



PRACTICAL GUIDE

FOR AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AT THE SUBNATIONAL LEVEL



OAS | More rights
for more people



Forum of Federations

The Global Network on Federalism and Devolved Governance

University of
Kent

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FOREWORD

While the member states of the Organization of American States (OAS) vary widely in land extent and population, the authorities at the subnational level, no matter the size of the country, carry the weight and responsibility of addressing the needs of their local communities. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to wreak havoc across the region, we are reminded how their effective response depends on a number of factors, including counting on sufficient resources; coordinating closely with other levels of government, as well as with the private sector and other non-governmental institutions; and governing with transparency and accountability.

It is for this reason that the voices of the representatives of the subnational governments can no longer be minimized. Within the OAS we have taken an initial step in this direction by creating a section within the newly created Department for the Promotion of Peace to focus exclusively on this issue. We hope to take a further step by identifying a space within the Organization to enable ongoing exchanges between representatives of subnational governments of the hemisphere and the governing bodies of the OAS.

Today, each corner of our region is facing historical challenges in almost every sector of society as a result of the pandemic. Notwithstanding the differentiated impact of the COVID crisis among countries, regions, and municipalities, local authorities are the most appropriate to offer and implement viable solutions to overcome them.

The pandemic has taken the lives of thousands of men, women and children because of a lack of access to appropriate health services; it has left millions of children out of the classroom; and it will soon cause an unprecedented humanitarian crisis as a result of food shortages. We cannot rest easy until we overcome these challenges and begin to rebuild more just, equal, tolerant and inclusive societies so that we never have to relive this tragedy again. And we can only effectively make progress in this endeavor by actively engaging, empowering and lending a louder voice to those who are closest to the communities they serve: the representatives at the local levels. By establishing a formal strategic alliance with the Forum of Federations and the University of Kent, and combining the knowledge, the skills and the resources of a diverse range of experts, we hope to add further value to these efforts.

The purpose of this guide is to provide practical insights and recommendations on key measures that can be taken to mitigate the territorial impact of the pandemic. The guide also includes good practices and lessons learned that decision-makers from different levels of government throughout the Americas can consider to effectively respond to the current challenges posed by COVID-19, as well as concrete actions for implementation during a post-pandemic phase. If we are to succeed in overcoming this crisis, we must support and strengthen those that represent the most direct point of contact between governments and citizens and who best know and understand their communities.

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INTRODUCTION

In July 2020, the Organization of American States, the Forum of Federations and the University of Kent signed a Memorandum of Understanding to support the OAS Department for the Promotion of Peace and for the Coordination with Subnational Governments in its peace building, conflict prevention, crisis management and conflict resolution efforts. The first joint initiative launched by these three partners was a webinar on the occasion of the International Day of Peace (September 21) addressing the growing pivotal role of subnational governments in the current Latin American and Caribbean COVID-19 scenario. The event aimed to:



Develop a better understanding of the differentiated impact of the crisis across countries, regions and municipalities;



Highlight the key challenges facing subnational governments as a result of the pandemic, as well as good practice examples in addressing those challenges;



Call attention to the need to raise the voice and increase the participation of subnational governments in the hemispheric dialogue;



Examine the new priorities societies face in the COVID-19 era, including the need for greater coordination between national and subnational governments to address the impacts of the pandemic;



Identify next steps to chart a new era of cooperation with these influential actors by learning from other successful collaborative experiences from the region and beyond; and



Explore the opportunities that the pandemic offers to rebuild more just and peaceful societies as governments transition from response efforts to the recovery phase of the crisis.

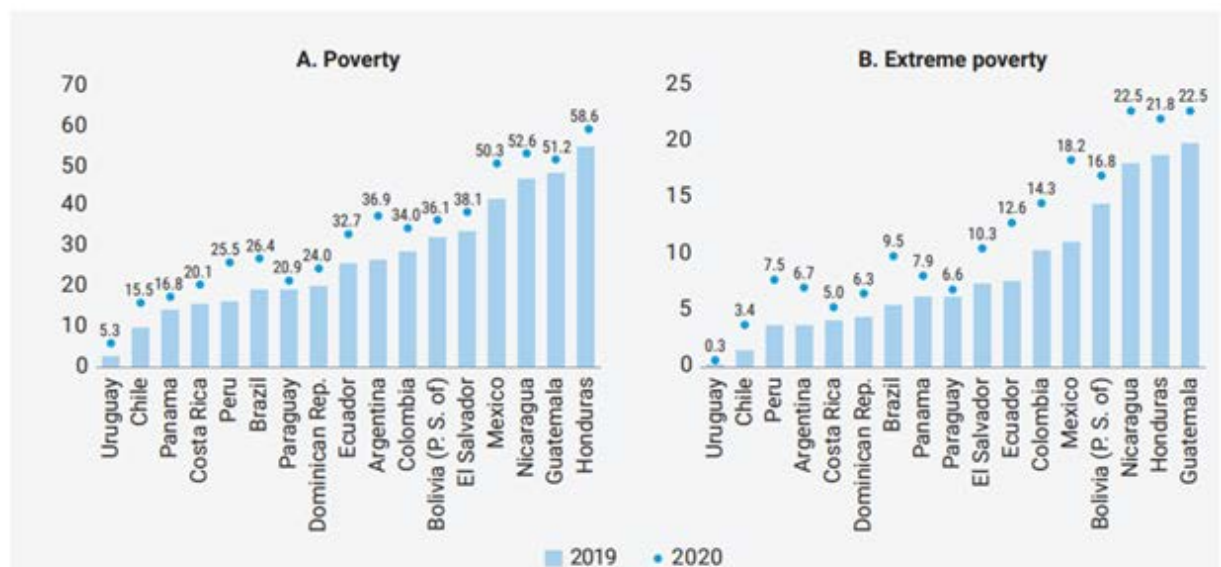
The invaluable information, rich exchanges and vast amount of data provided by the experts and practitioners who participated in the event provided meaningful insights and recommendations. These have been reviewed and summarized to produce this practical guide as an important contribution to the hemispheric efforts underway to strengthen local democratic governance, and more specifically to respond effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic at the subnational levels.

