



Social balance of the COVID-19 cycle in Latin America and the Caribbean (2020-2021)

Diagnosis of the socioeconomic
and environmental situation in
Latin America and the Caribbean

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SOCIO-ANTHROPOLOGICAL PASTORAL OBSERVATORY

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Network of Social Debt Observatories of
Latin American and the Caribbean (Red ODSAL)

Organization of Catholic Universities of Latin America and the Caribbean (ODUCAL)

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The pandemic revealed the social inequalities that affect our communities and exposed -without asking for permission or forgiveness- the heartbreaking situation of so many brothers and sisters, a situation that so many post-truth mechanisms were unable to hide. Many things we took for granted fell like a house of cards. We experienced how, from one day to the next, our way of living can change drastically. [...] Migrants, undocumented people, informal workers with no fixed income were deprived, in many cases, of any state aid and prevented from carrying out their usual tasks, aggravating their already lacerating poverty. One of the expressions of this culture of indifference is that this suffering third of our world does not seem to be of sufficient interest to the mainstream media and opinion makers, it does not appear. It remains hidden, huddled. [...]

Sisters and brothers, let us dream together. And so, as I ask this with you, together with you, I also want to transmit to you some reflections on the future that we must build and dream. I said reflections, but perhaps I should say dreams, because at this moment our brains and hands are not enough, we also need our hearts and imagination: we need to dream in order not to turn back. We need to use that sublime faculty of the human being, the imagination, that place where intelligence, intuition, experience and historical memory meet to create, compose, venture and risk. Let us dream together, because it was precisely the dreams of freedom and equality, of justice and dignity, the dreams of fraternity, the ones that improved the world. And I am convinced that in these dreams God's dream for all of us, who are his children, is slipping in... Let us dream together, let us dream among yourselves, let us dream with others.

**Pope Francis' video message to popular movements.
The Vatican, 2021**



Preface

Six months after the first report on the social question in times of COVID in Latin America and the Caribbean, the data provided by the second version confirms the need for structural changes to address the inequalities and exclusions that seem to be worsening in our region. After six months, data from international organizations and research centers show that the serious effects of COVID are accentuated. There are also some optimistic views regarding some level of economic recovery. However, it is clear that, if we maintain the current structures, inequity and discarding of human beings will continue to deepen, as well as the damage to our Common Home.

Discerning the signs of the times is key to solidly founding the pastoral action of our Church. Expert knowledge, together with the sentiments of the People of God in the midst of the roots of our societies (as expressed in the Listening Time of the Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean), are very useful for this task. Both complement each other and shed light on how to understand reality and act accordingly. In this sense, the new report provided by the Socio-Anthropological Pastoral Observatory (OSAP for its acronym in Spanish) of the Knowledge Management Center of CELAM is not just another technical contribution. It has academic support, but it analyzes the reality of Latin America and the Caribbean from a believing point of view and incorporates a theological-pastoral reflection.

In this document we will find data regarding the magnitude of the crisis, but at the same time the way in which states have reacted, preventing the disaster from being three times worse. It also warns that the financing of aid to populations is increasing the indebtedness of our peoples. This is a warning sign, since it basically means that the cost of the pandemic will be financed by greater poverty.

We are particularly concerned about the fact that we are losing,

in practice, a generation in terms of education. Education has been heavily impacted by COVID.

Furthermore, the recovery of employment will be slower than expected and, according to what is reported, slower than the recovery of the economy. There is no greater poverty than not having a job, Pope Francis has rightly told us. In this item, the most affected ones are women and young people.

We are hurt because, in terms of housing and health, the deficits are far from being reduced. This is evidenced by the fact that, although just over 8% of the world's population lives in our region, infection amounts to 20% of the global total, and deaths account for 30% of the deaths due to COVID in the world.

We are also concerned about the situation of democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean. The population perceives major deficits that need to be seriously addressed.

All these facts lead us to actively place ourselves in God's hands. Of course, in prayer and action. Always working so that the Father's will may be fulfilled and become incarnate among us. We can never forget that God always continues creating, and to do so today He asks us to put our intelligence and our hands in motion. The search for justice and solidarity is rooted in the love of God and neighbor. This teaching, when assumed in depth, has a very clear consequence in the social dimension of evangelization.

In this sense, we present this report with the hope placed in God and also in each one of our brothers, under the protection of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Msgr. Jorge Eduardo Lozano
Archbishop of San Juan de Cuyo | General Secretary of CELAM





Introduction

I hope that in these times in which we live, recognizing the dignity of every human person, we can revive a worldwide desire for brotherhood among all of us. Among all: "Here is a beautiful secret to dream and to make our life a beautiful adventure. No one can fight life in isolation. [...] We need a community to support us, to help us and where we help each other to look ahead. How important it is to dream together! [...] Alone we run the risk of having mirages in which we see what is not there; dreams are built together." Let us dream as one humanity, as walkers of the same human flesh, as children of this same earth that shelters us all, each one with the richness of his or her faith or convictions, each one with his or her own voice, all brothers and sisters.

Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti of the Holy Father Francis on fraternity and social friendship, 8.

The Vatican, 2020

More than a year and a half has passed since the appearance of the first case of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Latin America and the Caribbean, which triggered a health crisis that has prolonged along with a persistent deterioration in human and social development. The prolonged COVID-19 pandemic has claimed nearly 1.5 million lives in Latin America and the Caribbean and has resulted in more than 44 million confirmed cases since its outbreak in the region in February 2020. The region accounts for nearly one-fifth of confirmed COVID-19 cases and about 30% of deaths worldwide, despite having only 8.4% of the world's population.

The conditions of vulnerability that characterize Latin America and the Caribbean have made it particularly sensitive to the effects of the pandemic. This unprecedented crisis has highlighted the centrality of people's and community's health and well-being for the performance of economies and social development. In this sense, the report highlights how historical weaknesses in political-economic and institutional terms, in a context of growing structural inequalities, have made it difficult to control the pandemic and its social effects.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that the epidemic originated in the city of Wuhan due to the new coronavirus had become a pandemic. COVID-19 spread to all corners of the world, leaving in its wake millions of people infected and dead and creating a health, economic and social crisis of unprecedented dimensions. As the Holy Father Francis mentioned in the Urbi et Orbi blessing of March 28, 2020, "the storm unmask our vulnerability and lays bare those false and superfluous securities with which we had built our agendas, our projects, routines and priorities."

Yet, the region was virtually stagnant in the years leading up to the 2020 economic crisis. Growth had averaged just 0.3% in the period 2014-2019. This six-year period was one of the lowest growth periods since records have been kept, comparable only to those including World War I or the Great Depression (ECLAC, 2021c). Political uncertainty, tensions among the most developed countries and the slowdown in global investment were already creating a context that was not conducive to regional growth before the beginning of the pandemic. In this context, in 2020, as a result of the health crisis, Latin

America and the Caribbean experienced the largest economic contraction in the last 120 years and was the region with the worst performance of all developing regions.

The contraction could have been three times larger had it not been for the supportive policies that were deployed almost transversally (IMF, 2021). According to annual estimates made by the World Bank, the fall in Gross Domestic Product worldwide in 2020 was 3.5% (World Bank, 2021a). However, the crisis did not have homogeneous effects among the regions of the world: the countries located in the southern hemisphere were the ones that suffered the greatest drops in economic growth, with very significant impacts and with scenarios that are difficult to resolve in the short term.

In this context, poverty would have added 22 million people compared to the previous year, with a significant effect on children. The loss of labor income due to unemployment has translated into increases in poverty rates and also in the magnitude of income inequality. Historical milestones have

been recorded in the labor market, such as the decline in both employment and labor share and the increase in unemployment. The situation of people in vulnerable conditions, such as informal workers, women and youth, indigenous people, Afro-descendants, migrants and people with disabilities has worsened. In addition, the effect on education generates the risk of losing a generation in formative terms. The crisis has also led to the closure of a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as well as the destruction of human capital and employment. This exacerbates the productive heterogeneity of the region, to which low levels of investment are added (ECLAC, 2021b).

By 2021, the economic situation is expected to improve significantly, with global growth of 5.6%. A breakdown of this projection shows that the advanced economies will grow by 5.4% this year, reversing the effects of COVID-19 and returning to the path of development. In the case of emerging economies, an increase of 6% is forecast for 2021, but not all regions will be able to reverse the fall caused by

Figure 1.1. Projections of interannual global economic growth. In percentage (2018-2023).

	2018	2019	2020	Projections		
				2021p	2022p	2023p
World product	3.2	2.5	-3.5	5.6	4.3	3.1
Advanced economies	2.3	1.6	-4.7	5.4	4.0	2.2
United States	3.0	2.2	-3.5	6.8	4.2	2.3
Western Europe	1.9	1.3	-6.6	4.2	4.4	2.4
Japan	0.6	0.0	-4.7	2.9	2.6	1.0
Emerging and developing markets	4.6	3.8	-1.7	6.0	4.7	4.4
Latin America and the Caribbean	1.8	0.9	-6.5	5.2	2.9	2.5
Central Europe and Central Asia	3.5	2.7	-2.1	3.9	3.9	3.5
East and Southeast Asia	6.5	5.8	1.2	7.7	5.3	5.2
Middle East and North Africa	0.6	0.6	-3.9	2.4	3.5	3.2
South Asia	6.4	4.4	-5.4	6.8	6.8	5.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	2.7	2.5	-2.4	2.8	3.3	3.8

Source: Own elaboration based on World Bank data (2021).

the pandemic, and this recovery will not be sufficient to recover the GDP levels of 2019 (ECLAC, 2021b). Furthermore, the health management of the pandemic is generating new economic instabilities, including an increase in public debt to cover the increase in public spending, as well as an increase in inflation and the depreciation of local currencies against the U.S. dollar (World Bank, 2021a).

