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Social protection for families with children and adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean

An imperative to address the impact of COVID-19



Introduction¹

- The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) have predicted that the social and economic effects of the ongoing pandemic will have a significant impact on the well-being of families with children and adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, children and adolescents were already a highly vulnerable population group, suffering a higher incidence of poverty than other age groups and affected by numerous inequalities in various dimensions. Not only does the current emergency threaten families with the loss of their livelihoods and a drop in their incomes, children and adolescents also face significant barriers in securing access to health care—including vaccination schemes—and to education. Thus, they are also at a higher risk of falling behind or dropping out of school, as well as at risk from food insecurity and threats of violence or physical punishment. It is therefore urgent to invest in children and to ensure their development in a context characterized by adversities old and new.
- The impact of COVID-19 will be profound. The latest forecasts for regional growth indicate that GDP will fall by at least 9.1% in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2020 (ECLAC, 2020a). In addition, increases of 7.1 and 4.5 percentage points are foreseen in poverty and extreme poverty in Latin America, as a result of which poverty will affect 37.3% of the population and extreme poverty, 15.5% (ECLAC, 2020a). In this context, ECLAC estimates that monetary poverty among Latin America’s children and adolescents could rise by as much as 7.6 percentage points. With this, monetary poverty would affect 51.3% of that population segment: in other words,

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¹ This report was prepared using the information available as of 10 July 2020, unless otherwise indicated.



one out of every two children and adolescents in the region. The regional unemployment rate is also expected to reach 13.5% (44.1 million people), a rise of 5.4 percentage points and an increase of nearly 18 million people over 2019 figures (ECLAC, 2020a). Labour informality is also expected to grow (ECLAC, 2020b), which will be challenging since informal workers already accounted for 51% of all those employed in 16 Latin American and Caribbean countries in 2019 (ILO, 2020).

- In that context, the ability of households to respond will be heavily dependent on the existence and strength of countries' social protection systems. Those systems play a key role at times of emergency: both in the immediate response or reaction, and in the subsequent reconstruction and recovery processes, including, in the medium and long terms, progress towards social and labour inclusion and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- This report showcases the centrality and urgency of social protection for families with children and adolescents in the COVID-19 context. The first section reviews the main arguments for the importance of child-sensitive social protection mechanisms in the context of the current crisis. The second section addresses the social protection gaps reported by households with children and adolescents prior to the crisis and analyses the social protection responses that the countries have adopted. The third section introduces the alternatives of an emergency basic income and universal cash grants for children as short-, medium- and long-term policies for the region. It also reviews the guidelines that should guide social protection policies in the medium and long terms in order to ensure progress towards universal, solidarity-based and child-sensitive social protection systems, which would serve to strengthen welfare states in the region and prevent another lost decade (ECLAC, 2020d). The report concludes with a series of final reflections on emerging and future challenges.

A. The role of child-sensitive social protection in the current crisis

- The COVID-19 pandemic —and, specifically, the necessary confinement measures adopted to protect the population's health— and its socioeconomic effects are impacting the various dimensions of children and adolescents' well-being, placing them among the main victims of this crisis (UNICEF, 2020).
- Despite the strategies deployed to implement remote learning, the closure of schools and other centres of education has affected millions of the region's children and adolescents (UNESCO, 2020). In early July 2020, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimated that over 165 million students across all levels of education in Latin America and the Caribbean were out of school (ECLAC/UNESCO, 2020); this will have repercussions for their learning and lead to increased drop-out rates. Because of the lockdown, the mental health of children and adolescents is at increased risk, and they face greater exposure to violence (ECLAC/UNICEF, 2020a), especially in the most overcrowded households (ECLAC/UNICEF, 2020b). The total or partial suspension of health services will have effects on preventive health, such as growth and development check-ups and vaccination programmes, which are particularly essential in early childhood. This could also have medium- and long-term effects on overall development in such key areas as nutrition and child mortality (Robertson and others, 2020)² if determined measures to protect their well-being are not taken promptly. In addition, an increase in child labour can be expected among children and adolescents from poorer households, where the loss of income is felt more sharply (ECLAC, 2020d).³ In general, the effects of COVID-19 are not distributed evenly (UNICEF, 2020) and will instead widen existing gaps in health, education trajectories and overall development.

² A recent study estimated the potential increase in under-five child mortality and maternal mortality in 118 low- and middle-income countries, based on simulations of reduced health service coverage and increased prevalence of wasting. It found that additional deaths among under-fives could increase by between 9.8% and 44.7% per month in that set of countries, depending on the scenarios calculated (Robertson and others, 2020).

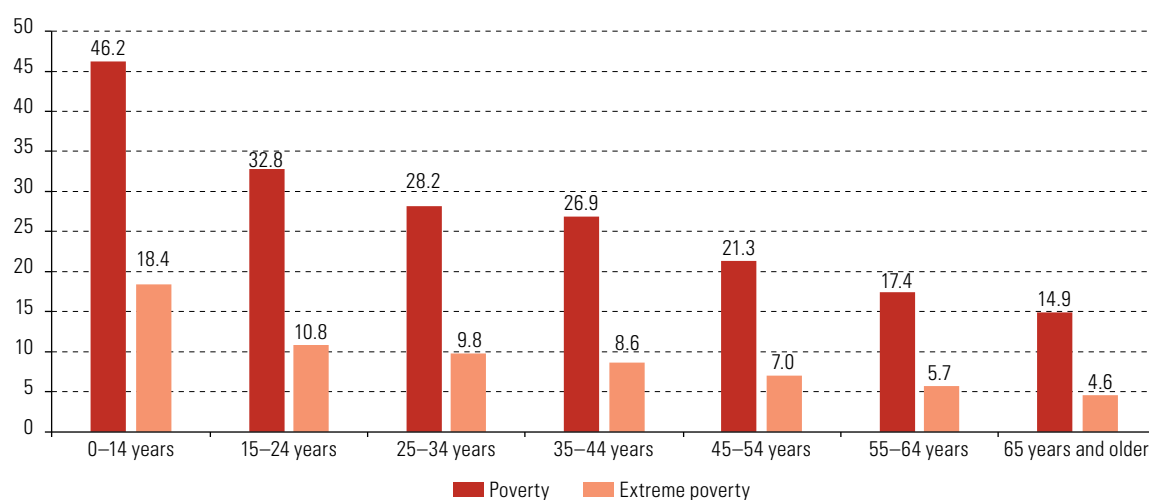
³ Estimates by ECLAC/ILO (2020) for Chile, Mexico and Peru indicate that the pandemic's impact could increase child labour rates by at least 1 to 3 percentage points, with which between 109,000 and 326,000 children and adolescents would swell the ranks of the 10.5 million already engaged in child labour at present.

- During the COVID-19 crisis, social protection strategies are crucial elements in how countries' policies respond, and designing them from a child-sensitive perspective is even more of a priority for the region. Child-sensitive universal social protection systems mitigate the impact of poverty and inequality on families and strengthen their capacity to care for their children. In the current context, these systems must be geared towards ensuring all people a minimum standard of well-being, including the protection of their incomes and employment and their access to basic services and care policies (ECLAC, 2020c). Public investment in social protection for children and adolescents is central to keeping inequality of access to opportunities at this stage from later crystallizing into unequal capacities and social disparities that would be difficult to rectify (Esping-Andersen, 1999). At the same time, families are especially vulnerable and more fragile when they have children and are engaged in raising them, particularly so during the early years. Leaving child welfare to market forces and the capacities of individual families is not only socially ineffective and inefficient from a strictly economic perspective, it is also unacceptable from the point of view of rights (Filgueira and Rossel, 2017; ECLAC, 2018a).

B. Social protection for families with children and adolescents during the COVID-19 crisis: social protection systems before and during the pandemic

- Despite the significant achievements that Latin America and the Caribbean has made with poverty reduction since the start of the century, there were at least two warning signs that preceded the pandemic. First, in recent years, the region has experienced a rise in poverty levels. Thus, between 2014 and 2019, Latin America's poverty rate rose from 27.8% to 30.8%, while extreme poverty increased from 7.8% to 11.5% (ECLAC, 2019).⁴ Second, poverty and extreme poverty affect children and adolescents more than other age groups. In 2018, 46.2% of Latin Americans aged 14 years and younger were living in poverty, while extreme poverty affected 18.4% of this age group. As shown by figure 1, these figures contrast with the levels reported among young people, and among adults and the older population the differences widen further (ECLAC, 2018b).

