

Afro-descendants in Latin America Battling COVID-19

The International Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights (Race & Equality) has produced the present analysis based on webinars and dialogues held between Race & Equality staff and Afro-descendant leaders between March 27th and May 17th, 2020. The analysis also incorporates statements¹ by Afro-descendant organizations and by the mechanisms of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations (UN) dedicated to combatting racial discrimination.

This initial analysis seeks to expose the situation facing people of African descent in the Americas during the COVID-19 pandemic and to offer recommendations for addressing the current crisis and preparing for future crises. This report is intended to be a tool for States and for institutions charged with protecting human rights and promoting international cooperation.

The report begins with an examination of the Afro-descendant populations' living conditions across the region and the impact of the current pandemic on this population. Based on these findings, specific recommendations are offered with the goal of respecting and protecting the human rights of Afro-descendants as countries respond to COVID-19.

Context

Paola Yañez, Afro-Bolivian leader and general coordinator of the Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women (RMAAD), affirms: "COVID-19 does not discriminate, but we experience its effects in a different manner because we do not live under equal conditions."

Based on information provided by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Afro-descendant population in Latin America is approximately 130 million people, which equates to 21% of the total population in the region.² Despite being a minority of the region's population, Afro-descendants, along with Indigenous peoples, represent the majority of the region's poor³ due to the structural racism and racial discrimination and exclusion generated through the action or inaction of States and societies. To address this issue, Afro-descendant organizations began to collaborate on a regional level and generate their own

¹ La red interamericana sobre políticas de Población Afrodescendiente advierte sobre impacto desproporcionado de la pandemia en estas comunidades. April 30th, 2020. Available at:

https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?sCodigo=C-042/20; Los Gobiernos deben responder con igualdad racial a la pandemia del coronavirus. April 7th, 2020. Available at:

<https://news.un.org/es/story/2020/04/1472532>

² Procesamiento especial de las bases de microdatos censales utilizando Redatam. Informe: Situación de las personas afrodescendientes en América Latina y desafíos de políticas para la garantía de sus derechos. CELADE-CEPAL, 2017. Available at: <https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/42654-situacion-personas-afrodescendientes-america-latina-desafios-politicas-la>

³ Germán Freire Carolina, Díaz-Bonilla Steven, Schwartz Orellana Jorge, y Soler López Flavia Carbonar. Afrodescendientes en Latinoamérica: Hacia un marco de inclusión. 2018. Graphs 9 – 22. Authors' calculation using SEDLAC (CEDLAS and the World Bank). Available at: <http://documents1>.

analysis during the Regional Preparatory Meetings for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in the year 2000. Although some progress has been observed, primarily in legislation, national data collection, and the creation of affirmative action programs, this progress is still minimal in comparison to the large socio-economic gaps in the region, especially in countries where racial discrimination is largely legitimized (such as the Dominican Republic) and/or where extreme violence and impunity reign (as in Colombia, Brazil, and Mexico).

At the time of this report's writing, according to statistics from Johns Hopkins University and Medicine⁴ which coincide with data from the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO)⁵ and the World Health Organization (WHO), over half a million COVID-19 cases have been reported in Latin America, and the number of cases continues to grow. According to the WHO report published on May 17th, the countries most heavily impacted by the pandemic are Brazil, Peru, Mexico, Chile, and Ecuador. Brazil is currently the third most affected country in the world, having recently surpassed the United Kingdom in the number of infections and patient deaths. The current situation does not surprise Brazilian Afro-descendant and human rights organizations – since the election of the current president, Jair Bolsonaro, they have reported an intensification of antidemocratic, antiscientific, and denialist social tendencies in Brazil.

COVID-19 has highlighted the structural racism and racial discrimination in Latin America. In light of this, the importance of implementing the International Decade for People of African Descent established by the United Nations for 2015-2024;⁶ the International Decade for Persons of African Descent in the Americas established by the OAS for 2016-2025;⁷ the Inter American Convention Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, and Related Forms of Intolerance;⁸ and the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁹ is clear.

COVID-19's impact on the Afro-descendant population

Audes Jiménez, Afro-Colombian leader of the RMAAD's Andean subregion coordination team says: "we're protecting ourselves from the pandemic, we're dying of hunger, or we're being killed by those armed groups [...] the situation and the messages from Colombia are distress signals."

