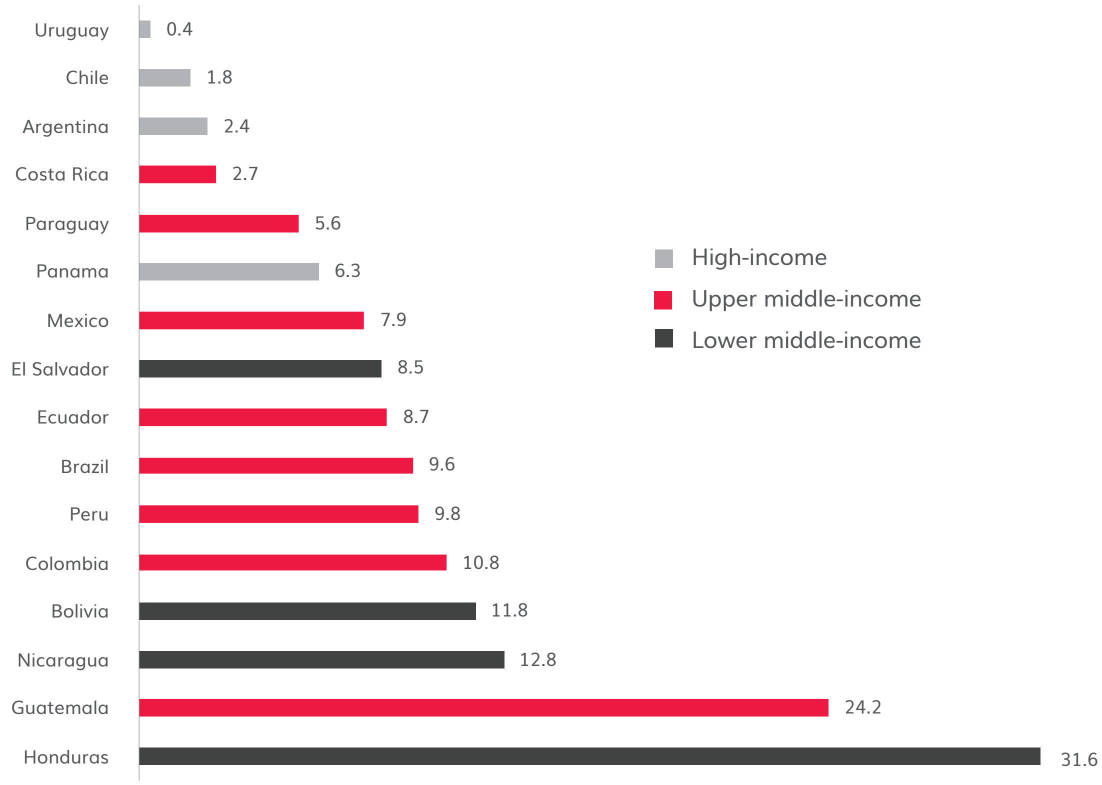
Poverty in Latin America has decreased in the last two decades (World Bank, 2019). Currently, most countries in the region show no or lower levels of extreme poverty (using the USD 1.90 a day poverty line). Despite regional progress, since 2016, extreme poverty has increased in Brazil, resulting in an approximately 10% increase in the region in 2017. This is the highest figure since 2008 (ECLAC, 2019b). On the other hand, the proportion of the population living under the USD 3.2 a day poverty line has not increased, but the reduction rate has stagnated in some countries (see Figure 1). Honduras and Guatemala show a higher proportion of the population living under these conditions, at 31% and 24%, respectively. In contrast, in Uruguay, it is barely 0.4% (World Bank, 2019). In Venezuela, poverty has increased and is expected to continue growing (World Data Lab, 2018). With the reduction of poverty, Latin America's middle classes expanded from approximately 23% to 26% of households in 2018 (Hogson, 2019); however, growth has stagnated since 2016 (World Bank, 2018a).

Figure 1. Poverty headcount ratio at USD 3.2 a day (2011 PPP) (% of the population)

A. Evolution of poverty rates, by income level



B. Poverty headcount, USD 3.20 PPP per day–2017



*Venezuela is not included due to outdated income data and availability issues.
Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank (2019); compiled by authors

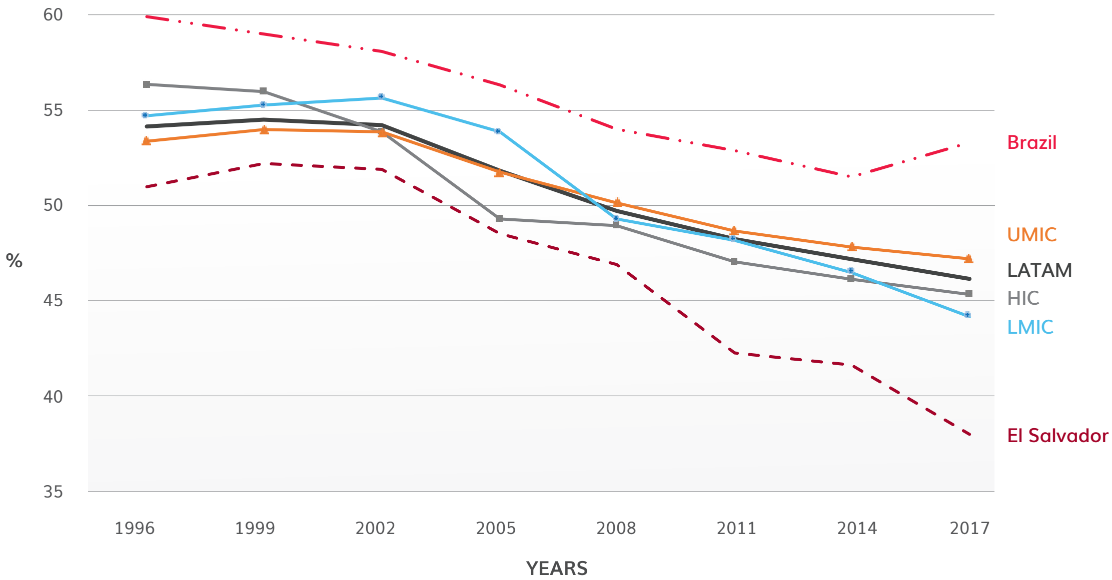
The reduction of poverty in Latin America has several explanations. Unlike the 1980s when most Latin American countries suffered economic crises and high debt levels, since the 1990s most countries underwent structural reforms and democratization processes, improving macroeconomic conditions and trade policies (Edwards, Esquivel, & Marquez, 2007). During the same period, global growth favoured demand for primary products exported by many Latin American countries, generating a commodity boom, improving government revenues and expenditure (Edwards et al., 2007). However, results achieved by countries varied, but most shared slow social progress, insufficient poverty reduction and high-income inequality (Landes, 1998; Diamond, 1997; Acemoglu & Robison, 2012). Two factors also contributed to further reductions in poverty. On the one hand, social protections programs introduced in the past 20 years, including conditional cash transfers and other targeted policies, initially in Mexico and Brazil, and then, in most countries (ECLAC, 2015a). On the other hand, the participation of women in the labour force has also played a role in poverty decline (World Bank, 2012). Poverty changes in recent years have been influenced primarily by changes in labour income (ECLAC, 2019b).

Income inequality, measured using the GINI index, has been falling in most Latin American countries in the last 20 years; with a slowdown since 2012, especially in HICs and UMICs (see Figure 2). In 2017, El Salvador and Uruguay had the lowest inequality in the region; while, Brazil, Honduras and Panama are considered the most unequal (see Figure 2). One driver of this decline is the reduction of wage inequality—even more important than conditional cash transfers, the expansion of pension coverage, and changes in household demographics (Messina & Silva, 2017). Latin America is still the region with the highest levels of inequality in the world (ECLAC, 2018a), due in large part to the very high concentration of income at the top of the distribution (Birdsall, Lustig, & McLeod, 2011).

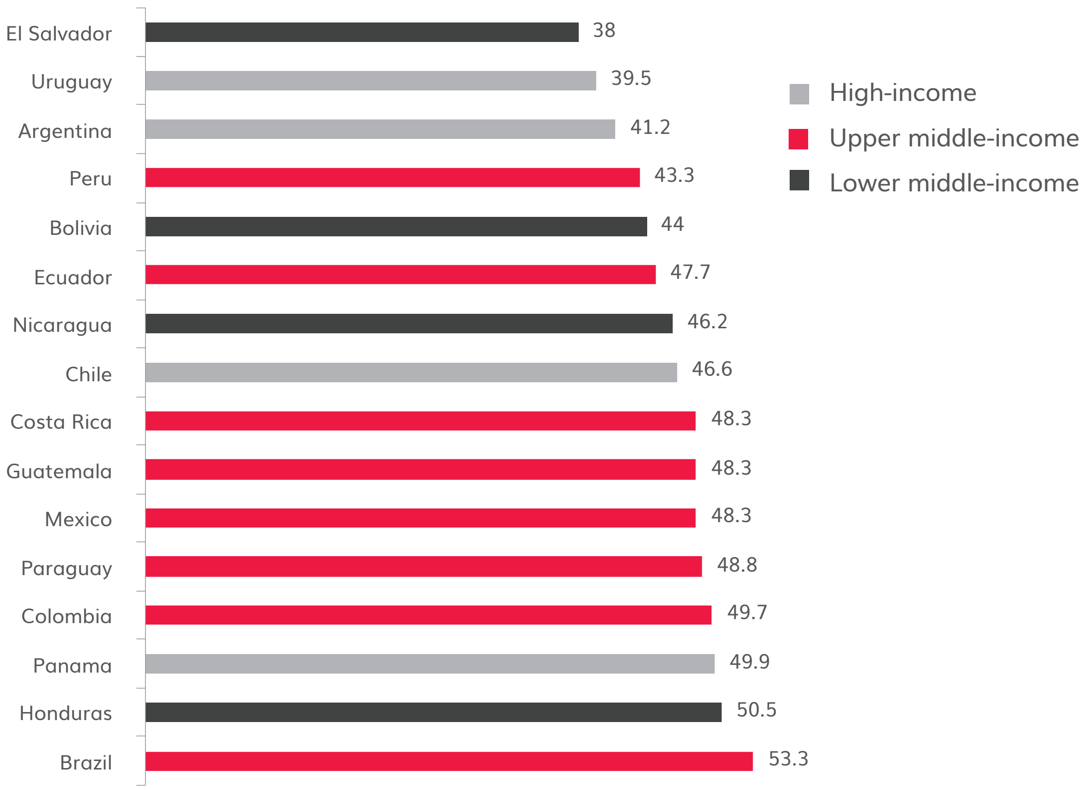
In Latin America, just four countries have reached upper-income status recently: Uruguay in 2012, Argentina and Chile in 2014, and Panama in 2017. Uruguay doubled its GDP per capita between 1990 and 2017, improving education, poverty reduction, health, environmental sustainability, corruption and citizen security. In Chile, GDP per capita increased two and a half times between 1990 and 2017, sharply reducing poverty, increasing life expectancy and reducing infant mortality to levels close to the OECD average. In Panama, GDP almost tripled between 1990 and 2017, also improving life expectancy and reducing infant mortality (OECD, CAF, ECLAC & EU, 2019). In the past decade, Argentina has made improvements in education and extreme poverty reduction, and GDP per capita almost doubled between 1990 and 2017. However, recent economic performance resulted in Argentina being reclassified as a middle-income country in 2019.

Figure 2. Inequality Latin America (GINI Index)

A. Evolution of inequality (GINI Index), by income level



B. Inequality (GINI Index)–2017



Source: World Bank (2019); elaborated by the authors.

On the other hand, most countries in the region were able to reach middle-income status; some moved from LICs to MICs, but then failed to advance any further. This is known as the middle-income trap (Agénor, 2012). Out of 17 countries included in this analysis, 14 are middle-income countries (MICs) and have been so for a long time[5]. To continue reducing poverty and inequality, Latin American countries need to overcome this middle-income trap.

Factors sustaining the middle-income trap interact and reinforce themselves, making development challenges more complex, limiting the capacity of Latin American countries to move forward (Taylor, 2017; Melguizo et al., 2017; Doner & Schneider, 2016; Agénor, 2012 and 2016). These factors can be seen in four structural traps:

- **The productivity trap:** The concentration of exports on the primary and extractive sectors or industries with low sophistication, and difficult participation in higher-value-added segments of the global value chains, means that jobs tend to be of lower quality. Simultaneously, low productivity makes it difficult for medium, small, and microenterprises to link with international markets (OECD, CAF, ECLAC & EU, 2019).

- **The social vulnerability trap:** Most people who escape poverty are part of a new vulnerable middle class. They tend to have low-quality, usually informal jobs, associated with a lack of social protection and lower incomes. Because of these circumstances, they do not invest in their human capital and lack the capacity to save and invest in dynamic entrepreneurial activities (OECD, CAF, ECLAC & EU, 2019).

- **The environmental trap:** The productivity structure in most Latin American countries focuses on material and natural resources, which may be environmentally and economically unsustainable. There is a concentration on a high carbon growth path that has a high cost to abandon. A dependency on a productive structure that depletes natural resources is also not sustainable (OECD, CAF, ECLAC & EU, 2019).