Figure 1 | Latin America (18 countries): incidence of poverty and extreme poverty by age group, 2018
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2019* (LC/PUB.2019/22-P/Rev.1), Santiago, 2019.

⁴ Figures for the incidence of poverty and extreme poverty in 2019 are projections published by ECLAC (2019).

- This age bias in well-being is a historical trend in the region and it is associated with the fact that the State still covers only a limited portion of the consumption of children and adolescents, which is basically assumed by their families. However, international experience indicates that this pattern is not an unavoidable fate for the region: it can be changed, as indicated by the path taken by various developed countries (Rossel, Filgueira and Rico, 2015; Filgueira and Rossel, 2017).
- The possible deepening of poverty and extreme poverty among children and adolescents as a result of the COVID-19 crisis would also have a very significant impact on the worsening of social inequality in the region in its diverse manifestations and could have a more pronounced effect on rural, indigenous and Afrodescendent populations, migrants and persons with disabilities (ECLAC, 2016).

1. Pre-existing gaps in social protection for children and adolescents

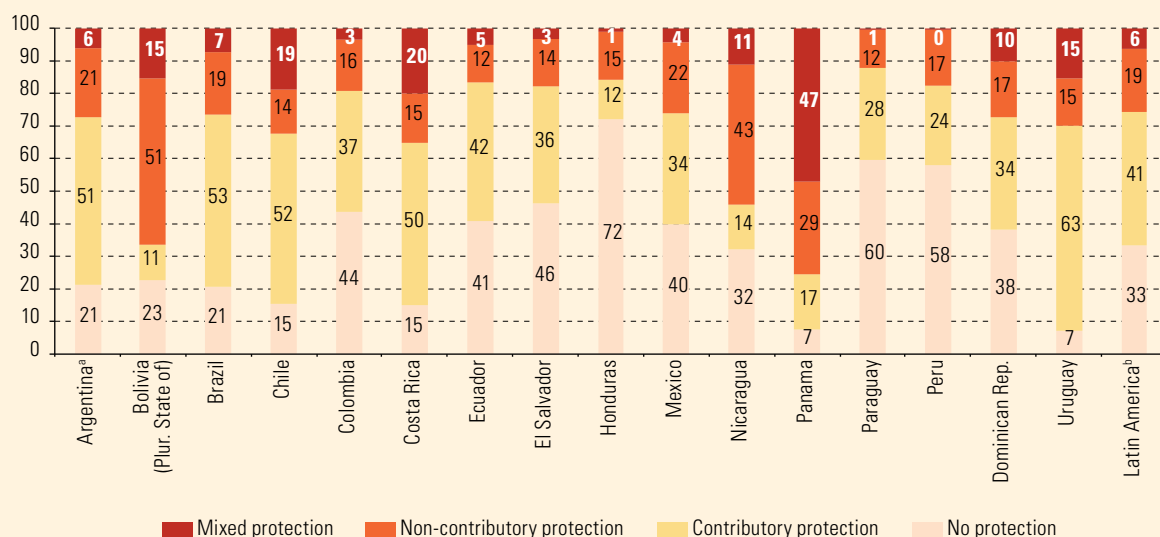
- The overrepresentation of children and adolescents among the population living in poverty is a familiar phenomenon, and it highlights the weaknesses of Latin American and Caribbean social protection systems in guaranteeing the rights of children and adolescents.
- Latin American and Caribbean countries report both achievements and pending tasks with social protection for children and adolescents. In general terms, since the start of the century, most of the region's countries have increased the resources allocated for social investment (ECLAC, 2019). This can be expected to have led to improved funding for social services, especially investments in education and health and transfers to households with children and adolescents. However, pro-cyclical to economic performance, growth in social policy investment appears to have slowed down and, in some countries, reported setbacks (ECLAC, 2019). At the same time, levels of investment in policies for children and adolescents and their families are very low compared to the amounts reported by developed countries.
- Children and adolescents are often underrepresented in the coverage of the contributory pillar of social protection (social security), while young families and families with children—especially very young children—are more likely to be informally employed or to have members who are unemployed or who have not yet managed to enter the labour market (ECLAC, 2012). In that context, one encouraging sign is that over the past decade, the proportion of the region's children and adolescents living in households where at least one member was affiliated to health systems has increased. For example, whereas in 2002 the proportion of children and adolescents living in households with at least one member covered by the health system through social security was 29%, by 2015 the figure had risen to 45% (ECLAC/UNICEF, 2018). Despite this progress, it should not be forgotten that access to social security by children and adolescents has historically been stratified according to the income levels of the households in which they live and that contributory pillar coverage remains low among the poorest sectors, which could be exacerbated by a general deterioration in employment conditions in the current context. ECLAC has estimated that more than a third of formal employment (34.2%) is in sectors heavily impacted by the COVID-19 crisis and that more than 2.7 million formal businesses in the region could close, with the loss of 8.5 million jobs (ECLAC, 2020f). This could have major repercussions for social security access among those sectors' workers, if their jobs were to be compromised.
- At the same time, over the past two decades the region has reported a notable expansion of non-contributory policies, particularly cash transfer programmes. Generally subject to conditionalities related to attendance at school and growth and development check-ups, these programmes have made it possible to reach families with children and adolescents not covered by contributory social protection. Some countries, such as Argentina or Uruguay,

have interconnected their cash transfer policies with the family allowances they have had in place for decades (Filgueira and Rossel, 2017). Although cash transfer programmes represent a step forward towards guaranteeing a minimum level of well-being for families with children and adolescents, in most cases the amounts transferred are meagre and insufficient to pull them out of poverty (Cecchini and Atuesta, 2017; Abramo, Cecchini and Morales, 2019).

- At the same time, although there are significant variations from one country to the next, estimates of spending on both conditional and non-conditional transfer programmes show they account for but a small proportion of gross domestic product or of public social expenditure compared to the region's traditional social security policies (Cecchini and Atuesta, 2017). In addition, in most countries they are not protected by national laws and do not always have firm sources of funding, which exposes them to a degree of instability. Moreover, only a few cash transfer schemes are equipped with automatic indexing mechanisms to ensure that their purchasing power vis-à-vis inflation is maintained over time (Cecchini and Madariaga, 2011).
- In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, one important task is to review how Latin American and Caribbean social protection systems are covering the child and adolescent population through these two pillars, and to explore the interplay between contributory and non-contributory social protection. Even more relevant in the current context is determining how many households with children and adolescents are being left out of social protection schemes, regardless of the particular mechanisms they use.
- An analysis of the coverage of the contributory and non-contributory components of social protection shows that the proportion of households with children and adolescents where the head of household and/or their spouse was of working age (between 15 and 64 years of age) but had no such protection stood, across the region, at 33% immediately before the crisis.⁵ Moreover, 41% of those households were covered solely by contributory social protection, 19% solely by non-contributory benefits and 6% were receiving both contributory and non-contributory entitlements (see figure 2). This scenario offers warning flags for the design of measures to cope with the pandemic and deal with recovery period. First, the fact that one third of households with children and adolescents were without social protection coverage is worrying and points to a major shortfall in access. Prior to the countries' implementation of emergency measures, non-contributory coverage reached only one quarter of households with children and adolescents: a proportion that seems limited, particularly in a context of deteriorating working conditions and a projected increase in informality, and hence a fall in contributory coverage. If these levels of coverage persist after the emergency, a large percentage of children and adolescents are likely to be left without access to social protection.
- Not all countries are in the same situation as regards social protection coverage: whereas in Uruguay, for example, the proportion of households with children and adolescents that could be considered "unprotected" is only 7%, the corresponding figure for Honduras stands at 72% (see figure 2).

