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Social protection response to COVID-19 in rural LAC: Protection and promotion of employment in the agricultural sector¹

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Abstract

This policy brief reflects on how to improve social protection systems in Latin America and the Caribbean after the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on social insurance and labour market measures. It studies the regional social protection response to COVID-19 and analyses three country-level examples that show promising features for promoting and protecting rural employment in the region. Based on this analysis, it recommends measures to build rural social protection back better.

1 Introduction

The rural areas of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are key for development—not only because they are home to 19 per cent of the region's total population but also because of their many contributions in different sectors, including food production, energy, environmental services, culture and identity, and landscapes and natural resources (Trivelli and Berdegué 2019).

LAC's rural economy is fundamental for employability, encompassing various activities such as tourism, mining, agriculture and others. The primary contribution of agriculture to employment declined from 19.9 per cent in 1990 to 14.3 per cent in 2017, but it remains the main source of employment for LAC's rural populations² (Ramírez 2019). Considering all jobs in the larger food industry, LAC's agri-food sector accounts for an additional 10–15 per cent of all jobs in the region (Morris, Sebastian, and Perego 2020).

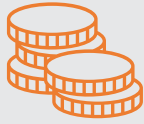



Agriculture is important for LAC's national economies. In 2020, primary activities within this sector represented 5.7 per cent of regional gross domestic product (GDP) (World Bank n.d.). Further, a study of nine LAC countries showed that, when considering manufactured goods and complementary services related to agricultural production, the agriculture sector's contribution to national GDPs is between 1.6 and 7 times higher (Trejos et al. 2004). Moreover, agricultural exports represent a significant share of LAC's exports (25.8 per cent in 2017) (Trivelli and Berdegué 2019).

Despite agricultural workers' importance for LAC's economy and employment, small agricultural producers and rural populations tend to be more vulnerable to poverty than their urban counterparts. In 2019, LAC's rural poverty rates reached 45.7 per cent, compared to 26.9 per cent in urban areas (ECLAC 2021). Most of the people living in poverty in rural areas work in agriculture, with those living in extreme poverty primarily engaged in subsistence agriculture (FAO 2020c). These vulnerabilities relate to a lack of decent work and low coverage of social protection programmes, particularly for agricultural workers. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO 2020a), 76.8 per cent of all rural workers in LAC were informal in 2017 and, thus, lacked access to secure employment contracts, benefits and social insurance (SI), becoming more vulnerable to risks and shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic (ILO 2020b; n.d.). Table 1 summarises some of the risks and vulnerabilities faced by agricultural workers and how COVID-19 has further aggravated them.

Given the importance of agriculture to employment in LAC and the high prevalence of informality in this sector, the current lack of evidence on rural SI and labour market (LM) interventions is very problematic. Thus, this study reflects on how to improve social protection systems in LAC after the pandemic, focusing on SI and LM measures.

TABLE 1

Main risks and vulnerabilities faced by agricultural workers

Risks	Pre-existing risks	COVID-19 impacts
 <p>Economic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low salaries • Seasonal, informal employment • High under- and unemployment • Unpaid family work (mainly women and youth) • Limited access to credit and insurance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural workers lost jobs due to movement restrictions that disrupted supply chains, and were unable to seek employment in urban centres. • When labour-intensive periods (planting and harvesting) overlapped with movement restrictions, labour opportunities were lost, impoverishing agricultural workers. • Market closures reduced demand for agricultural labour, resulting in income losses among informal and self-employed rural workers lacking access to SI or labour market policies. • Remittances dropped globally by 20 per cent in 2020, particularly affecting migrant workers, many working in agriculture or the rural economy.
 <p>Social</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political and social exclusion • Poor access to public services and infrastructure • Lack of land rights • Labour abuse and child labour • Gender discrimination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women, youth, children and migrant workers are highly prevalent in informal agricultural employment, and suffered more from income losses during the pandemic. • The above-mentioned economic impacts prevented rural households from implementing coping strategies (moving to cities, casual labour or productive diversification) and fostered agricultural child labour, aggravated by school closures.
 <p>Health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of health insurance • Hazardous and arduous work • High level of exposure to epidemics • Poor health and WASH* services • Lack of maternity benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty, poor working conditions, lack of alternative livelihoods and weak SI exposed agricultural workers to COVID-19 infection, as they had to continue activities without appropriate preventive measures or protective equipment. • Structural health service deficits were aggravated and imposed further difficulties for rural agricultural workers to access treatment, including sexual and reproductive services.
 <p>Environmental</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income dependent on environmental factors • Seasonality affects food security • Climate change impacts production and employment through natural disasters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income losses, mobility restrictions and a lack of social and productive insurance deepened the lack of capacity of agricultural workers and rural households to cope with climate-related shocks (droughts, floods) or to invest in resilience/ sustainable practices, productive diversification and sustainable use of natural resources (e.g. forests, fisheries).

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Allieu and Ocampo (2019), Scheil-Adlung (2015), FAO (2020a), FAO and ECLAC (2020) and Vasconcelos (2020).

Note: *WASH = water, sanitation and hygiene.

1.1 The role of SI and LM in promoting and protecting rural employment

The state of SI schemes for LAC's agricultural workers

SI entails contributory schemes that usually include old-age, invalidity and survivor pensions; sickness and maternity benefits; work injury benefits; unemployment benefits; and family benefits. Rural workers can face several barriers to accessing them:

- **Legal:** Some forms of employment prevalent in rural areas (i.e. casual, seasonal, temporary or self-employment) are excluded from legal provisions in labour legislation (ILO and FAO 2021b).
- **Financial:** SI schemes usually require monthly cash contributions, whereas rural workers' incomes tend to be irregular, unpredictable and primarily in-kind. Even when schemes cover rural workers, they are not affordable,