Drawing upon contributions from our counterparts in the region, Race & Equality offers the following general description of COVID-19's impact in communities of African descent:

⁴ Johns Hopkins University & Medicine. Coronavirus Resource Center. Available at:

<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

⁵ Pan American Health Organization. Situation in the Americas. Available at:

<https://who.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=2203b04c3a5f486685a15482a0d97a87&extent=-17277700.8881%2C-1043174.5225%2C-1770156.5897%2C6979655.9663%2C102100>

⁶ Available at: <https://www.un.org/es/observances/decade-people-african-descent>.

⁷ Available at: <https://www.oas.org/es/sadye/documentos/res-2891-16-es.pdf>

⁸ Available at: http://www.oas.org/es/sla/ddi/tratados_multilaterales_interamericanos_A-68_racismo.asp

⁹ Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

Government policies

The initial response enacted by most Latin American governments consisted of heightened hygienic measures and activity restrictions. Governments closed their borders, canceled air travel, installed curfews, ordered the use of gloves and masks, required cleaning with sanitizing products, implemented social distancing measures, and ordered the temporary closure of businesses identified as non-essential. However, Brazil, along with Nicaragua, has refused to take the urgent measures necessary for preventing the spread of COVID-19, as recommended by the WHO.¹⁰ Both governments have encouraged mass gatherings¹¹ (for example, marches and public events) and used media to manipulate public opinion towards their view of the less-than-serious consequences of COVID-19.

Mandatory confinement orders, also known as ‘quarantine’ or ‘self-isolation’ measures, have been sharply criticized for failing to take into account the socio-economic reality which prevents the majority of the region’s inhabitants from carrying them out. Governments did not consider the effects of intra-family violence, child abuse, poverty, abandonment, displacement, migration, armed conflict, and many other conditions on people’s ability to comply, nor did they study which social groups are particularly vulnerable to these conditions. Without consulting with vulnerable communities or heeding international recommendations, governments have met citizens who break quarantine with punishment and violence.

Similarly, orders to instill precautionary sanitary measures such as periodic handwashing and the wearing of gloves and masks were criticized. Although such measures seem easy to fulfill, they do not take into account the reality that a large percentage of Latin Americans totally or partially lacks access to safe drinking water and lives in situations of extreme poverty that limit the purchase and use of gloves and masks.

¹⁰ BBC Mundo. Coronavirus: qué significa que la OMS haya clasificado al Covid-19 como pandemia. March 11th, 2020. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-51842708>

¹¹ Nicaraguan Vice President Rosario Murillo sent the following letter to national leaders urging public activities: “1. Scheduling of community or in-person meetings, direct communication, vacations, competitions, fashion shows, business undertakings and creative and productive events of all types, festivals, and events proper to the season in keeping with our creative, family-based, people-oriented economy and our local culture”; 2. “All social gatherings, meetings of labor unions and businesspeople, commercial and entrepreneurial dealings, digital and technological initiatives, meetings of transportation professionals [...]”; 3. “All cultural, sporting, social, economic, environmental, creative and innovative events; all infrastructure, land, and housing projects”; 4. “All scheduling of gatherings and meetings of organizations and preparation for electoral challenges”; 5. “The campaign *Nicaragua, toda dulce, con amor para vos, este verano 2020*, is still scheduled, is growing, and is attracting media attention of all types including online, from the Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism, city halls, and from the participants themselves and cultural, environmental, touristic, and social influencers”; 6. “All campaigns that increase care and protection of our natural resources, fortify the declaration of reserves, the conservation of forests, water sources, flora and fauna”; 7. “All creative undertakings surrounding our cultural heritage exotic plant and wildlife, reproduction and legal commerce of species in breeding grounds [...]”.

Local institutions representing communities of African descent anticipated their communities' needs and advocated for aid and preparation assistance from their national governments. However, few communities received effective assistance, and the actions that were carried out generally lacked gender- and race-sensitive approaches.