⁵ This analysis was conducted on the basis of data from household surveys conducted in the Latin American countries that allow the identification of social protection coverage, taking into account the situation of households with children and adolescents in which the head of household and/or their spouse is of working age (up to the age of 64 among men and up to the age of 60 among women, as indicated by their different retirement ages). Access to contributory social protection is defined as those households where the head of household or his/her spouse is contributing or affiliated to a pension system, and access to non-contributory social protection is indicated by the receipt of transfers and other assistance entitlements as reported by household surveys. Using this method, four categories of household were identified: (i) households with contributory protection alone, (ii) households with both contributory and non-contributory protection (mixed), (iii) households solely covered by non-contributory protection, and (iv) unprotected households (where none of the above conditions are met). The last group may nevertheless be receiving contributory or non-contributory old-age pensions, which were not taken into account in this exercise because they are not specifically targeted at households with children and adolescents. Importantly, the information presented here reflects only the coverage of benefits and not their adequacy, for which further analysis would be required.

Figure 2 | Latin America (16 countries): distribution of households with children and adolescents and with a head of household or their spouse of working age, by access to social protection, around 2018 (Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of special tabulations of household surveys conducted in the respective countries.

^a For non-contributory coverage, the survey microdata record the provision of government cash aid but do not identify the specific programmes.

^b Weighted average. Data for Guatemala and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela are not included. Data for Nicaragua are from 2014, for Panama from 2016, and for Argentina and Chile from 2017.

2. Overview of measures adopted by countries for families with children and adolescents

- At the very onset of the pandemic, Latin American and Caribbean governments began to implement measures to mitigate its effects on falling incomes and deteriorating living conditions. These measures are of particular importance to families with children and adolescents on account of their heightened vulnerability to the crisis.
- ECLAC classifies the measures deployed into five groups: cash transfers, in-kind transfers, provision of basic services, protection for formal workers and other direct support to individuals and families (ECLAC, 2020d). A large proportion of them entail the expansion or adaptation of existing social protection policies and directly or indirectly impact children and adolescents.⁶
- First, the governments' top priority was guaranteeing incomes for the most vulnerable families. ECLAC research found that as of 10 July 2020, a total of 199 social protection measures to support households had been put forward in 30 Latin American and Caribbean countries,⁷ of which 108 (in 29 countries) were linked to cash transfers (see figure 3). Such transfers are intended to allow advance payments, bolster the amounts of existing programmes and increase their coverage of families. In addition, new programmes have also been created to include previously uncovered population sectors, such as informal workers, whose situation has become more vulnerable during this crisis as they face the threat of losing their jobs (ECLAC, 2020d).
- The creation of emergency cash transfers is the mechanism most frequently chosen to cope with the crisis, with those transfers taking the form of emergency payments—either on a one-time basis or over the short term (ECLAC, 2020d; Rubio and others, 2020)—to cover the population not enrolled in social security (generally informal workers or the self-employed) and mostly not covered by or eligible for existing transfer programmes. The transfers have ranged widely in terms of both their duration and generosity, and in terms

⁶ Similarly, in line with its reference framework for social protection, UNICEF classifies the COVID-19 social protection responses into the following groups of measures: (i) social assistance, which includes adapting or creating cash or food transfer programmes, among others, (ii) access to services, such as psychosocial support programmes, housing bonuses and subsidies, electricity, gas, water, Internet and so on, (iii) social security, such as unemployment insurance, advances on or access to pensions, leaves of absence with pay and others, and (iv) labour market, such as job protection, teleworking, access to credit for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), among other measures. For further details, see Rubio and Escaroz (2020b) and Rubio and others (2020).

⁷ Table A1.1 in the annex lists the countries that have announced and launched various non-contributory measures to support households and individuals threatened by poverty and vulnerability.

of whether they are delivered to households or individuals (ECLAC, 2020d; Rubio and others, 2020). The initiatives of this type deployed include transfers that were announced for one single occasion, such as Argentina's *Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia* ("Emergency Family Income", IFE) for informal workers, domestic workers and lower-income taxpayers subject to the simplified regime, and which have since been extended.⁸ The *Bono Familia* ("Family Grant") in the Plurinational State of Bolivia is designed as a one-time transfer to low-income families with children in primary education who cannot receive school meals because their schools are closed. Similarly, the country's *Bono Universal* is a one-time transfer for segments of the population not covered by the other benefits introduced to mitigate the effects of the crisis (Rubio and others, 2020).⁹ Some countries have introduced payments covering longer periods, with a duration of three months being the most frequent. Additionally, some of the measures have been extended for two months or more in response to the prolongation of the pandemic. For example, Costa Rica introduced its *Bono Proteger* ("Protection Benefit"), intended as a three-month measure to mitigate the lost incomes of wage earners who have lost their jobs or had their working hours reduced, as well as self-employed and informal workers.¹⁰ Likewise, Chile launched its *Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia* ("Emergency Family Income", IFE) through Law No. 21.251 of 3 August 2020, which requires beneficiary households to be included in the Social Household Registry in order to apply for the transfer, which will consist of a maximum of six instalments.¹¹ Brazil's *Auxílio Emergencial* ("Emergency Assistance")¹² and Jamaica's Supporting Employees with Transfer of Cash (SET Cash) programme¹³ have been extended and will last a total of nine and five months, respectively. Colombia's *Ingreso Solidario* ("Solidarity Income"), targeting informal workers not covered by other programmes (namely, Families in Action, Youth in Action and the *Colombia Mayor* programmes), has been extended until June 2021.¹⁴ The interim assistance benefit for vulnerable persons in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines will last for nine months (April to December 2020).¹⁵

- Several countries have also bolstered the amounts allocated or brought forward the delivery of existing transfers, bringing the recipient families immediate relief. Although less frequently, some countries have expanded the population covered by their existing transfers. Such is the case of the horizontal expansion announced by the *Bolsa Família* programme in Brazil to include 1.2 million more families from the applicant waiting list (Rubio and others, 2020).
- Although the investment required by these measures is significant and the region has less fiscal space today than 10 years ago (ECLAC, 2020e), countries have made noteworthy investments as part of their social protection responses to the pandemic. On average, as of 6 July 2020, the fiscal packages the countries have announced are equal to 3.9% of Latin America's GDP: an admirable effort, even though the actual amounts range from 0.7% to 10% from one country to the next (ECLAC, 2020a). Specifically, the expenditure associated with the social protection measures announced by the countries to mitigate the effect of the crisis on poor and vulnerable families for a period of six months is in the region of US\$ 67 billion, equal to 1.3% of 2020 GDP (ECLAC, 2020a),¹⁶ a figure far in excess of the annual cost of the conditional transfer programmes in place prior to the crisis, which accounted for around 0.35% of GDP in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2018 (Abramo, Cecchini and Morales, 2019).

⁸ Argentina's Emergency Family Income amounts to around US\$ 154 a month for each recipient. In early July it was announced that it would be extended for a third instalment.

⁹ The Universal Bonus and the Family Bonus in the Plurinational State of Bolivia provide a transfer of approximately US\$ 73 per household.

¹⁰ The monthly per-recipient amount is US\$ 220 for workers who have had their hours reduced by more than 50%, and US\$ 110 for those whose hours have been reduced by 50% or less (ECLAC, 2020d).

¹¹ At the onset, the Emergency Family Income (IFE) covered the most vulnerable 60% of the population, but it was later extended to the most vulnerable 80% of the national population, as indicated by the Social Household Registry. The IFE 2.0 transfers were planned with variable amounts according to the families' vulnerability and size and the type of earnings they receive (formal or informal). For example, a family of four with no formal income and belonging to the country's most vulnerable 80% of households would receive a transfer of US\$ 490 a month, with decreasing amounts for the last two instalments. This is in addition to a first payment under the first IFE scheme, which had a narrower population scope and a lower transfer amount.

¹² These transfers are aimed at independent workers, who do not have formal jobs or fixed incomes to help them weather the health crisis. They amount to US\$ 115 per person, with a US\$ 230 ceiling (payable to mothers in single-parent families). They cover an estimated total of 70 million people. Between September and December, the amount was reduced by half.