CONTEXT

Although today we are experiencing an unprecedented crisis, the scenario in Latin America and the Caribbean before the pandemic broke out was not very encouraging. Despite the progress made in reducing extreme poverty in recent decades, this region remains the most unequal in the world. To make matters worse, it has been hit particularly hard by the immediate health consequences of the pandemic in terms of the number of infections and deaths it continues to experience.

The economic impact of the measures taken around the world to control the spread of coronavirus is anticipated to be severe. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, economic inequality will worsen as a result of the pandemic. The economic damage caused by COVID-19 will impact upon women and minority groups in particular, increasing the risk of a growth in poverty and deprivation among marginalized communities in many countries.

POPULATION LIVING IN POVERTY AND EXTREME POVERTY, 2019 AND 2020 (%)



Source: The United Nations – July, 2020

The pandemic also hits the region in the midst of the largest migration crisis of its history as a result of the more than 5 million Venezuelan refugees and the thousands of Central American migrants who are particularly affected by the economic consequences of the virus.

In times of crisis, local government authorities are almost always at the front lines of any response. The level of government closest to the citizens, these authorities often have direct responsibility for providing services to the public. National emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have local impacts and thus are tackled on the ground by local authorities. Citizens look to these authorities to implement measures to mitigate the impacts of the crisis, provide a source of guidance and support, and ultimately protect the community from the worst effects of the emergency. Due to their proximity to the people they serve, local authorities understand how the specific dynamics of a crisis are impacting upon their locality, and are typically directly responsible to their constituents electorally.



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More rights for more people is our philosophy and it depends on [the subnational governments] that the institutions can respond to the needs of the people.

LUIS ALMAGRO
Secretary General,
Organization of American States

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis differs not only among the countries of the hemisphere but also across regions and municipalities. The resilience of local governments, and their ability to carry out governance functions effectively, is dependent upon a range of factors including their resources, their capacity to act independently, and the extent to which there is coordination between the local, subnational, and national levels of government. There are significant variations in practice between the different countries and subregions of the hemisphere (Caribbean, Central, North and South America), with some of the differences derived from the extent to which the governance powers and competences are more centralized or decentralized, as well as the size and population of the countries. Nonetheless, in a pandemic and post-pandemic scenario, resilient and effective local governance, which has the ability to manage and deal with crises effectively, can act as a bulwark against conflict and play a key role in rebuilding more equal and peaceful societies.

While some countries are still grappling to get the virus under control, other countries can boast impressive results in how they have managed the health crisis so far, including addressing the numerous secondary challenges that emerged as a result of the pandemic. In Europe, Germany attributes a large part of its success in controlling the virus to effective coordination between the federal, subnational, and local agencies. In Latin America, the current hotspot of the pandemic, Uruguay stands out as an exception, recording one of the lowest number of cases and deaths per capita.

The pandemic offers a unique opportunity to learn from these and other best practices, as well as to refocus attention, priorities and resources on supporting strong, accountable local governments, with transparent, clearly defined functions and responsibilities (including their relations with other levels of government). This will be necessary to ensure that services can be delivered as required to the people in their localities, and that governments in the region are able to respond better to crisis conditions.

“

As we look back on 6 months of the pandemic, the blunt instruments used by governments such as lockdowns were unsustainable and undesirable. Unsustainable because they damaged livelihoods and undermined the fiscal basis that allows governments to deliver critical services, and undesirable because of the social upheavals cause by unemployment and marginalization.

RUPAK CHATTOPADHYAY
President and CEO,
Forum of Federations

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In a progressively interconnected and interdependent world, the OAS is cognizant of the need to increase the participation of sub-national governments in the hemispheric dialogue.

FRANCISCO GUERRERO
Secretary for Strengthening Democracy,
Organization of American States

SYSTEMS OF GOVERNMENT IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The systems of government in the OAS member states

include:

Federal Systems

(Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Canada, US) [1]



Unitary/Centralized Systems

(Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, Central America, Caribbean) [2]



Although Latin America, and the Caribbean have been historically characterized by highly centralized governmental structures, following the end of the Cold War significant efforts have been made to encourage decentralization through the strengthening of local governments in the hemisphere. By sharing power, democratic governments contribute to institution building, economic development, and offer a more inclusive system of governance. A strong democracy requires the participation of all of its people and the greater the participation the more legitimate the democracy. The Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) has classified 17,500 subnational governments in the region, of which 400 represent intermediate levels of government, with the remainder consisting of municipalities.[3]

[1] It should be noted that there is great diversity between different federal systems in the Americas with regard to aspects such as state architecture, institutional frameworks, and division of powers, level of centralization and decentralization, among others.

[2] In the 1990s Venezuela began a process of decentralization, transferring sovereignty and power to each governor of the state, and for the first time in its history, the people directly elected the state governors through free elections. When Hugo Chavez was elected president in 1998, a new constitution halted the decentralization process and the concentration of power in the executive branch increased, a trend which has continued under the Maduro administration.