- **The institutional trap:** The expansion of the middle class has brought new expectations for better quality public policies, services, and institutions. However, institutions have not been able to respond adequately. This results in a vicious

5 The World Bank began classifying countries by income level in 1987; that year, all countries in this study were classified as middle-income. Since then, two countries were considered lower-income countries for a period of time (Honduras from 1990 to 1998 and Nicaragua from 1991 to 2004) and only three reached upper-income status (Uruguay, Panama and Argentina). See Table 2 above.

cycle: declining trust and satisfaction and deepening of social disengagement make citizens see less value in fulfilment of their social obligations, such as paying taxes. In turn, this limits resources available to respond to higher expectations of society for better public services (OECD, CAF, ECLAC & EU, 2019). Discontent can generate social instability, as seen in recent years in street protests in Peru, Ecuador, Chile and Bolivia (Pardo, 2019). These conditions also contribute to the emergence of populist governments, which tend to increase the likelihood of setbacks and lead to further deterioration of democracy (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2019).

To escape these traps, it is essential that countries invest in education, quality infrastructure, and technology, and promote competitiveness and productivity (Taylor, 2017). Education plays an important role, especially in the transition from middle-income to high-income status (Wang, Li, Abbey, & Rozelle, 2018). This is particularly so for tertiary education (Heckman & Yi, 2012). Investing in education is key, especially given global technological changes, to ensure that individuals and countries are prepared to take advantage of the fourth industrial revolution. At the same time, countries should boost innovation to increase productivity and overcome dependency on exports of primary products, generating more formal jobs.

In addition, Latin America needs to prioritise policy actions to improve the rule of law (fight corruption and promote transparency), improve taxation systems, and reduce gender gaps (Gurria, 2018). These reforms are complex and will require building political and public support to implement. Improving institutions would generate stronger public confidence and increase the legitimacy of public policy and democracy.

However, addressing the policy issues outlined above, without considering the interactions among them, will have limited effects. Thus, for Latin America, the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda provides a particularly relevant framework to implement the multidimensional approaches needed to break these development traps and turn them into opportunities to achieve a higher level of development.

Quality education, productive jobs, and strong institutions: significant challenges

Given the evidence presented above, improving the quality of education and achieving more years of schooling, generating better jobs and reducing gender gaps, strengthening institutions, and procuring appropriate financing mechanisms are relevant in the Latin American context. These issues relate to quality education (SDG 4), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16) and partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17). The achievement of these Goals, in turn, can break the middle-income trap and achieve other Goals of the 2030 Agenda. This section explores the evolution of relevant indicators from the 1990s to the present. Importantly, there is not one common pattern across the indicators presented, due to differences across and within subregions (Central America and Mexico vs South America), or because of gaps in income level (UICs, UMICs, LMICs).

SDG 4 (quality education)

Completion of primary education in Latin America has become near-universal (more than 90% of the population) in all countries, with noticeable improvements also in the completion of lower secondary education. Mean years of schooling have increased from six years in 1995 to almost eight in 2017. Chile leads regional progress in this area, with a little over ten years of schooling, while Honduras and Guatemala trail behind with an average of 6.5 years.

> **Completion of primary education in Latin America has become near-universal in all countries.**

Despite some progress, gaps remain in Latin American education related to income level, gender, place of residence, language, ethnicity, and disability (ECLAC, 2019b). Rural areas often have poor educational services, and coverage is marked by gender inequalities, such as work overloads for women (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2018). Women with fewer years of schooling in rural areas and within indigenous populations are at greater risk of early pregnancies, which creates a vicious cycle in which escaping poverty becomes harder (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2018).

Disparities across countries are more visible at higher levels of education. Tertiary education has expanded markedly in all countries. However, the gaps between HICs and LMICs are also increasing; in Chile, enrolment reached 45% in 2017, but in Honduras, it was only 15%. Within LMICs, the notable exception is Bolivia; with the education revolution implemented by law in 2010, almost all children have access to at least secondary education, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or income level (Andersen, Medinaceli, Maldonado, & Hernani-Limarino, 2020). Bolivia's net enrolment in tertiary education is the third highest in the region.

Table 3. PISA: Mean scores by subject (on a scale from 0 to 1,000)*

		2015			2018		
Group	Countries	Science	Reading	Mathematics	Science	Reading	Mathematics
PISA	Argentina * (CABA)				404	402	379
		475	475	456			
	Chile	447	459	423	444	452	417
	Uruguay	435	437	418	426	427	418
	Costa Rica	420	427	400	416	426	402
	Colombia	416	425	390	413	412	391
	Mexico	416	423	408	419	420	409
	Brazil	401	407	377	404	413	384
	Peru	397	398	387	404	401	400
	Panama**				365	377	353
PISA-D	Ecuador	399	409	377			
	Guatemala	365	369	334			
	Honduras	370	371	343			
	Paraguay	358	370	326			
OECD Countries		493	493	490	489	487	489
Global scores		456	451	449			

* In 2015, averages were computed only for the capital city (Buenos Aires, CABA), due to inconsistencies.
**Panama participates from 2018
Note. Levels of proficiency go from 1 to 6, the highest. The scores in red denote proficiency level 2 (students can extract and make inferences about basic or everyday knowledge); in black, proficiency level 1 (students recognise basic knowledge, but they need support to identify relationships and to interpret the information); and in grey, scores below minimum level.
Source: PISA Databases (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019); compiled by authors.

Together with increased access, quality of education is key to achieving the SDGs. In 2015, eight Latin American countries participated in the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) with one more added in 2018 (Panama). Additionally, four countries participated in the pilot project PISA-D, which has a test adapted to the context of developing countries but results are measured on the same scale (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2017a)[6]. Latin America scored at the bottom of the international ranking on quality of education (Bos, Elías, Vegas, & Zoido, 2016). Performance in the three subjects evaluated was deficient, especially in science and mathematics. Participating countries in the region achieved scores below the OECD and the global average. Only the city of Buenos Aires (CABA) exceeded the global average in the three subjects in 2015 (see Table 3). Chile, the country with the highest averages in 2015, increased its performance, especially in mathematics, as a result of better resourcing interventions such as improved access to basic education materials and modified school calendar schedules (Nicolai, Hoy, Berliner, & Aedy, 2015). However, in the 2018 version of the test, Chile no longer achieved scores in level 2 in mathematics. In the latest round of tests, most participating Latin American countries maintained their proficiency levels even when their average scores decreased. The exceptions are Brazil and Peru, which increased scores in all subjects, especially in mathematics. Panama, which participated for the first time in 2018, achieved the lowest scores in the region in all subjects.

SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy)

The electrification rate is almost universal in Latin America: more than 90% in 2017 (World Bank, 2019). However, the region has the challenge of accelerating the production and consumption of renewable energy (derived from hydropower, solid and liquid biofuels, wind, the sun, biogas, geothermal and marine sources, and waste). Almost all energy produced by Paraguay, Costa Rica and Uruguay comes from renewable sources. However, in upper-income countries, the share of renewable sources is only around 30%, with a slow increase since 2004 (International Energy Agency, 2018). However, the proportion of renewable energy has decreased steadily in the region's LMICs since 1995, except for Guatemala, whose consumption of renewable energy remains above 60% of its total final energy consumption. To accelerate the transition to clean energy, incentives should be increased, given current financial and political support is limited (FGV Energía, 2018).

Latin American countries have modestly improved their efficiency in the use of energy. Energy intensity, measured as the amount of energy needed to produce one unit of GDP, has steadily decreased in the last ten years, especially in LMICs. The difference between

6 PISA and PISA-D are useful tools to measure how schools are responding to the challenges of today's knowledge societies (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2017b).

HICs and LMICs remains large. Honduras had the highest level of energy intensity (units of energy used to produce a unit of GDP), where Panama had the lowest (International Energy Agency, 2018).

SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth)

The progress observed in poverty reduction may be a result of favourable labour market conditions (Nicolai, Bhatkal, Hoy, & Aedy, 2016). On average, vulnerable employment, defined as own-account or contributing family work, has declined from 40% in 1995 to close to 34% in 2014. However, it has increased slightly since then. Bolivia experienced a noticeable and continuous reduction from 70% in 1991 to close to 50% in 2011; yet since then the trend has reversed, reaching 58% in 2019. Costa Rica has continued to improve in this indicator (World Bank, 2019). In 2019, the situation among Latin American countries varied greatly, from 58% in Bolivia to just 20% in Costa Rica. In general, rural areas have a higher rate of unpaid contributing family workers than urban areas, especially among women (United Nations Development Group [UNDG], 2018).

In addition to vulnerable employment, informality is prevalent, especially in MICs, and is higher among youth, women, older adults and in rural areas (UNDG, 2018). Costa Rica has the third-lowest proportion of informal employment(36%), behind Uruguay (approximately 24%) and Chile (approximately 28%). This country has sustained efforts to promote the transformation of their economy to attract investments in higher-value activities (Argumedo, 2015), which provide higher returns to education (Gindling & Trejos, 2013). At the same time, it has implemented regulatory improvements to facilitate the registration of informal workers, such as domestic workers and freelancers to enjoy these benefits (Cheng-Lo, 2018). Contrastingly, informality in Bolivia, Honduras, and Guatemala is very high, at approximately 78%, 76%, and 73% respectively. Despite the great improvements in educational attainment, returns on education remain low (Andersen, Medinaceli, Maldonado, & Hernani-Limarino, 2020). This shows that failing to address the high dependency on commodities and low-productivity sectors prevents countries from providing higher quality employment for younger cohorts with higher levels of schooling, which generates dissatisfaction among the population.

Gender disparities in the region's labour market are changing slowly. Since 1990, female labour force participation increased from 40% to around 50% in 2017. Trends are similar among different income levels. However, there are differences among countries. For example, Peru has improved more than other countries in the region, going from 50% at the beginning of the period to almost 70% in 2017. In contrast, Guatemala, which has the lowest ratio in the region, has not undergone significant changes; its level of female participation in 2017 was the same (around 40%) as in 1995. In general, participation is lower among poorer rural women, those with fewer skills, older women (over 54 years) and youth (18-24 years) (Beneke de Sanfeliú, Polanco, Vásquez, & Calderon, 2016).

Even if, on average, Latin America is improving in terms of female labour force participation, women remain at a disadvantage in terms of time-use, access to equal pay, and other resources (ECLAC, 2015b). Insufficient education and training and time constraints are the main obstacles to women joining the labour market. Cultural norms regarding women's roles as caregivers and as responsible for unpaid household work are also relevant (Beneke de Sanfeliú, Polanco, Vásquez, & Calderon, 2016).

SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions)

Robust institutional frameworks allow countries to promote social capital, uplift citizens' quality of life, increase participation in matters of general interest, and improve overall confidence in public institutions. Economic agents need legal certainty in institutions to make investment decisions, making a robust institutional framework essential (World Economic Forum, 2018). Given its particular relevance for Latin America, this study includes a review of SDG 16.

South America, as a subregion, is considered the fourth most peaceful region in the world (out of nine regions) in terms of the absence of internal or external armed conflicts, civil wars, and terrorism; however, recently Latin America, and especially Central America, has suffered a deterioration in peace, caused mainly by high homicides rates resulting from fragile institutions, gang violence, and social collapse (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018). The regional homicide rate of roughly 22 per 100,000 inhabitants is more than three times the global average. Around 33% of murders in the world occur in Latin America, a region with 8% of the global population (Igarape Institute, 2020). 41 of the 50 cities with the highest homicide rates in 2018 belonged to the region, with 15 in Mexico and 14 in Brazil (Martell, 2019). Central American countries in the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), are among the most violent in the world. In 2017, El Salvador had the highest ratio of homicides in the region (62 per 100,000 inhabitants), followed by Venezuela (56 per 100,000 inhabitants).

In contrast, Chile has the lowest (4 per 100,000 inhabitants) and stable homicide rates. The high rate of homicides is closely related to organised crime groups, which takes different forms in different countries, including street gangs. They represent a governance problem, as they emerge where state control is weak (Jaitman, 2017).

One key problem with the region's institutions and the rule of law is widespread corruption. The Corruption Perception Index (Transparency International, 2018) reveals that this issue is a severe problem, especially in LMICs. Yet little change has been achieved.

In 2018, just three countries had better scores than the world average (43 out of 100): Uruguay (70), Chile (67) and Costa Rica (56) Venezuela had the lowest score (18 out of 100). Widespread cases of corruption in several Latin American countries have influenced popular perceptions. For example, the 'Odebrecht' case, on the Brazilian construction company Odebrecht, showed that it had offered kickbacks and bribes to current and former government officials, many of which have been jailed (BBC World News, 2018b; El Internacional, 2018). Another high-profile case is the Lava Jato, or 'Car Wash'. This investigation began in 2014 into corruption at the oil giant Petrobras and quickly evolved into Latin America's biggest anti-corruption probe. As a result of these investigations, many countries in the region adopted laws to fight bribery (Schipani, Stott, & Webber, 2019). In other cases of corruption in El Salvador, one former president was convicted, and another is pending extradition (Del Cid, 2019).