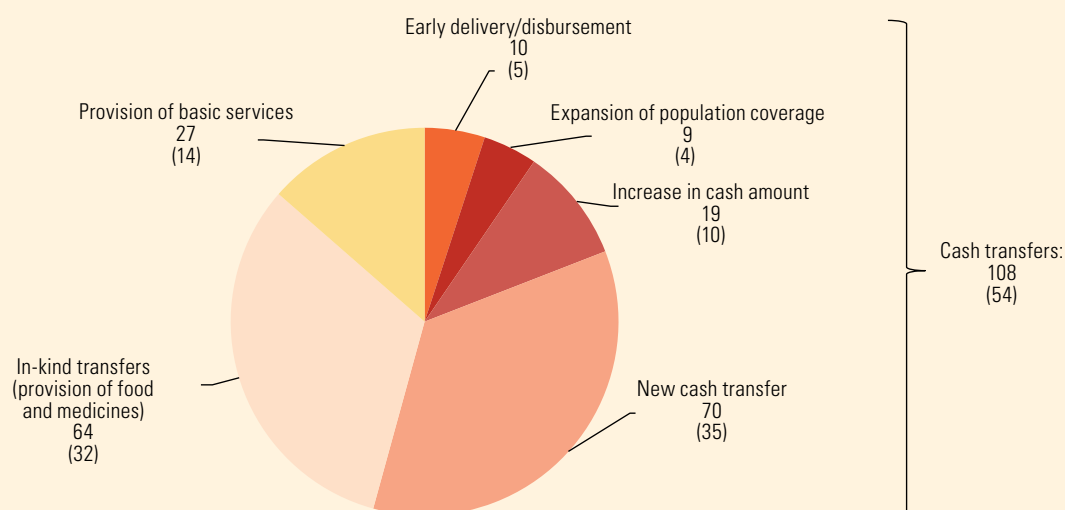
¹³ Temporary cash transfer equal to US\$ 135 for individuals who lost their jobs between 10 March and 30 June 2020 because of COVID-19.

¹⁴ The programme was initially planned to last three months (from March to May), but it was given a first extension until December 2020. At present, per an announcement made on 20 July, a total duration of 15 months is planned. The transfer is worth US\$ 41 a month and is aimed at a coverage of 3 million households.

¹⁵ Transfer of approximately US\$ 74 per month for older adults, persons with disabilities and population groups experiencing increased financial vulnerability on account of the pandemic.

¹⁶ This amount includes non-contributory cash and in-kind transfer measures.

Figure 3 | Latin America and the Caribbean (30 countries):^a social protection measures for the population living in poverty and vulnerability announced to address the pandemic, 13 March to 10 July 2020
(Number of measures and percentage distribution)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), based on official information from the countries, COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://www.cepal.org/en/topics/covid-19> and Observatory on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, "Desarrollo Social y COVID-19 en América Latina y el Caribe" [online] <https://dds.cepal.org/observatorio/socialcovid19/listamedidas.php>.

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

- Second, the crisis has encouraged governments to create or strengthen in-kind transfers, basically through the provision of food supplies. Thus, by 11 April 2020, 24 countries had established foodstuff programmes, delivered either direct to households or by means of institutional arrangements such as through schools or community kitchens (ECLAC, 2020d). Particularly noteworthy in this regard are the steps taken in several countries to ensure the continuity of school feeding programmes despite the temporary closure of schools. As of July 2020, 21 out of 33 countries had maintained school feeding programmes through various mechanisms, with the most frequent (13 countries) being the provision of food kits for home preparation (ECLAC/UNESCO, 2020; Rubio and Escaroz, 2020b).
- Third, the region has been pursuing innovations in the shape of alternative forms of social protection through measures to ensure and facilitate access to basic services (water, energy, telephone and Internet), deferring payments, providing usage bonuses and refraining from cutting off services for non-payment (ECLAC, 2020d). According to ECLAC, as of 10 July, 27 such measures had been proposed in 19 countries, focused mainly on the reconnection of water and electricity services.¹⁷
- Fourth, efforts under the contributory pillar have also been made to mitigate the effect of total or partial income loss by formal workers, including not only wage earners but also owners of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). Notable policies among the 194 measures deployed in 30 countries as of 22 July include guaranteed incomes in the event of absence from work, paid sick leave, bans on dismissals, optional absences from work, unemployment subsidies and advance payments of wages or holidays. The crisis has also highlighted the importance of unemployment insurance and sick leave, as well as of minimum labour regulations to protect workers' jobs and earnings, which remains a pending task in many of the region's countries. The regulation of teleworking has also been an important measure to ensure continuity in those sectors where working remotely is possible (Rubio and Escaroz, 2020b).

¹⁷ Those countries are Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Uruguay. See also Rubio and Escaroz (2020b).

3. Highlights and challenges of pandemic interventions

- The recommendation that the COVID-19 emergency required social protection systems to adapt, made recently by UNICEF and the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) (Rubio and others, 2020), has crystallized in the form of different mechanisms that build on existing tools to improve coverage and strengthen entitlements. Not only do the measures deployed to date represent a clear effort to improve the protection afforded by social protection systems, they have also been predominantly aimed at mitigating the impact of the crisis on the most severely affected populations.
- Amidst this crisis, countries' trajectories in terms of conditional cash transfer programmes for families with children and adolescents made by Latin American and Caribbean countries over recent decades should once again be highlighted. Without the strength and legitimacy of the institutional frameworks that have been put in place, including the State capacities built up over these years—seen in the existence in some countries of comprehensive, reliable and up-to-date social registries and modern payment systems—it would have been difficult for the region's countries to respond to this shock as swiftly as they did.
- Another important innovation in the region's social protection systems has been the establishment of measures for informal workers (ECLAC, 2020d), which can help mitigate impacts on the well-being of children and adolescents living in households where the wage earners are informally employed.
- Against that backdrop, there is still room to strengthen some of the measures introduced and, at the same time, to deploy other strategies to protect children and adolescents, especially those in situations of poverty and vulnerability. In line with proposals already made in some countries, the conditionalities placed on cash transfer programmes must be temporarily suspended, on the grounds that even as lockdowns are lifted, their fulfilment might not be possible for a period of time. A review up to June 2020 found that some countries had suspended the monitoring of conditions on account of the pandemic. For example, Brazil's *Bolsa Família* programme has suspended monitoring of both its education and health conditionalities and has released entitlements that would otherwise have been suspended for non-compliance; however, it has continued to monitor pregnant women (Ministry of Citizenship, 2020). In Colombia, Legislative Decree No. 563 of 15 April 2020 ordered the suspension of verification of compliance with co-responsibilities for provision of transfers under the *Familias en Acción* ("Families in Action") programme (Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 2020). In Costa Rica, the Joint Institute for Social Aid (IMAS) announced that the temporary closure of schools in March and April would not trigger the suspension of transfers under the *Avancemos* and *Creceamos* programmes (IMAS, 2020). Similarly, in May 2020 Guatemala announced that the Ministry of Social Development's *Bono Social* programme would be distributing its transfers without imposing any conditions. In most countries, however, although it can be expected that checks are not being carried out, no explicit measures for the temporary suspension of conditionality compliance have been adopted.
- In addition, and based on the progress made so far, further efforts are needed to advance policy options and programmes that specifically address the needs and vulnerabilities of children and adolescents and their families in the current context (Rubio and others, 2020). There is an urgent need, for example, to provide additional differentiated responses for single-parent families with children and adolescents, for families with young heads of household, for children and adolescents with disabilities and for children and adolescents belonging to migrant families, all of whom will face particular difficulties during the crisis and recovery period. As some countries have been doing, family and psychosocial support services must also be strengthened, given that they are central in addressing the effects of the crisis on psychosocial stress and in containing and responding to situations of physical and emotional abuse, which affect women and children and adolescents particularly severely (Rubio and others, 2020), and access to special protection services must be assured.

- Accordingly, the actions of social protection systems must be interconnected with sectoral policy actions —particularly in the areas of health, food security, education and special protection— in order to strengthen coordinated support for the child and adolescent population and ensure the early prevention and identification of violations of their rights, particularly among those living in situations of poverty or heightened vulnerability. This is especially relevant given the possibility of increased dropout rates following the prolonged closure of schools on account of the pandemic, the strategies that households might adopt to cope with severe contractions in their incomes, including child labour, a possible uptick in child malnutrition and other potential impacts.