The arrival of COVID generated a systemic crisis in all countries of the region. A drop in regional gross product of 6.5% is estimated for 2020 (World Bank, 2021a), with even more abrupt impacts in Argentina (-9.9%), Peru (-11.1%), Panama (-17.9%), and in tourism-dependent economies such as Belize, Bahamas, Barbados or Jamaica, which show declines above 10%. In most of these cases, the expected growth rates will not be sufficient to reverse the COVID effect, at least by 2021. Very few cases will be able to return to the conditions of 2019, including Brazil, Chile, Guatemala and Paraguay, where growth is expected to be higher than in the year prior to the arrival of COVID.

Latin American and Caribbean countries are characterized by presenting structural conditions of inequality, inequity, vulnerability and social exclusion that are combined and reproduced with the informality and precariousness of employment, the weakness of social protection systems and the productive structures with low levels of integration and limited capacity to maintain sustainable levels of growth. These conditions are reflected in the institutional structure of health systems and have been exacerbated by the pandemic. With underfinanced, segmented and fragmented health systems (ECLAC/PAHO, 2020) and weak and insufficient social protection systems, a significant proportion of the population in the region has deepened its unsatisfied basic needs.

Thus, in addition to the alarming health scenario that the pandemic has meant for public health in Latin American and Caribbean countries, the weakness of the development model of the region in economic, social and environmental terms has become evident. The multiple and profound impacts that the health crisis has had and continues to have, despite the

economic recovery, reveal the structural vulnerability of the region. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only made clear the need to implement comprehensive policies and to recognize the interdependence that exists between health, economy, social development and the environment (ECLAC/PAHO, 2020), but, given its prolongation, it has consolidated the centrality of action both by the state and by markets and civil society.

Currently, there is consensus among international organizations about the possible directions that the post-COVID-19 recovery may take. Two possible scenarios are proposed: a first scenario will be characterized by an oscillating recovery, with slow growth starting in 2022, accompanied by low confidence caused by the possible outbreaks of new COVID-19 cases, together with a rise in economic vulnerabilities that would complicate financial conditions. A second scenario, on the other hand, would be characterized by a sustained expansion, accompanied by an increase in confidence and the accelerating pace of technological change. This optimistic view, however, loses sight of the fact that, without structural changes in development and distribution models, structural inequalities and exclusions will deepen despite progress.

Figure 1.2. Projections of interannual global economic growth in Latin America Latina and the Caribbean. In percentage (2018-2023).

	Projections					
	2018	2019	2020	2021p	2022p	2023p
Latin America and the Caribbean	1.8	0.9	-6.5	5.2	2.9	2.5
South America						
Argentina	-2.6	-2.1	-9.9	6.4	1.7	1.9
Bolivia	4.2	2.2	-8.8	4.7	3.5	3.0
Brazil	1.8	1.4	-4.1	4.5	2.5	2.3
Chile	3.7	0.9	-5.8	6.1	3.0	2.5
Colombia	2.6	3.3	-6.8	5.9	4.1	4.0
Ecuador	1.3	0.1	-7.8	3.4	1.4	1.8
Guyana	4.4	5.4	43.5	20.9	26.0	23.0
Paraguay	3.2	-0.4	-0.6	3.5	4.0	3.8
Peru	4.0	2.2	-11.1	10.3	3.9	3.5
Suriname	2.6	0.3	-14.5	-1.9	0.1	1.3
Uruguay	0.5	0.4	-5.9	3.4	3.1	2.5
Central America						
Belize	2.9	1.8	-14.1	1.9	6.4	4.2
Costa Rica	2.1	2.2	-4.1	2.7	3.4	3.1
El Salvador	2.4	2.6	-7.9	4.1	3.1	2.4
Guatemala	3.3	3.9	-1.5	3.6	4.0	3.8
Honduras	3.8	2.7	-9.0	4.5	3.9	3.8
Mexico	2.2	-0.2	-8.3	5.0	3.0	2.0
Nicaragua	-3.4	-3.7	-2.0	0.9	1.2	1.4
Panama	3.6	3.0	-17.9	9.9	7.8	4.9
Dominica	2.3	3.6	-10.0	1.0	3.0	2.5
The Caribbean						
Bahamas	3.0	1.2	-16.2	2.0	8.5	4.0
Barbados	-0.6	-0.1	-18.0	3.3	8.5	4.8
Dominican Republic	7.0	5.1	-6.7	5.5	4.8	4.8
Granada	4.1	1.9	-12.6	3.5	5.0	4.9
Haiti	1.7	-1.7	-3.3	-0.5	1.5	2.0
Jamaica	1.9	0.9	-10.0	3.0	3.8	3.2
Saint Lucia	2.6	1.7	-20.4	2.6	11.5	8.1
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	2.2	0.5	-3.8	-6.1	8.3	6.1

Source: Own elaboration based on World Bank data (2021).



Executive Summary

1. Ecological dream

Taking care of the world that surrounds and contains us is taking care of ourselves. But we need to become a "we" that inhabits the common home. This care is of no interest to the economic powers that need a quick profit. Often the voices raised in defense of the environment are silenced or ridiculed, disguising as rationality what are only private interests. In this culture that we are creating, empty, immediatist and without a common project, "it is foreseeable that, in the face of the exhaustion of some resources, a favorable scenario will be created for new wars, disguised behind noble claims."

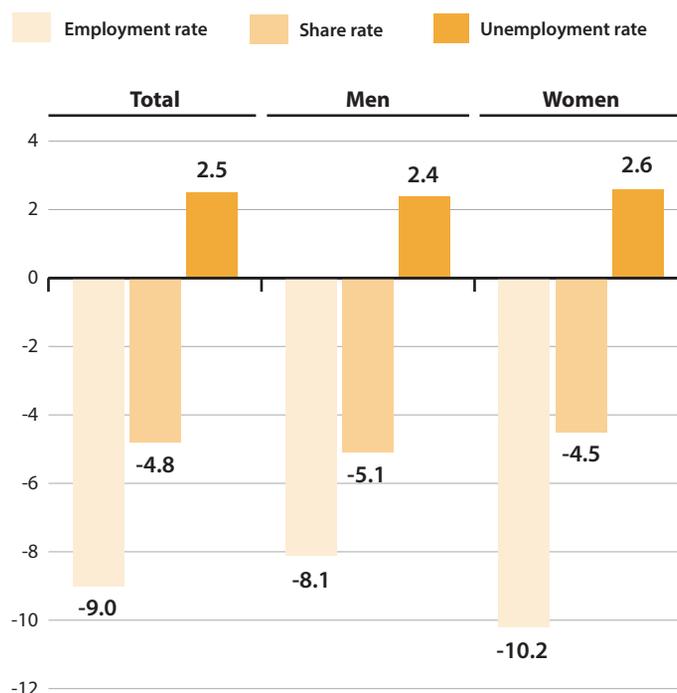
**Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti of the Holy Father Francis on fraternity and social friendship, 17.
The Vatican, 2020**

Employment situation

- Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ILO (2020) estimated that about 470 million people worldwide lacked access to paid work. In Latin America and the Caribbean, 26 million people were unemployed (8.1% of the regional population) before the pandemic. It is estimated that 35 million jobs were lost in the region

during the crisis. In other words, more than 50 million people faced the pandemic without a job as a means of livelihood.

Figure 2.1. Variation in employment, share and unemployment rates by gender in Latin America and the Caribbean. In percentage (2019-2020).



Source: Own elaboration based on ECLAC data (2021).

- ▶ It is important to note that the loss of employment did not produce as its main effect an increase in unemployment or informal employment, but rather a considerable transition to forced inactivity (ILO, 2021a). In this context, Latin American countries announced measures aimed at protecting formal workers' income, including measures to protect employees, reduce working hours and prohibit dismissals (ILO, 2021a).
- ▶ However, these measures were unable to halt the loss of employment among informal workers and small businesses. The contraction of employment was concentrated in the most precarious, informal and low-wage jobs, resulting in a significant drop in the total wage bill (ECLAC, 2021b). This was the case in Uruguay (5%), Argentina (9%), Costa Rica (15%) and Peru (more than 25%).
- ▶ The impact of the crisis was greater on female and youth informal employment. Between 2019 and 2020, the number of the employed fell by almost 25 million people, out of which almost 13 million were women (ECLAC, 2021c). This translated into a female unemployment rate of 11.9%. What is detected in 2021 is that many women who lost employment in 2020 have not returned to look for it due to the overload of care demands in households.
- ▶ Despite the increase in the number of employed people, by the first quarter of 2021 the region had only recovered 58% of the total number of jobs lost during the crisis. For 2021 as a whole, it is estimated that the labor share rate will increase by 3.4 percentage points, from 57.7% in 2020 to 61.1% in 2021 (ECLAC, 2021b). Men would recover share levels similar to those recorded before the crisis, whereas women would reach share rates similar to those of 2006 (49%). Given the slow increase in employment levels and higher share rates, the unemployment rate would increase from 10.5% to 11% between 2020 and 2021. As with share rates, women would have a worse outcome, with an unemployment rate that would be 12.7% (ECLAC, 2021b).