SDG 17 (partnerships for the Goals)

Goal 17 refers to implementing and strengthening a global partnership to achieve the ambitious Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda, bringing together national governments, the international community, civil society, the private sector, and other actors. SDG 17 reflects a holistic approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda, including 19 Targets that span finance, capacity-building, trade, technology transfer, and systemic issues. These include: policy and institutional coherence, data, monitoring and accountability, and multistakeholder partnerships (United Nations, n.d.). This section focuses on trends of financial implementation measures relevant to Latin America; aspects related to non-financial means are discussed in section 5.

Domestic resources: tax revenues

The Addis Ababa Action Agenda advocates improving the mobilisation of domestic resources to achieve the SDGs through the reduction of subsidies (United Nations, 2015b), appropriate public spending consistent with national sustainable development strategies, and new policies and reforms to combat tax evasion and avoidance. Countries have also increased efforts to reduce illicit financing flows substantially by 2030 (including tax evasion and corruption). In general, tax revenues have increased in HICs and LICs, but not among UMICs. As a percentage of GDP, Uruguay has the highest tax revenues (approximately 20%), and Paraguay has the lowest (10%).

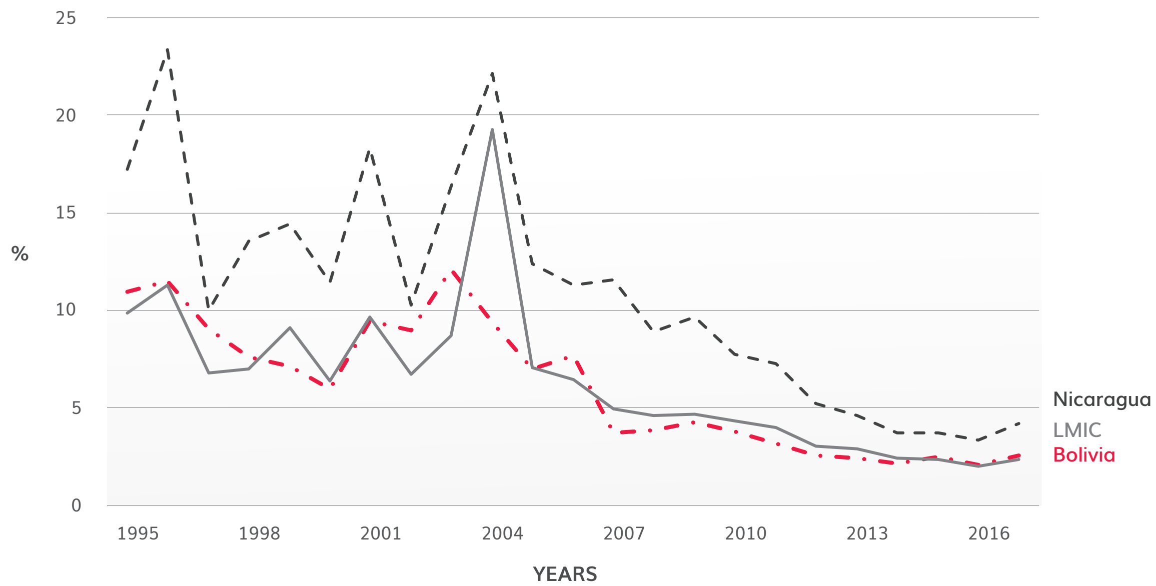
Official development assistance and blended finance

According to World Bank figures, the net amount of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and other official cooperation received by Latin America and the Caribbean increased from USD 10.288 billion in 2015 to USD 11.39 billion in 2016. However, per the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness, many donors reduced or terminated their cooperation with middle-income countries to focus on low-income countries (OECD, 2005). Consequently, ODA received by Latin American countries has declined significantly (Figure 3). Middle-income countries have encountered difficulties in accessing concessional finance because of their per-capita income, even though they still face significant development challenges (United Nations General Assembly, 2018).

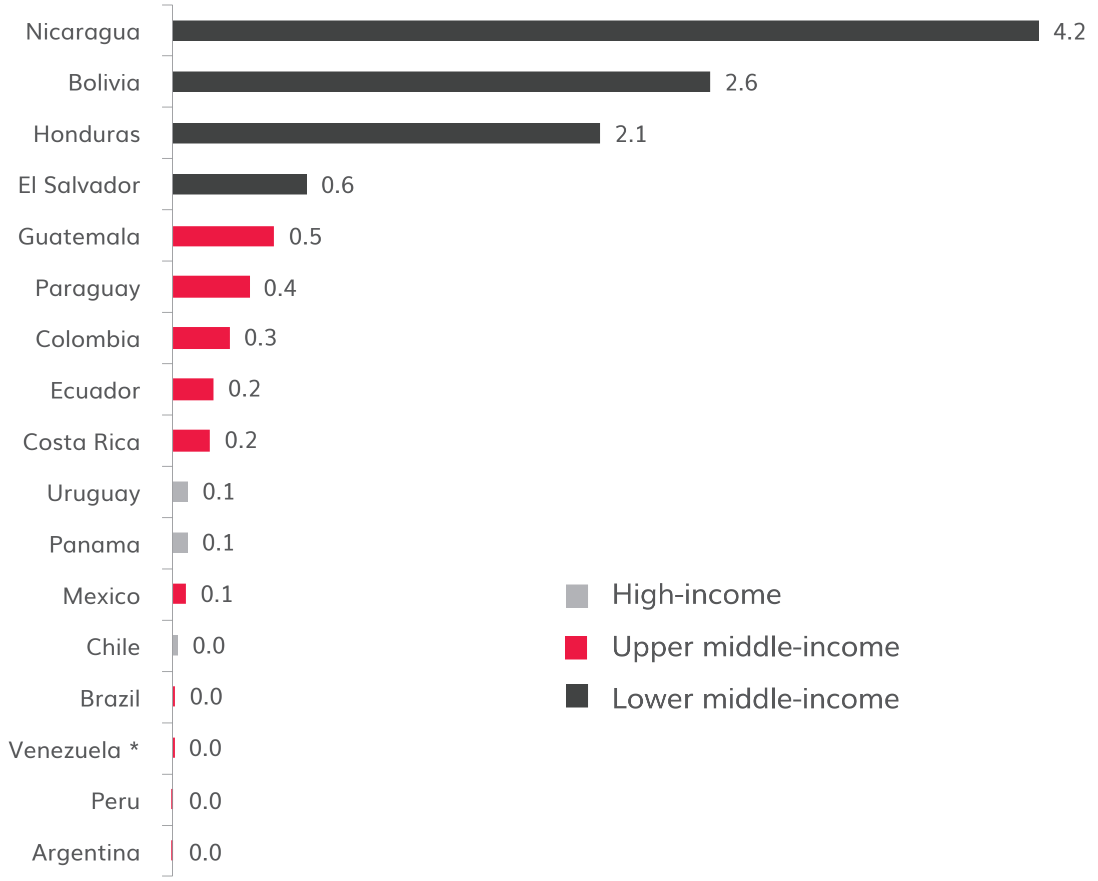
Another source of funds for development is blended finance: the targeted use of concessional funding from public or philanthropic sources to complement private sector capital in high impact projects where actual or perceived risks are too high for commercial finance (Inter-American Development Bank Blended Finance Team, 2018). Latin America receives an estimated 20% of this type of resource (Convergence, 2018). However, momentum is growing; at least 80 blended finance deals have been struck since 2000, with an accumulated value of USD 14 billion, with over USD 5 billion in 2018 alone (Diaz Loyola, 2019). Blended funds have a leverage ratio of 5.1x, larger than in any other region, which is evidence that these instruments can unlock private capital (Bery, 2018).

Figure 3. Official development assistance, as % of GNI

A. Evolution of ODA, by income level



B. Net ODA received in 2017, by country



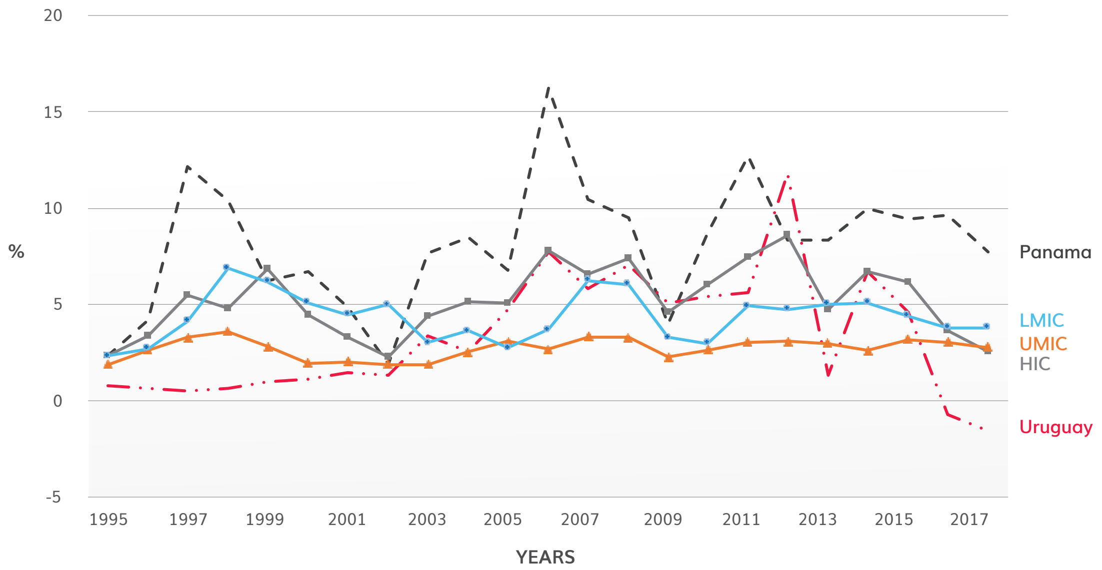
Note. Data for Venezuela corresponds to 2014.
Source: World Bank (2019); compiled by the authors.

Foreign direct investment

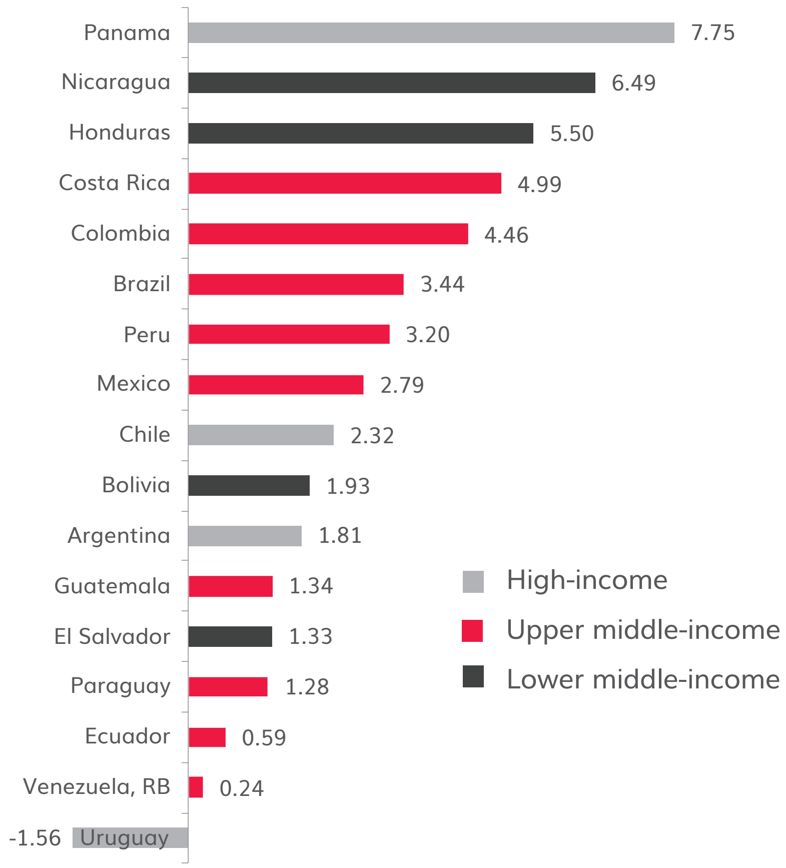
Foreign direct investment (FDI) flows to Latin America and the Caribbean rose 8% in 2017 to reach USD 151 billion, as a result of the region's economic recovery. However, inflows remain well below the 2011 peak during the commodities boom. The countries with the most significant amounts of FDI are Brazil (USD 62.7 bn), Mexico (USD 29.7 bn), Colombia (USD 14.5 bn), Argentina (USD 11.9 bn), and Peru (USD 6.8 bn) (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2018) (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Foreign direct investments, net inflows (% GDP)

A. Evolution of FDI



B. FDI, as % GNI - 2017



Source: World Bank (2019); compiled by the authors.

Remittances

Some economies in Latin America are highly dependent on private transfers sent by expatriate workers. For Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, these revenues represent more than 10% of their GDP. Honduras is the country with the highest dependency ratio, representing approximately 20% of GDP, followed by El Salvador with 18%, Guatemala with 12% and Nicaragua with 10% (BBC Mundo, 2018).