C. Proposals for the social protection of the region's families with children and adolescents from the impacts of the pandemic

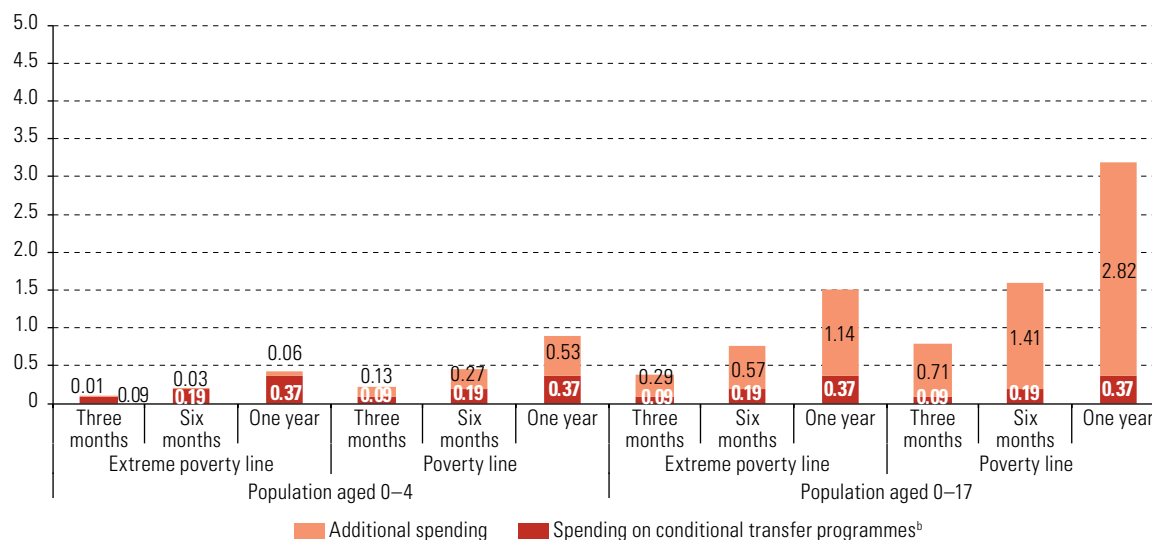
- While the crisis caused by the pandemic has highlighted the shortcomings of Latin American and Caribbean social protection systems, it has also undeniably shown that the region's governments are well equipped to respond rapidly to a shock of this nature through social protection mechanisms. This offers an opportunity to reflect on possible policy alternatives for the short term, as well as on those intended to safeguard children's well-being and development through a comprehensive and inclusive medium- and long-term policy agenda.

1. Basic emergency income and households with children and adolescents

- COVID-19's serious social and economic impact forces States to respond rapidly to sustain levels of household income and consumption that will allow for the protection of children and thereby keep the crisis from severely affecting their development. Although the responses implemented by the countries have been significant, the pandemic's most acute effects will foreseeably outlast some of the measures adopted.
- Against that backdrop, the Secretary-General of the United Nations has proposed that governments explore mechanisms to introduce a basic emergency income for all people living in poverty (United Nations, 2020). Such a measure would make it possible to safeguard a basic level of household consumption and contain the impact of the crisis, and it could be expressed as the equivalent of the national poverty line. If put in place for six months, a transfer of that nature would represent an additional average expenditure of 2.0% of GDP in the region, taking into consideration what the countries already regularly invest in conditional cash transfer and social pension programmes and the programmes that have been implemented during the emergency. A 12-month extension would imply additional spending of 5.2% of GDP (ECLAC, 2020a).¹⁸
- In view of the greater incidence of poverty suffered by the region's children and adolescents and the impact that deteriorating well-being can have on their comprehensive development, it is possible to calculate the additional cost of a transfer of this nature if the basic emergency income (BEI) were to focus on children. Figure 4 presents the results of an exercise to assess the additional fiscal cost of a basic emergency income focused on children covering a range of durations.
- It estimates the cost of a transfer equal to one poverty line and one extreme poverty line over periods of three, six and twelve months for children living in poverty between 0 and 4 years of age (preschool age) and for children and adolescents between 0 and 17 years of age living in poverty.

¹⁸ That expenditure includes the cost of a cash transfer equivalent to one poverty line (US\$ 143 at 2010 prices) over periods of six months and twelve months for the entire population living in poverty in 2020, taking into account what the region was already spending on conditional cash transfer and social pension programmes (equal to 0.6% and 1.3% of GDP for six months and twelve months, respectively) and emergency expenditure on social protection measures for families in situations of poverty and vulnerability (equal to 1.3% of GDP). For further information, see ECLAC (2020a).

Figure 4 | Latin America (18 countries): estimated additional cost of a cash transfer equivalent to one extreme poverty line and one poverty line to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, population in poverty aged 0–4 and 0–17 years, by duration^a
(Percentage of GDP)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG); Non-contributory Social Protection Programmes Database in Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://dds.cepal.org/bpsnc/cct>; United Nations, World Population Prospects 2019 [online database] <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/>.

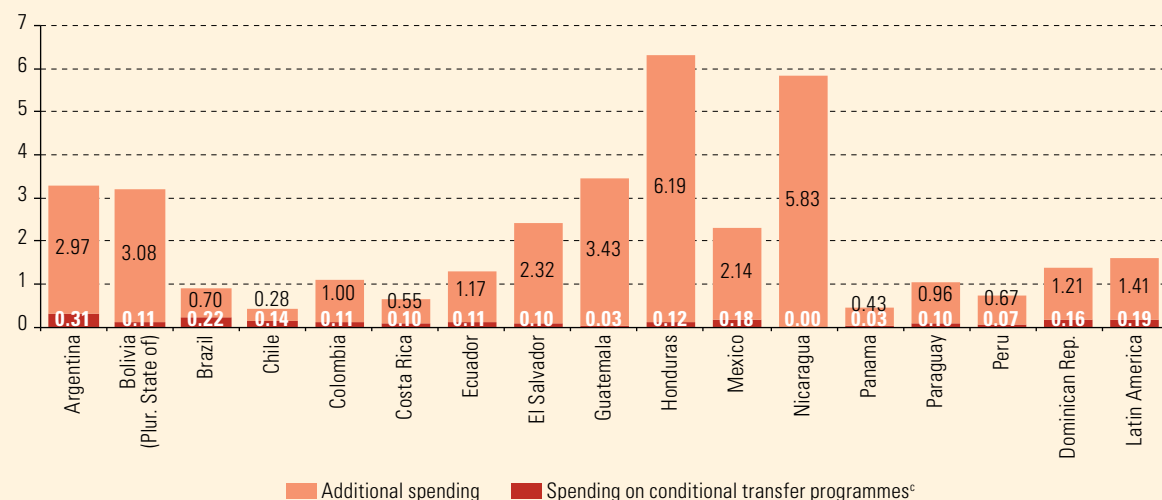
^a Estimates based on a 9.1% decline in GDP and a population of 230.9 million living in poverty in 2020. The administrative costs needed to make the transfers have not been included. The countries covered are Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay. To estimate the additional cost, the population estimates and projections of World Population Prospects 2019 and adjustments for household survey coverage were used.

^b Spending on conditional cash transfer programmes in 16 Latin American countries in 2018 as a percentage of that year’s GDP at current prices in dollars, based on information from the ECLAC Non-contributory Social Protection Programmes Database in Latin America and the Caribbean.

- As a regional average, if what the countries already invest in conditional cash transfers is discounted, transferring the equivalent of one extreme poverty line to the population aged 0 to 4 years in poverty would imply an additional investment of only 0.01% of GDP for a period of three months, rising to 0.03% for six months and 0.06% for an entire year. If the transfer is equal to the poverty line, the additional investment for three, six and twelve months would be 0.13%, 0.27% and 0.53% of GDP, respectively. Transferring the equivalent of one extreme poverty line to those aged 0 to 17 years living in poverty would mean an additional investment of 0.29% of GDP for three months, 0.57% for six months and 1.14% for one year. Similarly, the additional cost of transferring the equivalent of one poverty line to that age group would be 0.71% of GDP for three months, 1.41% for six months and 2.82% for one year (see figure 4).
- Figure 5 shows that the fiscal effort required to transfer one poverty line to children and adolescents aged 0 to 17 living in poverty for six months varies among countries and that it falls when the countries’ current spending on conditional cash transfer programmes over a similar period is taken into account. The estimated additional expenditure needed to finance such a measure ranges from 0.28% of GDP in Chile to 6.19% in Honduras.¹⁹ If the transfer were equivalent to one extreme poverty line, the additional expenditure would amount to 0.06% of GDP in Chile and 3.04% in Nicaragua (see figure 6).