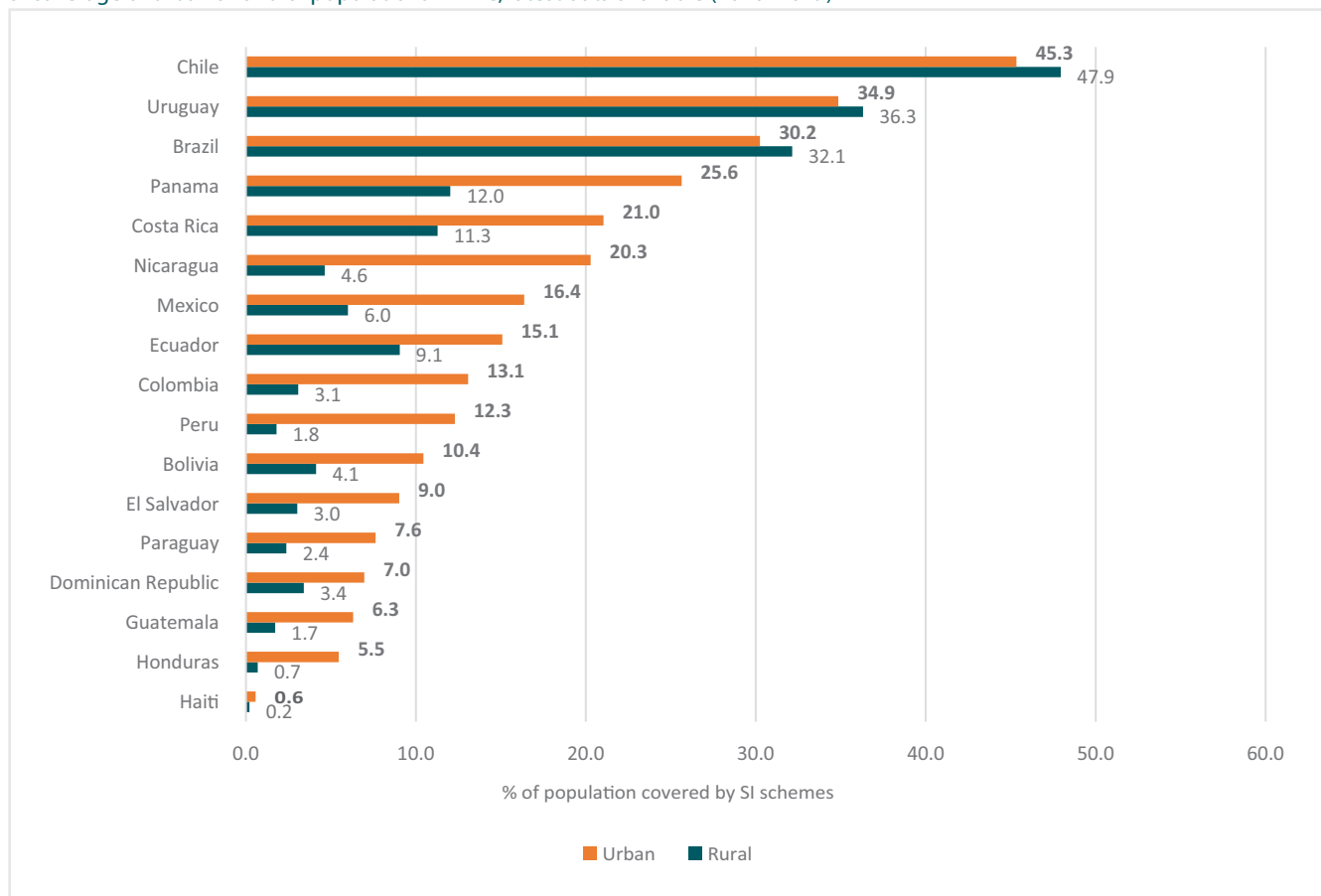
particularly for self-employed workers paying both employer and employee contributions (ILO and OECD 2020; ILO and FAO 2021b).

- **Low administrative capacities:** It can be challenging to identify and reach beneficiaries, deliver benefits and enforce labour legislation. The limited number of physical social protection offices in rural areas increases the opportunity costs to contribute to existing schemes due to the remoteness of rural communities (ILO and FAO 2021b).

ASPIRE data about SI coverage in LAC confirm the effects of these barriers. **In 14 out of 17 LAC countries, urban populations presented higher SI coverage rates** (Figure 1) (World Bank n.d.).

FIGURE 1

SI coverage of urban and rural populations in LAC, latest data available (2010–2019)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on World Bank (n.d.).

In Brazil, Chile and Uruguay, SI coverage is higher in rural areas than in urban areas, possibly due to SI adaptations implemented to address the above-mentioned barriers and cover agricultural workers:

- **Uruguay's Monotax** is an optional unified tax package for predominantly informal small businesses. It entails the payment of taxes and social security contributions in a simplified scheme, covering independent workers usually excluded from ordinary contributory schemes, and supporting tax formalisation (ILO 2019; Durán-Valverde et al. 2013).
- **Brazil's *Previdência Rural* and 'special insured' categories** are contribution categories for self-employed farmers according to the number of employees and land size. For employees, categories vary according to their salary. A special contribution category covers subsistence farmers, who contribute only 2.1 per cent of the total sales of their products (ILO 2019).
- **Chile's integrated pension system** is a means-tested pension for workers not entitled to contributory benefits, and a welfare pension complement providing a solidarity top-up to pensions for those who did not accumulate enough (Winkler, Bulmer, and Mote 2017).³

The state of LM schemes for agricultural workers in LAC

Some LM programmes support **labour supply**, such as training, skills-building and remedial education.

Others address **labour demand**, such as programmes for independent workers, job intermediation, and direct and indirect job creation (e.g. public works).

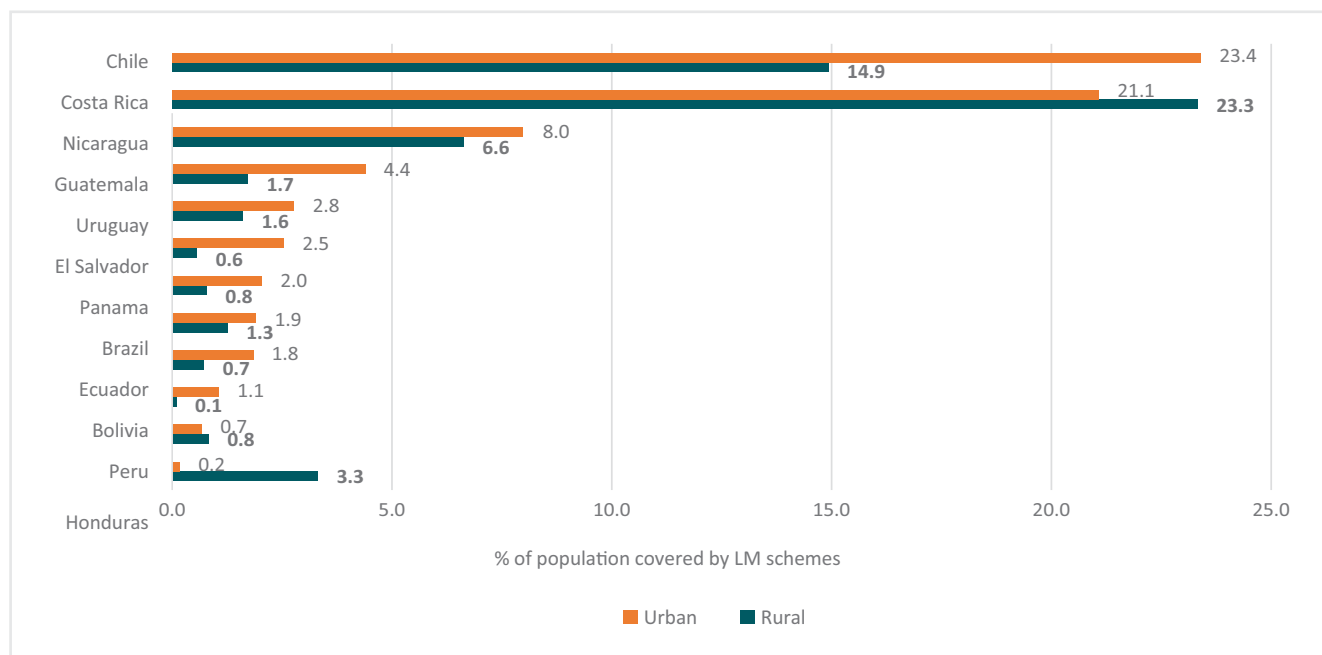
According to Rossi and Faret (2019), **only 1.3 per cent of LAC's rural families have access to LM programmes** due to:

- **reductionist approaches when designing social protection policies for rural or poor populations**, assuming that poor people in rural areas are unproductive or incapable of contributing to development;
- **support for productive units rather than active labour market policies (ALMPs)** for specific individuals in the rural economy; and
- **administrative limitations**, such as a lack of inspection mechanisms and the burden of cross-checking information.

