

The coronavirus pandemic in Latin America

Latin America is among the world's regions worst affected by Covid-19, and its economies, employment and even human rights are already suffering seriously, and are expected to continue to do so. Governments and international organisations, including the EU, are making efforts to mitigate the consequences, but the results remain uncertain.

So far, the [coronavirus](#) pandemic has affected over 27 million people in Latin America (around [20 %](#) of total cases worldwide), causing over 860 000 deaths. Five Latin American countries are among the world's top 20 in terms of the number of cases, with Brazil (currently considered the [epicentre](#) of the pandemic) accounting for nearly half of the region's total and over 40 % of deaths. Peru has the highest incidence, with nearly 177 deaths per 100 000 inhabitants. As of 20 April 2021, the [cases and deaths](#) notified in a 24-hour interval were still increasing slightly in many countries, with no clear downward [trend](#). As regards [vaccination](#), nearly all countries have started their immunisation plans. Chile and Uruguay, with respectively [30 %](#) and 10 % of their population fully vaccinated as of the same date, are outstanding examples in the region and the world; other countries, such as Guatemala and Honduras, have not reached 0.1 %. The Pfizer-BioNTech [vaccine](#) was the first to be used in the region (Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Mexico), together with the AstraZeneca one (in Argentina especially); and [Colombia](#) was the first to approve the Janssen vaccine. Nevertheless, the Chinese CoronaVac and Russian Sputnik V [vaccines](#) are increasingly being used, and a Sputnik V [factory](#) has started production in Argentina. Ibero American [leaders](#) have called for better vaccine distribution, as the region has only received 8 % of the world's doses (over 11 million of them through [Covax](#)).

Since the start of the pandemic, [most governments](#) (some initially more [reluctant](#), like those of Mexico and Brazil) have applied [measures](#) to [prevent and fight](#) it through lockdowns, quarantines, curfews, social distancing, travel and border restrictions, and to alleviate its effects through [economic and fiscal measures](#) and [social programmes](#). They have yielded [varied results](#) ([Uruguay](#) controls the pandemic without having imposed a lockdown). The [pandemic](#) has also aggravated [existing socio-economic](#) and [political](#) conditions across Latin America. Its [impact](#) has been worsened by the following factors: i) it is the [most unequal region](#) in the world; three quarters of its [population](#) have low or lower-middle income, and 30 % live below the poverty line; ii) over 50 % of [Latin Americans](#) work in the [informal](#)

This is an update of an 'At a glance' note from October 2020.

Covid-19 situation in Latin America and the Caribbean

Country	No of cases (world ranking)	Number of deaths	Deaths / 100k population	% of population fully vaccinated
Brazil	13 973 695 (3)	374 682	117.53	4.3 %
Argentina	2 714 475 (11)	59 476	132.35	1.8 %
Colombia	2 667 136 (13)	68 748	136.57	2.4 %
Mexico	2 306 910 (14)	212 466	166.54	3.1 %
Peru	1 707 787 (17)	57 537	176.98	1.7 %
Chile	1 131 340 (23)	25 277	133.37	30 %
Panama	361 044 (46)	6 189	145.75	—
Ecuador	360 563 (47)	17 703	101.90	1.0 %
Bolivia	290 362 (54)	12 666	110.01	1.5 %
Dom. Rep.	261 531 (58)	3 422	31.87	5.6 %
Paraguay	252 443 (60)	5 384	76.43	0.2 %
Costa Rica	230 837 (67)	3 099	61.40	5.0 %
Guatemala	213 049 (69)	7 241	43.61	<0.1 %
Honduras	201 677 (71)	4 963	50.92	<0.1 %
Venezuela	184 595 (74)	1 925	6.75	—
Uruguay	167 033 (77)	1 971	56.94	10 %
Cuba	94 571 (93)	531	4.69	—
El Salvador	67 557 (100)	2 078	32.20	—
Jamaica	44 136 (110)	727	24.66	—
Haiti	12 918 (134)	251	2.23	—
Belize	12 558 (137)	318	81.46	N/A
Guyana	11 901 (138)	271	34.62	0.1 %
Bahamas	9 791 (144)	194	49.81	—
Surinam	9 581 (145)	187	32.17	—
Trinidad and Tobago	8 964 (146)	154	11.04	—
Nicaragua	6 778 (150)	180	2.75	—
Regional Total	27 303 232	867 640		
World Total	142 972 108	3 044 801		

Source: [Johns Hopkins University](#) Coronavirus Resource Center, data from 20 April 2021, (JHU [Global Map](#), [Mortality analysis](#)), [New York Times Vaccination Tracker](#), updated daily on websites. Author's own elaboration.