¹⁹ Figures 5 and 6 do not include Uruguay because the country’s current level of investment in its cash transfer programmes and its low levels of poverty mean that no additional spending would be needed to implement this measure.

Figure 5 | Latin America (18 countries): estimated additional cost of a six-month cash transfer equivalent to one poverty line to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, population in poverty aged 0–17 years, by countries and regional average^{a,b}
(Percentage of GDP)



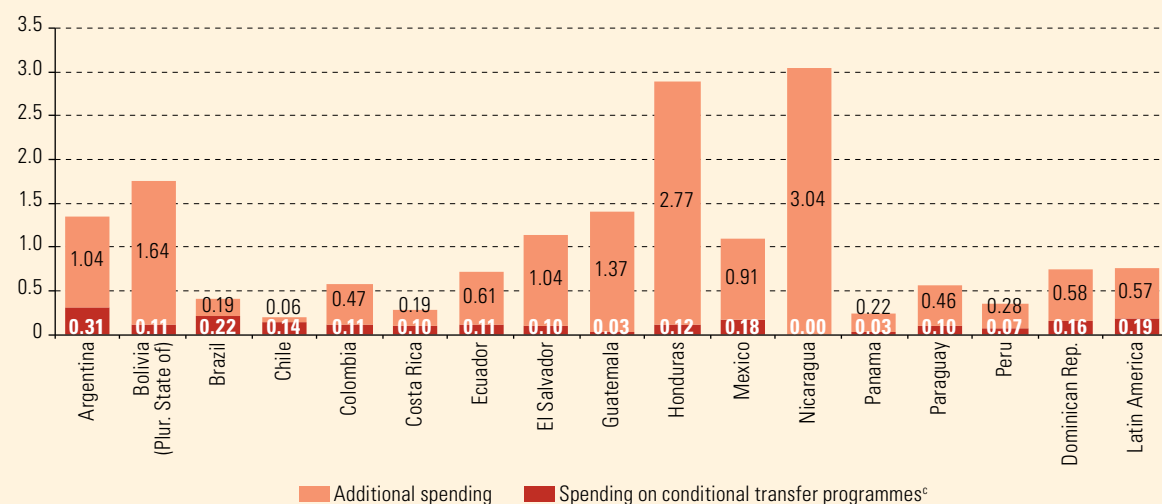
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG); Non-contributory Social Protection Programmes Database in Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://dds.cepal.org/bpsnc/cct>; United Nations, World Population Prospects 2019 [online database] <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/>.

^a Weighted average of 18 countries. The countries covered are Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

^b Estimates based on a 9.1% decline in GDP and a population of 230.9 million living in poverty in 2020. To estimate the additional cost, the population estimates and projections of World Population Prospects 2019 and adjustments for household survey coverage were used. The administrative costs needed to make the transfers have not been included.

^c Spending on conditional cash transfer programmes in 2018 as a percentage of that year's GDP at current prices in dollars, based on information from the ECLAC Non-contributory Social Protection Programmes Database in Latin America and the Caribbean. The average for Latin America represents the regional aggregate for 16 countries.

Figure 6 | Latin America (18 countries): estimated additional cost of a six-month cash transfer equivalent to one extreme poverty line to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, population in poverty aged 0–17 years, by countries and regional average^{a,b}
(Percentage of GDP)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG); Non-contributory Social Protection Programmes Database in Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://dds.cepal.org/bpsnc/cct>; United Nations, World Population Prospects 2019 [online database] <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/>.

^a Weighted average of 18 countries. The countries covered are Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

^b Estimates based on a 9.1% decline in GDP and a population of 230.9 million living in poverty in 2020. To estimate the additional cost, the population estimates and projections of World Population Prospects 2019 and adjustments for household survey coverage were used. The administrative costs needed to make the transfers have not been included.

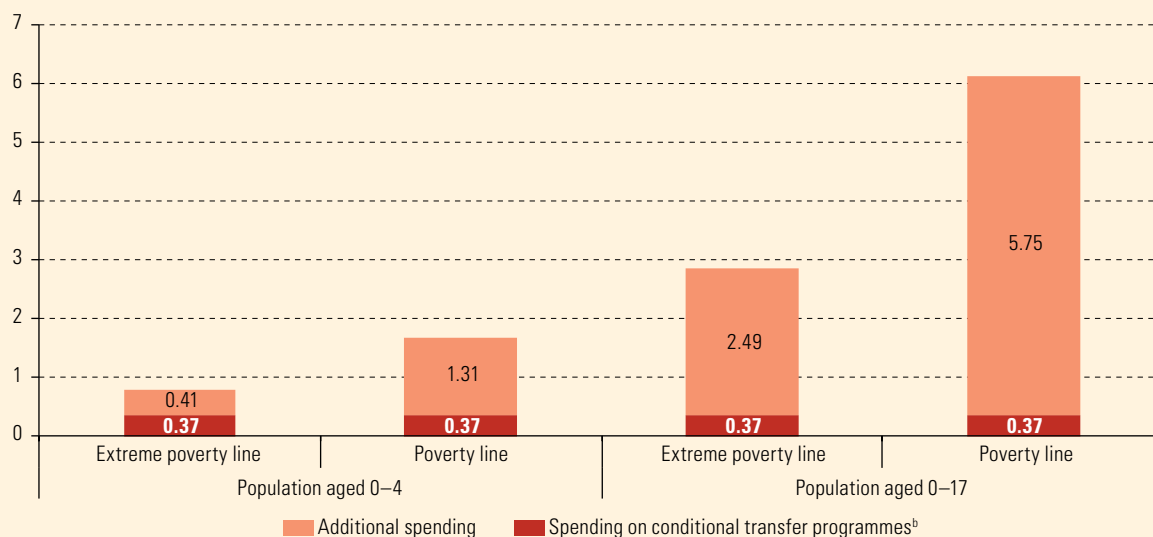
^c Spending on conditional cash transfer programmes in 2018 as a percentage of that year's GDP at current prices in dollars, based on information from the ECLAC Non-contributory Social Protection Programmes Database in Latin America and the Caribbean. The average for Latin America represents the regional aggregate for 16 countries.