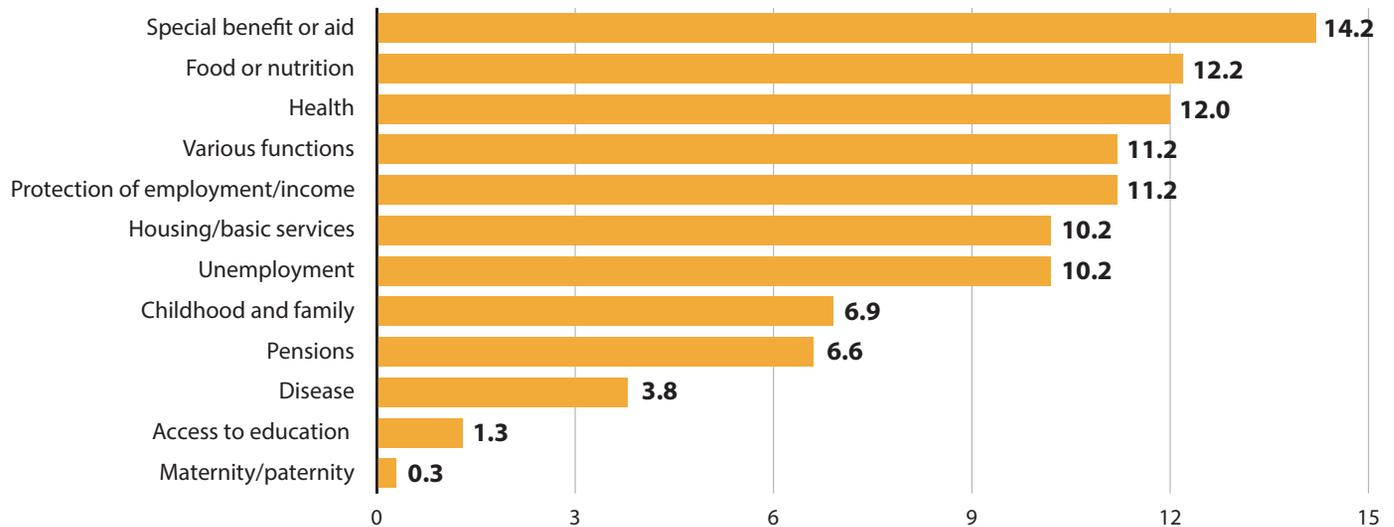
Social protection and pandemic

- ▶ With the onset of the pandemic, the ILO (2021c) estimates that around 1600 social protection measures were announced in 2020 worldwide, implemented mainly through pensions and subsidies, income and employment protection, unemployment insurance, health, housing, provision of basic services and food supply.
- ▶ In terms of social protection in Latin America and the Caribbean, the trend has been upward over the last decade, with significant advances in the coverage of traditionally excluded groups. The onset of the health, social and economic crisis caused by COVID-19 brought to the forefront the importance of social protection systems in societies with high levels of vulnerability, such as those in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- ▶ In 2020, 32 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean adopted 263 non-contributory social protection measures aimed at maintaining consumption and guaranteeing basic living conditions. Forty-six percent of these measures correspond to monetary transfers (326 million people in the region received emergency transfers), 22% to in-kind transfers, 12% to access to basic services and 20% to direct support to individuals and families. This shows the rapid activation of responses by the governments of the region.
- ▶ The onset of a new increase in cases in 2021 made it necessary to retake and strengthen the measures announced in 2020, focusing especially on cash transfers and access to basic services (ECLAC, 2021d). Between March and April 2021, monetary transfers were resumed in most countries in the region (Emergency Family Income in Argentina and Chile, Family Bonus in Bolivia, Solidarity Income in Colombia, among others) as well as guarantees of access to basic services (suspensions of service cuts for

non-payment, tariff freezes, exemption of bill payments, prohibition of increases). However, this was not the case in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala and Paraguay, which

did not announce the resumption of transfers before the onset of the new wave (ECLAC, 2021b).

Figure 2.2. Distribution of measures by function of social protection in Latin America and the Caribbean. As a percentage of the total number of measures announced (February - August 2020).



Source: Own elaboration based on ILO data.

- ▶ In this context, the collaboration of civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations was crucial, as they were able to reach those populations that the state was unable to assist. These organizations carried out awareness-raising and information strategies on infection prevention measures, food distribution campaigns, hygiene products, care for the elderly and prisoners, as well as emergency aid to orphanages, indigenous communities, rural communities and migrants.
- ▶ It is the task of governments to establish fiscal and redistributive schemes so that the wealth of one part is shared equitably. Currently, millions of people in the region live burdened by overwork, whereas many other millions of people are burdened by the lack of work. Likewise, the Latin American experience reinforces the need to implement universal and comprehensive social protection systems, expanding their coverage, especially in a context of high poverty. The universal basic wage, universal transfers for children and the expansion of social pensions are measures to be considered so that each person can have access to the most basic goods of life.

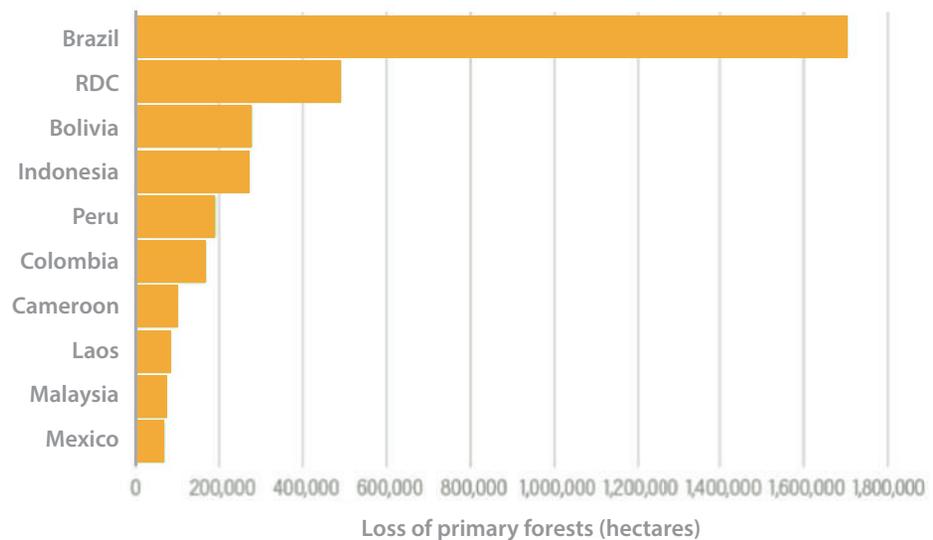
Environment and climate change

- ▶ Climate change is one of the most relevant problems that humanity will face in the coming decades, being urgent a change in the paradigms of production and consumption to reverse the damage already caused. Latin America and the Caribbean is a region particularly vulnerable to the impact of climate due to its geographic, climatic, socioeconomic and demographic characteristics (ECLAC, 2019).
- ▶ In the region, quarantines, reduced traffic and closures of commercial establishments led to local improvements in air quality in cities such as Bogota, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro and Santiago. However, these improvements, like

those in greenhouse gas emissions, were temporary and dissipated when economic activities resumed.

- ▶ In Latin America, indiscriminate logging continued unabated despite the beginning of periods of confinement. Out of the ten countries with the greatest loss of native forests, five are in Latin America (Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia and Mexico), four of which contain part of the Amazon rainforest within their territory (World Resources Institute, 2021). In the case of Brazil, about 1.8 million hectares of covered forests were lost in 2020 (World Resources Institute, 2021).
- ▶ The environmental situation in the region is also marked by natural disasters. The second warmest year in history was 2020, with intense droughts and severe storms. As

Figure 2.3. Loss of native forests. In hectares (2020).



Source: World Resources Institute.

a consequence of climate change, storms are longer lasting and more intense in our region, generating even more complications to the health situation (WMO, 2021). In 2020, more than 200 people died in Central America as a result of hurricanes Eta and Iota, which also left multimillion economic losses in infrastructure and food production as a result of flooding.

- ▶ By 2021, international organizations foresee an increase of around 5% in greenhouse gas emissions in Latin America and the Caribbean, moving away from the goal of 0% emissions by 2030 (ECLAC, 2021b). On the other hand, the World Resources Institute (2021) detected 17% more deforestation in the first half of 2021 than in 2020. Regarding natural disasters, the WMO (2021) expects a season with less activity of tropical storms compared to the previous year, as could be seen with storm Ida in the North Atlantic (WMO, 2021).

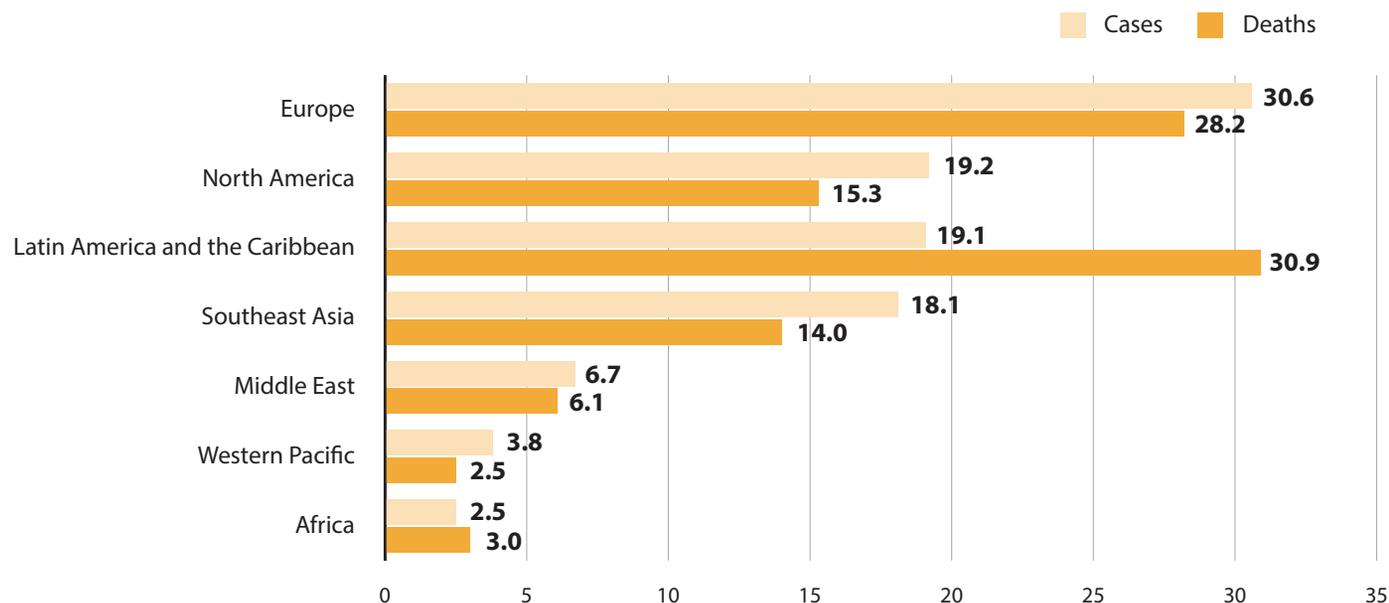
Systems and health in pandemic

- ▶ Prior to the onset of the pandemic, the state of health in Latin America and the Caribbean indicated major complications, especially due to the prevalence of non-communicable diseases and deficiencies in the functioning of health systems because of the lack of adequate funding for this sector (about 3% of the regional GDP invested in health systems). According to ECLAC (2020f), health systems in our region are underfinanced, segmented and fragmented.
- ▶ The COVID-19 pandemic quickly became a threat to the health of the entire world population. To date, WHO has reported nearly 240 million cases and almost 5 million deaths. Both Latin America and the Caribbean and North America have about 19% of the world's cases. Taken together, the Americas account for almost 40% of global

cases, followed by Europe with about 30% of cases. But the highest number of deaths occurs in Latin America and the Caribbean, with 30.9% of deaths at the global level. It is important to note that, despite having a similar number of cases, Latin America and the Caribbean have almost twice as many deaths as North America, showing the shortcomings of the health system in dealing with the pandemic.