ASPIRE data show that **LM programme coverage remains lower among rural populations in 9 of the 12 countries for which data are available. Costa Rica, Honduras and Peru are notable exceptions. In Costa Rica, the National Employment Programme (PRONAE) specifically targets poor people in rural areas, and is just one of several LM interventions that may contribute to this high rural coverage (ILO 2015b).**

FIGURE 2

Coverage of urban and rural populations in LAC by LM schemes, latest data available (2010–2019)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on World Bank (n.d.).

The role of social protection in protecting and promoting rural employment

Social protection may protect and promote employment through human capital development, employment creation and security, changes in household labour allocation, and promotion of decent work. Considering this, this subsection highlights how SI and LM policies may address the risks faced by rural workers.

- **Increasing formalisation:** Subsidising SI contributions for agricultural workers can incentivise rural formalisation (ibid.).
- **Enhancing productivity:** Programmes that provide training, skills-building and remedial education support human capital and livelihood creation, promote economic diversification and stimulate the productive transformation of rural areas through skills development (ILO 2015a).
- **Decreasing the risks of impoverishment:** Insurance and pensions maintain workers' incomes. They mitigate the impacts of hazardous work if workers get injured or sick (Samson et al. 2015). However, precarious work ought to be prevented through labour legislation.



Mitigating economic risks

- **Employment creation:** ALMPs can offer temporary income relief. Subsidised credit and in-kind transfers can enhance rural communities' productive capacity, diversify income sources and contribute to new employment opportunities (Samson et al. 2015). However, if not well conceived, these opportunities can increase the workload and involve heavy manual labour (FAO 2017).
- **Employment maintenance:** Access to credit and agricultural insurance provide a financial buffer to rehabilitate families and businesses after shocks, enhance access to finance for productivity investments, sustainability and business resilience, and contribute to job maintenance by preventing agricultural companies from closing (FAO 2021).
- **Improving access to the labour market:** LM programmes such as labour market information systems, assistance to seek employment and intermediation services enhance opportunities to access formal employment (FAO 2020c).



Mitigating social risks

- **Developing human capital:** ALMPs can build capacities, improve production and support job reallocation. Improved income levels and human capital tend to positively impact children's school attendance (Kangasniemi, Knowles, and Karfakis 2020; Samson et al. 2015).
- **Improving working conditions:** Programmes ensuring minimum income for workers can increase their capacity to negotiate better working conditions, enhancing employers' responsibilities and elevating rural salaries (FAO 2017).
- **Improving gender equality:** When maternity benefits are available as SI schemes co-funded by the State rather than a liability for employers, they can prevent discrimination against women during recruitment, and the impoverishment of new mothers (Bilo and Tebaldi 2020).



Mitigating health risks

- **Reducing income loss due to health risks:** Health insurance and sickness and work injury benefits protect workers from income loss due to work hazards (FAO 2020c).
- **Promoting safe working conditions:** LM programmes can enhance work inspection and access to protective equipment to ensure decent work (FAO 2020b).



Mitigating environmental risks

- **Mitigating against the effects of natural disasters:** Agricultural insurance schemes protect against

environmental shocks by providing economic relief for victims, rehabilitating producers and protecting jobs and businesses (FAO 2021).

- **Proactively enhancing resilience and sustainability:** LM programmes offering training on sustainable resource management may improve rural workers' capacity to deal with their environment. SI schemes can cushion the impacts of natural resource management measures that preserve resources but impact livelihoods (FAO 2020c).

2 Methodology

To achieve the objectives outlined in the introduction, this policy brief analyses LAC's good practices in using social protection to protect and promote employment in rural areas during the COVID-19 pandemic. The methodology outlined in Box 1 was applied in all three policy briefs comprising this series.

BOX 1

Methodology for case study selection and analysis

An initial pool of programmes that targeted rural populations and addressed food security or production during the COVID-19 pandemic was selected based on a mapping of social protection responses to the pandemic conducted by the IPC-IG (2021). This mapping contains adapted social protection programmes and new measures created specifically to respond to COVID-19 that were implemented by governments of low- and middle-income countries up to July 2021.

While this mapping does not discriminate by ministry, measures by ministries not typically associated with social protection may have been overlooked. Thus, based on the literature and discussions with the FAO, the sample for case study selection was adapted to include interventions that combined social protection for food security with economic inclusion.

The final step to select the case studies entailed the definition of the following selection criteria based on which the programmes were evaluated:

- Explicitly targeting vulnerable groups within the rural population
- Sustainability of the programme:
 - Prioritisation of programmes funded by domestic resources
 - Preferably linked to existing social, farmers' or beneficiary registries
 - Priority given to programmes that already existed before the pandemic, and to programmes created during the pandemic with the goal of remaining after it'
- Government-led implementation was compulsory, but the responsible line ministry was not a selection criterion. Programmes with too many reported implementation issues were excluded. For that, we considered the following:
 - Programmes with low coverage rates (less than half) of target groups during the pandemic were avoided, but not necessarily excluded.
 - The suitability of benefits was only considered for cash benefits, where the value of the benefit in relation to the minimum wage or the national poverty line could be estimated by the authors.
 - News reports about implementation issues were also considered, although positive factors could outweigh some of the problems encountered. Case studies ideally covering LAC's different sub-regions
- Availability of information

The analysis of the selected programmes was based on a desk review of official public documents, as well as semi-structured interviews triangulated with relevant secondary literature. The interviewees were officials responsible for devising and implementing the programmes, researchers or FAO country office experts. Through their responses, the case studies' planning and implementation phases, factors pertaining to political will, and the programmes' success, obstacles and future plans were investigated. Our analysis of the interviews and secondary data considered how local particularities may have impacted the programmes, by including questions about this matter in the interviews and comparing country responses.