Latin America and the Caribbean was the only region to register an increase (approximately 7%) in remittance flows, supported by strengthening employment levels in the United States, reaching USD 73 billion (World Bank, 2017). Mexico, the region's largest recipient, posted an estimated growth of approximately 9% in 2016. Remittances to El Salvador also climbed to record highs, bolstered mainly by improvements in the U.S. labour market. Other countries, like Panama and Brazil, recorded estimated declines of approximately 7% and 5%, respectively. The study signals that "for some of the smaller economies in the region, remittances are particularly important, as they help cover the basic needs and expenses of low-income families" (World Bank, 2017, p. 23)

> **Some economies in Latin America are highly dependent on private transfers sent by expatriate workers.**

In December 2018, remittance flows rose approximately 9% in Latin America and the Caribbean, reaching USD 87 billion, led by Mexico and the Central American countries (World Bank, 2018b). However, remittance growth for the region is expected to slow to approximately 4% in 2019 (World Bank, 2018b).

Debt

One indicator of potential implementation weakness is that debt levels are increasing in LMICs and UMICs. The ratio of debt service to exports has been increasing since 2010, reversing the downward trend that had been present since 1990 (World Bank, 2019). This result is especially evident for Venezuela, whose debt service as a percentage of exports of goods, services, and primary income now sits at 69%. Bolivia has the lowest debt service percentage, at approximately 10%, followed by Mexico and Peru, both at approximately 12% (World Bank, 2019).

North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation

Non-financial resources are a crucial implementation instrument for the 2030 Agenda. As they confront the challenge of overcoming the middle-income trap, Latin American countries have adopted some common policy priorities (e.g. governance, inequality). In this context, the room for knowledge transfers and mutual learning is significant—including through South-South and triangular international cooperation (Melguizo, Nieto-Parra, Perea, & Pérez, 2017). Regionally, South-South cooperation (SSC), defined as two or more developing countries sharing knowledge, skills, expertise, and resources to meet development goals through concerted efforts (United Nations Office of South-South Cooperation [UNOSSC], 2019). It has become an important and feasible means to strengthen capabilities to achieve the SDGs (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2018; UNOSSC, 2018; Kindornay, 2018).

In Latin America, Brazil had been a leading cooperation offeror country; according to the Brazilian Cooperation Agency, triangular and SSC programs are crucial elements of the 2030 Agenda. The country has underlined its potential to contribute to regional cooperation activities in MERCOSUR, UNASUR, and CELAC. It has been adopting and harmonising guidelines for perfecting the training needed for the implementation of all the SDGs (Ibero-American General Secretariat, 2016). Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, and Uruguay had among their means of implementation triangular, South-South, and bilateral cooperation, as well as technology and knowledge exchange agreements as sources of good practices and lessons learned in implementing the SDGs. In 2015, Mexico was most engaged in regional South-South cooperation initiatives, followed, in order of importance, by Brazil, Argentina, Colombia and Peru (Xalma & López, 2017). It is important to note that Brazilian foreign policy has changed, and SSC is no longer a priority for the country. Venezuela, followed by Bolivia and Ecuador, had the lowest levels of engagement in regional South-South initiatives.

Implementation challenges

Latin American countries may not achieve the SDGs if progress remains at its current pace (United Nations, 2018), especially with development traps that prevent middle-income countries from advancing to higher levels of development. Accelerating the rate of progress requires that governments at different levels (national, regional, or local) and other actors and stakeholders assume a more active role and that they ensure that implementation efforts reflect the integrated, universal, and sustainable nature of the 2030 Agenda.

This section explores actions that Latin American countries are taking to implement the 2030 Agenda and the challenges they face in policy alignment, institutional infrastructure, financial resources, partnerships and participation, and data for monitoring and accountability.

Policy alignment

In order to achieve the SDGs, the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda requires that international to local levels of governance align their strategies, policies, and actions (vertical policy coherence). It also requires that countries identify, understand, and address synergies and trade-offs among policy areas and SDGs (horizontal policy coherence).

> **2030 Agenda requires that countries identify, understand, and address synergies and trade-offs among policy areas and SDGs.**

Vertical policy alignment refers to the coherence among SDGs and national and subnational development policies. According to their VNRs, most countries whose National Development Plans (NDPs) predate the adoption of the Agenda 2030 conducted mapping exercises to determine the alignment of their plans with the SDGs. Colombia developed its plan as the SDGs were being negotiated, and incorporated most Goals and Targets into their NDP; Ecuador and Uruguay formulated their plans afterwards, incorporating the SDGs as their strategic goals. Additionally, some countries (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Panama) created ad hoc implementation plans for planning, implementing, and monitoring the 2030 Agenda.

These plans, whether NDP or government plans, became the national frameworks for the implementation of the Agenda and the primary public policy instrument for sustainable development. Most plans span presidential periods; only six countries developed long term development plans (see Table 4). This is an important challenge for the region, considering that 15 of 17 countries studied are expected to have new Presidents before 2020[7], and to achieve the SDGs by 2030 requires sustaining efforts for more than one presidential period. Yet there are signs that many of the new authorities

7 Probably this might chage due to circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Bolivia´s election scheduled for March has been postponed (Molina, 2020).

are not committed to the Agenda; for example, Brazil´s new 2020–2023 multiyear plan was published with a veto for the SDGs (Metrópoles, 2019).

Table 4. National planning instruments and period of validity, and presidential period

Country	National Development Plans		Government Plan	Presidential period
	Long term	Medium-term		
Guatemala	K'atun Nuestra Guatemala 2032			2012-2016 2016-2020
Honduras	Vision de país 2010-2038		2018-2022	2014-2018 2018-2022
Panama	Plan de Nación 2010-2022		2015-2019 2019-2024	2014-2019 2019-2024
Uruguay	Panama 2030			2010-2015 2015-2020
Paraguay	Uruguay 2050			2013-2018 2018-2023
Peru	Paraguay 2030			2011-2016 2016-2021
Mexico	Plan Bicentenario 2021	2013-2018 2019-2024		2012-2018 2018-2024
Colombia	Visión del Perú al 2050	2014-2018 2018-2022		2014-2018 2018-2022
Costa Rica		2015-2018 2019-2022		2014-2018 2018-2022
Bolivia		2016-2020		2015-2020
Nicaragua		2018-2021		2012-2017 2017-2022
Argentina			2015-2019	2015-2019 2019-2023
Brazil			2016-2019 2020-2023	2016-2019 2019-2022

Chile			2014-2018 2018-2022	2014-2018 2018-2022
Ecuador		2017-2021		2007-2017 2017-2021
El Salvador			2014-2019	2014-2019 2019-2024
Venezuela			2013-2019 2019-2025	2013-2019 2019-2025

Source: ECLAC (2019) and VNRs (2016-2018); compiled by authors.

Despite the importance of bringing the SDGs to sub-national agendas (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA], 2018), few countries have formulated local plans in alignment with national implementation strategies. In Brazil, local governments adapted targets to local contexts and have prepared multiyear plans (2018-2021); in Mexico, 29 of 32 states have implementation and follow-up mechanisms in place, and 300 local governments adopted an SDG perspective in their work plans. In Honduras, SDGs are integrated into subnational institutional and development plans, and a pilot is being conducted for projects related to the 2030 Agenda at the local level. Similarly, Colombia´s High Level Inter-Agency Commission is helping local authorities to integrate the SDGs into local development plans, and created a 'territorial toolkit' to aid in the process. In Costa Rica and Ecuador, work is being done for the local adaptation of the SDGs; some municipalities have started to link SDGs to their plans.

Horizontal policy alignment refers to coherence across policy areas. All countries include at least one Goal in each dimension of development—social, economic, and environmental. Most have prioritised, to some degree, SDG 1 (no poverty) and 3 (good health and wellbeing); which continue the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Nine countries mention in their VNRs some coordination efforts among the three dimensions of development; four countries mention a priority SDG, which then links with other objectives. However, only a small group recognise its importance explicitly in their VNRs.

Overcoming development traps require understanding how factors interact and reinforce themselves; otherwise, policies will have limited effects. Therefore, to accelerate achieving the SDGs requires identifying and addressing synergies and trade-offs. For example, increasing educational attainment (SDG 4) will not automatically result in better quality employment (SDG 8) without transforming the productive structure.

Bolivia achieved significant improvements in educational attainment, but the country did not evolve towards higher-value activities; returns on education remain low (Andersen, Medinaceli, Maldonado, & Hernani-Limarino, 2020), and rates of informality (77%) are the highest in the region). Conversely, Costa Rica, with the third-lowest informality rate (36%), has made sustained efforts to attract investments in higher-value activities (Argumedo, 2015) and has registered informal workers (Cheng-Lo, 2018).

Policy alignment efforts can also be identified regionally. The ECLAC has led the establishment of three initiatives to facilitate coordination among multiple stakeholders: the forum of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on sustainable development; the regional observatory for development planning in Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2018c); and the statistical conference of the Americas (ECLAC, 2018b). At the subregional level, the System of Central American Integration (SICA, 2017), takes the SDGs as reference for their priority strategic agenda.

Institutional structure

Implementing the 2030 Agenda requires coordinated efforts of government actors, civil society, the private sector, and international organisations, with each sector having a defined contribution and responsibility in implementation (UNDP, 2017). Therefore, achieving the SDGs requires the appropriate institutional structure: mechanisms needed to facilitate policy alignment, coordinate sectors, mobilise resources, and manage partnerships.

In all countries, the executive branch is responsible for coordinating and implementing the Agenda. Two approaches were adopted for establishing institutional arrangements. According to their VNRs, six countries built the institutional infrastructure from existing institutions, at the highest level of ministries and secretariats dependent on the Presidency of the Republic, assigning them political and technical responsibilities. Nine countries created commissions, councils or high-level ad hoc entities, some of them accompanied by a technical committee (Table 5). Executive decrees created institutional arrangements and, therefore, can easily be revoked when the government changes, as in the case of El Salvador, or can be politically weakened, as in Brazil.

A common challenge is achieving cross-sectoral coordination and establishing an adequate institutional design to carry out integrated actions (Leyton et al., 2017). This is not common practice in the region. Five countries have the coordinated participation of at least one ministry in charge of the social, economic, and environmental dimensions (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Brazil and Costa Rica); while Chile and Paraguay created separate commissions to coordinate each dimension

Table 5. National coordination mechanisms for 2030 Agenda implementation and follow-up

Country	Institutional arrangements
Interagency ad-hoc institutionality	
Brazil	National Commission for the Sustainable Development Goals (CNODS)
Chile	National Council for implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
Colombia	High Level Inter-Agency Commission for the Preparation and Effective Implementation of the 2030 Agenda
Costa Rica	High Level National Council for the Sustainable Development Goals
Honduras	National Council for Sustainable Development
Mexico	National Council for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
Panama	Multisector Commission of the Social Affairs Cabinet
Paraguay	Inter-Agency Coordinating Commission for the SDG (ODS Paraguay 2030), for the follow-up and monitoring of the 2030 framework.
Peru	Inter-Agency Commission for Follow-up of the 2030 Agenda
Honduras	National Council for Sustainable Development
Existing institutionality	
Argentina	National Council for Social Policy Coordination (CNCS)
Ecuador	National Secretariat of Planning and Development, “Planifica Ecuador”
El Salvador	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Technical Secretariat of the Presidency
Guatemala	National Council for Urban and Rural Development, CONADUR
Uruguay	Planning and Budget Office
Venezuela	Council of Vice Presidents

Note. The Technical Secretariat of the Presidency in El Salvador was eliminated when the new Government took office on June 2019; to date, a coordinating institution has not been assigned.
Source: ECLAC (2019) and UNDESA (2018); compiled by authors.

While the executive branch is responsible for coordinating and implementing the Agenda, parliaments also have an important role in advancing the SDGs. As part of their competencies, parliaments have incorporated different actions (UNDESA, 2018). For example:

- **Reviewing and adapting enabling legislation:** Brazil created the Joint Parliamentary Front to Support SDGs; in Honduras and Uruguay, parliaments review legislation and policies related to SDGs and harmonise national legislation with international agreements. Ecuador's parliament approved legislation making the SDGs a binding framework and passed 15 laws related to the 2030 Agenda in the last three years (Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo, 2018).
- **Formulating budgets aligned with the SDGs,** as in Mexico and Uruguay.
- **Monitoring implementation:** Parliaments created the 2030 Agenda Parliamentary Observatory in Argentina, the Senate Working Group in Mexico, and a working group in Ecuador (UNDESA, 2018). In Costa Rica, parliament will monitor implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- **Participating in the national commissions and other coordinating entities:** Members of parliament are part of coordination councils in Peru, El Salvador, and Guatemala.
- **Direct actions:** In Costa Rica, parliament has implemented programmes directly linked to SDGs 12, 13, and 16, while in Guatemala, congress has established several working groups.