States have also provided humanitarian aid as a policy to respond to COVID-19. From April 2020 until the date of this report's completion, the majority of States had distributed some humanitarian aid, but aid received by Afro-descendant communities was miniscule in comparison to that received by other communities and sectors of the population. Both Afro-descendant and non-Afro-descendant organizations have condemned aid failures, which has resulted in disciplinary procedures for some public servants. At the time of this analysis, the Attorney General's Office of Colombia was pursuing 1,286 cases of suspected irregularities in contracts and/or service provision, particularly suspected overcharging for food kits, biosafety equipment, and protective gear.¹² Similar situations exist throughout the region, including cases involving Ecuador's Secretariat for Risk Management (SNGR)¹³ and public hospitals or the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS).¹⁴ Nedelka Lacayo, RMAAD liaison in Honduras, states:

“In La Ceiba, food kits are handed out by political inclination [...] furthermore the government stated that it would not be providing help to Garifuna communities because they are allegedly ‘receiving shipments from the United States,’ but the truth is that this pandemic is global and, although many have relatives in the New York, that city is heavily affected and shipments are not making it to the communities.”

Similar attitudes have been reported in all studied countries, demonstrating how government policies exclude Afro-descendant populations.

Although the majority of States have recognized the disastrous consequences of COVID-19 and have adopted response measures, Afro-descendant organizations have expressed concerns that they are being excluded from COVID-19 response measures and that pre-pandemic agreements seeking to benefit the Afro-descendant population might go unfulfilled. Organizations in Brazil and Nicaragua expressed that those countries' minimal COVID-19 response programs have excluded civil society and that there is no expectation that these programs will be effective or meet their goals.

¹² Procuraduría revela primeras decisiones frente a presunta corrupción con la contratación por la emergencia sanitaria por el covid-19. April 24th, 2020. Available at: <https://www.procuraduria.gov.co/portal/Procuraduria-revela-primeras-decisiones-frente-a-presunta-corrupcion-con-la-contratacion-por-la-emergencia-sanitaria-por-el-covid-19.new>.

¹³ Eél María Angulo. Una plaga de corrupción consume los fondos para los 'kits de alimentos Covid-19'. May 15th, 2020. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/es/20200515-corrupción-kits-alimentos-pandemia-covid19-ecuador-colombia>.

¹⁴ Eél María Angulo. La oscura mina de oro en la que se convirtió la compra de equipos por la pandemia en Latinoamérica. May 8th, 2020. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/es/20200508-corrupcion-insumos-médicos-covid19-pandemia>.

Finally, Afro-descendant organizations are not surprised by the considerable socio-economic disparities in COVID-19 transmission and mortality rates indicated in the small amount of data available. These disparities highlight the importance and urgency of creating official, permanent, and reliable data sets in Latin America, disaggregated by ethnicity/race and with an intersectional approach by government authorities. Such data is needed to inform the actions of health, education, economic, and justice sectors in the region.

Health sector

Afro-descendant organizations have signaled that their communities face a health emergency resulting from government inattention. Most of the Afro-descendant population does not have access to social security; furthermore, the healthcare sector is severely lacking in both rural and urban communities. In Buenaventura¹⁵ and Chocó,¹⁶ Colombia, there are no third-level hospitals and existing hospitals must tend to 400,000-500,000 people, mainly Afro-descendant and Indigenous people. These hospitals have neither the personnel nor the infrastructure to treat complex cases. Residents must therefore travel to nearby cities for adequate hospital services, if they have sufficient resources to do so. This situation is mirrored across Latin America. Those who live in remote areas are attended to by traveling nurses that may come only every two days and by doctors that see patients once a week or every two weeks. This state of affairs is particularly worrying given that prevention, containment, and control measures that require constant medical attention are vital to addressing COVID-19. Afro-descendant persons are also particularly vulnerable due to the pre-existing conditions that they face. Diseases such as anemia, respiratory problems, hypertension, dengue and hemorrhagic dengue, malaria, cholera, and tuberculosis make this population one of the primary victims of COVID-19.