2. Medium- and long-term social protection responses to safeguard the well-being of children and adolescents

- Despite the progress made in recent decades, social protection systems still face challenges in covering children and adolescents and their families in Latin America and the Caribbean. The crisis produced by the pandemic draws attention anew to the need to continue strengthening investment in these policies, starting with the inclusion of a universal and child-sensitive perspective in the region's social protection systems (ECLAC, 2020c; Rubio and others, 2020).
- Strengthening cash transfers for families with children and guaranteeing a basic level of income for consumption must be a priority on the social protection agenda over the coming years in order to safeguard well-being of this population. This is true not only as a response to the emergency, but also with a view to recovery and development, to promote rather than compromise the comprehensive development of their capacities, while at the same time supporting the reactivation of the economy and its multiplier effects. Above and beyond emergency support, more permanent and broader cash transfers for children must be consolidated, given the widespread levels of vulnerability faced not only by households in poverty and extreme poverty, but also by families in the non-poor and lower-middle income ranges (ECLAC, 2019 and 2020d). This could be achieved through a universal transfer for children, available to all families with children and adolescents. Given the impact on children and their families of the economic, social and health crisis triggered by the pandemic, it is not implausible to consider a transfer of this kind in the medium term. As pointed out by the United Nations Secretary-General, in light of the growing incidence of poverty among children, a universal child grant could be considered as a step towards a permanent universal basic income policy, under a new direction for the development model during the recovery period (United Nations, 2020).
- At the regional level, transferring one extreme poverty line or one poverty line to all children aged 0 to 4 would mean additional spending equal to between 0.41% and 1.31% of GDP. Likewise, introducing a universal transfer for all those aged 17 years and under would mean additional spending of between 2.49% and 5.75% of GDP, depending on whether an extreme poverty line or a poverty line is used (see figure 7). A more detailed analysis of the cost of a universal transfer for the population aged 4 years and younger shows that the additional fiscal effort required would be less than or close to 1% of GDP in six of the countries, with a low of 0.39% of GDP in Uruguay, although it could amount to as much as 5% in Honduras and Nicaragua (see figure 8).
- Both ECLAC and UNICEF have long argued the importance of consolidating a guaranteed basic level of income in order to make progress towards inclusive social protection. In the documents presented at its sessions, as well as at the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC (2010, 2017 and 2018a) has analysed the costs and benefits of universalizing non-contributory cash transfers from the State and has examined the relevance and viability of the basic income proposal.²⁰ Likewise, the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development proposes “advanc[ing] in consolidating the guarantee of a basic level of income for all, prioritizing those living in poverty and extreme poverty” (ECLAC, 2020c, p. 30), including the evaluation of “the desirability and feasibility of gradually and progressively incorporating a universal transfer for children and a citizen’s basic income” (ECLAC, 2020c, p. 30), along with ensuring that social protection system entitlements endorse a child-sensitive perspective. More recently, in relation to the debates that have opened up in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic and to the need to strengthen the welfare state, ECLAC (2020d, p. 14) has proposed “mov[ing] towards a universal basic income that could be implemented gradually over a period suited to each country’s situation”.

²⁰ Universal basic income can be understood as a universal, regular and unconditional payment from the State to its citizens, which can use different approaches and mechanisms. For further information, see ECLAC (2017 and 2018a).

Figure 7 | Latin America (18 countries): estimated additional annual cost of a universal cash transfer equivalent to one extreme poverty line and one poverty line, population aged 0–4 years and 0–17 years^a
(Percentage of GDP)

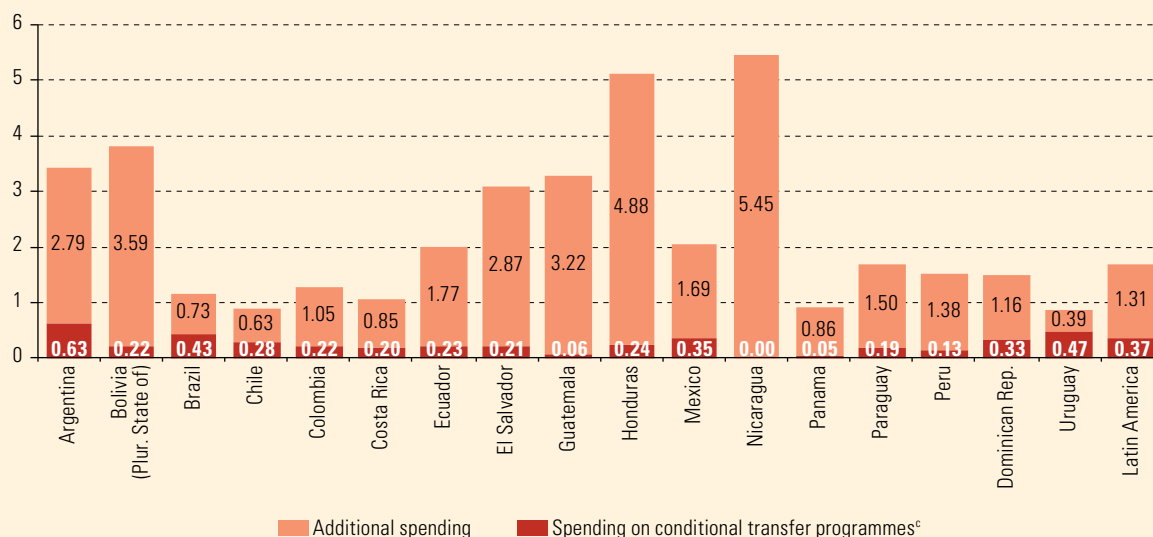


Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG); Non-contributory Social Protection Programmes Database in Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://dds.cepal.org/bpsnc/cct>; United Nations, World Population Prospects 2019 [online database] <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/>.

^a Estimates based on a 9.1% decline in GDP and a population of 230.9 million living in poverty in 2020. The countries covered are Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay. To estimate the additional cost, the population estimates and projections of World Population Prospects 2019 and adjustments for household survey coverage were used. The administrative costs needed to make the transfers have not been included.

^b Spending on conditional cash transfer programmes in 16 Latin American countries in 2018 as a percentage of that year's GDP at current prices in dollars, based on information from the ECLAC Non-contributory Social Protection Programmes Database in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Figure 8 | Latin America (18 countries): estimated additional annual cost of a universal cash transfer equivalent to one poverty line, population aged 0–4 years, by countries and regional average^{a, b}
(Percentage of GDP)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG); Non-contributory Social Protection Programmes Database in Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://dds.cepal.org/bpsnc/cct>; United Nations, World Population Prospects 2019 [online database] <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/>.

^a Weighted average of 18 countries. The countries covered are Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

^b Estimates based on a 9.1% decline in GDP and a population of 230.9 million living in poverty in 2020. The administrative costs needed to make the transfers have not been included. To estimate the additional cost, the population estimates and projections of World Population Prospects 2019 and adjustments for household survey coverage were used.

^c Spending on conditional cash transfer programmes in 2018 as a percentage of that year's GDP at current prices in dollars, based on information from the ECLAC Non-contributory Social Protection Programmes Database in Latin America and the Caribbean. The average for Latin America represents the regional aggregate for 16 countries.

- For its part, UNICEF has highlighted the importance of pursuing the universalization of social protection for children and adolescents, emphasizing that one mechanism that can contribute to achieving that goal, under certain conditions, is a universal child grant (ILO/UNICEF, 2019; ODI/UNICEF, 2020), consisting of a universal or quasi-universal cash transfer for all children and adolescents, paid on a regular basis and with no conditions attached. Cash transfers to households with children deviate from this scheme when they include conditions and targeting elements other than age and legal residence or citizenship or when they are paid on a one-off or occasional basis. Such transfers are proposed as part of a package of benefits, which may include access to other social services, benefits in kind, tax deductions or subsidies, and which are intended to help parents with the cost of raising children and to ensure equal opportunities for development regardless of the conditions or circumstances of the household in which they are born. Therein lies the importance of their universal availability.
- In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, when the urgent need for a timely response led the region's governments to institute various emergency programmes, both ECLAC (2020d) and Rubio and others (2020) have highlighted the unprecedented extension of social protection coverage that emerged; they have also recommended, since the beginning of the pandemic, giving thought to making those transfers universal. Indeed, the pandemic has shown that social protection coverage is incomplete and needs to be expanded and adapted to emergencies using the existing registration mechanisms, which were generally designed for the poor but which are insufficient to cover the broad swaths of the population affected by the pandemic. In view of the weakness of the operational mechanisms that make it possible to provide quick and sufficient basic protection to the population affected by COVID-19 through the existing programmes, the universalization of these transfers is a pragmatic measure that responds to the State's imperative of meeting the basic needs of the population whose livelihoods have been affected by the short-term containment measures. However, now that the initial response has passed, Rubio and others (2020) recognize that this innovative, historic and unprecedented response constitutes an important step towards comprehensive, universal social protection systems and adapting them to emergencies, coexisting alongside the regular programmes that focus on different populations and that use different selection and targeting mechanisms. Universal systems stand at the centre of the debate on how to move on from the initial response —one in which existing transfer programmes coexist with temporary, broad-coverage emergency transfers— to a future scenario of reactivation that, without duplicating programmes, can provide the coverage required at a time of greater poverty and vulnerability and can ensure progress towards better social protection systems based on the achievements secured during the pandemic. This proposal would undoubtedly remain purely rhetorical in the absence of scenarios for modernizing regional social policy based on the identification of national fiscal spaces, either through the rationalization of existing spending or through measures to shore up fiscal revenues with a view to the solidarity-based funding of social protection.
- The adoption of universal transfers presents an opportunity —as well as a challenge— in terms of the necessary strengthening of the region's social information systems and social registries in order to attain the levels of coverage required. It also demands a significant fiscal effort. Although the paths countries can take are diverse and inevitably gradual, and although the time frames also may vary from each country to the next, progress towards a universal basic income (ECLAC, 2020c) that covers the entire population is crucial if the region's countries are to begin to overcome the dual logic that currently protects various populations of children and adolescents with entitlements of different kinds, quality and sufficiency. A universal, unconditional transfer for children also makes more sense at a time when there is a need to rethink the conditionalities placed on cash transfer programmes and their viability and functioning, with the main focus placed on ensuring the rights of children and adolescents.
- The strengthening of non-contributory transfers must not obscure the importance of continuing to pursue the prospect of comprehensive social protection, with its various components and functions, including mechanisms to guarantee access to basic services, care policies and decent work. This is of particular importance in ensuring the full exercise of the rights of children and adolescents and in addressing the inequalities that affect them. In that context, a policy agenda that includes various additional interventions can be identified.