Some countries have initiated coordination mechanisms at different levels of government. For example, in Argentina, ten provinces and the city of Buenos Aires have signed coordination agreements with their National Council; 6 more are under negotiation. In Paraguay, there are 244 Local Development Councils, and 17 Regional Development Councils to facilitate local-national consultation and collaboration. In Peru, elected officials in national, regional, and local governments signed the Governance Agreement for Comprehensive Human Development 2016-2021 to uphold the Goals and Targets. In Guatemala, its 340 municipalities are required to formulate, approve, implement, and follow-up development plans; in 2018, the Planning Secretariat published a guideline tool as part of the commitment to advise local governments in these efforts (UNDESA, n.d.).

Latin American countries have defined institutional arrangements for monitoring progress. In almost all cases, two levels of coordination have been established. The first level entails political and institutional involvement to prepare roadmaps for the achievement of the SDGs and to coordinate and monitor progress. The second level involves statistical, technical, and implementation coordination to provide and disaggregate relevant data for the monitoring of the Goals, Targets and Indicators. Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Paraguay have designated an institution responsible for coordinating the production of adequate indicators and construction methodologies, and have created ad hoc technical committees. Likewise, Argentina, Chile, Perú, and Uruguay have each set up cross-sectoral bodies to lead and coordinate statistical activities (Leyton, et al., 2017).

Many countries have mechanisms to include stakeholders in policy design and prioritisation; however, the formal inclusion of non-governmental organisations is not a generalised practice. Although no country grants attributions of coordination and planning to these actors, some have institutionalised spaces for subnational and inter-sector participation, and issue policy and programme recommendations. For example, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, and Peru have institutionalised spaces for subnational and inter-sector participation, which issue policy and program recommendations to the Commissions or High Level Committees. Costa Rica implemented a national pact for the SDGs, which ensures commitments from all three branches of government, local authorities, civil society organisations, academia, and private sectors (UNDESA, 2018). In Brazil, civil society organisations were in charge of the implementation of several SDG targets (gender, race, and ethnic inequalities and human rights); their action is enhanced with online tools: DialogaBrasil, Participa.br Portal, the 2030 Agenda Platform, and the Map of Civil Society Organisations (Secretariat of Government of the Presidency of the Republic & Ministry of Planning, Development and Management, 2017). This institutional arrangement depends on the political will of all actors involved and may change when the government changes.

Chile implemented official consultative dialogues through Civil Society Councils, to contribute to the formulation of public policies. Honduras created a local commission for sustainable development. El Salvador created three instances, not exclusively related to the 2030 Agenda, to allow participation of other actors in discussions (UNDESA, 2018). The sustainability of these instances are dependent on the political will of the government in office, so their continuation is not assured. In El Salvador, the new government that took office in 2019 discontinued the participation spaces.

Finally, Mexico launched the Alliance for Sustainability as a platform for dialogue and action with the private sector; it includes 80 Mexican and foreign companies to exchange information on how to integrate the SDGs into their business models and to design cooperation projects. In Ecuador, private businesses have committed to seven SDGs, and several NGO initiatives support monitoring and compliance subnationally. Civil society and the private sector have also engaged in the VNR process (UNDESA, 2018).

Most countries' VNRs mention that civil society and private sector actors participate in events to raise awareness for the SDGs and setting local agendas. This is the case of Argentina, Brazil, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Chile, Panama, and Mexico. Also, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay, and Peru include the role of civil society, the private sector, and academic sectors in areas of scientific production and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Several international institutional arrangements have been established to support countries in the implementation process. The UN system set up the Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support methodology, or 'MAPS' to support countries at the national and local levels; 39 MAPS missions have been developed, with three in Latin America (UNDG, 2018c). Also, all countries in the region, except for Nicaragua, have received support from the UN Resident Coordinator and UN Country Teams. At the global level, the UN High Level Political Forum was established to oversee the review of outcomes and implementation at the global level (Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, Dahl, & Persson, 2018).

Resources mobilisation

The first step for defining financial needs is to align priorities with quantifying needs and incorporate them into national budgets. All 15 countries include in their VNRs a section related to implementation, but experiences are heterogeneous. Colombia and Mexico discuss the assessment of financial resources, public and private, domestic and international, that they have available to finance their development plans. Argentina, Guatemala, Paraguay and Venezuela do not include discussions of financial resources as a means of implementing the Agenda.

Nine Latin American countries have incorporated their SDGs priorities into national budgets. Argentina, Ecuador, and Mexico carried out specific exercises to link public monetary resources and financing of the SDGs. The case of Mexico is noteworthy, as it is carried out in two ways: 80% of their budget programs are related to the 2030 Agenda and, also, 156 of 169 SDG targets connect to at least one program. Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Paraguay and Uruguay, have public budgeting by results mechanisms; they incorporated priorities indirectly, through the components of their NDPs associated with the SDGs.

Colombia stands out as it is the only country in the region that has linked its general national budget to public resources executed by local and municipal governments and specific SDGs. Colombia identified the amount invested between 2015 and 2017 by the central government and by sub-national entities in the financing of efforts related to SDGs 3, 4, 6, and 11. Colombia has linked almost all financial means of implementation to the SDGs, except resources coming from international trade. As reported in their VNRs, Argentina, Chile, Honduras, and Mexico are in the process of directly linking their national budgets with the 2030 Agenda.

Achieving the SDGs depends on identifying and mobilising resources from multiple sources. Most countries mention addressing the need for funding, mainly through fiscal resources. Eleven countries reported in their VNRs actions related to evaluations of fiscal space for financing the SDGs or mention fiscal reforms (or their need) to increase the income of the national budget. Most efforts are aimed at mobilising tax resources and measures to combat tax evasion and avoidance. In the last ten years, tax revenues have increased in HICs and LICs (World Bank, 2019).

Increasing domestic resources to address investment needed to achieve SDGs, for example, in social protection or infrastructure, can also be achieved by redistributing spending from other areas (Chaparro & Minatta, 2019). Likewise, they can be used even more efficiently through fiscal discipline and control of leaks through corruption. However, only Mexico mentions spending, and Brazil presents measures to maintain fiscal discipline in their VNRs. A sign that fiscal space may be a challenge is increasing debt levels in LMICs and UMICs since 2011, reversing the downward trend present since 1990.

ODA is known as one of the most important resources for sustainable development; however, for developing countries, there remains a finance gap (Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, 2016). Very few countries in Latin America have linked ODA with achieving the SDGs. Only Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Uruguay have linked the funds of international cooperation to the SDGs. Uruguay and Colombia mention that despite being a HIC and UMIC, respectively, they still need these kinds of resources to overcome economic and social challenges. El Salvador and Honduras have made progress in generating formal frameworks for the management of cooperation resources, based on results.

> **Nine Latin American countries have incorporated their SDGs priorities into national budgets.**

Regional banks have become an essential source of financial resources. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) approved loans for over USD 48 billion between 2015 and 2019, covering areas that span the 17 SDGs. Even though the total amount is less than for the previous five years, noticeable is the increase in the amount to support institutional reforms, transport, and clean energy (IDB, 2019). Since 2015, China, Latin America's second-largest trade partner after the United States, has provided through its development banks more than USD 141 billion in loan commitments to Latin America. In several years, these were larger than lendings from the World Bank, the IDB, and CAF combined (Zhang, 2019).

Promoting private investment towards sustainable development complements resources for financing the ambitious Agenda 2030. Internationally, more governments and organisations are now acknowledging its importance and the need for assembling and intermediating public and private financing from domestic and international sources. Nevertheless, only three countries in Latin America recognise public-private partnerships in their VNRs as a mechanism to finance investment public interest projects. Brazil mentions mobilising private resources for public infrastructure investments. For Colombia, participation by the private sector is crucial to achieving substantial transformations in at least 88 of the 169 Targets; Chile has a multisector organisation in charge of promoting national production and economic growth.

An underutilised resource is blended finance for development: the targeted use of concessional funding to complement private capital (Inter-American Development Bank Blended Finance Team, 2018). This could generate better outcomes for sustainable development (Schmidt-Traub & Sachs, 2015; Bello & Sanou, 2018). Despite only 20% of the funds available being destined for Latin America (Convergence, 2018), this mechanism is increasingly being used in the region (Diaz Loyola, 2019). with a leverage ratio of 5.1x, which is evidence of the potential to unlock private capital (Bery, 2018). At least three projects have been developed by private investors with additional funds provided by IDB Invest: the replacement of sodium vapour lamps with LEDs in the city of Ensenada (Mexico); the large-scale photovoltaic solar plant in El Salvador; and the La Jacinta solar project in Uruguay.

As for international private sector participation, only three countries mention strategies to attract more FDI. Brazil is working on regulatory changes to attract long-term private investment. Ecuador and Colombia mention incentives like tax exemptions related to the amount of investment made in the country, or for investments in renewable energy projects, respectively. China is also an increasingly important foreign direct investor, primarily through mergers and acquisitions (Zhang, 2019) and investments in green energy and clean transport (Koop, 2020). This is in line with the 2016 pledge of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to boost cooperation in Latin America on environmental protection and climate change (Soutar, 2016).

Economic agents need robust institutional frameworks with legal certainty to make investment decisions (World Economic Forum, 2018); long term stability of policies is also important. To attract private investment to accelerate their transition to clean energy

(SDG 7), Guatemala and Uruguay, which have the highest renewable energy consumption in the region, have incentives in place within long-term policies. Uruguay includes long-term contracts and purchase guarantees which has increased foreign investment and, at the same time, reduced energy prices due to increased competition (Presidency of Uruguay, 2019). Through a bidding process with 15-year contracts, Guatemala attracted the participation of small business and civil society, supported by international institutions, in the generation of renewable energy (Ortiz, 2018). Through its 2013-2027 energy policy, it is also expected to achieve 80% of electricity through renewable resources (Ortiz, 2018).

Latin American countries with large incoming remittances do not mention this source of financial resources as a means to achieve the 2030 Agenda objectives. Only Ecuador mentions remittances from the United States, Spain, and Italy. Mexico and the Central America northern triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), do not mention this source, even though they have substantial flows of family remittances.

Partnerships & participation

The ambition of the 2030 Agenda's integrated development approach requires the strengthening or creation of alliances among governments, different sectors of society, and international cooperation. This is recognised in SDG 17, which stresses the need to foster participation and partnerships involving public and private sectors, civil society, and other stakeholders at the local, national, regional, and global levels.

Global institutions have an important role to play in setting up the broader framework for the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. Several institutional arrangements have been set up; the different UN system agencies and other international institutions have adopted the Agenda. One of the most relevant is the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF), overseeing the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda at the global level (Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, Dahl, & Persson, 2018).

At the regional level, ECLAC has led the establishment of three regional initiatives:

- The **Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development** was established in May 2016 as a regional mechanism to follow up and review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including its Goals and Targets, its means of implementation, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. The Forum also aims to serve as a space for preliminary discussion in the process of preparing VNRs (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, 2018). The Forum entails regional coordination among multiple stakeholders, such as governments, the United Nations system, development banks, the private sector, academia and civil society.

- The **Regional Observatory for Development Planning in Latin America and the Caribbean** contributes as a space for analysis, information, and collective production of knowledge for governments, academia and think tanks, the private sector, and civil society regarding planning for development (ECLAC, 2019a). The Observatory makes available information related to national developments plans, open government action plans, methodologies, and other documents related to the 2030 Agenda.
- The **Statistical Conference of the Americas** was established as the main forum for statistical monitoring of the 2030 Agenda at the regional level, and especially as a space for cooperation, coordination, and harmonisation of work in official statistics (ECLAC, 2018b).

Beyond the UN, the World Bank established the Partnership Fund for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG Fund) to incentivise catalytic activities, equipping countries with tools and best practices (World Bank, n.d.). The OECD, through its Action Plan on the Sustainable Development Goals, defined how it will support its members and the international community.

At the subregional level, the System of Central American Integration (SICA), formed by Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama, takes the SDGs as reference for their Priority Strategic Agenda (System of Central American Integration, 2017). This is based on the five pillars of Central American integration; democratic security, prevention and mitigation of natural disasters and the effects of climate change, social integration, economic integration, and the strengthening of regional institutions. The Agenda has specific objectives under each of these five pillars, and each one responds to a specific SDG (System of Central American Integration, 2017).

The IDB works to support the 2030 Agenda on several aspects (Zavala, 2016):

- Optimisation of the IDB's balance sheet, through agreements with other multilateral development banks to reduce concentration risk;
- Support and technical assistance to borrowing countries in mobilising and collecting more domestic resources;
- Facilitating the mobilisation of private financing; and
- Alliances with other development banks and strategic partners.

Since 1960, the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) has been the financial arm for the integration and development of Central America. The member countries of CABEI are Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Belize, Mexico, Argentina, and Colombia, among other non-regional members (CABEI, 2019). In 2015, CABEI signed a cooperation agreement with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) in order to improve operational supervision mechanisms, ensure the fulfilment of the SDGs, and carry out supervision, monitoring and evaluation of the impact of programs and projects. (CABEI, 2015).

The directory of CABEI recently approved its Environmental and Social Strategy for 2018–2019, which establishes the Bank's "commitment to the provision of financial solutions that promote sustainability and mitigation and resilience to the effects of climate change" in the region (CABEI, 2017). CABEI has announced that the strategy corresponds to the provisions of the global development agenda, particularly about compliance with the SDGs.