Note that interviewees' willingness and ability to elaborate on more controversial aspects of these programmes was a limitation. Related to this, their answers may have been biased towards pointing to programmes' successes, given their relationships with the respective governments. For programmes implemented during the pandemic, no impact evaluations could be considered to overcome this bias, as they are too recent. Finally, some interpretation was needed to clearly identify interviewees' main points.

Based on this methodology, the following programmes were selected for analysis:

- Brazil: *Garantia Safra* (GS)
- Mexico: *Sembrando Vida* (SV)
- Peru: *Noa Jayatai-Mujer Indígena* (NJMI).

None of these programmes were implemented without any problems, and the authors allowed for positive or interesting factors to compensate for the lack of correspondence with some selection criteria. Further, all programmes focus on subsistence farmers, as these are the most vulnerable rural workers (FAO 2020c). Finally, aligned with FAO (2020c), this study considers that agricultural insurance schemes protecting

rural workers from production losses due to environmental shocks may be seen as SI programmes.

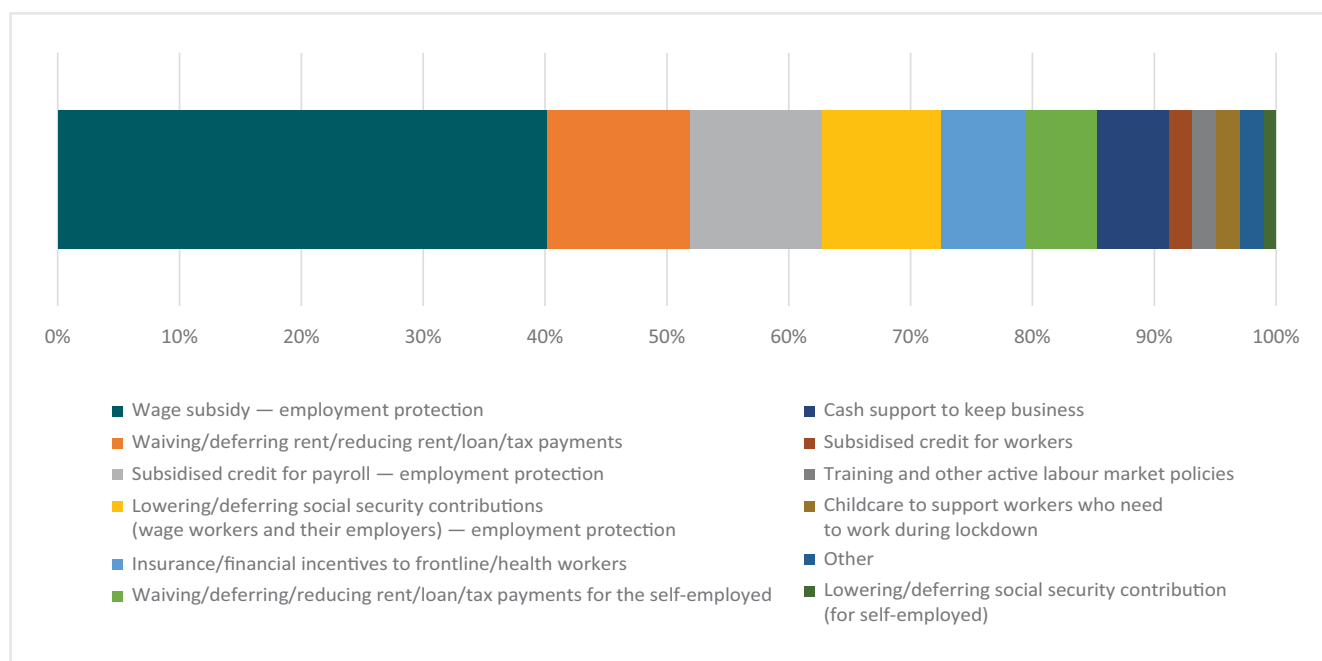
3 Findings

3.1 Governments' social protection responses to COVID-19

This subsection is based solely on the IPC-IG 'Mapping of Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 in the Global South',⁴ and examines social assistance (SA), SI and LM measures. It takes a shock-responsive perspective, considering programmes that were **horizontally or vertically expanded** or **operationally adapted**⁵ to function during the pandemic. In LAC, this mapping identified **208 SA, 163 LM and 42 SI responses** adopted by 37 countries and territories⁶ (IPC-IG 2021b).

FIGURE 3

Different components of LM measures used in LAC



Source: Authors' elaboration based on IPC-IG (2021).

Given the region's high level of labour market informality, it was expected that SI would play a minor role in the response. Considering the SI and LM instruments employed, **adaptations to contributory pensions were the most common SI instrument** (Figure 3), while the adoption of wage subsidies to protect employment was the most common LM intervention in LAC (Figure 4).

Most LM and SI measures focused on formal workers (Figure 5). Given the predominance of informal work arrangements in rural areas, it is likely that these workers did not benefit from these measures, but relied mostly on SA.

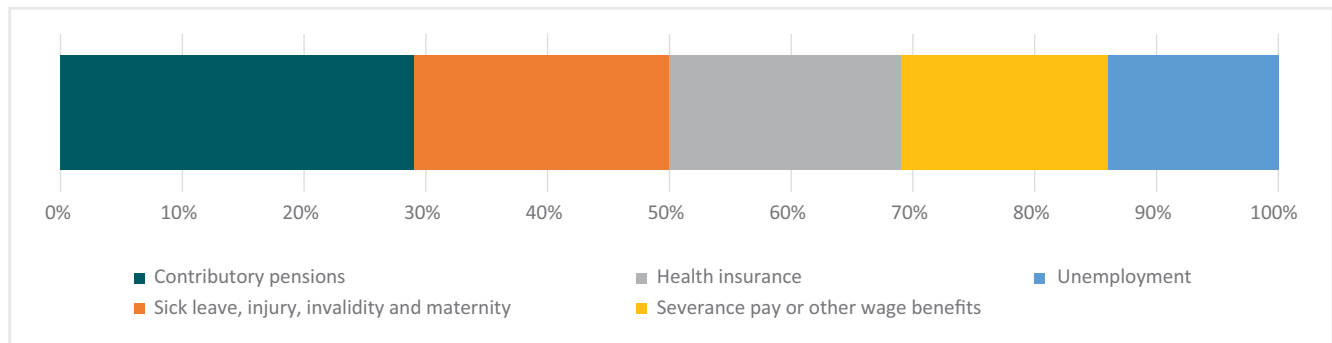
Only 5 per cent of SI responses and 7 per cent of LM measures explicitly mentioned the eligibility of rural families or agricultural workers (Figure 6). The only two SI responses that explicitly included agricultural workers were Uruguay's adaptations to its Sickness Allowance for People over 65 Years Old in 2020 and 2021. This insurance existed before the pandemic and already

covered rural workers, daily workers, self-employed workers and other categories that pay the monotax. As a response to the pandemic, the government increased the benefit value to allow elderly people to stay at home, including those working in rural areas.