- ▶ The high number of deaths in Latin America and the Caribbean is largely due to the incidence of comorbidities or chronic diseases in the population of the region, including cardiovascular, renal, respiratory, diabetes, obesity and hypertension diseases. The population with these types of diseases was the most susceptible to severe disease by COVID-19, compared to those who do not have any comorbidities (PAHO, 2021).
- ▶ On the other hand, in this context of uncertainty, crisis situations and fear of the unknown have an impact on the mental health and psychosocial well-being of populations. Having to face an unknown situation such as a pandemic can cause people to experience feelings related to fear, worry and stress. These are normal responses in times when we face uncertainty or situations of change or crisis, which can be prolonged in time several years after the pandemic experience (PAHO, 2020).
- ▶ In this context, the development of vaccines was at record speed. More than 15 types of vaccines were developed and approved throughout 2020, allowing vaccination campaigns to begin at the end of that year. To date (October 18, 2021), according to WHO data, the number of vaccinated people worldwide amounts to 6,544,787,495, out of whom only 2,767,036,072 people have a complete schedule vaccination. However, according to PAHO (2021), 75% of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean is still not fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and in the region more than one third of the countries have vaccinated no more than 20% of the target population.

Figure 2.4. Confirmed cases and deaths from COVID-19 worldwide, by region. In percentage (March 2020 - October 2021).

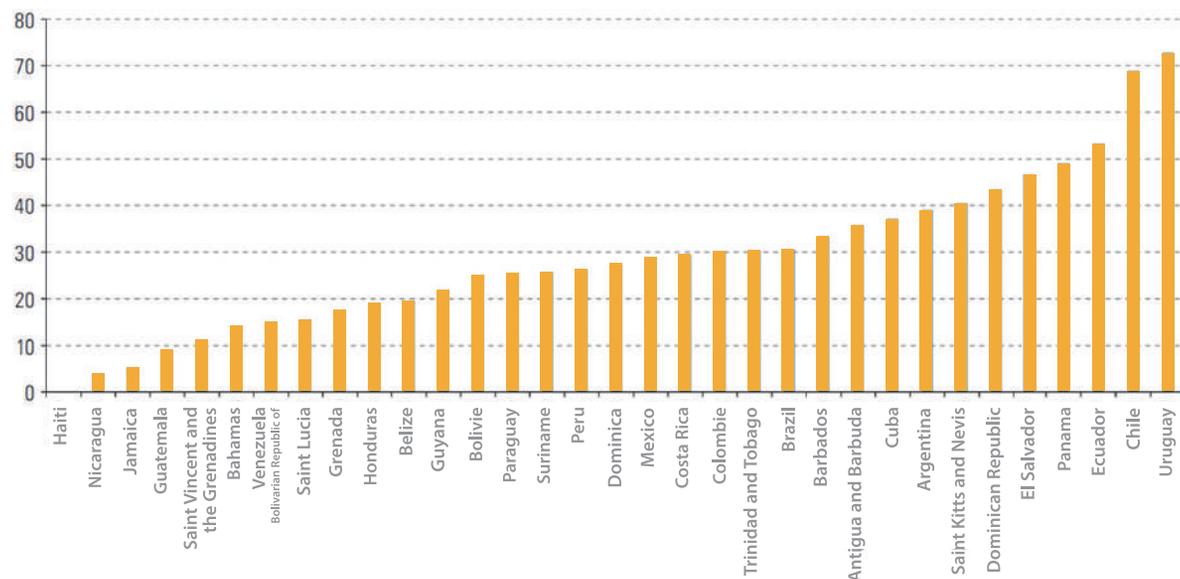


Source: Own elaboration based on WHO data.

- ▶ The country that has made the greatest progress in immunizing its population is Uruguay (around 75% of people vaccinated), followed by Chile (close to 70% of people vaccinated). In contrast, some countries in Central America and the Caribbean (such as Haiti, Guatemala, Jamaica and Nicaragua) have not yet managed to vaccinate at least 10% of their population. According to PAHO estimates (2021), the number of vaccines that should be supplied in the various countries of Latin America and the Caribbean in order to immunize 60% of the population corresponds to 540 million doses, a complex situation considering the vaccine deficit and the resources required to have the necessary doses in the various countries.

“The country that has made the greatest progress in immunizing its population is Uruguay.”

Figure 2.5. Coverage of complete vaccination schedules against COVID-19. In percentage of population (2021).



Source: *The prolongation of the health crisis and its impact on health, economy and social development*, ECLAC, 2021.

2. Social dream

Parts of humanity seem to be expendable for the benefit of a selection that favors a human sector worthy of living without limits. Basically, "people are no longer considered a primary value to be respected and protected, especially if they are poor or disabled, if they are "not yet useful" - such as the unborn - or if they are "no longer useful" - such as the elderly. We have become insensitive to any form of waste, starting with food, which is one of the most shameful."

Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti of the Holy Father Francis on Fraternity and Social Friendship, 18.
The Vatican, 2020

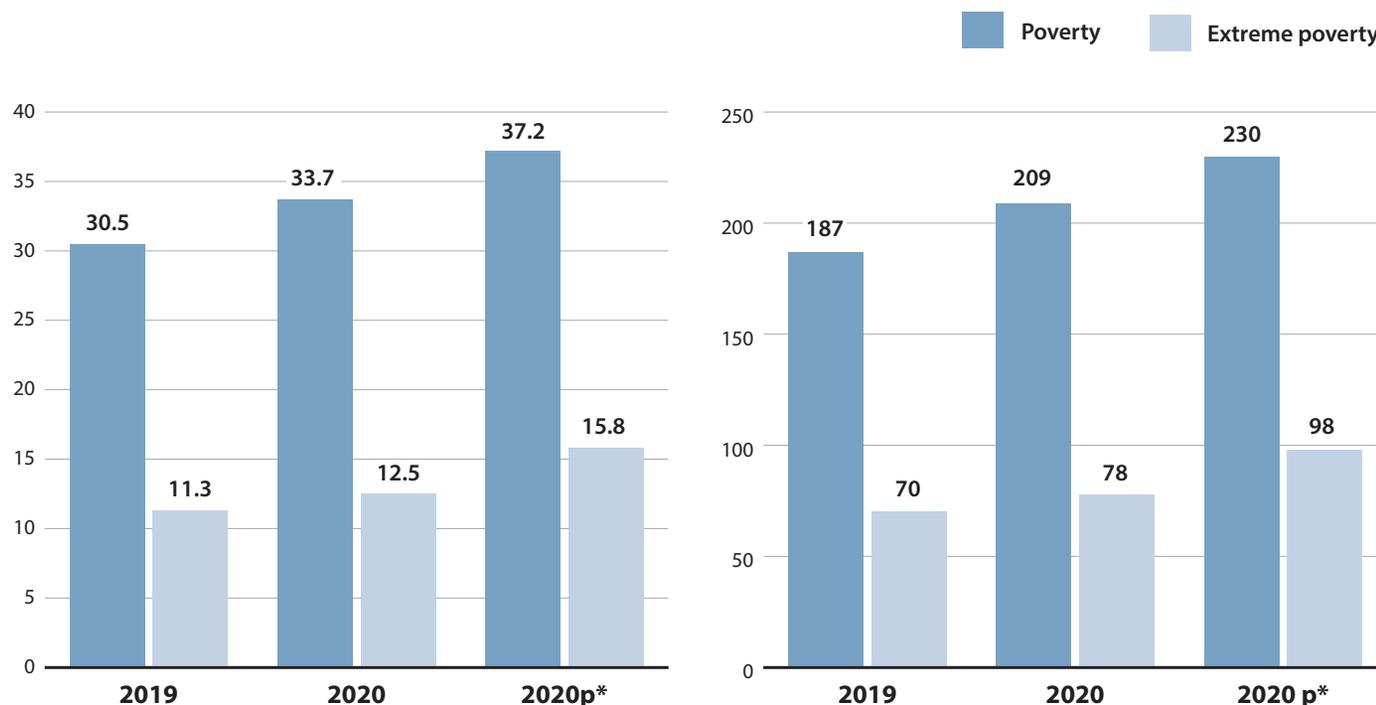
Impoverishment, indigence and inequality

- ▶ Before the pandemic, poverty and indigence in the world affected about 1.3 billion people in 2018, and there was a slow but systematic process of reduction. But one year after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Bank (2021) estimates that in 2020 between 119 and 124 million people fell into poverty, and between 88 and 93 million people fell into extreme poverty, implying an increase in global poverty for the first time in 20 years.
- ▶ In contrast to the global situation, an increase in poverty and indigence levels had been observed in Latin America and the Caribbean during the last decade, mainly as a consequence of the increase in poverty in Venezuela,

Brazil, Argentina and Ecuador. In 2019, poverty in the region reached 30.5% of the population, out of which 11.3% was indigent. The onset of the pandemic, together with the loss of employment and the reduction of labor income, generated a worsening of living conditions and a significant transition into poverty: 22 million people fell into poverty, out of whom 8 million people fell into extreme poverty. ECLAC (2021c) estimated that, in a scenario without social protection measures, the increase would have been of more than 40 million people.