A third development bank, CAF, is owned by 19 countries (17 in Latin America and the Caribbean) and seeks to promote a sustainable development model (CAF, n.d.). In 2016, CAF signed a cooperation agreement with the UNDP to support the governments to explore and promote South-South cooperation initiatives among different government levels, countries, and actors in the region (CAF, 2016).

South-South cooperation has become a feasible means to strengthen capabilities to achieve the SDGs (UNDP, 2018; UNOSSC, 2018; Kindornay, 2018). However, only nine countries mention in their VNRs triangular, South-South and bilateral cooperation, or technology and knowledge exchange agreements as a source of good practices and lessons learned.

Even though it is not mentioned in VNRs, SSC in the region is increasing. An example of this is the participation of the region in the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); currently, eight Latin American countries have joined the initiative, signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU): three in Central America (El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Panama) and five in South America (Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, and Uruguay) (Devonshire-Ellis, 2019). Engaging in the BRI brings opportunities but also risks. The relative size of Chinese lending remains small in the region; there are concerns that it could increase the overall debt burden of countries, and there are also concerns about unsound investments (Zhang, 2019). It is important that to leverage opportunities and minimise risks, countries and private companies engage and help shape BRI agreements, mindful of both the opportunities and risks involved (Zhang, 2019).

Non-government actors are also leading initiatives to strengthen partnerships. The UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), mobilises global scientific and technological expertise to promote integrated approaches addressing economic, social, and environmental challenges (UN Sustainable Solutions Network, n.d.). Its members are mainly universities and research institutions and think tanks. The German Development

Institute (DIE) developed the NDC-SDG Connections to help policymakers become more aware of potential synergies and trade-offs between the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) developed the Sustainable Asset Valuation (SAVi) to help decision-makers assess the extent to which environmental, social, and economic externalities affect the financial performance of infrastructure assets and projects (HLPF on Sustainable Development, 2018). Similarly, members of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a multilateral initiative, must submit a biannual action plan co-created by various actors (public institutions, civil society, academia, and others), and annually report on its progress (ECLAC, 2019b). Except for Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Venezuela, the region's countries are already implementing or are currently developing National Action Plans (Open Government Partnership, 2019a).

Responding to the increasing need for tools and methodological approaches to support countries aligning their policies and decisions with the SDGs, several actors, including governments, international organisations, and think tanks are contributing innovative initiatives to assess horizontal and vertical policy alignment better (HLPF on Sustainable Development, 2018). For example, Morales (2019) identified two useful tools:

- The NDC-SDG Connections[8], a tool that helps policymakers become more aware of potential synergies and trade-offs between the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change, developed by the German Development Institute (DIE) (HLPF on Sustainable Development, 2018).
- The Sustainable Asset Valuation (SAVi)[9], a flexible tool developed by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), that helps decision-makers to assess the extent to which environmental, social, and economic externalities affect the financial performance of infrastructure assets and projects (HLPF on Sustainable Development, 2018).

Data situation and accountability mechanism

The production of Indicators and the monitoring of prioritised Targets are critical to ensuring that strategies achieve intended results. It is also a mechanism to implement the principle of leaving no one behind. Through the use of data, countries can identify those that need more attention (Nicolai, Hoy, Berliner, & Aedy, 2015). Therefore, a fundamental purpose of data collection for monitoring and evaluation is to ensure accountability and evidence-based policymaking to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

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8 See https://klimalog.die-gdi.de/ndc-sdg/

9 See https://www.iisd.org/project/SAVi-sustainable-asset-valuation

> **Latin America has the challenge of strengthening data and information systems for improving access to data sources on the SDG Targets and Indicators.**

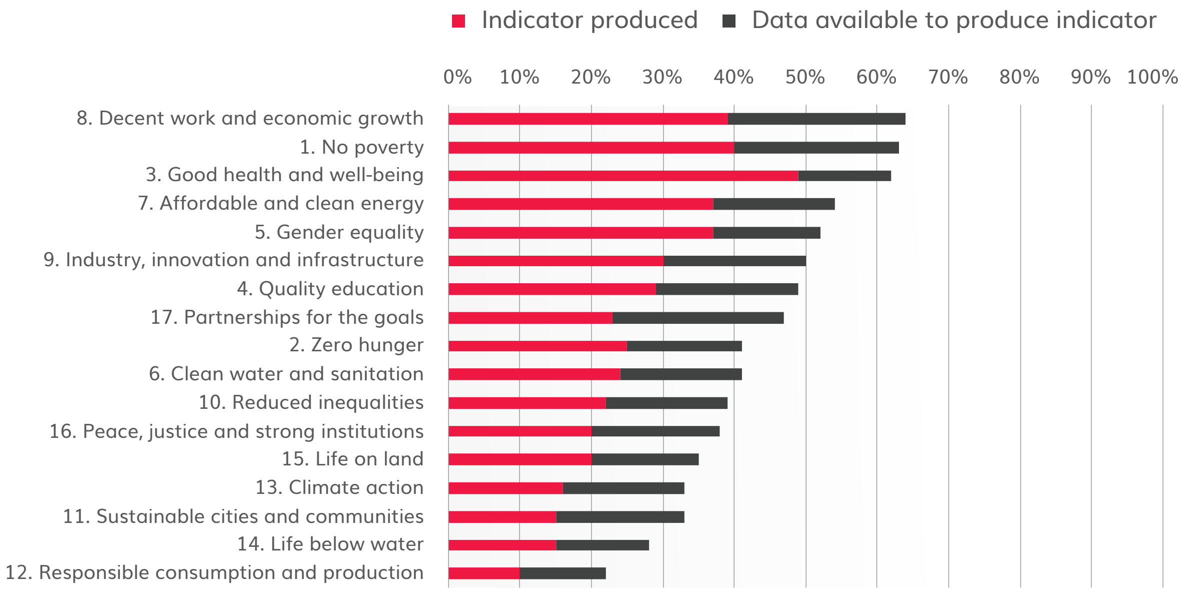
Data availability is part of the monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs for reviewing progress towards achievement of the Goals; it is a mechanism to ensure transparency and accountability of resources (Bhattacharya, Khan, Rezbana, & Mostaque, 2016). Latin America has the challenge of strengthening data and information systems for improving access to quantitative and qualitative data sources on the SDG Targets and Indicators. Most countries have made progress conducting initial situational maps of their ability to produce the indicators required to monitor progress; according to their VNRs, assessment exercises were as follows:

- Chile and Panama conducted a partial assessment for indicators included in the global framework for selected SDGs only. Chile evaluated the statistical feasibility for Indicators for SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 14, and 17. Panama included the same Indicators as Chile, except SDG 17.
- El Salvador, Mexico, and Peru also developed partial assessments, but only for the Indicators related or applied to the priorities of their national development plans. El Salvador, for example, determined that 197 of the 241 global Indicators applied to the Salvadoran reality; nonetheless, the country can produce and monitor only 103 indicators (52%).
- For Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay, the evaluation process assessed the capacity to produce and also disaggregate the SDG indicators. Paraguay evaluated for disaggregation on geography, gender, age, income level, disability, ethnicity, race, and immigration status; however, there was no indication of which Indicators could be disaggregated. Uruguay evaluated disaggregation on gender, age groups, ethnic groups, and income levels. Argentina mentioned in its VNR that disaggregation was formally evaluated during the elaboration of its technical datasheets for the available data; however, there was no mention of the disaggregation dimensions or to which Indicators were disaggregated. Chile included levels of disaggregation for some Indicators in the annexes of its VNR. For example, poverty indicators are disaggregated for geographic regions, sex, age, and ethnic groups.

Besides the evaluation carried out by countries, ECLAC (2018a) evaluated the production of Indicators and the availability of information for the development of Indicators not currently produced. Latin American countries currently produce approximately 31% of SDG Indicators, and there is information regularly available to provide an additional 19%; for an additional 23%, some information exists to produce the Indicator but needs to be improved. It is relevant to mention that the importance given to statistics is another aspect that depends on the political will of governments; some signs of constraints placed on generating statistics after a change of government has been seen, for example, in Mexico (Ramos, 2019).

ECLAC (2018a) also assessed the data situation for each of the SDGs. This perspective is valuable to understand the statistical barriers in adopting an integrated approach to the dimensions of sustainable development. There are marked differences in data availability: the Goals with the highest proportion of Indicators produced are SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 3 (good health and well-being) and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), with levels above 60%. On the other hand, SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) and the SDG 14 (life below water) are those that register lower levels of production, with 22% and 28% respectively (Figure 5). The low level of output of Indicators related to environmental sustainability introduces doubts about the capacity of the region to monitor and ensure the integrated implementation of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Figure 5. Level of production of the SDG Indicators, by SDG–Latin America

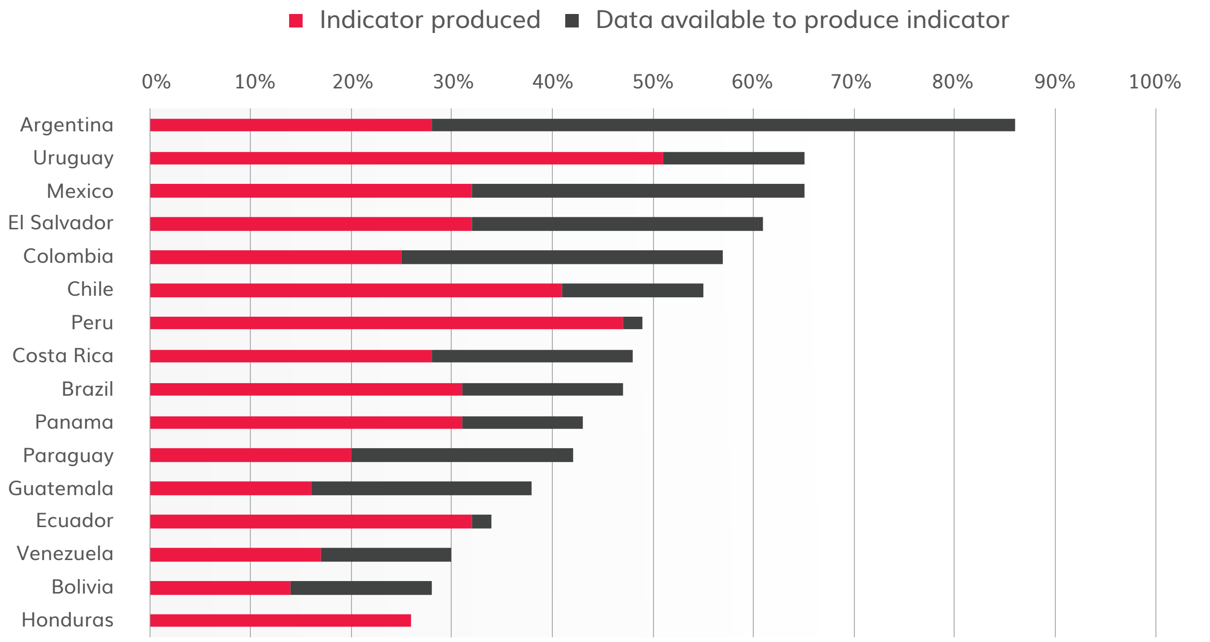


Source: ECLAC (2018a).

Elaborated by the authors.

There are significant differences across countries in the development of Indicators. For example, Argentina, El Salvador, Mexico, and Uruguay stand out in producing (or having the information available to produce them), more than 60% of Indicators (ECLAC, 2018a). At the other extreme are Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Venezuela, with the capacity of production levels below 40% (ECLAC, 2018a). Venezuela is the country that currently produces the least number of Indicators: 26% (see Figure 6). The level of commitment to continue closing the data gaps differs by countries; Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay and Costa Rica, for example, have increased their efforts to generate disaggregated data to monitor the SDGs. On the other hand, recent developments in some countries following changes in government have resulted in decreased interest in data, which in turn have reduced the available budgets or in data transparency, for example in Mexico, Brazil, and El Salvador.

Figure 6. Level of production of the Sustainable Development Goals Indicators, by country – Latin America



Source: ECLAC (2018a).

Elaborated by the authors.

One of the main challenges of the 2030 Agenda is the existing mismatch between the Goals and Targets established at the global level, and the interpretation and adoption of the agenda at the national and regional levels (Morales H., 2019). However, some work has already been done: the Statistical Conference for the Americas, supported by ECLAC, created the Statistical Coordination Group formed by the ten countries of the region that are part of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs).

The Statistical Coordination Group carried out a prioritisation exercise to define Indicators to monitor the progress of the 2030 Agenda from a regional perspective. As a result of a consultation process, ECLAC proposed a regional framework to complement the global Indicator framework (Statistical Conference of the Americas, 2018). The regional framework is comprised of 154 Indicators: 120 come directly from the global framework; 30 are added complementary Indicators, and 4 are proxy Indicators that substitute from the global ones. This new framework does not eliminate the other Indicators included in the global framework, but they are assigned a lower priority (Statistical Conference of the Americas, 2018).