- First, one key element is to continue strengthening the contributory component of social protection systems and, through them, to specifically protect families with children and adolescents, thereby bolstering their ability to respond to future crises. This implies further progress in establishing basic protection measures that are at present uncommon in the region, such as unemployment insurance and parental leave. In relation to the latter, the region should remain open to the possibility of introducing exclusive parental leave for fathers, to encourage men's participation in care tasks (IPC-IG/UNICEF, 2020).
- Second, in pursuit of universal and comprehensive social protection systems, it is essential to strengthen the synergies between a transfer policy and access to basic services, both those related to housing (water, sanitation, electricity, Internet) as well as social services (education, health, child protection and care services). In the current context, one urgent need is to call attention to gaps in access to key entitlements and to address those shortcomings. It should also be borne in mind that rapid increases in coverage pose quality challenges for services and, if not closely monitored, can ultimately produce stratified or even segregated services. The challenge of service quality requires addressing that stratification to correct the inequalities that currently cause gaps in access, coverage, quality and outcomes (Rossel, Filgueira and Rico, 2015), which have also had repercussions for the capacity to respond to the pandemic. Coordinated actions in health, education and food security will also need to be strengthened to address the potential impact of the crisis on child malnutrition. Accordingly, reference has been made to the importance of strengthening school feeding programmes to guarantee children and adolescents adequate nutrition during the health crisis (ECLAC/FAO, 2020), along with the introduction of an anti-hunger grant for the population living in extreme poverty (ECLAC/FAO, 2020; United Nations, 2020). ECLAC has estimated that such a grant, equivalent to 70% of one regional extreme poverty line, would cost 0.52% of the region's GDP (ECLAC, 2020a). In addition, care services and educational centres can play a key role in establishing interconnections with special protection mechanisms and mental health programmes, which are of central importance vis-à-vis the pandemic's potential impact on children and adolescents.
- Third, policies based on shared responsibility for care —through parental leave, care services and early child development services— must become a strategic objective to achieve equality in the region. Although many countries have made progress on this issue, even before the pandemic, the region still needs to strengthen its care systems and family support policies. For example, IPC-IG/UNICEF (2020) indicates that across the region, only five countries provide the 18 weeks of maternity leave proposed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) Maternity Protection Recommendation of 2000 (No. 191) to ensure a basic level of protection. Paternity leave, where it exists, does not exceed five days in most cases, and paid parental leave is rare. But it goes beyond that: in the region, informal workers and their families generally do not have access to the family support policies that today, during the COVID-19 crisis, represent an additional form of social protection. Those policies are also essential given the current crisis in care systems, when care tasks fall predominantly to women, deepening pre-existing gender inequalities and threatening to expel women from the labour market so they can shoulder the care burden.
- Fourth, while investment is needed at all stages of childhood and adolescence, the development of early childhood interventions must be a priority. Further progress is needed in strengthening interventions during pregnancy and the first months and years of life, as well as for policies to “welcome” newborns (Rossel, Filgueira and Rico, 2015).
- Fifth, it is now more necessary than ever to deploy policies that are sensitive to inequalities and differences, in pursuit of the universalization of rights (ECLAC, 2016). The commitment to improve lasting access to opportunities for families with children and adolescents must be renewed, with emphasis on the development of skills and access to policies in line with a welfare state. The priority placed on these sectors requires expanding investments aimed at improving opportunities for migrant families, indigenous people, Afrodescendants and persons with disabilities.

D. Final remarks

- The pandemic is having a profoundly negative impact on Latin American and Caribbean economies and societies. It can only be expected that children and adolescents —historically overrepresented in poverty and extreme poverty in the region— will be particularly affected by that process. This calls for the countries' urgent and priority attention to avoid another lost decade in the region and to ensure that well-being is placed at the heart of the new social contract that will be consolidated during the recovery period.
- The economic contraction expected for 2020 will be the worst in the region's recent history (ECLAC, 2020e). At this time of crisis and in view of the expected impact, progress must be made on broad-spectrum agreements to safeguard the comprehensive development of children and adolescents. Strengthening universal social protection systems that are sensitive to children's rights is a strategically important component on the agenda for a region that is committed to equality and the rights of children and adolescents. This requires the implementation of priority interventions to tackle the crisis, within which one priority will be to safeguard the incomes of households with children and adolescents, enabling their access to basic goods. In the medium and long term, establishing an income guarantee will continue to be a key element in their well-being, along with mechanisms to ensure their access to basic and social services of good quality and the expansion of the coverage of social security entitlements, addressing the various manifestations of inequality.
- These actions will require safeguarding investments in the social protection of children and adolescents and their families and working to strengthen them during the recovery period. Drawing on the lessons learned from past crises —particularly the crisis of the 1980s and the most recent crisis in 2008— will be a key element in avoiding a devastating social impact. The countercyclical measures adopted by the region's governments in response to the 2008 crisis, together with their development of labour market and social protection policies, enabled them to mitigate its impact on incomes and lay the foundations for rapid recovery. In addition, the most recent crisis was a key factor in generating institutional progress, with the establishment of new policies that were long overdue and that allowed the protection of previously unprotected sectors of the population while promoting employment and labour formalization (ILO/World Bank, 2013). In contrast, the debt crisis of the 1980s and the structural adjustments undertaken at that time led to significant increases in poverty levels, which had a severe impact on the well-being of children (Cornia, Jolly and Stewart, 1987), and it took the region 25 years to return to its pre-crisis poverty levels (ECLAC, 2020d).
- The consolidation of universal social protection systems that are sensitive to children's rights and include an income guarantee for children is an essential step forward for a region that cannot risk their well-being or expose them to further vicissitudes without relevant and timely responses. For this reason, safeguarding adequate levels of social spending is vital, in order to further strengthen investment in children and adolescents at this time of crisis and as we progress towards building welfare states.

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Table A1.1 Latin America and the Caribbean (30 countries): countries that have announced social protection measures for the population living in or vulnerable to poverty to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, by type of measure, as of 10 July 2020

	Cash transfers	Early disbursement of existing cash transfer programmes	Expansion of population coverage for existing cash transfer programmes	Increases in amounts allocated under existing cash transfer programmes	New cash transfers	Provision of food, medicine and hygiene products	Provision of food	Provision of medicine and hygiene products	Basic services
Antigua and Barbuda									
Argentina									
Bahamas									
Barbados									
Belize									
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)									
Brazil									
Chile									
Colombia									
Costa Rica									
Cuba									
Dominican Republic									
Ecuador									
El Salvador									
Grenada									
Guatemala									
Guyana									
Haiti									
Honduras									
Jamaica									
Mexico									
Panama									
Paraguay									
Peru									
Saint Kitts and Nevis									
Saint Lucia									
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines									
Trinidad and Tobago									
Uruguay									
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)									

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), based on official information from the countries. COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://www.cepal.org/en/topics/covid-19> and Observatory on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, “Desarrollo Social y COVID-19 en América Latina y el Caribe” [online] <https://dds.cepal.org/observatorio/socialcovid19/listamedidas.php>.

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