- ▶ In this context, the role of the social economy was crucial in meeting economic needs outside the market economy, showing its capacity to respond to critical situations. However, the social economy is still limited in promoting the exit of households and individuals from situations of poverty and unjust deprivation.
- ▶ The first decade of the 21st century brought a decrease in inequality in our region, coinciding with a period of economic expansion. However, the decade 2010-2020

Figure 3.1. Poverty and extreme poverty rates and people living in poverty and extreme poverty in Latin America. In percentage and millions of people (2019-2020*).



* p = projection that estimates the absence of the effect of social protection on poverty and extreme poverty.

Source: Own elaboration based on ECLAC data.

was characterized by a joint stagnation of the economies, resulting in a worsening of life quality sustained in recent years, as well as a slow decrease in inequality in income distribution. For 2019, the Gini index averaged 0.460. The lowest values, below 0.40, were recorded in Argentina and Uruguay, whereas in Brazil and Colombia they exceeded 0.52 (ECLAC, 2021c).

- ▶ In 2020, the combination of the economic, labor and health crises led to an increase in income inequality in all countries of the region. ECLAC (2021c) estimates a 5.6% increase in the Gini Index between 2019 and 2020, with regressive variations in all countries of the region. However, when incorporating the transfers made by governments to mitigate the loss of labor income, the expected increase in the average Gini index for the region would be 2.9%. The least affected countries will be Guatemala and Paraguay, with variations of between 1% and 1.9%; the countries with the greatest increase in inequality will be Argentina, Ecuador and Peru, with variations of 6% or more in their Gini indices.

Social outcasts

- ▶ In a context of increasing poverty and inequality, it is essential to place in the forefront of visibility those cruelly discarded by society, who suffer intensely from the consequences of the pandemic: the elderly, migrants, indigenous peoples and people with disabilities. These populations are particularly vulnerable in Latin America and the Caribbean, where poverty, marginalization and exclusion are most concentrated.
- ▶ In 2019, the elderly represented 13% of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean (84.9 million people). By 2030, about 17% of the population is expected to be older, denoting a gradual aging process of the regional population (ECLAC, 2020b). The onset of the pandemic has exposed this population to greater health risks, since

it is the most exposed to a severe disease, especially for people who suffer from pre-existing diseases.

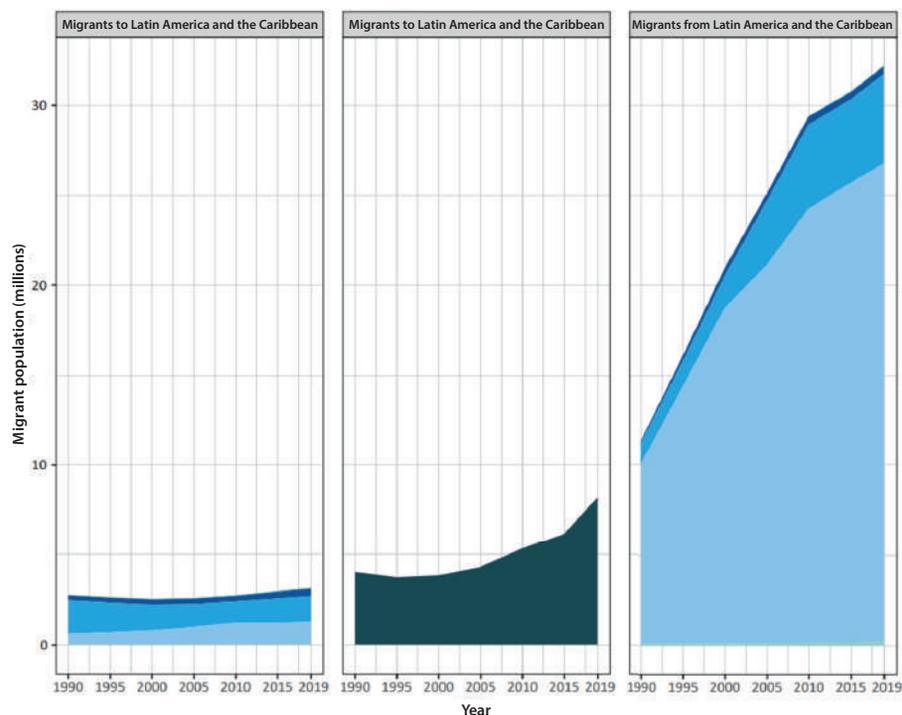
- ▶ In the vast majority of countries in the region, older adults suffer from cardiovascular diseases (stroke and ischemic heart disease), chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes (ECLAC, 2020c). In addition to these comorbidities, there is a number of situations such as co-residence in intergenerational family structures or residence in nursing homes, which increase the risk of contagion for the elderly, as well as the ineffectiveness of health and support systems in protecting this population group (Acosta et al., 2021).
- ▶ Migrants constitute a mass of 272 million people (3.5% of the world's population), according to WMO estimates for the year 2019. In Latin America and the Caribbean, migration is characterized primarily by being outward from the region, although in recent years there has been a considerable increase in intra-regional migration. The region has witnessed an unprecedented increase in migratory flows, particularly in Central America and from Venezuela (IDB, 2021).
- ▶ The onset of the crisis caused by the arrival of COVID-19 to the region led to the paralysis of international movements of people, the temporary and indefinite closure of borders and the imposition of domestic confinement measures. The lack of access to adequate housing and documentation as well as the impact of informal jobs further complicate the situation of migrants in our region, making them one of the most vulnerable populations in the face of the pandemic.
- ▶ Globally, the ILO (2019) estimated that about 476.6 million people belong to indigenous peoples, representing about 6.2% of the population. Latin America is estimated to be home to 58 million people belonging to 800 indigenous peoples, representing 9.8% of the regional population. With the pandemic, limited access to markets and health services in forest areas has made indigenous peoples in

these regions particularly vulnerable. The situation is even more critical for older adults living in these communities, as well as for indigenous women and girls (ECLAC, 2020d).

- ▶ About 15% of the world's population (1 billion inhabitants) experiences some type of disability, and the prevalence of disability is higher in developing countries. According to ECLAC (2020e), Latin America is home to more than

70 million people with disabilities. The discrimination they suffer is multiple and is enhanced by gender, age, place of residence, socioeconomic status and migration status. In the face of the pandemic, significant regressions are expected in social inclusion and in the acquisition of rights, given that previous inequalities and disadvantages have been exacerbated.

Figure 3.2. Migrants to, within and from Latin America and the Caribbean. In millions of migrants (1990-2019).



Source: *World Migration Report 2020*, IOM, 2021.

The situation of children and adolescents

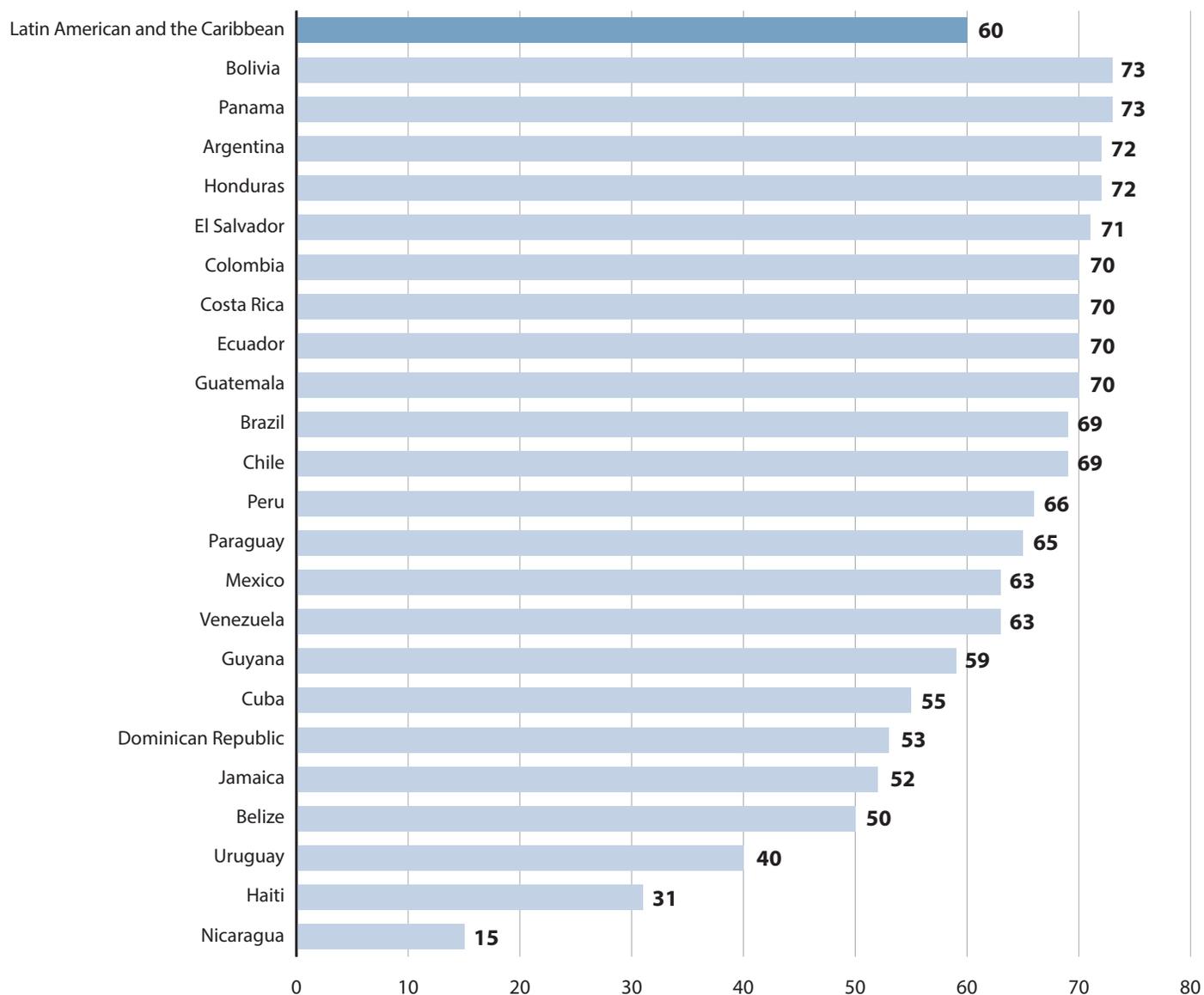
- ▶ There are approximately 190 million children and adolescents living in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the last two decades, significant progress has been made in the areas of health, food, education and care for children's rights. However, in 2019, it is estimated that 47.2% of minors were living in poverty and 19.6% in extreme poverty (ECLAC, 2021). The impact of the crisis caused by the COVID was even more negative among children and adolescents affected by the "pandemic of inequality" that deteriorates life opportunities and compromises their development prospects (UNICEF, 2021).
- ▶ This reflects a great debt owed by all actors in society to the development of the population that constitutes the future of humanity. The onset of the pandemic and the new crisis disrupts the reality of childhood through the interruption of education, the limitation of access to protection and health services, the increase of situations of violence and abuse as well as the impact on physical and mental health.
- ▶ UNICEF (2021) estimates that three out of ten children and adolescents are overweight in Latin America, caused mainly by the consumption of ultra-processed food and sugary drinks, which are easily accessible, low cost and highly promoted in mass media, as well as the lack of physical activity. During the pandemic, the problem has intensified with limited access to healthy food: many families have lost their income, added to the increase in food prices and the impossibility of receiving food at school.
- ▶ The pandemic also has negative effects on children's physical and mental health (Wang et al., 2021): during periods of confinement, activity hours were interrupted, resulting in increased screen time (cell phones, computers,