[3] Inter-American Development Bank “Next Steps for Decentralization and Subnational Governments In Latin America and the Caribbean” by Huáscar Eguino and Axel Radics.

CHALLENGES OF SUBNATIONAL GOVERNMENTS



Level of Decentralization and Participation in Decision-Making



Fiscal challenges: Expenditures, Service Delivery, Sources of Revenue, Transparency and Accountability



In the context of the ongoing COVID emergency, the study of the pandemic's impact on governance and the capacity of states and societies to tackle intra and inter-state conflict, is timely and likely to continue in the decades ahead.

NEOPHYTOS LOIZIDES
Director of the Conflict Analysis Research Centre,
University of Kent



Urbanization, Rural Development, Access to Services and Connectivity



Effective Multi-level Government Communication and Coordination



Public and Private Sector Investments



Institutional and Administrative Capacity



Natural Resource Extraction



Central vs. State Political Polarization and Opposition



Climate Change



Transnational Organized Crime



Border Management

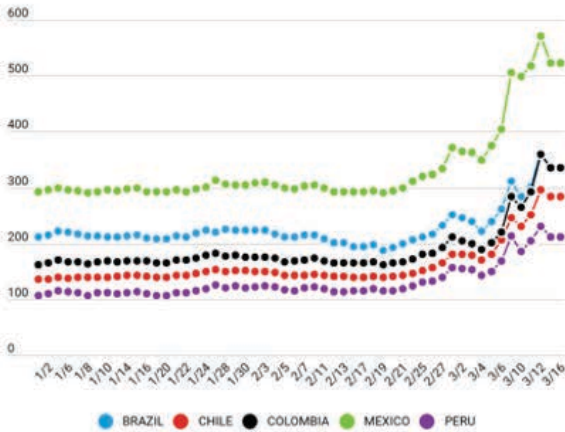


Inter-Regional and Transnational Migration Flows

Impact channels

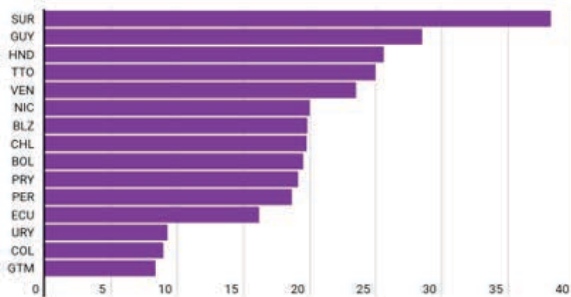
Immediate economic impacts in Latin America include a tightening of financial conditions, a decline in commodity prices, and lower tourism.

(Sovereign spreads, emerging-market bond index; basis points)



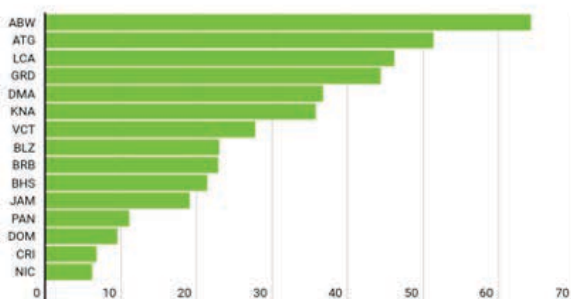
Source: Bloomberg Finance L.P.
Time series represents January 2020 through March 2020.

(Commodity exports, percent of GDP)



Source: World Bank. World Development Indicators database and IMF staff calculations.
Note: Latest available data. Includes food, fuel, and ores and metals exports. Country abbreviations refer to the International Organization for Standardization code.

(International tourism receipts, percent of GDP)



Source: World Bank. World Development Indicators database and IMF staff calculations.
Note: Latest available data. Country abbreviations refer to the International Organization for Standardization code.

COVID-19 CHALLENGES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Local authorities represent the most direct point of contact between governments and citizens. They are the ones who best know and understand the challenges facing their communities. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, we have witnessed how coordination between the subnational governments themselves, as well as between the subnational governments and the central governments, has been key to ensure an effective and quick response to the health, education and social challenges of the communities they serve. Effective leadership and coordination with the private sector, NGOs, security and armed forces, and even international and development organizations, will be key to ensuring long-term societal well-being.

Probably the most important lesson of the COVID-19 crisis has been the need to count on strong, large-scale public **health care** services to improve the health of citizens, particularly those in more vulnerable situations.

Health care has not been prioritized in terms of public funding in Latin America and the Caribbean. In some countries, decentralization has generated an uneven response to the crisis since resources and skills vary across local governments, while in others the provision of adequate funding and resources combined with effective coordination between the central government and local authorities has been key to successfully responding to the pandemic. Moving forward, local health officials must be responsible for providing support inclusively and transparently and coordinating not only with national and other local governments but also with the private sector in order to deliver the desperately needed health services, as well as receive, track, and distribute the requisite medical equipment and other urgent supplies.





In terms of **security**, pre-pandemic the region already had the highest violence and murder rates on the planet, accounting for 33% of the world's homicides[4] and housing 41 of the 50 most dangerous cities in the world.[5] With the pandemic, unemployment has skyrocketed and recruitment of vulnerable and at-risk groups by gangs and criminal networks has increased significantly. As the attention of most law enforcement agencies has shifted to focus on the virus, crime prevention and management efforts have been diminished, and organized crime has stepped in to fill the void. Amid the distraction, criminal networks are leading the efforts to provide relief to the desperate local communities by distributing food and medicine to the elderly and most needy, consolidating their control over the communities, winning their loyalty and laundering their illicit money in the process. If governments do not intervene, organized crime will emerge from the COVID crisis more powerful.