The information requirements to achieve the SDGs are leading to innovation in data collection and collaboration across complex data systems. Currently, the private sector leverages information generated from everyday interactions with digital products and services through big data. Similar techniques could be used in the official statistical production processes to get real-time insights into people's well-being (United Nations, 2019).

Evaluating development challenges in each country, using as a benchmark the relevant experiences from other alike partners (in economic, social, or political terms), is crucial. Several multidimensional indices have been developed recently, standardising methodologies and Indicators to allow for inter-country comparison; most of them are now highlighting their linkages with different SDGs and specific Targets. Examining this type of indices helps to identify areas where countries have strengths and difficulties. Three examples are:

- The Human Capital Index (HCI), produced by the World Bank, measures the productivity that a child born today could accumulate at the age of 18. It assesses the contribution of health and education among three components—survival, expected learning, and health (World Bank, 2018c).
- The Social Progress Indicator (SPI), created by the Social Progress Imperative, measures the provision of social and environmental needs in 146 countries throughout 12 components organised in three dimensions (basic human needs, foundations of wellbeing, and opportunity). According to the overall score, countries are grouped into six tiers. Tier 1 denotes the highest social progress, while Tier 6 denotes the lowest (Social Progress Imperative, 2018).
- The Global Competitiveness Index (GCI), produced by the World Economic Forum, analyses four dimensions, divided into 12 pillars on which competitiveness is based, giving scores from 0, the lowest, to 100, the highest. The 140 countries are ranked based on these scores, where 1 is the best position (World Economic Forum, 2018).

Another similar tool explicitly developed to measure the progress made towards achieving the SDGs in 'The Sustainable Development Goals report 2018' assesses regional and worldwide progress yearly. It was launched in 2018 to overview the performance of SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 15, and 17, emphasising their interdependence with other Goals and resilience while confronting challenges (United Nations, 2018). The SDGs selected for the report were chosen as a good start towards development but are not based on their importance because all of them are fundamental.

Moreover, the report highlights the importance of improving data collection to support advances with reliable evidence. The global outcomes of all SDGs are not keeping pace with the 2030 Agenda, and more efforts are needed. However, the conclusions rely on the evidence of some Indicators, but they do not measure how far are regions from their Targets, making comparisons difficult. Furthermore, the document does not present an individual analysis per country, which prevents the evaluation of which country needs more intervention.

The three example indices described in the paragraphs above rely on data generated by official sources and by administrative data. However, they are limited by the type of data and level of disaggregation available. To overcome this restriction, diverse actors have increased efforts to generate data specifically to monitor the achievement of the SDGs better, and also, as a means of accountability. Some examples are:

- The Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (Data4SDG);
- EqualMeasures2030 that produces the EM2030 Index on gender equality; and
- Data2X, that produces gendered data, through partnerships with UN agencies, governments, civil society, academics, and the private sector.

In Latin America, the International Center for Strategic Thinking (CEPEI), a Colombian think tank, has been active in helping the government improve their data ecosystems, creating associations and cooperation to close data gaps. Recently, they have worked with the government of Paraguay to help them in the same manner.

Two Colombian initiatives are contributing to generating alternative data to track advances related to the SDGs. The first one, mentioned in Colombia's 2018 VNR, is 'Unidos por los ODS,' an initiative fostered by private sector institutions from Colombia to make visible and identify the contribution of a group of companies to the fulfilment of the SDGs and to identify the main challenges (International Center for Strategic Thinking, 2018).

The other one, the Ciudades Cómo Vamos model, first implemented in several Colombian cities, was created to generate localised data by integrating the participation of civil society and the private sector. It generates reliable, impartial, and comparable information on sustainability and quality of life from the municipalities where it is implemented. It has contributed to regional agendas to incorporate the SDGs into local development (Secretaría Técnica de la Comisión ODS, 2018), besides being a mechanism for more transparent and efficient local governments. The model has been replicated, with the support of Fundación Corona, in almost 30 other cities in Latin America (Salvadoran Foundation for Social and Economic Development, 2019).

Critical concerns and challenges of SDG implementation for Latin America

Achieving the SDGs by 2030 has its challenges, as has been discussed in previous sections. However, even when progress is made, it can be compromised if some risks are not taken into consideration. This section highlights some critical concerns and challenges for SDG implementation facing Latin America

Governance issues and institutions

The expansion of the middle class in Latin America has brought new expectations for a better quality of public policies, services, and institutions; however, existing institutions have not been able to respond. This results in a vicious cycle: declining trust and satisfaction and deepening of social disengagement make citizens see less value in fulfilment of their social obligations, such as paying their taxes. In turn, this behaviour limits resources for the better quality of public services.

Little attention has been paid to building strong institutions in MICs (Doner & Schneider, 2016), because the population's demand for such institutions may be weak (see the section on governance issues and institutions above). In large countries classified as MICs, there is a lack of incentives for key actors to support institutional reforms. Building the necessary political coalitions to advance to UMIC status requires overcoming challenges that are particularly pronounced in Latin America. Inequality makes politics more likely to be dysfunctional; informality generates disincentives to educational investment. Foreign investors, especially multinational companies, have little incentive to join in collective efforts to improve policies in areas such as education, research, and development (Taylor, 2017). In this sense, addressing governance issues is particularly relevant for this region.

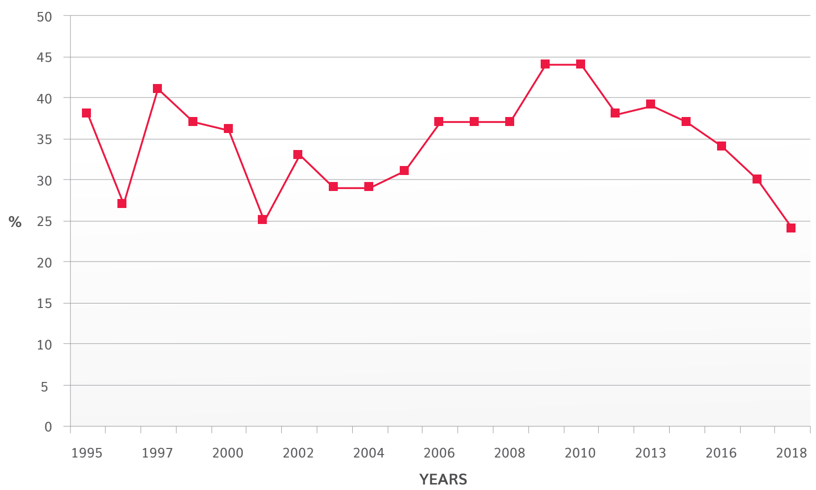
The rule of law and strong democratic institutions are a sustainable development goal (SDG 16), but they are also necessary instruments to achieve other objectives. The lack of strong institutions, which is deepened by the weakening of political parties and electoral democracy, hinders compliance with the SDGs. Also, the lack of consensus among the different political forces and the ever deeper demands of citizens to implement development agendas complicate the implementation of the SDGs because they do not allow for agreements to finance different projects.

According to the Latinobarometro (Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2018), which evaluates the development of democracies, economies, and societies in LATAM countries, in 2018, all of the region's economic and socio-economic indicators fell. Some of those indicators reached the lowest points since the beginning of the measurements in 1995. In 2018, confidence indicators had the most significant drop since 1995, showing the discontent that citizens have with institutions and their disenchantment at the lack of connection between the needs of the population and how governments respond. According to the report, the most common reasons why this confidence in institutions has deteriorated are the unfavourable economic situation, high rates of violence and crime, and numerous cases of corruption in several Latin American countries (Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2018).

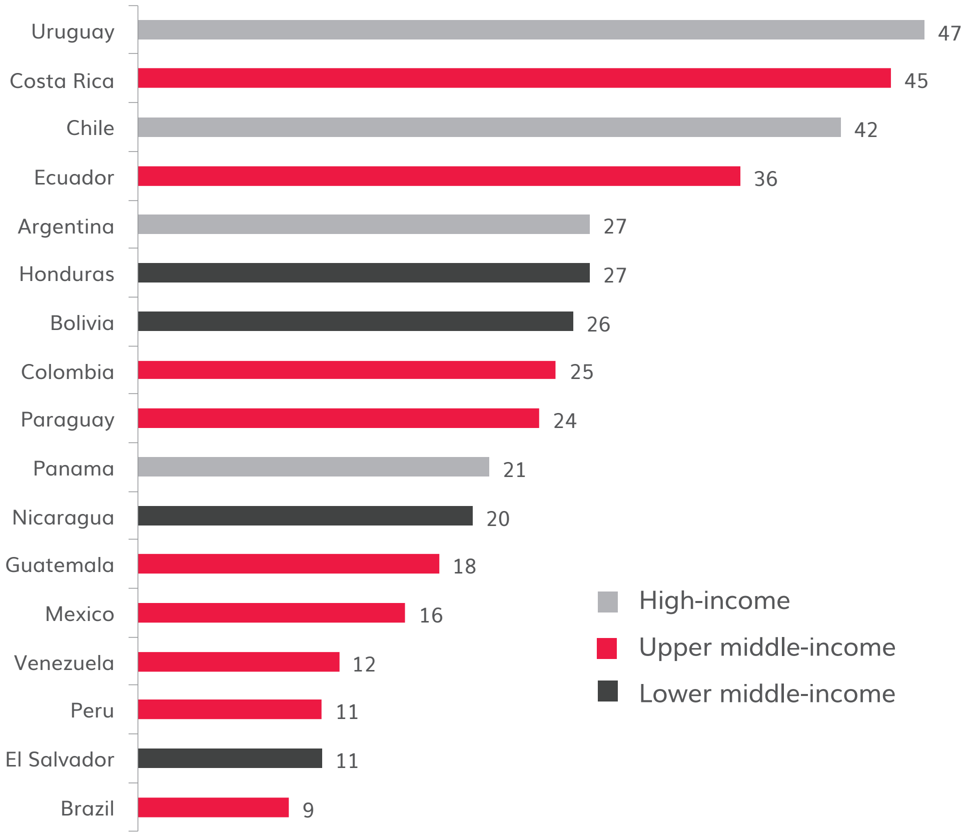
Support for democracy has been dropping for seven consecutive years, between 2008 and 2018; satisfaction with democracy is low in the region, and on average fell from 44% in 2009 to just 24% in 2018, a drop of 20 points in 10 years (Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2018). More people express indifference to the type of democratic regime, not caring whether or not the authorities respect the rule of law. Their major concerns tend to revolve around access to food, health, and security, thus feeding the emergence of populism in the region (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Satisfaction with the democracy by region (quality of democracy, results in percentage)

A. Evolutions of satisfaction with democracy



B. Satisfaction with democracy, % - 2018



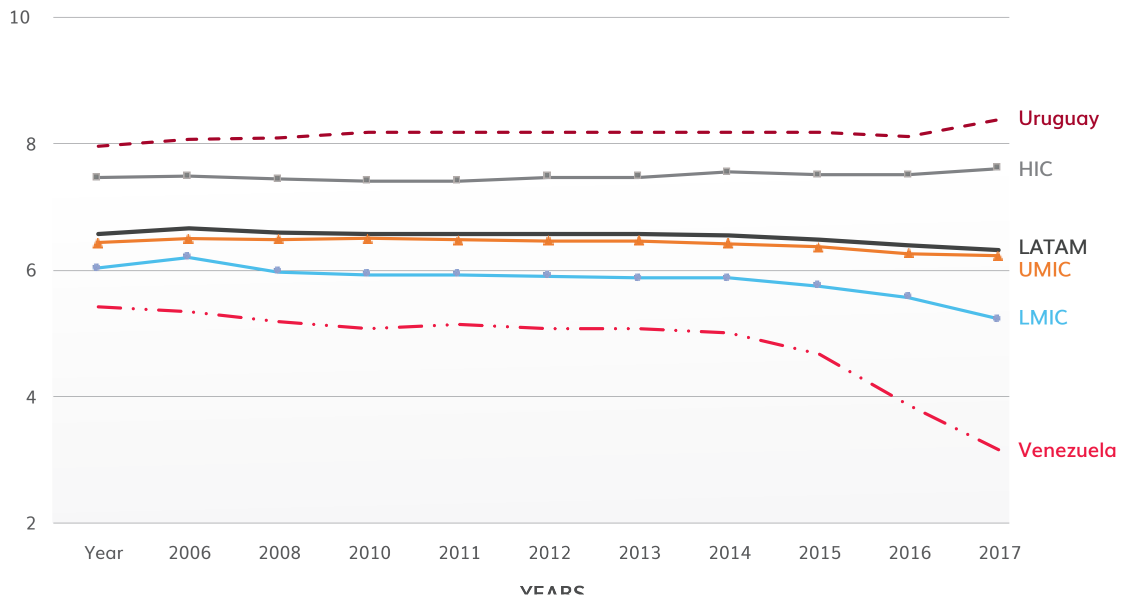
Source: Corporación Latinobarómetro (2018); compiled by the authors

Discontent with traditional politicians, the perception that authorities cannot provide what citizens need or fulfil their expectations, and the gap between what people think democracy can provide and results, contribute to the rise of populism (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2019). Discontent can generate social instability and political turbulence, as has been seen in recent years in street protests in Peru, Ecuador, Chile, and Bolivia (Pardo, 2019). A characteristic of populists is the lack of respect for democratic institutions; they have a predisposition to unlimited power. This makes populism a threat to democracy populism (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2019). Populist presidents and governments tend to increase the likelihood of a setback in social progress and further deterioration of democracy (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2019).