tablets), changes in sleep patterns and loss of physical activity.

- ▶ Inequalities within children are exacerbated in the case of access to education during the pandemic. Latin America and the Caribbean has been the region most affected by school closures: around 60% of all children and adolescents lost a full school year. On average, schools in Latin America and the Caribbean remained closed for 60 weeks. Those who were able to continue with their classes (either through electronic devices or teachers sending homework) were also hindered by little or no family accompaniment, which in no way can be equated with the face-to-face accompaniment of educational personnel (UN, 2021).

“Latin America and the Caribbean has been the region most affected by school closures: around 60% of all children and adolescents lost a full school year.”

Figure 3.3. Number of weeks without face-to-face classes in Latin America and the Caribbean. In number of weeks (March 2020 - September 2021).



Source: Own elaboration based on UNESCO data.

The situation of women

- ▶ The situation of women in Latin America has not been extensively studied by regional organizations. However, research conducted during 2020 and 2021 allows recognizing negative impacts of the pandemic on the population of women, who have been especially vulnerable to COVID-19 disease.
- ▶ Among the impacts detected in 2020, there was a significant increase in violence against women, as a direct consequence of the mandatory social isolation measures to prevent the spread of the virus. These situations became visible in the increase in reports of gender violence: in Buenos Aires province, Argentina, there was a 32% increase of reports and in Bogotá, Colombia, there was a 187% increase in reports by telephone lines and a 774% increase in reports by virtual lines.
- ▶ On the other hand, the pandemic has had a major impact on women's economic autonomy, especially because of the drop in employment levels and the increase in unemployment and inactivity. According to ECLAC (2021e), the pandemic will cause a reduction in women's employment levels that represents a setback of at least ten years. The direct consequence of this deterioration has been the widening of the wage gap between men and women.
- ▶ These situations not only limit women's possibilities for personal development, but also generate an overload in the responsibility of care and domestic work due to the unequal distribution of care tasks. This overload generates a delay in women's return to the labor market.
- ▶ It is also important to highlight the impact of the pandemic on women's mental health. Studies in some Latin American countries (Ramirez Coronel et al., 2020; Goncalves et al., 2020, Romero et al., 2020) indicate increases in anxiety, depression and alcohol consumption

in general, as well as a high degree of resilience when faced with the health emergency.

3. Cultural dream

Recognizing every human being as a brother or sister and seeking a social friendship that integrates everyone are not mere utopias. They require determination and the ability to find effective ways to make them truly possible. Any commitment in this line becomes a supreme exercise of charity. Because an individual can help a person in need, but when joining with others to generate social processes of fraternity and justice for all, he or she enters "the field of the broadest charity, the political charity". It is a matter of moving towards a social and political order whose soul is social charity. Once again, I call for the rehabilitation of politics, which "is a very high vocation, it is one of the most precious forms of charity because it seeks the common good."

**Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti of the Holy Father Francis on fraternity and social friendship, 180.
The Vatican, 2020**

Human rights

- ▶ Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the most dangerous regions in the world in terms of human rights: poverty and extreme poverty, precarious access to water and sanitation, food insecurity, environmental pollution and lack of adequate housing place the region in a situation of extreme vulnerability to disease.

- ▶ The pandemic may seriously affect the full enjoyment of the population's human rights due to the serious risks to life, health and personal integrity posed by COVID-19; as well as its immediate-, medium- and long-term impacts on societies in general, and on individuals and groups in situations of special vulnerability (OAS, 2020).
- ▶ The IACHR (2020) has expressed its concern about the imposition of states of emergency or exception, which suspend and restrict some human rights, especially those related to freedom of expression, access to public information, right to private property, use of surveillance technology and mass data storage.
- ▶ On the other hand, there are groups that are more likely to suffer violations of their rights, as they are populations especially at risk: the elderly and people of any age with pre-existing medical conditions, people deprived of liberty, women, indigenous peoples, people in a situation of human mobility, children and adolescents, Afro-descendants, people with disabilities, workers, and people living in poverty and extreme poverty, especially informal workers and the homeless, as well as human rights defenders, social leaders, health professionals and journalists (IACHR, 2020).

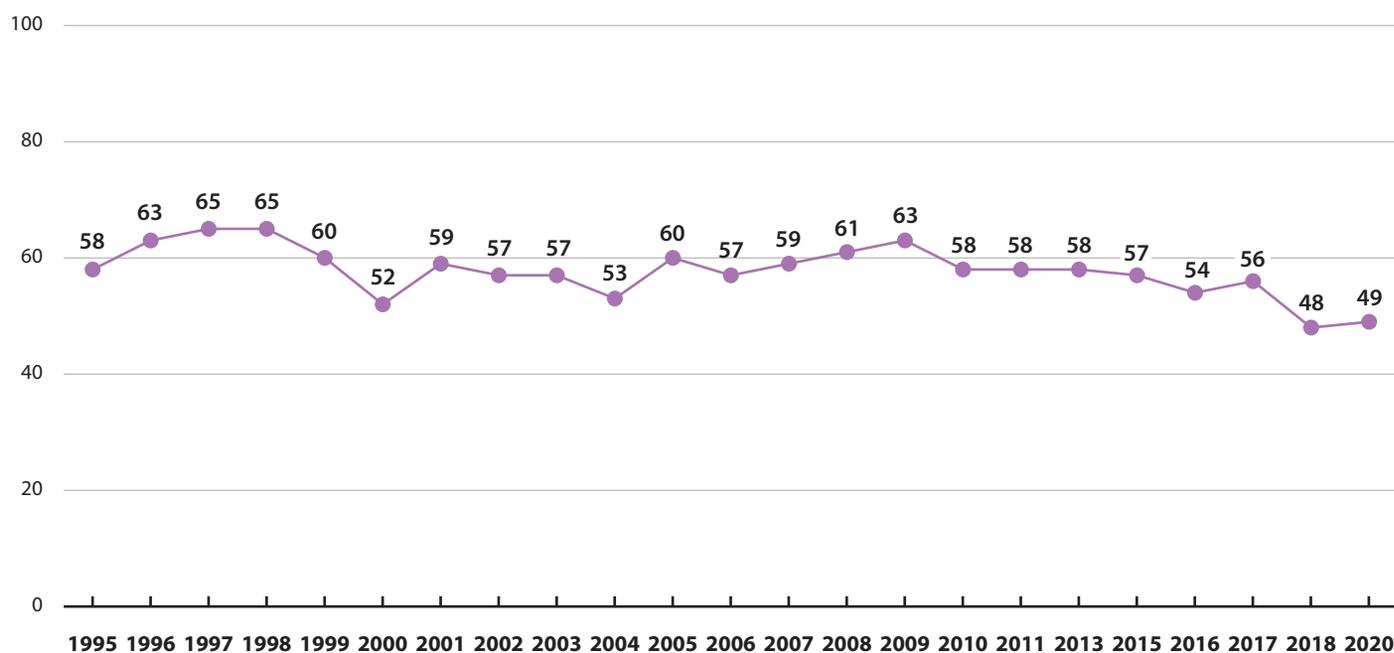
Consequences of the pandemic on political regimes

- ▶ The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic generated a disruption in all aspects of political life in Latin America and the Caribbean, which already showed a decline in the functioning of democratic regimes. Only three democracies (Uruguay, Chile and Costa Rica) were considered full democracies in 2020, whereas most democracies in the region were considered "flawed"

democracies due to deficiencies in electoral processes, government functioning, political participation, political culture and civil liberties (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021).