“

*Peace begins in our homes, in our communities,
in those environments closest to us.*

MAGDALENA TALAMÁS

Director, Department for the Promotion of Peace
and the Coordination of Subnational Governments,
Organization of American States

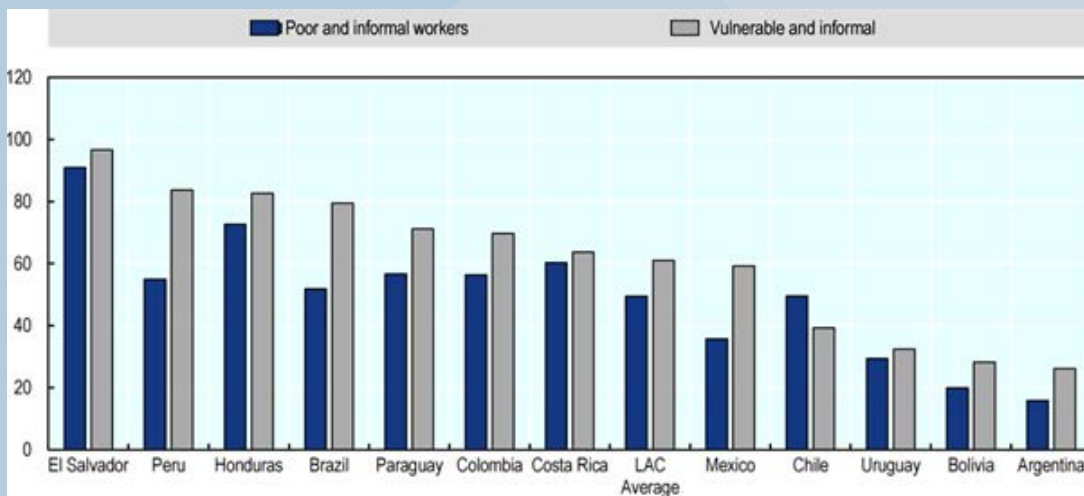
[4] <https://igarape.org.br/latin-america-leads-world-on-murder-map-but-key-cities-buck-deadly-trend/>

[5] <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/most-violent-cities-world-latin-america-dominates-list-41-countries-top-50-a6995186.html>

Stagnant **productivity** and **unemployment** are major contributing factors to the high levels of crime and violence permeating the region. Before the pandemic broke out, 20 million young people were neither studying nor working (the ni-ni's as they are known in Spanish: neither/nor; neither employed nor in school).[6] Experts have predicted that the COVID-19 pandemic will result in the worst economic contraction in the history

of the region and youth unemployment is forecast to reach roughly 18% by the end of this year.[7] Moreover, the extremely high levels of informal economic activity throughout the region poses a severe threat to the effective management of the crisis.

Percentage of Poor and Vulnerable Workers not Covered by a Major Social Assistance Program (Select Latin American Countries)



Source: OECD calculations based on each country's Household Surveys, April 2020 (preliminary estimations).

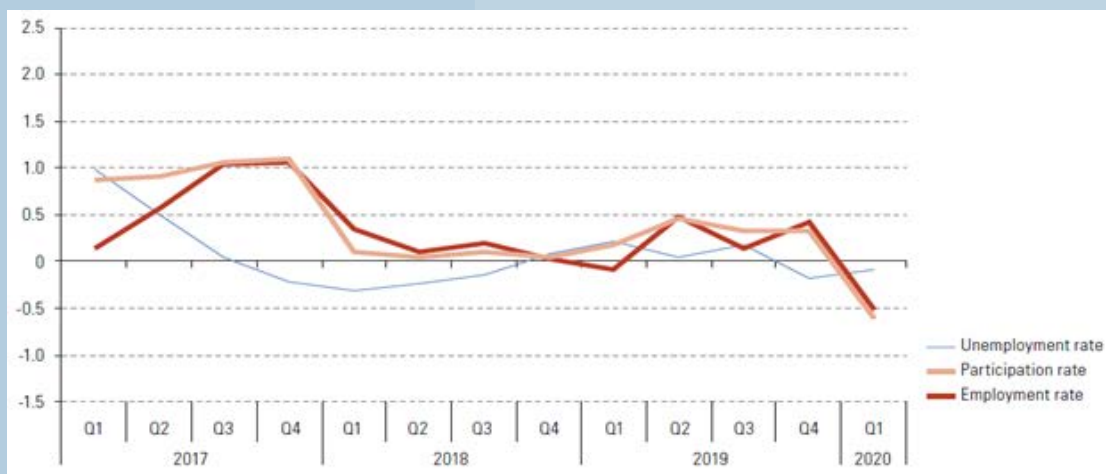
Note:

- Informal Workers are those who do not contribute to social security system therefore do not have access to contributory health and unemployment insurance.
- Vulnerable and Informal workers are those who have low-quality jobs associated with low social protection, and face higher volatility in their income which prevents them from investing in human capital and moving to higher productivity jobs, trapping them in a vulnerable state.
- Poor and Informal Workers are those at the bottom of the pyramid with lowest earning of less than 2 USD per day.
- Regional Average is simple average.