In the following sections, three good practices of employment protection and promotion through rural social protection are presented. Recalling the limitations of IPC-IG (2021b) highlighted in Section 2, after finding a limited number of social protection responses focused on rural areas, we expanded our research to: (i) programmes that may have been overlooked due to their implementation by institutions not typically associated with social protection; and (ii) programmes in place before the onset of COVID-19 that only underwent minor adaptations during the pandemic. Both GS and NJMI were identified as good practices but were not originally included in IPC-IG (2021b). Based on the findings from this policy brief series, the IPC-IG aims to update its COVID-19 mapping.

FIGURE 4

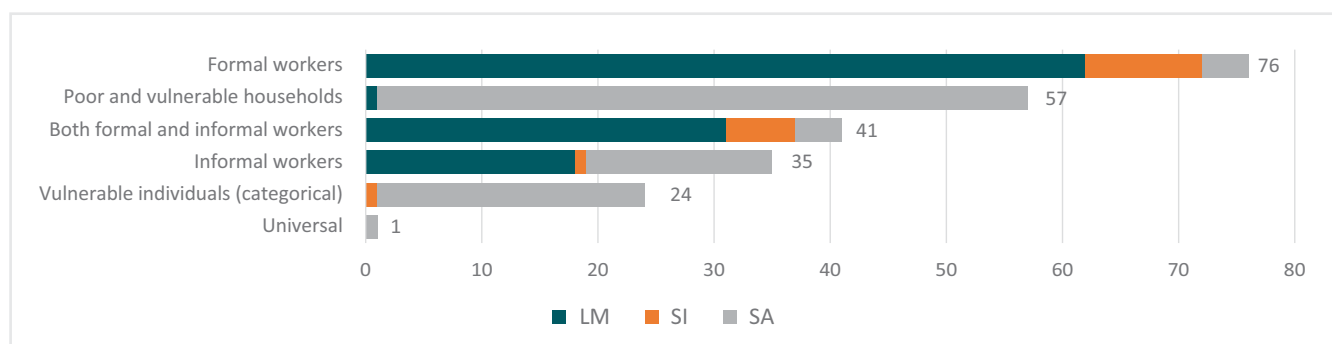
Different components of SI measures used in LAC



Source: Author's elaboration based on IPC-IG (2021).

FIGURE 5

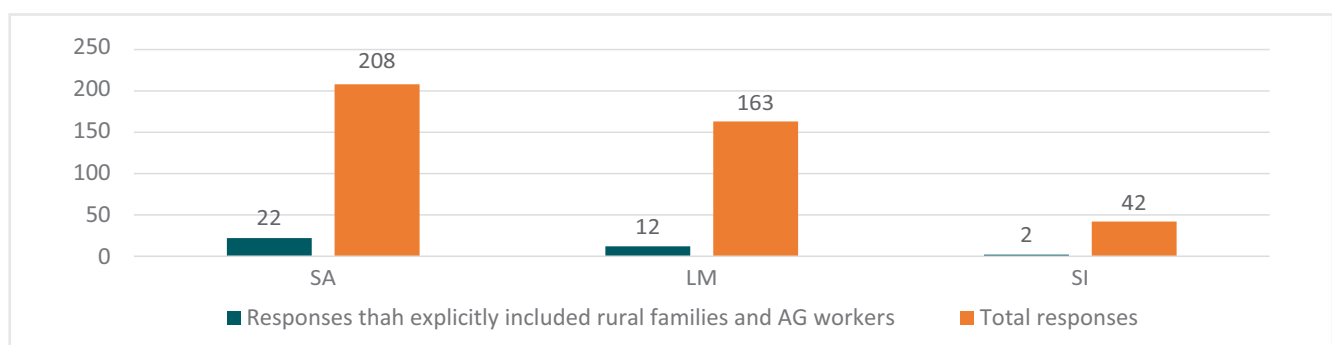
Main target groups of LM, SI and SA responses in LAC



Source: Author's elaboration based on IPC-IG (2021).

FIGURE 6

Total number of social protection responses in LAC, and those that explicitly included rural families and/or agricultural workers



Source: Authors' elaboration based on IPC-IG (2021).

3.2 Brazil: *Garantia Safra*

The GS is a subsidised **public index-based climate risk insurance scheme** for small, vulnerable producers (Table 2) (Kühne 2020; Government of Brazil 2020b). It uses payment mechanisms that are characteristic of social protection (social cards) and is linked to Brazil's social registry (*CadÚnico*) and the PRONAF Aptitude Declaration, which is a registry for multiple programmes for production and income generation. Thus, it may also be considered an SI measure (see ILO and FAO 2021a).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, family farmers in eligible municipalities were required to enrol actively every year before planting. Municipal Councils for Sustainable Rural Development checked those requirements and prioritised the most vulnerable families based on beneficiary quotas assigned to their municipality. Once approved, **eligible families had to contribute BRL17 (USD6.91 PPP) to the GS Fund, equivalent to 2 per cent of the benefit value**. The remaining value was subsidised by municipalities, states and the federal government (Mercês Júnior, Domiense, and Andrade Júnior 2021; Government of Brazil forthcoming).

Municipalities must prove that insured families have lost at least 50 per cent of their production due to drought or floods, confirmed by **at least two out of four indices** (Mercês Júnior, Domiense, and Andrade Júnior 2021):

- **Technical reports:** Experts visit a sample of properties to check farmers' production and average losses.
- **INMET** provides weather information to indicate crop losses above 50 per cent. Fewer than 70 per cent of municipalities that are part of the GS can use this index, as meteorological stations are not available everywhere.
- **CEMADEN** measures soil evapotranspiration from the planting period to harvest and can indicate crop losses.
- **IBGE-LSPA** provides estimates of the planted and harvested area, quantity produced and the average yield of selected products in each municipality. However, it considers the production of all farmers, including those that do not fit the GS profile.

TABLE 2

Programme information: GS

Goal	Guarantee the livelihood of family farmers in municipalities subjected to crop loss due to drought or floods
Implementation year	2002
Implementing institution	Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply
Components	Cash transfer
Value and frequency of the benefit	BRL850 (USD345.28 purchasing power parity—PPP) per year, paid in five instalments COVID-19 adaptation: Payment in one lump sum
Targeting mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographical • Means-tested • Categorical
Target group	Smallholder farmers registered as family farmers ⁷ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average gross monthly income in the 12 months before enrolment does not exceed one and a half minimum wages, excluding rural social security benefits. • Farmers must cultivate traditional crops, such as maize, beans, cassava, cotton and rice.
Eligibility criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The planted area must be between 0.6 and 5 hectares. • Preference is given to families with lower per capita income; female-headed households; families containing persons with disabilities; and families that do not own rural property. • At least two out of four indices used in the GS must indicate losses of at least 50 per cent of production due to floods or drought.
Coverage	708,863 insured families (2020-2021); 380,303 family farmers that had crop losses verified and the benefit authorised (2019-2020).
Expenditure	BRL323.257 million (USD131.311 million PPP) (projected for 2019-2020)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Government of Brazil (n.d.; 1998; 2002; 2014; 2020b; forthcoming); and Mercês Júnior, Domiense, and Andrade Júnior (2021).

