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## Latin America and the Caribbean: Impact of COVID-19

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is having widespread economic, social, and political effects on Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). As of May 3, 2022, the region had nearly 1.7 million deaths (over 27% of deaths worldwide). Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Colombia, and Argentina had the region’s highest numbers of deaths. Looking at deaths per 100,000 people, Peru had the highest recorded COVID-19 mortality rate in the region, followed by Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Colombia, and Trinidad and Tobago (see **Table 1**).

In its May 3, 2022, weekly epidemiological update on the pandemic, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) reported that cases increased in the Caribbean and Central America compared with the previous week but decreased in Mexico and South America. PAHO also reported that deaths decreased in Mexico and Central America but increased in South America (driven by Brazil and Chile) and in the Caribbean; but PAHO noted that some reported deaths in the Caribbean were historical deaths reclassified as COVID-19 deaths.

Since the start of the pandemic, PAHO’s director has expressed concern about the poor and other vulnerable groups at greatest risk, including those living in the Amazon Basin, particularly Indigenous communities; women, who comprise 70% of the health workforce; people of African descent; migrants in temporary settlements; and prisoners in crowded jails.

According to PAHO, more than 66% of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean had been fully vaccinated as of April 20, 2022. The World Health Organization has set a goal for countries to achieve a 70% vaccination rate by mid-2022. As of early May 2022, however, although nine LAC countries had fully vaccinated over 70% of their populations, four Caribbean countries—Haiti, Jamaica, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines—had less than 30% fully vaccinated. Of these, the most concerning is Haiti, which had just over 1% of its population fully vaccinated. Another eight LAC countries had fully vaccinated less than half of their populations. Vaccine hesitancy has been a challenge in several countries.

PAHO has helped countries prepare for vaccine rollout and has facilitated access to vaccines through the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) Facility, a mechanism developed by global health organizations to facilitate equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines; 22 countries in the region have signed agreements to access vaccines through the facility. In addition, 10 countries in the region—Bolivia, Dominica, El Salvador, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines—benefit from the COVID-19 Vaccines

Advance Market Commitment (COVAX AMC), launched by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, to provide donor-funded vaccines for low- and middle-income economies.

**Table 1. COVID-19 Deaths, Mortality Rates, and Vaccinations in Latin American & Caribbean**  
(countries with more than 1,000 deaths, as of May 3, 2022)

Country	Deaths	Deaths per 100,000	Fully Vaccinated (percentage)
Brazil	663,838	312.31	76.91
Mexico	324,350	253.81	62.56
Peru	212,865	645.60	80.99
Colombia	139,797	274.74	69.60
Argentina	128,653	284.66	82.28
Chile	57,541	301.01	91.29
Ecuador	35,598	201.77	78.55
Bolivia	21,923	187.81	49.98
Paraguay	18,870	264.56	48.33
Guatemala	17,613	98.31	33.93
Honduras	10,893	109.98	48.82
Cuba	8,527	75.28	87.77
Costa Rica	8,405	164.99	80.18
Panama	8,185	189.70	70.84
Uruguay	7,203	207.36	82.34
Venezuela	5,709	20.08	50.24
Dom. Rep.	4,376	40.34	54.92
El Salvador	4,128	63.64	66.27
Trinidad & Tobago	3,833	273.89	50.81
Jamaica	2,967	100.20	23.11
Suriname	1,328	226.38	40.50
Guyana	1,228	156.12	46.25
<b>Total LAC</b>	<b>1,691,707</b>	<b>—</b>	<b>—</b>

**Sources:** Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Coronavirus Resource Center, “Vaccination Progress Across the World,” at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/vaccines/international>, and “Mortality Analyses,” at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality>, May 3, 2022.

**Note:** Peru revised its official COVID-19 death toll in May 2021 to account for excess deaths attributed to COVID-19 not previously counted, which tripled the country’s reported death toll.

Latin American and Caribbean countries have been acquiring COVID-19 vaccines from various sources. As of May 3, 2022, PAHO reported that almost 142 million vaccine doses had been delivered or were in transit through COVAX, with 32 million doses provided through country donations, including from the United States. Many countries also have signed commercial agreements with pharmaceutical companies. Both China and Russia have largely sold, and in some cases donated, COVID-19 vaccines to countries in the region, and the United States has ramped up donations since June 2021 (see below).