- ▶ According to data presented by Latinobarómetro (2021), support for democracy by Latin American societies had been declining since 2010. Between 2010 and 2018, support for democracy had fallen from 63% to 48%. This discontent was expressed in 2019 with protests in Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, demonstrations that continued their course even in pandemic.
- ▶ In 2020, in a context of pandemic, 49% of Latin Americans supported democracy, marking a slight increase with respect to the trend of the rest of the decade. An increase in support for democracy was found in eleven countries in the region, being the most paradigmatic case that of El Salvador (18% increase between 2018 and 2020). A decrease in support for democracy was found in seven countries, being Ecuador the greatest exponent of this trend, with a 17% reduction between 2018 and 2020.
- ▶ This discontent translates into a pejorative evaluation of democracy: 45% of the Latin American population recognizes that the democracy in which they live has major problems, and 22% perceive that their democracy has minor problems (Latinobarómetro, 2021). Within the region's populations, 60% in Argentina, 56% in Peru, 55% in Ecuador, 54% in Chile and 52% in Colombia and Paraguay say that democracy in their country has major issues. Uruguay is the country with the least complaints against democracy with 19%.
- ▶ Another important indicator for evaluating the functioning of democracies in the region is satisfaction with the regime. In recent decades, satisfaction with democracy has behaved quite erratically: the highest satisfaction was found between 2005 and 2010, after which satisfaction began to decline sharply. At the height of the pandemic, dissatisfied people reached 70%,

Figure 4.1. Support for democracy in Latin American countries. In percentage (1995-2020).



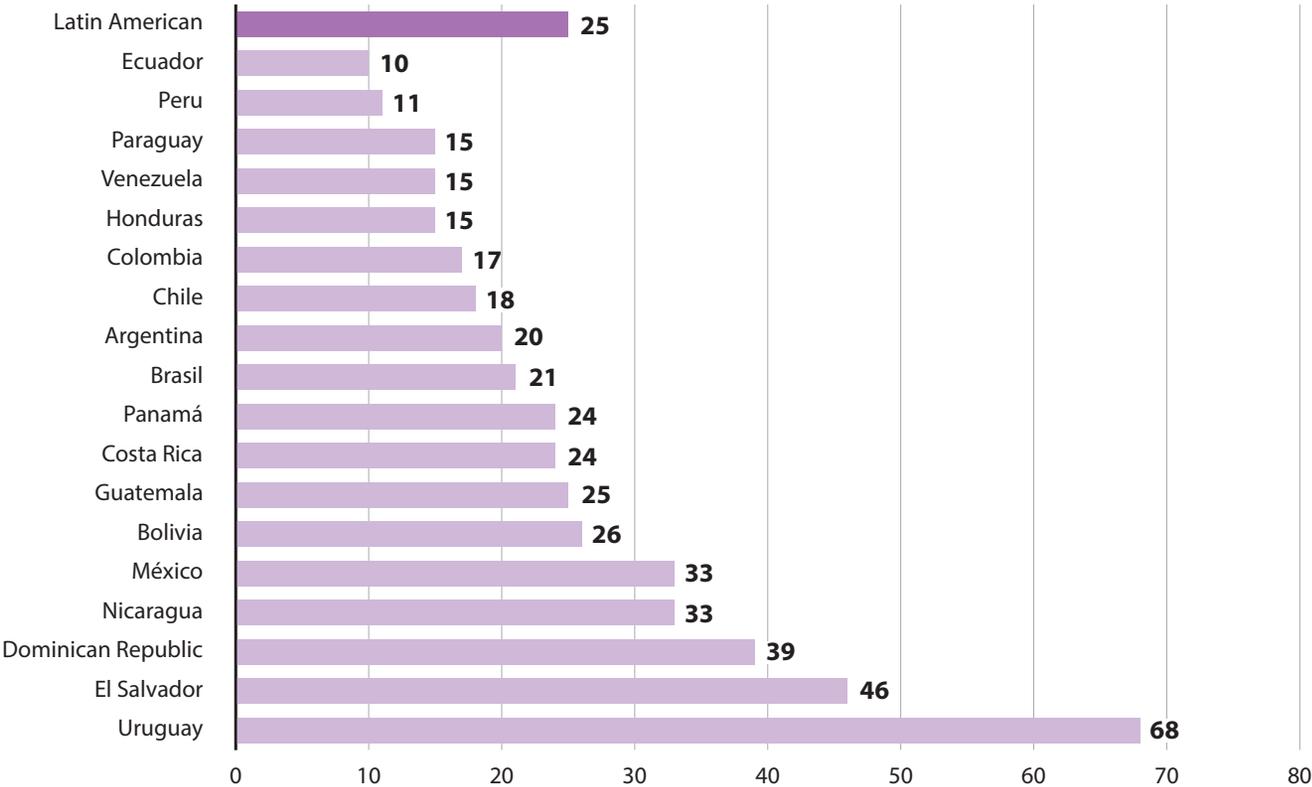
Source: Own elaboration based on Latinobarómetro data.

compared to 25% of those satisfied. Thirteen out of the eighteen countries surveyed have a satisfaction rate of less than one third of the population.

- ▶ It is also interesting to examine citizens' preferences for authoritarian governments as opposed to democratic ones. The population that prefers this type of government usually represents between 15 % and 20 % of the total, and has remained relatively constant during the last two decades. The onset of the pandemic did not produce major alterations to this type of government, contrary to what might be expected in a context of crisis. The highest preference for this type of government is found in Paraguay and Mexico (24% and 22%, respectively), in contrast to Uruguay (8%).

- ▶ It is important to consider the consequences of these indicators on the functioning of political systems. It is in contexts of high polarization and alternation that the fractures that allow the emergence of populisms appear. This can be noted in some countries in our region: in recent years we have seen the decline of Nicaragua with Ortega and Venezuela with Maduro, and new populisms are beginning to emerge in El Salvador with the arrival of the businessman Nayib Bukele, in Mexico with the government of López Obrador and in Brazil with Bolsonaro.
- ▶ On the other hand, the context of the pandemic and the imposition of states of emergency generate the creation of situations prone to corruption. Fifty-seven percent of

Figure 4.2. Satisfaction with democracy in Latin American countries. In percentage (1995-2020).



Source: Own elaboration based on Latinobarómetro data.

Latin Americans perceive that corruption has increased a lot compared to 2019 (Latinobarómetro, 2021). In the cases of Venezuela, Chile and Ecuador, the increase reaches figures above 70%. This is mainly explained by the corruption associated with the management of the pandemic: during this time, cases of irregularities have appeared, such as the arbitrary vaccination of high authorities in the region or the artificial fixing of prices in medical supplies (CAF, 2021).

Citizen participation

- ▶ The onset of the pandemic and the new health conditions led to changes in the conduct of elections and in the functioning of the electoral system. It was essential to make adjustments to the holding of the electoral event: six countries had to postpone their presidential, legislative or constitutional elections to the second half of 2020 or to 2021.

- ▶ In 2020, in Uruguay, the municipal elections were won by the National Party led by President Lacalle Pou. In Bolivia, the presidential elections led to Luis Arce's victory, the candidate supported by Evo Morales, after a period of intense conflict during the government of Jeanine Añez. In the case of Brazil, the results of the local elections showed a trend towards the center: only two out of the thirteen candidates supported by Bolsonaro managed to win a municipal office, and the Workers' Party (PT for its acronym in Spanish) led by Lula da Silva did not win any office.
- ▶ In Chile, the national plebiscite determined an agreement with the beginning of a constituent process to draft a new Constitution. In May 2021, the constituent elections were held, allowing the formation of the Constitutional Convention that began its sessions in July of the same year. Finally, in December 2020, parliamentary elections were held in Venezuela, with a participation rate of around 30% and without the participation of the main opposition parties.
- ▶ Numerous elections have been defined for 2021 throughout the region. They have started in Ecuador with Guillermo Lasso's victory, which put an end to the Correista period. In Peru, the legislative and presidential elections have ended with Pedro Castillo's victory, with just over 60,000 votes more than his opponent, Keiko Fujimori. In the middle of the year, Mexico elected governors, deputies and local congresses, which resulted in a decrease in López Obrador's support in the Legislative Power. However, the official party expanded its presence at the federal level, gaining control of 16 out of the 32 governorships. For the rest of the year, presidential elections are expected in Chile, Nicaragua and Honduras, and legislative elections will be held in Argentina, Nicaragua and Chile.
- ▶ These elections are taking place at a time of low institutional quality in our region, in an atmosphere of uneasiness due to the contagion and distrust towards the implementation of vaccination plans, which have provoked scandals in several countries due to their clientelistic use.
- ▶ In view of these elections and still in a context of recovery from the pandemic and social unrest, it is expected that the elections will give more space to new populist proposals. Experts believe that the demands of the present will lead to the emergence of new populisms, which manage to patch up the social situation without resolving the underlying issues. Populist candidates will try to capture the dissatisfied and marginal votes through proposals that will sensitize the electorate, and will no longer privilege the links to the traditional political class.
- ▶ The region faces some challenges in terms of citizen participation in politics. It is necessary to recognize that the mechanisms of democratic representation do not cover the entire population, making parties less and less viable as mechanisms for channeling concerns and disagreements. The high rates of electoral abstention are a reflection of this phenomenon, indicating a failure in the outreach of the parties. In the face of this crisis of representation, it is intuited that the new expressions of politics through social networks have a great value, allowing to know what that part of the population on the margins of politics (and that many times has an anti-political attitude) aspires to, in order to process these expressions in favor of the political ideology of each party.

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Theological-Pastoral reflections

The evangelical and pastoral discernment of historical situations and their complexities invites us to go from the datum - accurately researched and recorded - to the recognition of the challenges and calls that the Lord makes to be heard in the midst of these specific historical situations, to address our responsible freedom, to commit our condition of missionary disciples, called to be salt and light of the world, leaven of a new society, called to be, as the people of God, sacrament of salvation in the midst of society.

As an exercise of this evangelical and pastoral discernment on the Social Balance of the COVID-19 cycle in Latin America and the Caribbean 2020-2021, we present below some theological-pastoral reading keys that open the dialogue and invite to new discernment exercises on the data provided and the horizons that are announced to us.