COVID-19 response

The GS supported family producers during the pandemic through **minor administrative changes to its operations:**

- Due to social distancing measures, experts were unable to verify crop losses *in locus*. The Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply decided to **simplify crop loss verification** by considering that municipalities had crop losses of 100 per cent, and only one more index indicating crop losses above 50 per cent was necessary for eligibility (Mercês Júnior, Domiense, and Andrade Júnior 2021).
- Producers who had participated in the GS in the harvest prior to the onset of COVID-19 were **automatically re-registered during the pandemic** (ibid.).
- **Payment was made in a single instalment** for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 harvests. Efforts to reform the GS aim to

make this a regular operation, reducing administrative costs, and logistical barriers and costs for rural families who need to collect benefits in urban areas (Government of Brazil 2020a; Mercês Júnior, Domiense, and Andrade Júnior 2021).

During the pandemic, the GS protected small producers affected by drought or floods from a double crisis: the socio-economic effects of the pandemic and production losses.⁸ Most GS beneficiaries (around 70 per cent) also received SA (*Bolsa Família* and/or *Auxílio Emergencial*)⁹ (Mercês Júnior 2021).

Employment protection and promotion

By insuring vulnerable family farmers who lose their annual harvest, the GS sets minimal conditions to allow them to maintain their livelihoods and work their lands despite environmental risks. By injecting income into local economies, the GS has decreased food insecurity in the municipalities it covers, including among farmers who are not direct beneficiaries

(de Aquino, de Fátima Vidal, and Alves 2021). It encourages farmers to stay on their property despite drought, thus maintaining herds, productive yards and family arrangements, as smallholders do not need to find work elsewhere (Silva 2014). However, the fixed value of the GS benefit does not consider the actual losses incurred by individual units, resulting in insufficient compensation (Alves 2009).

The Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply intends to reform the GS and enhance its potential to increase family farmers' productivity, further protecting and promoting agricultural employment. The Ministry has been studying the possibility of interlinking the GS with other federal programmes that support the productive capacities of family farmers (Mercês Júnior, Domiense, and Andrade Júnior 2021).

One priority is to incorporate **rural extension and technical assistance components**. These can improve productivity and incentivise the diversification of production while respecting local climatic characteristics. The GS could promote rural work and offer incentives for youth to remain in rural areas. The federal government is analysing this proposal (ibid.).

3.3 Mexico: *Sembrando Vida*

SV is a **public works programme** created as a response to the lack of policies supporting small rural producers (Hernández 2021). SV aims to **mitigate social and environmental degradation by promoting employment for poor rural families and vulnerable groups** (women, indigenous peoples and Afro-Mexicans) through the **adoption of the agroforestry system of production** (see Table 3).

TABLE 3

Programme information: SV

Goal	Combat rural poverty and environmental degradation
Implementation year	2018
Implementing Institution	Secretariat of Welfare
Components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conditional cash transfers (need to perform at least 80 per cent of activities established in work plans and attend at least two meetings of the Comunidades de Aprendizaje Campesino¹⁰ every month • In-kind • Technical assistance
Value and frequency of the benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash benefit: monthly salary of MXN5,000 (USD467.42 PPP) paid directly into beneficiaries' bank account • In-kind benefits vary according to the agroforestry system and the work plans elaborated but can include plants and seeds, tools, a community plant nursery and materials to operate biofactories, among others • Bi-monthly technical assistance
Targeting mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographical: covers 20 out of 32 federal entities in Mexico, prioritising areas where indigenous communities live • Means-tested: must have an income below the rural welfare line • Categorical
Targeted group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural farmers whose incomes fall below the rural welfare line and own or hold 2.5 hectares of available land to implement agroforestry projects • Prioritises youth, women, indigenous peoples and Afro-Mexicans
Eligibility criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal age • Rural residence • Income below the rural poverty line • Own or hold 2.5 hectares of available land for agroforestry projects
Coverage	444,790 farmers reached (69% men and 31% women); aims to cover 451,000 farmers up to the end of 2021
Expenditure	MXN28.930 billion (USD2.704 billion PPP) in 2021

Source: Authors' elaboration based on CONEVAL (2021); Government of Mexico (2020a; 2021); and ECLAC (n.d.).

Interested farmers are pre-registered by facilitators through a computer application or a printed list, forming the candidates' registry. Then a validation process is carried out through visits to verify the requirements *in locus*.

COVID-19 response

During the pandemic, SV was fundamental to guaranteeing a source of income for family producers who lost income due to market closures and the disruption of logistics chains.

SV continued to operate with **minor operational changes**, guaranteeing the employment of beneficiaries. It may also have contributed to the economic dynamism of rural areas, as beneficiaries may have used their income to purchase goods from local small businesses (HernN ZOTERO_IT).

In April 2020, a horizontal expansion of the programme was announced, adding 200,000 farmers as part of the COVID-19 response plan (Government of Mexico 2020b). While the

pandemic hindered *in locus* visits for registration, 90 per cent of beneficiaries were already registered and work plans were already developed before its onset. When social distancing measures were lifted, the registration process returned, following biosafety protocols. The most affected component during the pandemic were the *Comunidades de Aprendizaje Campesino* meetings, which did not take place in some places with stricter social distancing measures (Hernández 2021).

Employment protection and promotion

SV directly creates employment in the agricultural sector, increasing family farmers' incomes and contributing to local economies. In the long term, it is expected to support rural families' capacity to invest in productive infrastructure for their farms and take more risks to diversify production. Its agroforestry model also offers the potential to prevent land degradation and enrich the soil, contributing to maintaining and promoting jobs in the agricultural sector in the long term through a sustainable approach.

In some communities, SV works in tandem with Youth Building the Future, a public works programme that provides opportunities for local youth. This is **relevant for**

communication in indigenous communities, as beneficiaries translate for SV rural expansion facilitators (Hernández 2021).

Employment protection through SV has also faced some challenges. Sometimes, farmers would not trust the programme due to a lack of confidence in its actual implementation. Other farmers would choose not to follow the established work plans, and, in some communities, eligible farmers would migrate to seek work elsewhere. Moreover, there has been some criticism of its delayed implementation, which resulted in only 14 per cent of the promised number of trees being planted by August 2020 (Senado de la Republica 2020). The land requirements for joining the programme could also be an obstacle for small producers without enough land. However, to remedy this, SV encouraged farmers to form associations to jointly have enough land to participate (Hernández 2021).

3.4 Peru: *Noa Jayatai-Mujer Indígena*

NJMI is a **pilot programme**¹¹ implemented under the *Haku Wiñay Express* model to support **poor and vulnerable rural producers** by enhancing their production capacity and providing home improvement facilities (see Table 4) (Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social n.d.).

