

Social Protection in Latin America: Evolution, Recent Reforms and Perspectives

Abstract

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During the decade of the eighties and particularly the nineties, several reforms to social security schemes in Latin America were implemented, both in relation to pension systems as well as in the area of health care services delivery. In parallel, programs or actions devoted to provide social assistance for the poor or the under-covered have become extensively relevant to provide protection to the population outside the contributory schemes. Such processes of reform or adjustment shed important insights, experiences and practices. Several countries, in turn, are reviewing or changing their social security protection systems.

On the other hand, the impact of the international financial crisis along the last decade is still affecting economies of Latin-America and elsewhere. Recently, the major international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank, agree that the current economic performance for countries in the region is relatively low and faces an unpromising horizon in the following years. This context has affected in different ways and depth social security systems in the region, altering the expected results, demanding containment measures. They are seen as an opportunity to take action plans towards structural changes, particularly in the retirement systems and health care, not to mention protection programs and social assistance.

The goal of the paper is to review the state of the art in Social Security Systems in Latin America, and particularly in health systems, the changes being observed, their motivations and purposes, as well as the challenges posed on both coverage and financial sustainability. Under this scenario, discuss alternative action plans.