Afro-descendant organizations have also condemned disinformation or the absence of adequate information about COVID-19, especially in rural areas. Afro-Mexican leader Beatriz Amaro, President of the Unidad para el Progreso de Oaxaca (Oaxaca Progress Unit, UNPROAX) highlighted this concern. According to Afro-Costa Rican leader Priscila Scott Zúñiga, some countries have developed and released guidelines for the health sector focused on addressing the Afro-descendant population's needs. Afro-descendant leaders feel that although this an important advancement in the healthcare field's recognition of their community, these guidelines do not solve the core issues facing their communities. Local organizations are examining the role that traditional medicine and traditional doctors can play in the pandemic. They emphasize that no pandemic response plan that includes these practices has yet been announced.

¹⁵ Violencia y salud, las dos 'enfermedades' de Buenaventura. Colombia Plural. October 23rd, 2016. Available at: <https://colombiaplural.com/violencia-salud-las-dos-enfermedades-buenaventura/>.

¹⁶ En precarias condiciones el Hospital San Francisco de Asís de Quibdó. Redacción Salud. El Espectador. January 26th, 2015. Available at: <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/salud/precarias-condiciones-el-hospital-san-francisco-de-asis-articulo-540031>

Milene Molina, RMAAD's Southern Cone regional coordinator, states:

“the Chilean state is saying with much conviction that there is a lot of testing going on to identify the contagion, but when one examines the data, one realizes that those who are being tested are people who have money to pay for it while those that get tested through public services are definitely the minority. This demonstrates that those with purchasing power know whether or not they are sick; other people are left without direction because when they go through the public sector to demand testing, they are not tested and are sent back home, if they are not feverish, vomiting or displaying other symptoms that point to possible COVID-19 infection, where they will infect their family or those with whom they live. Some houses have five, ten, or up to fifteen people living together; therefore, when the Chilean government constantly says that we are the country with the most testing by population, if one looks at the details, this claim is untrue.”

The majority of Afro-descendant communities have reported protests in their communities by medical and healthcare professionals due to these workers' inadequate equipment and protective gear. In addition, most of these communities lack public laboratory facilities to diagnose COVID-19 and adequately respond to the pandemic.

Increased violence and insecurity

Overview

Afro-descendant organizations have reported that States have utilized police violence in an attempt to ensure compliance with shelter-in-place measures and other restrictions. This violence is ultimately met with impunity and official approval. In addition, States have employed sanctions ranging from fines to detention at a time when people are particularly vulnerable to these sanctions' impacts. In the context of a pandemic, arrests increase the possibility of infection. They also increase the risk of fundamental rights violations, as it is impossible for most people to gain access to adequate legal representation.

A point frequently raised by Afro-descendant organizations, but rarely discussed in analyses of violence, is the increase of piracy in rural communities where boats are key to local life. This increase is the consequence of state abandonment and economic precarity. For this reason, according to Gloria De Silva (RMAAD Guatemala liaison), Garifuna communities in Central America have organized their own beach and riverbank patrols in order to avoid infection and violence in their communities by screening boats from outside the community.

Violence against women

As a result of mandatory shelter-in-place orders, many women find themselves shut in with their aggressors. Girls and women of all ages are currently being severely mistreated and/or sexually abused. In many communities, both urban or rural, they have nowhere to turn, as there is little to no access to care or protective services, especially now that many such services have closed due to COVID-19.

Milene Molina, RMAAD's Southern Cone coordinator, points out:

“[...] in Arica, Chile, there was a high rate of femicide, and a large proportion of the population is Afro-descendant and Indigenous; although this situation preceded COVID-19, our women are currently very vulnerable.” Prior to COVID-19, Afro-descendant women rarely accessed support systems for victims of intrafamily violence because they were met with cold and insensitive responses to their realities because they were of African descent.¹⁷ Hence, priority should be given to the greatest vulnerability facing Afro-descendant women who continue to be even more invisible in the current context of COVID-19.

In addition, Afro-descendant organizations reported that a large number of women who are part of the essential labor force in the healthcare sector, such as nurses or sanitation workers, have faced racial and gender discrimination during the pandemic.