[6] <https://www.worldbank.org/en/events/2016/01/07/out-of-school-and-out-of-work>

[7] https://www.ilo.org/caribbean/newsroom/WCMS_738634/lang--en/index.htm

Latin America and the Caribbean (14 countries): year-on-year variation in the employment, participation and unemployment rates, first quarter of 2017–first quarter of 2020 (%)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of official figures.

Note: The countries included are Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Jamaica, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay. The first-quarter 2020 figure does not include Ecuador.

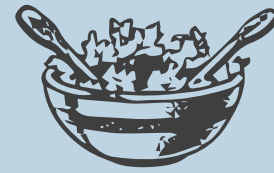
Reactive policies tend to be too little too late. This is true for the coronavirus pandemic but also for **climate change**. According to UN environmental agencies, climate change has provoked natural disasters that have caused more than 500,000 deaths in Latin America and the Caribbean in the past 50 years.[8] Climate change has also affected the fresh water resources in the region with significant consequences to ecosystems and societies. Moreover, climate change is a key driver of infectious disease.

In order to rebuild more equitable and resilient communities, COVID-19 recovery efforts must include locally led, technology-focused actions, planning and investment.



[8] <https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/confront-climate-change-emergency-and-rethink-post-covid-recovery-we-must-urgently>

In the **education** sector, more than 10% of the region's youth was considered illiterate and only 33% had access to secondary education before the crisis began.[9] Since then, school closures have left more than 154 million children[10] - approximately 95% of the enrolled - out of education. Many of these children have no way of accessing online learning, producing significant developmental deficits. Children who were already at-risk may never return to school.



As the Americas is quickly becoming the epicenter of the pandemic, food insecurity could develop into a severe humanitarian crisis in the most vulnerable countries of the region such as Haiti, or those in the dry corridor of Central America. The hurricane season might also exacerbate this problem in the Caribbean countries. In the Andean countries which house the majority of the Venezuelan migrants, the pandemic has the potential to increase severe **food insecurity** among the most vulnerable. Furthermore, virus-related closures of schools and childcare facilities mean in many cases children are missing out on the only proper meals they could count on. According to a study by the World Food Programme, the number of people facing food insecurity globally in 2020 is expected to increase by 130 million compared to 2019.[11]

[9] <https://www.youthpolicy.org/mappings/regionalyouthscenes/latinamerica/facts/>

[10] <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/covid-19-more-95-cent-children-are-out-school-latin-america-and-caribbean>

[11] <https://www.wfp.org/news/covid-19-will-double-number-people-facing-food-crises-unless-swift-action-taken>

EFFECTIVE COVID-19 RESPONSES/GOOD PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Uruguay

Uruguay is an exception in a region that has become the epicenter of the pandemic. Uruguay has been able to effectively control the spread of the coronavirus, keeping the number of infections and fatality rates low, while at the same time maintaining a functioning economy and facilitating a return of children to classrooms. There has been widespread popular support for the government's handling of the pandemic. Uruguay's success in managing the crisis is the result of rapid action to establish control measures in the early stages of the pandemic; longstanding investments in the national health system; and the role of an interdisciplinary expert group (consisting of independent leading scientists, mathematicians and physicians) that advised the government. This group devised a successful nationwide detection and tracking system with the support of the private sector, allowing health authorities to closely monitor the overall pandemic landscape. National unity, citizen responsibility, civic education,

close inter-agency coordination, and a clear roadmap with transparent communication to the general public were also key factors in the successful response to the crisis.



The uphill battle continues because of the regional and global concern.

ISAAC ALFIE

Director of the Office of Planning and Budget of Uruguay

Germany

In contrast to the largely centralized pandemic management approach adopted in Uruguay, the high degree of autonomy of subnational government units constitutes an important factor in explaining Germany's successful response to the pandemic to date. Specifically, decentralized action and policy implementation, as well as a clear division of responsibilities between different levels of government have been key to developing effective crisis measures sensitive to local pandemic contexts.

This is complemented by intense coordination within and between the Länder (States), as well as between the subnational units and federal agencies, which is grounded in the historical tradition of cooperative culture within Germany's federal system. Vertical collaboration between the federal government and the Länder governments has been facilitated by frequent video meetings of the Ministerpräsidentenkonferenz ("Conference of Prime Ministers") that provide a forum for intense dialogue on successes and failures of the approaches used, as well as on the joint virus control measures to be introduced throughout Germany.