[sector](#) and often lack access to employment and welfare benefits or health care; iii) [81 %](#) live in urban areas, [21 %](#) live in slums; and [25 %](#) still do not have reliable access to a safely managed [water supply](#); iv) Latin American [public healthcare systems](#) are mostly under-funded, fragmented and difficult to access in rural areas; v) [prison over-crowding](#) is very high (with prison population growth of [121 % since 2000](#)), which facilitates the propagation of the disease among inmates; and vi) the level of misinformation about the pandemic ([infodemic](#)) in the region is among the world's highest, made worse by low trust in governments.

Expected impact

An October 2020 [report](#) by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) revealed that the pandemic is having '[historic negative effects](#) in economic, productive and social spheres'. According to the IMF, [Latin American GDP](#) fell by 7 % in 2020 (compared with -6.5 % in the euro area and -3.5 % in the US), and it will grow moderately by 4.6 % in 2021. ECLAC expects a sharp increase in [inequality](#) and poverty (eight out of 10 people in the region – 491 million – will be living on under US\$500 a month, and the number of poor people will rise from 186 million to 231 million, which means a 15-year backslide). Some 2.7 million businesses will close and unemployment will reach a record [12.3 %](#) according to the ILO, and as of 30 September 2020, at least [34 million jobs](#) had already been lost, at least temporarily. The coronavirus crisis also raises serious concerns about [democracy and human rights](#) in the region, as the emergency [measures](#) taken often imply the [suspension of rights](#) and the increase of state power, and some – [but not all](#) – fear that leaders could use the pandemic to advance their own [political agendas](#), adding to already low [trust in democracy](#). [Human rights organisations](#) have expressed [concern](#) that these measures could be used to reinforce [authoritarian tendencies](#) and suppress opposition forces or the right to political dissent, or to discriminate against specific groups or minorities (such as [migrants](#) or [indigenous peoples](#)). For instance, [the army](#) has been used to support the police in curfew enforcement in El Salvador or against demonstrators in Honduras; and in [some countries](#) migrants and refugees have been forced to [quarantine](#) in centres where health or social distancing rules were not respected. The Inter-American Commission for Human Rights has established a Covid Rapid and Integrated [Response Coordination Unit](#).

International response

Regional organisations such as [Mercosur](#), the [Andean Community](#) and the Central American Integration System ([SICA](#)) have provided various [responses](#) to the crisis (through an [emergency fund](#), a [recovery agenda](#), or a [contingency plan](#)). [Latin America](#) will benefit from the UN-launched US\$2 000 million [Covid-19 Response and Recovery Fund](#). ECLAC has stressed the [need](#) for greater regional integration, created a [Covid-19 Observatory](#) and suggested adopting [political and social compacts](#) for equality and sustainable development in the region. International financial institutions, such as the [Inter-American Development Bank](#) (IDB), the [World Bank](#) and the [IMF](#) are stepping up their lending support to LAC countries to fight Covid-19 (though some [critics](#) consider it insufficient). The recent Covid-19 debt service suspension initiative ([DSSI](#)) by the G20 will also benefit poorer LAC countries such as Haiti or Honduras.

EU response

The Commission has committed [€1016 million](#) (as part of the [Team Europe](#) package), and the EIB [€325 million](#), to help Latin America's most vulnerable countries and population groups. The EU agreed [€273 million](#) in disbursements of [budget support](#) for 2020. In the Caribbean, the EU, in partnership with the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) mobilised [€8 million](#) to cater for the countries' most urgent needs in managing the fight against the pandemic. Latin America will also benefit from international cooperation resulting from the [international pledging conference](#) hosted by the Commission in May 2020 to help develop vaccines and treatments for Covid-19. The [EU Foreign Affairs Council](#) of 13 July 2020 reviewed how the EU could [support the region](#) and increase its political engagement there. EU [sanctions](#) against Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua will not affect supplies and equipment to fight Covid-19.

On 29 April 2021, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on the Covid-19 pandemic situation in Latin America, asking for more cooperation with the region in the fight against Covid-19 and reinforcing the capacity for vaccine distribution. In a 25 November 2020 [resolution](#) on the foreign policy consequences of the Covid-19 outbreak, it called on the Commission to keep engaging with Latin American countries. And on 17 April 2020, the Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on EU coordinated action to combat the pandemic. On 16 June 2020, [HR/VP Borrell](#) explained in plenary the need for a global solution to the pandemic, and for the [EU](#) to be at the centre of this response.