In terms of COVID-19 vaccine manufacturing in the region, Cuba's biotech sector has developed and produced three vaccines, two Brazilian institutions and a partnership between Argentine and Mexican companies have manufactured some vaccines, and two companies from Brazil and Chile announced plans to manufacture vaccines in 2022. In August 2021, PAHO announced a program to boost COVID-19 vaccine manufacturing in the region and subsequently selected biomedical centers in Argentina and Brazil to produce the vaccines.

### Economic Impact

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported a 7.0% economic contraction for Latin America and the Caribbean in 2020. Caribbean nations that depend on tourism had deep economic recessions, several with estimated economic declines over 13%. In 2021, many of the region's economies began modest recoveries, with the IMF estimating a regional growth rate of 6.8% and forecasting 2.5% regional growth in 2022. Nevertheless, many countries may struggle with protracted recoveries, given that they rely on global investment, trade, and tourism, all negatively affected by the pandemic. An important factor in the region's economic recovery is the course of the pandemic, including governments' responses and progress on fully vaccinating countries' populations.

The regional economic contraction in 2020 increased poverty and exacerbated income inequality. Latin America already was the most unequal region in the world in terms of income. The U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean estimated that 17 million people in Latin America moved into poverty in 2020, with poverty rising to 33.0% from 30.5% in 2019. With economic growth rates increasing in 2021, poverty declined slightly to 32.1%. Many countries have implemented relief programs to help protect their economies and vulnerable populations, and many have needed external financing to do so. In response, the IMF, Inter-American Development Bank, and World Bank have increased lending to the region.

### Political Impact

Even before the pandemic, public satisfaction with the quality of democracy in several Latin American and Caribbean countries was eroding. Several broad political and economic factors drove the decline and help explain the eruption of social protests in the region in 2019. Political factors include an increase in authoritarian practices, weak democratic institutions, politicized judicial systems, corruption, and high levels of crime and violence. Economic factors include stagnant or declining growth;

high levels of inequality and poverty; and inadequate public services, social safety net programs, and advancement opportunities. The pandemic exacerbated these factors, contributing to increased protests in the region in 2021, notably in Colombia, Cuba, and Brazil, and fueling anti-incumbent sentiment in elections held throughout the region. Human rights groups and other observers also have expressed concern about leaders taking advantage of the pandemic to advance their own agendas and restrict freedom of expression.

### U.S. Policy Considerations

Congress has provided some \$17 billion in international affairs funding (through two FY2020 supplemental appropriations measures, P.L. 116-123 and P.L. 116-136; the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, P.L. 116-260; and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, P.L. 117-2) to help countries worldwide respond to COVID-19. The funding supports global health interventions, humanitarian assistance, and contributions to multilateral efforts. For example, P.L. 116-260 included \$4 billion as a contribution to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, which supports COVAX AMC and coordinates implementation of the COVAX Facility, both of which benefit LAC countries.

As of November 2021, the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development had provided more than \$614 million in COVID-19 supplemental and American Rescue Plan Act funding to help countries in the region respond to the pandemic. This funding is in addition to annual foreign assistance to the region funded through the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations measure, some of which has been used to support pandemic recovery and support.

The Biden Administration has pledged to donate over 1.2 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses globally, and some Members of Congress have called for President Biden to prioritize Latin America and the Caribbean in U.S. donations. The vaccines are being provided bilaterally and through the COVAX Facility and COVAX AMC.

As of early May 2022, the United States had delivered some 65 million vaccine doses to 29 LAC countries, according to the State Department (at <https://www.state.gov/covid-19-recovery/vaccine-deliveries/>). Top recipients include Mexico (16.9 million); Guatemala (8.5 million); Colombia (6 million); Brazil (5.2 million); Bolivia (4.5 million); Honduras (4.0 million); Argentina (3.5 million); El Salvador (3.2 million); Ecuador, Paraguay, and Peru (2 million each); Costa Rica (1.5 million); Haiti (0.8 million); and Panama and Uruguay (0.5 million each). In August 2021, the State Department announced it would donate nearly 5.5 million vaccine doses to Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries; to date, almost 3.3 million doses have been delivered, including 0.7 million to Trinidad and Tobago and 0.6 million to Jamaica. If Haiti, a CARICOM country, is included, the donated amount to CARICOM rises to 4.1 million doses.

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