UNITED NATIONS

ECLAC

Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean

Virtual meeting
"The Role of Ministries of Social Development in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Caribbean"

Technical note

Tuesday 21 April 2020
From 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm, Trinidad and Tobago time

The Chair of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, jointly with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), invites the member countries of the Presiding Officers and of the Conference to participate in an extraordinary virtual meeting to share experiences on the role of the Ministries of Social Development and equivalent entities in the face of the current crisis that the world and the region are experiencing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The virtual meeting being organized for Tuesday 21 April is intended to address the specific challenges faced by the countries of the Caribbean subregion, identifying their needs. A similar meeting was held for the countries of Latin America on 2 April. This arrangement responded to both capacity and language requirements when communicating in this virtual space. The outcome of both meetings will be shared with all member countries of the Presiding Officers and of the Regional Conference.

The crisis in the region requires that necessary measures be taken to protect the entire population, including those who live in poverty or in vulnerable situations. As indicated by ECLAC Executive Secretary, Ms. Alicia Bárcena, "the degree of inequality is also important in assessing the extent to which the crisis will impact on the most vulnerable groups of society. The more unequal a country is, the more vulnerable groups will bear the burden of the economic impact of the pandemic and the fewer resources they will have to fight it. Special attention must be paid to women given their dual role as both workers and caretakers". [1]

[1] https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/covid-19-will-have-grave-effects-global-economy-and-will-impact-countries-latin

Social protection systems primarily under the leadership of Ministries and equivalent entities that are members of the Conference, are facing new demands in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic impact of the pandemic in the region will be inevitable, and ECLAC has preliminarily estimated a contraction of -1.8% of the regional Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the current year. In the case of the Caribbean, the pandemic will impact the economies through four main avenues: the slowdown of domestic activity, the health and related cost of responding to the pandemic, the decrease in travel and tourism receipts, and further shocks arising from the slowdown in the world economy. In particular, due to the lower demand for tourism services, it is calculated that if the travel ban prompted by the virus were to last for one, two, or three months, tourism activity in the Caribbean would contract by 8%, 17% or 25%, respectively, in 2020.[2] This scenario could be worsened considering that most countries of the subregion face limited fiscal space occasioned by high debt burdens and debt servicing costs. High dependency on food imports also creates additional challenges in terms of food security and the limited access to ICT implies a generally low level of readiness in the subregion to operate in a virtual environment in the current crisis. This is aggravated by the specific vulnerability of the Caribbean to climate change natural disasters, considering that the 2020 hurricane season starts in less than three months, placing the subregion and its people at greater risk, even as it grapples with the impacts of the pandemic.

In this context, it is most likely that the impact of COVID-19 will be greatest among the vulnerable groups with least resources, notably women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, and migrant populations. It is therefore important to have strengthened social protection systems to mitigate the negative effect of the pandemic on the well-being of households.

The Chair of the Regional Conference on Social Development, jointly with ECLAC, calls for regional coordination and cooperation in the face of this crisis, taking into account the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development (RAISD) agreed by the member countries of the Conference in Mexico City in October 2019 in the broader context of this Decade of Action to deliver the 2030 Agenda and its 17-time bound Sustainable Development Goals. It is urgent that these policies be fully coordinated so as to address this health crisis, which has brought grave socio-economic impacts.

Methodology of work:

The meeting will be held online. After the introduction and presentation of the social and economic situation of the region by ECLAC Executive Secretary, Ms. Alicia Bárcena, each country representative will have approximatively 5 minutes to present the actions being taken by the respective governments.

[2] https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/covid-19-will-have-grave-effects-global-economy-and-will-impact-countries-latin

The presentation should focus on the following points related to national response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. Main socioeconomic problems and priority actions aimed at enhanced social protection,

2. Difficulties, challenges and lessons learned in response to the crisis,

3. Cooperation needs.

Due to time constraints and communication limitations in the virtual space, the delivery of presentations using PowerPoint will not be possible. However, any information on social protection measures taken by governments, as well as lessons learned and cooperation needs, can be sent to the following e-mails: lydia.rosageny@eclac.org; with copy to conferenciaregionaldesarrollosocial@un.org. The information will be included in the summary report of the meeting and shared with all participants. ECLAC has launched the COVID-19 Observatory with information from the different countries in order to facilitate its dissemination and promote spaces for cooperation and exchange of information. The link to the ECLAC COVID-19 Observatory is: https://www.cepal.org/en/topics/covid-19 .

After the individual interventions, there will be time for joint discussion and analysis, mainly focusing on any request for cooperation and identifying possible areas for collaboration in the upcoming months.

Participation:

The meeting will be held on the Webex platform, which is accessible via the Internet. The connection details are:

Link: https://eclac.webex.com/eclac/onstage/g.php?MTID=e50c56e570ffb468bfb4a4e0034be78c3

Event Number: 475 131 364

Event Password: gcPTaMAm374

Each country is invited to designate one representative to make the country presentation. Other representatives from each country can participate as observers.

In order to communicate the contact details of the representative and observers of each country, to verify connectivity issues and to solve any possible problems, please send the information and contact telephone number to the following e-mails: lydia.rosageny@eclac.org; with copy to conferenciaregionaldesarrollosocial@un.org.

If there is any difficulty connecting on the day of the meeting, please contact the following WhatsApp number: +56 9 55301241.

Language:

The meeting will be conducted in English.

Meeting time:

The meeting will be held on Tuesday 21 April from 3:00pm to 6:00pm Trinidad and Tobago time.

Programme (Port of Spain time)

2:00 - 3:00 pm **Connection of participants**

3:00 - 3:15 pm **Welcome and presentation of the meeting**

Moderation: Diane Quarless, Director of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) subregional headquarters for the Caribbean

-Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

3:15 - 3:30 pm **Presentation of the socioeconomic situation of the region**

-Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

3:30 - 5:30 pm **Exchange of experiences and actions implemented by Caribbean countries**

Moderation: Diane Quarless, Director of ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean

5-minute intervention per representative.

5:30 - 5:50 pm **Possible next steps of cooperation and joint work**

Moderation: Diane Quarless, Director of ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean

5:50 - 6:00 pm **Closing remarks**