TABLE 4

Programme information: NJMI

Goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement of technical capacities for the development of productive activities • Development of productive agricultural and aquaculture activities, and orienting surpluses to markets • Improvement of living conditions and hygiene practices • Improvement of organisational capacities and active participation, contributing to community economic management
Implementation year	2020
Implementing institution	Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion
Components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-kind (productive assets and technologies) • Technical assistance and training
Value and frequency of the benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-kind benefits vary according to the priority of the community. They include assets and technologies to improve agricultural production (e.g. plants and seeds, some animals and fish, irrigation systems), and assets to improve the family environment and hygiene practices (e.g. improved kitchens, safe water modules) • Technical assistance: <i>Yachachiqs</i> provide training and technical assistance for beneficiary households • Geographical
Targeting mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Means-tested • Categorical
Targeted group	Rural households in extreme poverty—particularly Amazonian indigenous women living in poverty or extreme poverty, and vulnerable farming families in Loreto
Eligibility criteria	<p>Specific eligibility criteria for NJMI are not available, but <i>Haku Wiñay Express</i> follows the same criteria as <i>Haku Wiñay/Noa Jayatai</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population centres with at least 40 households located in rural districts and living in extreme poverty • The municipality must sign a commitment to support and co-finance some programme activities • Families must show interest in and commitment to adopting and incorporating productive technologies and the other components of the projects
Coverage	1,200 households
Expenditure	PEN4.640 million (USD2.447 million PPP).

Source: Authors' elaboration based on El Peruano (2021); Andina (2021); Asensio (2021); Government of Peru (n.d.); Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social (n.d.); and Fondo de Cooperación para el Desarrollo Social (2021).

COVID-19 response

NJMI builds on the pre-existing *Haku Wiñay/Noa Jayatai*. *Haku Wiñay* has been implemented by the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion's *Fondo de Cooperación para el Desarrollo Social* (FONCODES) since 2012, aiming to develop productive capacities and provide technical assistance, training and technology transfer to poor rural households living in Peru's Andean areas (Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social n.d.). *Noa Jayatai* is its 'Amazonian version'. In 2018, a total of 313,340 households benefited from *Haku Wiñay/Noa Jayatai* (Government of Peru 2021). Beneficiaries received support for three years to: (i) support family production; (ii) provide home improvements via the delivery of productive assets and individualised technical assistance; (iii) promote inclusive rural businesses via technical assistance to household groups; and (iv) incentivise financial literacy and promote savings through training (Asensio 2021).

FONCODES created *Haku Wiñay Express* (and its adapted version NJMI) during the COVID-19 pandemic to enhance social

protection coverage. A total of PEN80 million (USD42.185 million PPP) was provided to cover new 21,100 households. Differently from *Haku Wiñay/Noa Jayatai*, *Haku Wiñay Express* and NJMI supported households for one year through two components: (i) strengthening and consolidating rural family production systems; and (ii) offering improvements for healthy homes.

NJMI innovated through its **intercultural approach**.

First, indigenous organisations were directly involved in design and implementation, prioritising districts and selecting targeting criteria (Aste 2021). NJMI worked on an extended family care mode, aiding several households together, instead of nuclear families (Andina 2020). Further, it went through operational adjustments to incorporate indigenous women as benefit recipients (Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social n.d.; Aste 2021). Box 2 explains the context that made this possible. Note that while indigenous organisations were able to influence NJMI's design, Aste (2021) finds room for improvement by better including indigenous know-how in the currently standardised technical training.

BOX 2

Opportunity window for indigenous social protection through NJMI

- Increased awareness of the need for indigenous social protection through more data on indigenous vulnerabilities
- Increased awareness among social protection implementers through work experience
- Increased assertiveness of indigenous organisers for adequate social protection and emergency response
- High-level political commitment from the Minister for Development and Social Inclusion (Aste 2021).

Employment protection and promotion

NJMI can protect and promote agricultural employment through technical assistance that **fosters human capital in rural settings**. The distribution of productive assets and new technologies **increases productivity in rural areas**. It also promotes employment through **training opportunities for young local representatives** who assume the position of *Yachachiqs* and are responsible for transmitting technical knowledge to farmers in their different languages (Aste 2021).

By protecting the livelihoods and enhancing the productivity of farms led by indigenous women, NJMI contributes to the empowerment of this group in the medium and long term (ibid.). Further, NJMI's target group overlaps with that of the pre-existing cash transfer programme *Juntos*. Previous studies identified synergies between *Juntos* and *Haku Wiñay/Noa Jayatai*, in which *Juntos* beneficiaries' incomes and technological adoption were positively impacted by *Haku Wiñay/Noa Jayatai* (Rural Synergies 2021). NJMI may have impacted *Juntos* beneficiaries similarly.

However, when compared to the pre-existing *Haku Wiñay/Noa Jayatai*, NJMI **excluded two important components for rural employment promotion: promotion of inclusive rural businesses and financial inclusion**. Its shorter duration, the movement restrictions and the necessity to rapidly respond to increased needs caused by COVID-19 may explain the exclusion

of some components (Aste 2021). Nevertheless, **this may have limited beneficiaries' business plans and financial literacy to expand production**.

3.5 Common features of good practices

Several commonalities between the case studies were identified which may offer additional lessons for rural social protection in LAC, as follows.

First, **none of the programmes analysed were created from scratch** (Hernández 2021; Mercês Júnior, Domiense, and Andrade Júnior 2021; Aste 2021). In Brazil and Mexico, the **pre-existing infrastructure, including registries**, was important to enable the registration of beneficiaries during the pandemic. GS beneficiaries were also covered by additional programmes, in part due to the single registry, the *CadÚnico* (Mercês Júnior, Domiense, and Andrade Júnior 2021; Hernández 2021; Mercês Júnior 2021; Bartholo, Mostafa, and Osorio 2018; Bartholo et al. 2020). In Peru, **building on the experience of previous programmes and indigenous organisations** was important for a rapid response during the pandemic (Aste 2021).

Political will benefited NJMI and SV. The latter was a priority in Mexico's National Development Plan (Hernández 2021). In Peru, increased visibility of and concern for

indigenous social protection and high-level political commitment from the Minister for Development and Social Inclusion opened a window of opportunity for implementation of NJMI (Aste 2021).

In all countries, **collaboration with farmers' or indigenous organisations** supported programme implementation. In Brazil, farmers' organisations facilitated registration, eligibility assessment through community councils, and the sensitisation of farmers to join the GS (Mercês Júnior, Domiense, and Andrade Júnior 2021). In Peru, indigenous organisations were key players for communicating NJMI's existence, opening access to indigenous communities, and for the incorporation of the intercultural approach in programme design and implementation (Aste 2021). Mexico's SV encouraged the establishment of farming associations to guarantee that farmers had enough (combined) land to be eligible and for the creation of farmers' 'learning communities'.