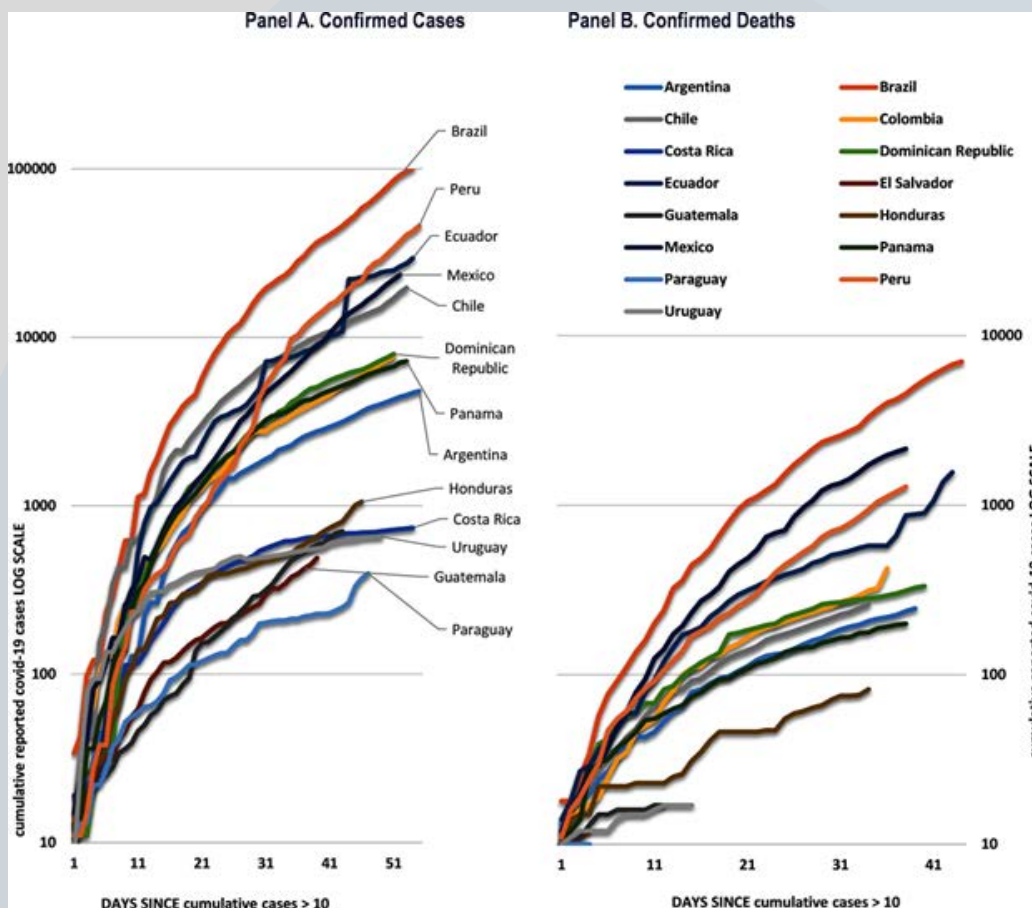
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The most important lesson was the lack of coordination between levels of governments. The lack of coordination was clear from the beginning but with time it ended up being an open political conflict between the federal governments and several governors.

JUAN CRUZ OLMEDA

Associate Professor, Center for International Studies,
El Colegio de Mexico

Numbers of Confirmed COVID-19 Cases and Confirmed Deaths from COVID-19 in Latin America (select countries) as of May 2020

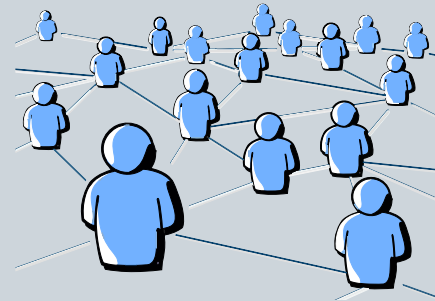


Source: OECD Secretariat, May 2020

Canada

Canada is another successful example of a country that has been able to effectively respond to the pandemic. From early on, the federal government enacted country-wide measures to contain the spread of the virus and implemented massive fiscal spending programs to mitigate the social and economic impact of the crisis. Implementation of a rapid testing system, contact tracing, and consistent messaging on social distancing and mask wearing from both federal and subnational authorities, as well as a unified national healthcare system, have all contributed to mitigating the impact of the pandemic. The decentralized nature of the Canadian federation allowed the provinces and territories to tailor the response to local conditions in their respective jurisdictions. Intensive intergovernmental collaboration also contributed to an effective response, despite a relatively low degree of institutionalization of intergovernmental relations in Canada. For example, the frequency of high-level intergovernmental interactions increased significantly, with First Ministers' Meetings taking place weekly via teleconference, rather than the usual one per year.[12]

These weekly meetings facilitated greater inter-provincial communication, as provincial governments could explore opportunities for common positions on different aspects of the management of the pandemic, including the closing/opening of the border with the United States, procurement of medical and testing equipment, and the possibility of the federal government invoking the Emergencies Act. [13] In addition to consensus-seeking negotiations and information-sharing, inter-provincial relations also included instances of material collaboration (for example, Alberta donating medical equipment to other provinces).[14]



[12] Lecours, André, D. Béland, N. Brassard-Dion, T. Tombe and J. Wallner, 2020. "The COVID-19 Crisis and Canadian Federalism", Forum of Federations Occasional Paper N. 48.

[13] Lecours, André, D. Béland, and Jennifer Wallner. "Reduced Acrimony, Quiet Management: Intergovernmental Relations During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Canada", forthcoming. ; Rae, B. (Speaker). 2020. Coronavirus and Federalism in North America. [audio podcast] ForumFedCast. Available at: <https://forumfedcast.podbean.com/> [Accessed 26 October 2020].

[14] Lecours, André, D. Béland, and Jennifer Wallner. "Reduced Acrimony, Quiet Management: Intergovernmental Relations During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Canada", forthcoming.

Caribbean Countries

In the hemispheric context, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented unique challenges for the **island nations of the Caribbean**. Globally, islands have, for the most part, benefited from geographical isolation and in many cases have managed to keep the number of infections relatively low. At the same time, key travel destinations were faced with the sudden loss of tourism income and the dilemma of having to ease travel restrictions at the expense of public health.

