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Social inequalities in Latin America: towards a subnational convergence or divergence?

Leandro M. González

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze the main available social variables at subnational level in Latin America and the Caribbean, to assess whether observed social progress tends to converge between the internal areas of the countries. The region as a whole has made significant progress in employment, education (primary and secondary) and health (reduction of infant mortality and total fertility, increase of life expectancy at birth) in last decades. Although many countries follow the same path, internal gaps are observed between subnational areas. Rural populations, indigenous communities and poor strata still show strong disadvantages in their life conditions. E.g. in terms of income, indexes of convergence draw that disparities remain high and have not changed significantly in the last two decades.

Using the sub-national database of the "s-ALyC" project (13 socio-demographic variables of 1960-2011 Latin American censuses from IPUMS-International) we obtain different results, depending on the convergence indicator used. The standard deviation shows that there was a convergence between the Major Administrative Divisions in the children/elderly ratio, jobs in agriculture, urban residence and primary education; divergence in female employment and secondary education has occurred. If the variation coefficient is used, there was convergence of female employment, general education and employment in services; but divergence in foreign migrants and agricultural employment. However, both indexes coincide in indicating a tendency to convergence in primary education and female labor participation. A contrast is seen between convergence in socioeconomic variables and stability in demographic indexes (e.g. children per elder) or mixed tendencies (e.g. migration).