All programmes **prioritised specific vulnerable groups within the rural population**, such as women (all programmes), indigenous peoples (SV and NJMI), people with disabilities (GS), the poorest (GS), remote communities (SV) and Afro-Mexicans (SV) (Hernández 2021; Mercês Júnior, Domiense, and Andrade Júnior 2021; Aste 2021).

Nevertheless, rural populations faced **difficulty in accessing documents** in Brazil and Mexico (Hernández 2021; Mercês Júnior, Domiense, and Andrade Júnior 2021). Mercês Júnior, Domiense and Andrade Júnior (2021) highlighted the high opportunity costs related to time and transportation that the GS was trying to mitigate through digitalisation and by paying benefits in lump sums.

Peru and Mexico faced additional **difficulties for the State to access indigenous communities** due to dangers of spreading COVID-19 (Hernández 2021; Aste 2021).

Barriers to land ownership were cited as obstacles for productive inclusion in Mexico and Peru. Farmers were hesitant to register for SV due to fears of losing land. Others did not own enough land to be eligible (Hernández 2021). In Peru, violence against indigenous communities perpetrated by drug traffickers, mafias and illegal miners is still a major barrier to land access.

Finally, **cultural barriers between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples** in Peru and Mexico were highlighted. To remedy this, SV and NJMI translated their materials into local languages, although NJMI's technical content remained little tailored to indigenous know-how. Both also worked with indigenous and *mestizo* youth from target communities during implementation (Hernández 2021; Aste 2021).

4 How can we build back better?

Considering the above-mentioned social protection responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in LAC, the authors recommend the following measures to build social protection systems back better in rural areas to protect and promote rural employment. Note that these recommendations complement Rolon et al. (2022), based on the findings from the good practices analysed above.

4.1 Integrate SI and LM measures with other rural social protection and economic inclusion interventions

- Link SI and LM programmes to civil, social and farmers' **registries** in which beneficiaries can be registered automatically (see Rolon et al. 2022).
- Implement SI and LM programmes with the goal of **double rural inclusion** (see Rolon et al. 2022).
- Combine **employment protection and promotion within the same programme** through multiple components. This may entail insurance from agriculture-specific (climate) risks combined with skills-building to maintain productivity despite shocks.
- **Involve line ministries responsible for agricultural production** in social protection programmes (see Rolon et al. 2022).
- **Address legislative, administrative and financial barriers that prevent rural workers from accessing contributory schemes** by reforming labour legislation, facilitating registration processes and the payment of contributions, including by adapting these to the seasonality of agriculture, and establishing subsidised insurance schemes for the most vulnerable (e.g. informal workers, and families engaged in subsistence agriculture).

4.2 Economic risk mitigation by increasing access to SI and LM measures

- **Design SI and LM interventions with the goal of increasing productivity to avoid shocks and maintain employment** through the provision of adequate benefit amounts and capacity-building.
- **Offer attractive employment opportunities in agriculture through ALMPs** by offering competitive salaries and skills training.
- **Design LM interventions in a gender-sensitive way** to promote rural women's engagement in decent work and enable them to derive benefits from their labour.
- **Subsidise SI schemes** as an incentive for formalisation of independent and salaried agricultural work and to protect rural workers from agriculture-specific risks. This includes the implementation of **subsidised agricultural insurance**.

4.3 Social risk mitigation by considering the diversity of rural populations

- **Guarantee an income floor and safe working environments through SA, SI and LM schemes** so that rural workers have increased capacity to negotiate decent working conditions.
- **Tailor productive assets and periodic technical assistance to local know-how, cultures and environmental peculiarities.** This includes the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into skills training programmes and the translation of educational material into indigenous languages.

- **Consider the history of gender discrimination and its intersectionality with cultural peculiarities** when implementing SI and LM schemes. This includes collaboration with community members to inform rural women about their rights to social protection.
- **Consider historical grievances and local vulnerabilities** when communicating the reasons for documentation and data requirements.
- **Involve rural worker associations, unions and indigenous associations in programme design and implementation.** Community members who speak local languages and are inserted into the local culture in programme implementation can contribute to this.
- **Make the application process for benefits as simple as possible** to avoid deterring potential applicants.

4.4 Health risk mitigation by addressing hazardous rural working conditions

- Subsidise **SI schemes that cover rural work accidents** and that require little effort to prove eligibility.
- **Adapt the contributions** of health insurance schemes to the seasonality of agricultural work.

4.5 Environmental risk mitigation through shock-responsive SI and LM measures

- Use LM schemes that **incentivise agroforestry models of production** to apply solutions to environmental degradation and to prevent and mitigate the impacts of the global climate crisis.
- **Make environmentally sustainable LM interventions attractive alternatives** compared to migrating to urban areas for (precarious) work.
- **Enhance shock-responsiveness** by investing in agricultural and beneficiary registries that are integrated with other relevant policy databases and making programme operationalisation more flexible.
- **Subsidise SI schemes that cover farmers affected by environmental shocks.**
- **Invest in data collection on environmental impacts on agricultural production**, such as satellite technology, weather monitoring and other necessary infrastructure.

- **Build smallholder producers' capacities to prevent impacts of environmental shocks on their agricultural production** by offering skills training on irrigation and other preventive agricultural practices tailored to local contexts.
- **Provide adequate assets and services based on the specific environmental risks of each location.** In regions affected by droughts, for example, provide drought-resistant seeds and related extension services, and investments in agroforestry models of production to enhance water management. For regions affected by floods, provide infrastructure components focused on flood preparedness and prevention, and early warning and anticipatory actions.

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2. The proportion varies significantly by country (see Morris, Sebastian, and Perego 2020);

3. No evidence was found on the impact of this scheme on coverage of agricultural workers.

3. See the IPC-IG online dashboard (*Social protection responses to COVID-19 in the Global South*) and the *Dashboard methodological note*.

5. Here, horizontal expansion refers to an increase in coverage to previously uncovered people by the social protection systems; vertical expansion refers to an increase in benefit amount or added benefits to existing beneficiaries; and operational adaptation refers to changes in payment methods or frequency and delivery mechanism, among others.

6. Apart from LAC's 33 countries, territories that are not sovereign countries, such as dependencies or dependent territories from other countries or areas of special sovereignty and autonomous territories (such as Anguilla, Aruba, Curaçao, Cayman Islands etc.), were also considered.

7. Brazilian law defines family farms as farms: (i) that cover no more than four fiscal modules; (ii) whose workforce consist mainly of family members; (iii) whose incomes derive predominantly from activities on the farm; and (iv) that are managed by families (Kühne 2020).

8. Programmes created to respond to the crisis such as the Auxílio Emergencial (emergency cash transfer) targeted similar groups to those targeted by the GS.

9. See Bartholo et al. (2020) for more information about these cash transfers during the pandemic.

10. Groups of up to 25 beneficiaries that meet with facilitators to plan monthly activities and receive technical support.

11. Terminology used by its implementers (Aste 2021).

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