Caribbean countries were among those hit most hard economically by the COVID pandemic because, as the IMF noted in October 2020, they are dependent on tourism for “anywhere between 20 to 90 percent of GDP and employment”.[15] Some of the temporary solutions introduced to mitigate the economic damage and support the tourist industry included new visas valid for a year for long-term travellers and their families (e.g. the 12-month Barbados Welcome Stamp), and Anguilla’s new “island bubble” concept where visitors technically have to quarantine on arrival but can still enjoy a relatively normal holiday. Other island destinations across the world have introduced a number of measures for holidaymakers to facilitate safe travel,

such as pre-departure tests or the provision of rapid tests at airports. The roll out of improved tracing systems has also helped to keep COVID-19 cases relatively low in island nations such as Cyprus and Malta.



A pandemic this complex must be managed in a collaborative, coordinated and calculated manner.

JOY ST. JOHN
Executive Director,
Caribbean Public Health Agency CARPHA)

[15] <https://blogs.imf.org/2020/10/22/pandemic-persistence-clouds-latin-america-and-caribbean-recovery/>

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL-SUBNATIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISMS

Within the framework of the General Assembly, the OAS facilitates high level exchanges and dialogue between the Foreign Ministers of the member states and the representatives of non-member states, civil society and the private sector respectively. Currently however, there is no mechanism in place to facilitate similar exchanges and cooperation with representatives of the regional subnational governments. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the indispensable role that subnational governments play in the overall national wellbeing. In a progressively interconnected and interdependent world, it is necessary to elevate the voice and increase the participation of subnational governments in the hemispheric dialogue by creating a similar space for exchanges and collaboration with these influential actors.

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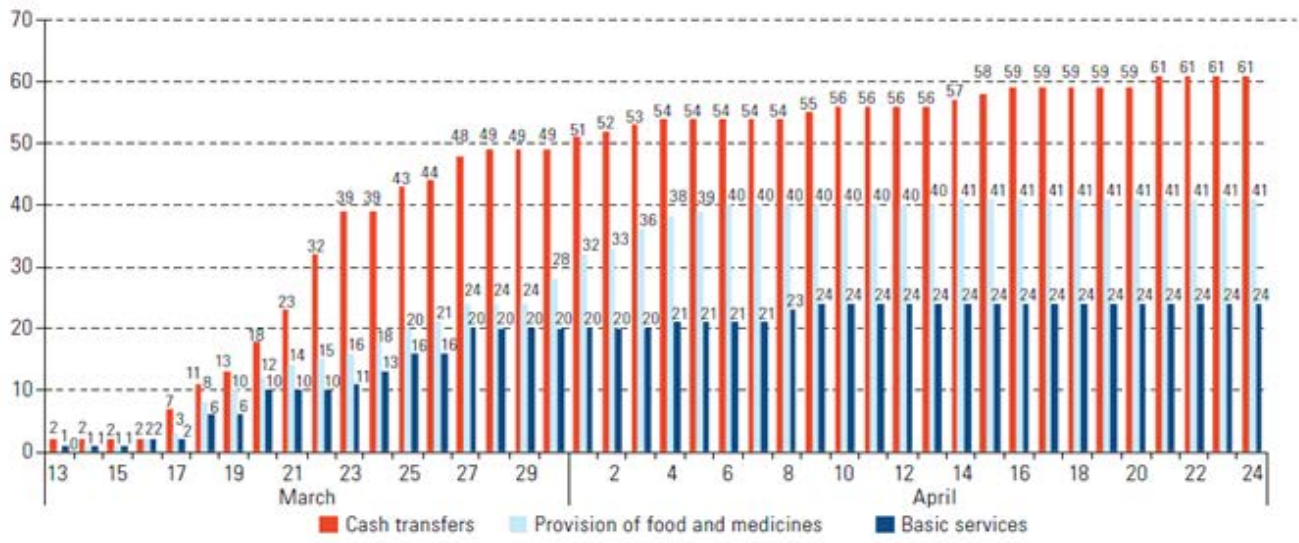
This pandemic showed that it's not only about human lives, about health. It is about the social issue, the functioning of institutions, the responsibility and roles in these processes.

ANDREAS KIEFER
Acting Secretary General,
Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

There are very good examples of effective coordination mechanisms that facilitate these types of high-level exchanges and promote cooperation between central and local authorities. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (the Congress) – a long-standing institution of the Council of Europe – is a good example of a mechanism that facilitates collaboration between national governments and regional and local authorities.

Providing a platform to reflect on the role of local and regional authorities in governance initiatives addressing the major challenges of modern society, the Congress works directly with the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, comprised of the Foreign Ministers of the respective member states. Over the past two decades, the Congress has undertaken activities in the fields of human rights promotion, gender equality, the strengthening of local and regional democracy, the prevention of corruption, the promotion of public ethics, and migration management and integration.