From a global perspective

A call to promote and participate in the needed changes

Once again, data identify a situation of ecological, social and cultural crisis, which becomes demands and requests for change at many levels: changes at the personal level, in attitudes and customs; changes at the community and

structural level in the face of the inefficiency of many systems; paradigm changes, in view of the limits presented by current economic and political models. The pandemic made visible the need for these changes at all levels, removed the veil of distractions that prevented recognizing the urgency and dimensions of these changes, and gave more arguments to those who had already been demanding them.

Necessary changes that lead us to think about the role of the ecclesial community when facing them; that remind us of the value of the questions that guided the 1974 Synod of Bishops on evangelization and that St. Paul VI recalled at the beginning of his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: "*What efficacy does the hidden energy of the Good News, capable of profoundly shaking man's conscience, have in our day? -To what extent and how can this evangelical power truly transform the people of today?*" (EN 4). These questions posed the challenge of the capacity of the Gospel and the Church to participate in change, to promote change, rather than merely seeing and suffering the effects of the social crises experienced in the last century. Questions that were approached from the recognition of the transforming dimension of evangelization, developed by the Pope in his document: "*Evangelization means for the Church to bring the Good News to all the environments of humanity and, with its influence, to transform from within, to renew humanity itself: 'Behold, I make all things new'*" (EN 18).

These questions are of great relevance today as we read the diagnosis of the situation of our continent and the challenges it poses to the evangelizing mission of the Church. What is the role of God's people in the face of these situations and the needs for change that we recognize?

This role is discovered and accomplished first of all in the

conviction of the mysterious action of the Risen One and of His Spirit, as Pope Francis reminds us :

"Some people do not give themselves to the mission, because they believe that nothing can change and so for them it is useless to make an effort... With that attitude it becomes impossible to be missionaries. Such an attitude is precisely an evil excuse to remain locked up in comfort, laziness, unsatisfied sadness, selfish emptiness... If we think that things will not change, let us remember that Jesus Christ has triumphed over sin and death and is full of power. Jesus Christ truly lives. Otherwise, 'if Christ is not risen, our preaching is empty' (1 Cor 15:14). The Gospel tells us that when the first disciples went out to preach, 'the Lord worked with them and confirmed the Word' (Mk 16:20). This also happens today. We are invited to discover it, to live it. The risen and glorious Christ is the deep source of our hope, and we will not lack his help to fulfill the mission He entrusts to us. His resurrection is not a thing of the past; it entails a life force that has penetrated the world. Where everything seems to have died, everywhere the shoots of resurrection reappear. It is an unstoppable force. It is true that many times it seems that God does not exist: we see injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty that do not cease. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always begins to sprout, which sooner or later produces a fruit... That is the power of the resurrection and every evangelizer is an instrument of this dynamism... Christ's resurrection provokes everywhere germs of this new world; and even if they are cut off, they spring up again, because the Lord's resurrection has already penetrated the hidden fabric of this history, because Jesus has not risen in vain. Let us not remain outside this march of living hope!" (EG 275,276,278).

A mission that is the responsibility of the entire ecclesial community, in virtue of the commandment of love, as the bishops stated in Medellin:

"Love, 'the fundamental law of human perfection, and therefore of the transformation of the world' [GS 38] is

not only the supreme command of the Lord; it is also the dynamism that must move Christians to accomplish justice in the world, having truth as its foundation and freedom as its sign. This is how the Church wishes to serve the world, radiating upon it a light and a life that heals and elevates the dignity of the human person [GS 41], consolidates the unity of society [GS 42] and gives a deeper meaning and significance to all human activity. Certainly, for the Church the fullness and perfection of the human vocation will be achieved with the definitive insertion of each person in Christ's Resurrection or triumph, but the hope of such a consummated accomplishment, rather than lulling us to sleep, must 'revive our concern to perfect this earth, where the body of the new human family grows, which can anticipate in some way a glimpse of the new century' [GS 39]. We do not confuse temporal progress and the Kingdom of Christ; however, the former, 'insofar as it can contribute to better ordering human society, is of great interest to the Kingdom of God' [GS 39]" (DM Justice 4-5).

The personal, cultural, structural and paradigmatic changes that must be promoted from the evangelizing commitment of the Church in the continent require, therefore, the discernment of the signs of the work that the Risen Lord is already doing, particularly in the lives of so many victims of injustices and inequalities, and with which He points out and confirms the efforts that are already being made and must be made as an ecclesial community, to serve justice and solidarity in the world.

Changes that must be promoted from the convictions of faith and with a vision of hope, as suggested by the titles from which the information was organized: ecological, social and cultural dream, which respond to the perspective of hope that gives us the Risen One and the transforming dynamism that has penetrated history and leads it towards the fullness of the Kingdom.

From a viewpoint of specific issues

There are specific facts and issues that also call our attention as evangelizers: health, labor, ecology, social economy, the crisis of democracy, and that point to specific fields in which to promote changes.

A call to care for health and life

Among the specific calls that resonate in the data presented in this balance, the need for particular attention to the issue of health is recognized. The health crisis, the inadequacy of state health systems to care for the sick and ensure this right, the insufficient investment of governments in this area and the lack of guarantees that it is truly a right exercised by all, call for the commitment of countries and of the Church itself to the right to health.

This health crisis, as well as the vaccination protocols, have highlighted the intimate relationship between health, economy and social development. This interrelationship must be taken into account in the evangelizing action of the Church. Physical health, mental health and spiritual health must be integrally considered in the evangelizing projects at the service of a full life for all. The new life in Christ that we recognize we are called to serve and to extend must take into account the challenge of integral health for all, as a necessary task in the evangelizing action.

A call to propose the good news of work

Another of the specific calls that resonate in the data presented in the balance is the particular attention that the issue of work requires. We know that one of the most significant negative effects of the pandemic was the loss of employment. There were already 26 million unemployed before COVID-19, and with its arrival, the loss of 35 million jobs in the region during 2020 was recognized, out of which only 58% have been recovered up to the first quarter of this year. These facts and their consequences, which have been felt so strongly, invite us to rethink the need for work, as well as its value and dignity.

We come from an era of exaltation of free time, leisure and entertainment, which has culturally overshadowed the value and dignity of work, its importance in people's lives and in society; a fact that becomes more acute with the low generation of employment sources, with the injustices that are committed in working conditions and inadequate remuneration.

The pandemic, with all its negative effects on the economic and social situation of families and communities, has helped to relativize certain visions that exalted leisure, free time, irresponsible consumption to the detriment of the value of work, and to better ponder the value and correlation of both profoundly human and social realities. In addition, the work restriction conditions imposed by the pandemic and the necessary biosecurity protocols, the development of home-based employment and the emergence of other forms of work have helped to bring back to the table the reflection on employment, its value, its regulation, and its conditions and fair remuneration.

These circumstances, as well as the consequences of the increase in informal employment, the lack of policies for decent employment and the importance of social protection systems that accompany employment, invite us to think of a call to a commitment towards work: to propose once again

the gospel of work, the profound meaning of work and the need for decent work, within the conditions of our society, to promote decent work sources, to promote a reflection on the new forms of work that are emerging and on labor relations. Undoubtedly, the social doctrine of the Church is called to address these issues, and the projects of the social pastoral must respond to this challenge.

A call to encourage ecological conversion

In the ecological area, the effects of the recovery of many ecosystems during the pandemic demonstrated that a change in favor of caring for our common home is possible. The signs of this favorable change, despite its short duration after the effects of the economic recovery, are an incentive to continue promoting change in the way we relate to the environment and achieve greater sustainability.

It is important to take advantage of the current context to continue the task of bringing the values of the Gospel to our relationship with creation and to promote ecological conversion, making every baptized person understand their commitment to the care of the common home..

A call to accompany the civil society in the development of a social economy

It is significant how civil society managed to develop a social economy during quarantines brought about by the pandemic, which in many ways replaced what the market economy was unable to achieve.

The solidarity action developed in favor of the weakest, with creativity and courage, saved many lives of people and families who did not receive the aid granted by the state, thus showing the need to promote the forms of organization and action of civil society and its complementarity with actions of the state.

The Church has much to contribute in this process of promoting ways of living a social charity that gives soul to the processes of development.

A call to enlighten new forms of citizen participation

The crisis of democracy and citizen participation, as noted in the report, challenges the evangelizing work of the Church to propose the principles and criteria that the social doctrine of the Church has to offer: the sense of human dignity, universal fraternity, human community, the common good, politics, etc. Wisdom of the Gospel that is necessary to put in dialogue with the new realities and forms of political participation that are emerging, with the multiplication of populisms that arise in these times and with the disagreements that populations express about the way democracy is being lived.

A call to listen to and dialogue with the victims, with the poor

Finally, it is necessary to take into account the great number of victims who have suffered the circumstances that question us. They are not only data, they are people and their life stories before whom the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ cannot pass by without stopping and listening to their pains, their claims and petitions. Closeness and dialogue lead to

the understanding of ways to solve many of the problems mentioned, to the generation of actions in favor of the passage from a culture of disposability to a culture of care, and generate the necessary mysticism for the great challenge of promoting the social dimension of evangelization.

The need of dreaming together

Together with the data on reality that question us, it is necessary to keep in mind what Pope Francis said in his address this year to the popular movements:

"Sisters and brothers, let us dream together. And so, as I ask this with you, together with you, I also want to transmit to you some reflections on the future that we must build and dream. I said reflections, but perhaps I should say dreams, because at this moment our brains and hands are not enough, we also need our hearts and imagination: we need to dream in order not to turn back. We need to use that sublime faculty of the human being, the imagination, that place where intelligence, intuition, experience and historical memory meet to create, compose, venture and risk. Let us dream together, because it was precisely the dreams of freedom and equality, of justice and dignity, the dreams of fraternity the ones that improved the world. And I am convinced that in these dreams God's dream for all of us, who are his children, is slipping in... 'But these are unattainable things,' some will say. Yes, but they have the capacity to set in motion, to set us on the way." (Pope Francis, Videomessage for popular movements, 2021).

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