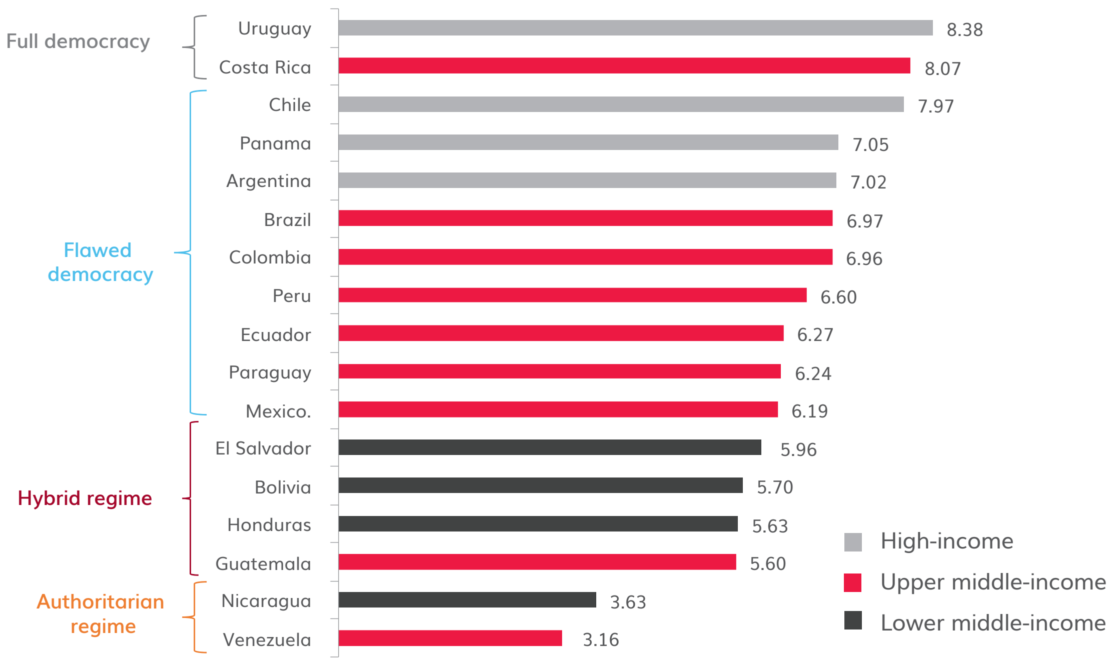
The number of governments with authoritarian leanings is increasing in response to increasing popular discontent. Brazil recently elected a far-right president with authoritarian inclinations (Basu, 2018). Venezuela has an authoritarian regime (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018); and the population in Nicaragua who opposes the government also suffers from the systematic abuse of fundamental rights, which recently lead the Organization of American States (OAS) to invoke the Inter-American Charter (Lugo, 2019) (See Figure 8).

Figure 8. Democracy Index (scale from 1 to 10)

A. Evolutions of democracy index



B. Democracy Index, 2018



Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit (2018); compiled by the authors

International migration

Another challenge for the implementation of the SDGs in Latin America is the poorly management of international migration. Generalised conditions in the region such as poverty, low family income, high levels of violence, and climate change have made Latin America a region with one of the most significant sustained emigration flows in the world. Migration has been a phenomenon present in the region for decades. Traditionally, countries with the highest emigration rates are from Central America and Mexico, with El Salvador having the highest rate of all, with 24 emigrants per 100 people (Americas Society/Council of the Americas, 2018). This phenomenon can be seen as a two-stage migration process: first, vulnerable individuals and families in rural areas migrate to urban areas; and as they do not find opportunities and face a violent environment, they migrate to other countries. The main destination is the United States of America, but also Canada, Europe—particularly countries such as Spain and Italy—and Australia.

However, during the past five years, there has been a critical change in the scale and character of migration: violence, poverty, environmental degradation, and political instability are causing an unprecedented increase in refugees, asylum-seekers, and displaced populations (Restrepo, Sutton, & Martinez, 2019). The region is facing several migratory movements: in the northern triangle of Central America, due to increased gang-related violence which compounds a lack of opportunities, and in states going through internal crises related to political violence and human rights abuses, such as Venezuela and Nicaragua.

A new migration crisis started in the Central American region (especially in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala) due to increasing insecurity and gang activity. By November 2018, more than 7,000 migrants had arrived at the US-Mexico border (BBC World News, 2018). In response, the President of the United States threatened to substantially reduce bilateral aid to those countries (Reuters, 2018a), which could worsen the social conditions of these developing countries and further increase the migration crisis. Also, remittances could be at risk due to the new anti-migration policies adopted by the US. Thousands of migrants face the termination of the Temporary Protection Status (TPS) and would have to return to their countries.

The social, economic, and political crisis in Venezuela has also caused large numbers of people to move across borders. Since 2015, around 4.7 million people have left Venezuela for other countries, especially in South America; more than half left in dire circumstances (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHR], 2019). By the end of 2019, there were more than 450,000 asylum seekers from Venezuela, mainly in the European Union (Schengenvisainfo, 2020) and the United States (Mossaad, 2019), as well as other countries in the region. Another 1.3 million have had arrangements outside of the asylum system (such as temporary residence permits, labour migration visas, humanitarian visas, and regional visa agreements). Thus the countries processing the most significant number of asylum seekers are not necessarily the one hosting or receiving the largest number of refugees. The larger numbers of refugees or migrants are hosted in Colombia (at least 1.1 million) and Peru (506,000), followed by Chile (288,000) Ecuador (221,000), Argentina (130,000), and Brazil (96,000) (UNHR, 2019).

It is important to note that the problem is not the movement of migrants as such, but rather the failure to properly accommodate them, whether due to lack of resources, lack of adequate laws and institutions, lack of coordination, or lack of political will. This new reality and scale of migration in the region is affecting regional politics and has created additional stress to governments and international agencies trying to address and avert humanitarian crises. The effects on economies and societies are likely to intensify in the months and years to come (Restrepo, Sutton, & Martinez, 2019).

Current migration trends in the region, which include both returning migrants to their home countries in Central America, or the rapid increase in migrants from Venezuela to neighbour countries, can have short term impacts in the receiving countries by increasing demands for social services and the demand for jobs (World Bank Group, 2018). However, international experience with large scale migration shows that migration can contribute to higher economic growth in the medium to long term, with the appropriate policies: adequately managing migration, prioritising the rapid incorporation of migrants and returnees into the labour market, and the prompt mitigation of vulnerabilities created by migration that can become poverty traps (World Bank Group, 2018).

> **This new reality and scale of migration in the region is affecting regional politics and has created additional stress to governments.**

Migration can be key to achieving the SDGs. Besides sending remittances, diasporas also promote trade and foreign direct investment, create businesses and spur entrepreneurship, and transfer new knowledge and skills (Newland & Plaza, 2013). Migration can improve development and investment in origin countries, fill labour gaps, and foster innovation in host countries' development outcomes (Foresti & Hagen-Zanker, 2018).

Despite being a critical concern, migration is a topic poorly covered in the VNRs reviewed. El Salvador and Mexico draw more attention to this issue, focusing on migrant conditions when leaving the national territory and in the returnee population. These countries mention the need for policies to reduce the emission of migrants, protection in their journey and the country of destination, and the reintegration of deportees. The rest of the countries referred below mention challenges related to migration within their borders. Specifically, the following topics where identified:

- Migrants are considered a vulnerable population that requires positive discrimination (Argentina and Panama);
- Some countries highlight the action of civil society organisations and social protection policies, such as temporary visas to have access to education, health, decent work, adequate housing, among others (Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico, and Uruguay); and
- Some countries mention the capabilities of officials and the society for non-discrimination towards this population (Chile and Costa Rica). For example, Costa Rica aimed at including migrants in the national consultation process for the construction of the post-2015 agenda.

Conclusions and recommendations

Latin American countries are diverse. They differ not only in size and population but also in their level of development. This is particularly persistent in the region. In the last two decades, poverty and inequality in Latin America have decreased. As a result, the middle class has grown in size. And with a higher income comes higher expectations. People demand better public policies, services, and institutions, and these are not able to respond. Citizens perceive a disconnection between their needs and the government's responses. In addition, numerous cases of corruption feed into popular discontent. All this diminishes trust in institutions. That is why the 2030 Agenda is so important for Latin America. It focuses simultaneously on the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social, and environmental). This provides a particularly relevant framework to address the multidimensional approaches needed to break development traps and turn them into opportunities. In addition, to achieve the SDGs, efforts must be sustained over time, beyond presidential periods; for this reason, the role of non-state actors become very relevant.

Most countries incorporated the SDGs into their National Development Plans or their government plans. As a reflection of the short-term planning, most plans have an application period which corresponds to presidential terms. Many Latin American countries held presidential elections between 2017 and 2019. Frequently the result was political change. This situation makes it critical to increase awareness among policymakers and other stakeholders that achieving the SDGs requires sustained efforts that span beyond government terms.

Some countries have conducted mapping exercises to determine how their plans align with the SDGs. However, very few adjustments were made to incorporate the SDGs consciously into development plans. The level of discontent among citizens in Latin America may be a signal that areas that were prioritised are not responding to their needs and expectations. So there is a need to re-evaluate priorities. The goal should be to identify what each country needs and what factors prevent them from escaping the development traps.

Also, there is a need to recognise that addressing policy issues without considering the interactions among them will have limited effects on breaking the development traps. This is a challenge not receiving enough attention in the region. Still, academia and research institutions may help to clarify those links by identifying possible synergies and trade-offs among the different areas of development.

The 'leave no one behind' principle of the 2030 Agenda is meant as a means to put a spotlight on the most vulnerable populations around the world. But in Latin America, the term 'vulnerable' also applies to the middle class. Understanding this could help, for example, analyse what prevents different groups from escaping informal jobs, or what needs to be done to transform economies, so they are able to provide more and higher quality jobs. It is also important to identify what data needs to be collected analysed to understand better what the needs and expectations of each group are. This exercise should go beyond the usual poverty, gender, age group, geography, and ethnicity classification schemes. Most data available in Latin America is related to the MDGs (poverty, health, labour, etc.), but this is not enough to achieve most SDGs within the next ten years.

Achieving the SDGs also depends on resource identification and mobilisation. Those resources need to be used strategically. Otherwise, outcomes might not improve. Currently, not enough is done to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of policies and investments. More transparency and accountability might improve citizens' trust in the process.

Less than ten years are left to meet the Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda. This moment calls for reflection on the appropriate strategy to accelerate the pace. The challenges are too significant for governments alone. Other actors need to be involved in giving policies sustainability beyond government periods. An 'ecosystem' approach is needed, in which each actor has a role that contributes to achieving the Goals.

Such a system requires that each actor understands the problem, proposes solutions, and helps with implementation and monitoring. There is a need for stronger participation of civil society, academia, think tanks and the private sector. They, together with the public sector, can help define the Agenda and the implementation of policies with a long-term vision.

Much has already been done at the global and regional level, e.g. by international agencies and other non-state actors. Many of them have adapted their strategies and now contribute actively to achieving the 2030 Agenda. However, it is essential to include in setting the cooperation agenda other local and non-state actors (academia and think tanks, civil society, and the private sector), not just governments. This will better reflect what the key issues are for the country and ensure the participation of all actors in implementing solutions.

And lastly, although the SDG discussion is well known in international fora, ordinary citizens do not hear much about it. It is urgent to help people understand the benefits and impact of the Agenda. Each person can be part of the global effort and be an agent of change. Overall, the 2030 Agenda can help build a consensus on a longer-term vision for each country. It provides a unique opportunity for a shared vision for Latin America.

Many countries in the region had presidential elections in 2018 and 2019 or will have them in 2020. Countries that experience changes in governments should be encouraged to report in their next VNRs the challenges, good practices, and lessons learned during the transition regarding the implementation and follow up of the 2030 Agenda. It is particularly interesting to determine:

- For the new government coming to office, are priorities the same as for the previous period? Were national plans adjusted to Goals and Targets, and their respective challenges? Were Goals and Targets evaluated?
- What lessons generating the next National Development Plans can be shared in the VNRs or through other mechanisms so other countries can learn from them?
- It is important to determine what legal arrangements need to be made to ensure continuity beyond presidential periods, with the adjustments that would be necessary, but keeping the SDGs as a mid-term orientation.

In 2020, the IAEG-SDGs will carry out a comprehensive review to improve the indicators framework of the 2030 Agenda. This process will include the replacement, removal and adjustment of indicators, and the possibility of adding new ones will be evaluated (UNDESA, 2019b). The moment is right to reflect on ways to incorporate elements that allow countries to evaluate synergies and trade-offs, with the appropriate level of disaggregation to ensure that no one is left behind.

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