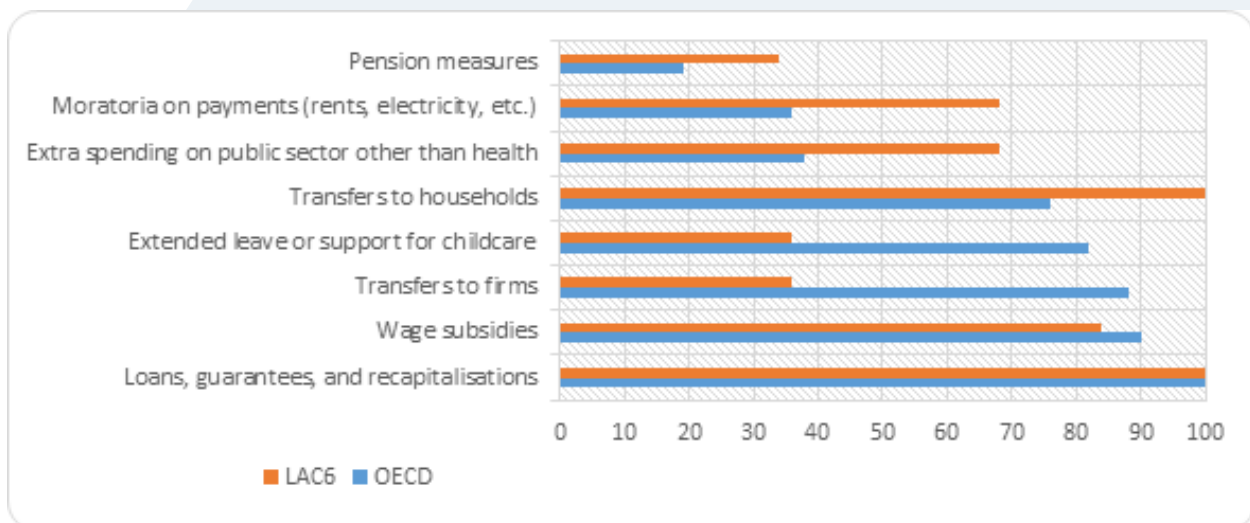
Latin America and the Caribbean (29 countries): social protection measures for the population living in poverty and vulnerability announced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, 13 March–24 April 2020 (Number of measures, daily figures)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

Note: The 29 countries are: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay.

Percentage of Government Measures in Response to the Pandemic, Select Latin American Countries



Source: Data from the OECD Country Policy tracker via OECD Ecoscope. June, 2020

Note: The countries included are Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Mexico.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

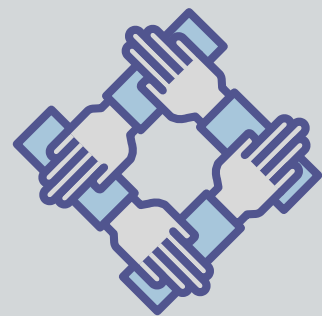
The pandemic has further increased the challenges already faced at the local level by subnational governments, particularly with respect to the impact of fiscal centralization and the vertical fiscal imbalances. Consequently, cooperative regimes that foster new innovative governance models beyond the context of the pandemic management will be key to rebuilding more resilient societies. This is all the more important considering the manifold interrelated hemispheric and global challenges governments face alongside the COVID pandemic, including climate change, extractivism, migration, and economic inequality among others. Likewise, civic engagement will be needed to enhance inclusion, tolerance, and diversity. These values are best fostered by local people and local communities and are necessary to ultimately secure peace and justice in the Americas and elsewhere. The following recommendations are proposed to mitigate the territorial impact of the current and future crises.


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The decentralized implementation of measures allows for flexible and quick reaction.


NATHALIE BEHNKE

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Identify state capacities and needs that include local and regional authorities in emergency response policy and decision-making.




Include opposition parties in the development of response policies to avoid a politicization of the crisis-mitigation efforts.




Work closely with technical experts and the scientific community to develop strong evidence-based planning and response strategies that take into account the different territorial realities.




Establish and foster mechanisms for communication and collaboration between central and subnational government (vertical) and between subnational governments (horizontal) to facilitate coordinated policymaking and implementation.




Act quickly and avoid delays by setting up working groups to address key needs, reach out to state and local partners, and deploy staff where needed to support state and local efforts.




Provide ongoing verified, transparent and consistent information to keep the public informed about challenges, developments, workplans and strategies. Ensure that this information is quickly and effectively disseminated by all levels of government.




Redistribute financial resources at the subnational levels; implement economic stimulus measures to provide critical local public services; and offer relief to businesses and individuals in terms of their access to finance and ability to comply with payments.




Commit funds to support victims of COVID-19 and their families especially young children, disabled persons and the elderly in marginalized communities.




Design accountability mechanisms at the subnational, regional and local levels to reduce the potential for corruption.





Prioritize connectivity and digital capacities throughout different levels of government. Digitalization improves the delivery of and access to public goods and services at the local level in times of crises, particularly in terms of health and education.





Take steps to counter misinformation and maximize proper use of scientific evidence in public policy as well as support stakeholders in communicating science more effectively to the public.


 Engage a wider network of actors in providing targeted understandings of the main trade-offs and priorities involving health, the economy and education. Faced with increasingly limited resources and budgets, governments and subnational authorities will come under significant pressure to reprioritize their needs and identify new consultation methods to do so.


 Promote civic engagement and responsibility and empower local actors to take collective action to protect their communities from the pandemic.

 Draw on recent advancements in public opinion research as an effective way to better understand citizen views as to how to best counterbalance the impact of COVID-19 and its aftermath.

 Work closely with neighboring countries, border management agencies and subnational and local governments to develop joint action plans aimed at preventing, detecting and managing pandemics in border crossings.

 The private sector has an important role to play to combat the pandemic. It should collaborate with local authorities to help gather and distribute emergency supplies, as well as to deliver critical services, including health equipment, cleaning products, food and safe drinking water.

 Development agencies and international finance institutions must include regional financing arrangements and take into account the particular vulnerabilities of each country and territories when disbursing funds to address the challenges of the pandemic.

 Create a space for ongoing high-level exchanges and dialogue with regional representatives of subnational governments within the framework of the OAS.

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This is a global challenge and we need to learn to work together. We need to collaborate in the use of our resources, to share our medical goods, to share best practices. This has been crucial to slow down the disease and eventually contain it.

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