Violence against human rights defenders

Afro-descendant organizations, primarily in Colombia and Brazil, have reported that violence against the life and physical and psychological safety of human rights defenders has increased as a consequence of mandatory shelter-in-place orders. In Colombia, for example, displacement and murders of social leaders have increased. Audes Jiménez, Afro-Colombian leader and member of RMAAD, shares:

“In this time of quarantine, many armed actors are taking advantage of this moment to advance their strategies of territorial control with serious, threatening messages of terror. Only the other day in Cauca Department, an area with considerable Afro-descendant and indigenous populations, they killed an entire family, a community leader, wife, daughter, granddaughter and there are a few wounded. Yesterday, it was that family, but we are receiving information daily from different areas, mostly from Afro-descendant and indigenous zones and from those who are monitoring water rights. These defenders and those monitoring extractivism and territorial rights are the most affected [...] and the government always distorts the reasons behind the murder of these leaders.”

For this reason, Afro-descendant organizations are demanding greater protection and government support for Afro-descendant human rights defenders, especially for those in Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. In addition to facing the pandemic, these defenders continue to fight to promote and protect the rights of Afro descendants, whether urban or rural.

¹⁷ Human Rights Council. 29th Session. Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 69/160. April 13th, 2015. Available at: <https://undocs.org/es/A/HRC/29/47>

Violence against the LGBTI population

During the virtual discussion “The reality of the Afro-LGBI and Trans populations during the current health crisis caused by COVID-19 in Latin America”,¹⁸ members of Red Afro LGBTI (Afro-LGBTI Network) brought attention to LGBTI organizations’ rejection of the *Pico y Género*¹⁹ policies implemented in some countries. In a positive step, these policies allowed transgender, nonbinary, and genderqueer people to adhere to their self-identified gender and did not require identification documents to ‘prove’ one’s gender. However, LGBTI groups ultimately rejected the use of police forces to implement these measures, as these forces have a history of discrimination and violence against members of the LGBTI community.

The LGBTI community, particularly the transgender population, has reported intra-family violence and severe abuse and torture at the hands of police during the pandemic. Persons of African descent have been the primary victims. In addition, members of the Afro-LGBTI network identified severe consequences of confinement in addition to intra-family violence, including delays in hormone therapy, lack of HIV medication, and postponement of legal name change proceedings, all of which affect LGBTI persons’ human rights. Furthermore, those who have abandoned their homes to avoid violence face even greater challenges.

Access to justice

The pandemic has put the shortcomings of the regions’ judicial systems on display, leading to calls for more technology in the judicial process to increase efficiency. However, the potential impacts of increased ‘technologization’ in the justice system are unknown, largely due to gaps between urban and rural areas.

As a result of COVID-19, most governments announced special arrangements to ensure citizens’ access to the justice system for matters concerning basic rights and emergency situations. COVID-19 has unquestionably increased the need for a functioning judicial system, having precipitated an increase in domestic violence, unemployment, medical needs, police violence, and corruption or irregularities in public pandemic responses.

Rosalba Castillo, general coordinator of Afroamérica XXI Capítulo Colombia (Afroamerica XXI, Colombia Chapter), reflects:

“Justice is a sophism in those regions; judges and prosecutors only go to those areas once a week and in this time of pandemic they do not appear at all. Furthermore, they express that work should be done via Internet. Prosecutors are in urban centers receiving protection,

¹⁸ Conversatorio virtual: Situación de la población Afro-LGBI y Trans durante la crisis sanitaria generada por COVID-19. April 23rd, 2020. Available at: <https://raceandequality.org/es/espanol/raza-e-igualdad-organizo-un-webinar-con-activistas-paracompartir-los-efectos-del-covid-19-sobre-la-poblacion-lgbti-en-america-latina-con-el-experto-independiente-en-asuntos-sogi-dela-onu/>.

¹⁹ *Pico y Género* policies consisted of alternating days on which men remained in social isolation while women left the home to perform necessary tasks, and *vice versa* the next day.

but only those that are risking their lives and those that have mentioned death threats. In some regions they are claiming that their job is difficult because the Internet connection goes out and they can no longer hear testimony this way.”

In the same vein, Afro-Colombian organizations highlight the role that armed groups play in these territories, warning that due to abandonment by the State, armed actors take justice, including quarantine enforcement, into their own hands.²⁰ Rosalba Castillo continues:

“apart from the incident where a family was murdered, in the town of Buenos Aires (Cauca Department) with a majority Afro-descendant population, we have noted that, because of the side job issue, the population obeyed the isolation orders very little for which, on April 29th, a FARC dissident group decided to throw grenades at the “disobedient” population. Many people were injured [...] in this town, no one, except armed criminals, drug traffickers, and guerilla groups in armored cars can move about, because if someone else is out and about, they become a military target; they warn the person that they should leave. This has been a personal experience and as a human rights defender I have to travel to many places. Justice does not exist in those areas. For that reason, many members of the Indigenous Guard, leaders of Black communities, human rights defenders, community action group members, etc. have all died [...]”

Afro-descendant groups in the region have reported that they are seriously affected by the suspension of judicial services and the resulting infringement of their rights as a result of the health crisis. However, the majority of the Afro-descendant population remains silent; just like before COVID-19, they do not have access to legal representation services that would allow them to pursue justice. Inadequate financial resources and longstanding racial discrimination which has generated distrust in the justice system prevent them from accessing justice.²¹

Employment

Before COVID-19, Afro-descendant organizations pointed to the large employment gap between the Black population and other populations, which put both Afro-descendant men and women at a disadvantage. A lack of educational and work opportunities and the persistence of ethnic/racial stereotypes in hiring push Afro-descendants into precarious, informal work situations. These

²⁰ Diego Camilo Carranza. HRW alerta “sanciones brutales” de grupos armados en Colombia para cumplir medidas ante COVID-19. Anadolu Agency Global Network. April 14th, 2020. Available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/es/mundo/hrw-alerta-sancionesbrutales-de-grupos-armados-en-colombia-para-cumplir-medidas-ante-covid-19/1803737>.

²¹ Human Rights Council. 29th Session. Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 69/160. April 13th, 2015. Available at: <https://undocs.org/es/A/HRC/29/47>

workers work in small, informal family structures or as street vendors, lacking legal authorization and the protections it offers.²²

Afro-descendant organizations also reported that the majority of Afro-descendant homes are single-parent, and most of these households are headed by women, many of whom now find themselves unemployed.

According to Afro-descendant organizations, both Afro-descendant men and women find themselves confronted with the wrenching decision of exposing themselves to the virus in order to obtain sufficient resources for daily survival, whether through informal work or returning to their previous jobs without any guarantee of the necessary protection.²³ Those who return to work risk being punished for disobeying confinement and quarantine orders and being condemned by a society that does not understand the situation they are facing.

Migration

Afro-descendant organizations highlight how migrants, especially Black migrants, have been one of the most ‘invisibilized’ populations in discussions around COVID-19.

Guerline Jozef, founder and executive director of the Haitian Bridge Alliance, discussed the situation experienced by migrants in Tijuana, Tapachula, Baja California, and Chiapas, Mexico. In these migration hotspots, COVID-19 has set off food and public health crises. Migrants are especially vulnerable, and African and Haitian migrants are doubly vulnerable due to systemic exclusion of Afro-descendants in these communities. She says:

“even before the crisis currently caused by COVID-19, the situation of many Black migrants in Tapachula, for example, was grave and lacking humanitarian attention. Women with children had to wait months to receive any help from the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Since January of this year, the Mexican government changed its policies and now undocumented persons cannot receive free medical attention, the only exception to this order being women giving birth. With almost 5,000 Haitians and 4,000 Africans awaiting the possibility to legally exit Chiapas state, measures undertaken by the Mexican states, plus the lack of resources, have chiefly harmed Black migrants. And now under the shadow of COVID-19, we continue to receive worrying news. In Tijuana, a Guatemalan woman requested food provisions at the distribution center in the same camp where she lives and she was denied because she did not have an identification card used for voting nor any other documentation establishing her legal status in Mexico.

²² CELADE, 2016. Procesamiento especial de las bases de microdatos censales utilizando Redatam 7. Tabulados y realizados en el marco del estudio regional CEPAL-OPS-UNFPA-FUNDACION FORD “Situación de las personas afrodescendientes en América Latina y desafíos de políticas para la garantía de sus derechos”.

²³ See graph V.16 (CEPAL, 2017b) [online] <https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/41598-panorama-social-america-latina-2016>.

Additionally, our organization has received hundreds of stories of Haitians without jobs, masks, food, or humanitarian aid.”

Race & Equality has also been informed that African migrants and Haitian residents have been the victims of indirect exclusion. For example, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) limits its aid to those that are under the Migration Protection Protocol (MPP) or those that are registered be interviewed by United States officials. The norms established by the IOM exclude the majority of Haitians and African migrants because these people are neither under MPP nor on the U.S.’s registry. There is an obvious need to evaluate and redesign humanitarian aid to account for the different situations and emergencies created by COVID-19.

Harsh realities for migrants under COVID-19 have been reported across the region, and a race-sensitive analysis reveals more serious issues. Afro-Chilean leader Milene Molina, RMAAD’s Southern Cone regional coordinator, explains:

“we have a high migrant population and there are many Haitians, mostly in Santiago. We saw news coverage about how the Chilean army had enclosed a place where approximately 200 Haitians lived and where only a few cases of COVID-19 were found. You can ask yourself if the government would have the same attitude if the persons living in that area did not possess African or indigenous features. Would the army remove them from where they live? The Chileans that live in the vicinity came out and started to throw stones at the place and to demand that they be thrown out. It’s like a really big house, almost a whole block where this Haitian population was. This is racial discrimination, and serious at that. The same thing is occurring in other areas where the migrant Haitian population is located, and we do not know what is happening in those places because no one can come or go. The army has them surrounded and we are concerned about what is happening in these areas.”

Education

Afro-descendant organizations have reported serious issues in public schools located in vulnerable urban sectors where the greatest share of Afro-descendants live. These schools attempted to resume classes virtually, but it was quickly revealed that most vulnerable homes have neither computers nor tablets, but rather low-end cellphones. Internet connection in these areas is deficient, if it exists at all. Under normal conditions, people frequent internet cafes where they can pay for browsing and printing. In the best of times, this service is only available to a few children in these zones, because the majority of their households barely possess the economic means to meet basic needs, much less afford the cafes. Under COVID-19, even those select few children are cut off, as these cafes are closed. In addition, parents lack the educational achievement to support their children in their schoolwork. These students find themselves at a major disadvantage next to other groups.

In rural areas, Afro-descendant organizations argue that the situation is even worse, with children’s fundamental right to education being violated. These students are at a disadvantage in relation to their urban counterparts.

Recommendations:

Race & Equality issues the following recommendations based on the analysis and commentary presented by Afro-descendant populations in this document. The need to improve the region's COVID-19 response and prepare for an improved response to future pandemics is paramount. Such a response should be prepared through consultation and coordination with Afro-descendant leadership.

1. States must improve their health, employment, and education systems, including by closing the gap between the rural and urban sectors. They should also implement public policies, programs, and projects that combat structural racism and racial discrimination against Afro-descendant persons.
2. States should incorporate concrete actions targeting Afro-descendants in both urban and rural areas into their emergency response plans. These actions should respect the rights to consultation and prior informed consent, be based on intersectional analysis, and take into account children, women, displaced persons, and the LGBTI population.
3. States should guarantee protection for Afro-descendant rights defenders and respond promptly and adequately to their requests for protection.
4. International cooperation should make the provision of aid possible without increasing States' debts. International programs and projects should be executed in harmony with States and include actions targeted towards Afro-descendant people, who make up the majority of the poor and are severely affected by racism and racial discrimination in the region.
5. States and international organizations should encourage and support the collection of trustworthy data disaggregated by ethnicity/race with an intersectional approach in the fields of health, education, employment, and justice. Statistical information is the best instrument for developing effective solutions and concrete aid to those who need it most during times of crisis.
6. Both local and national governments should plan an active and immediate role in the provision of solar energy, public health services, and access to water for all their citizens, especially Afro-descendants. This will require new, effective institutional actions that respond to violations of confinement orders without increasing arrests, criminalization, and racial profiling.
7. The bodies charged with promoting and protecting human rights that make up the Organization of American States and the United Nations should require from States detailed reports that include analysis and action for the defense of Afro-descendants' human rights. These bodies include the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights



(IACHR), UN treaty bodies, and the Special Procedures of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

8. We invite Afro-descendant organizations to increase their efforts to document the violations of their economic, social, and cultural rights and to continue presenting their demands at the local, national, and international levels.