



## Reports monitoring covid-19 pandemic in countries and regions of the Global South

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### Increasing food insecurity in Latin America

In the last report, we conceptually described food insecurity and its consequences among which hunger predominates (BIOCOM-SC, 2020). According to the *World Food Programme (WFP)*, 821 million people in the world suffered from hunger before the pandemic. It was estimated that during 2020 this number could increase by 135 million due to different conflicts and current economic and environmental crises. However, due to covid-19 and its socio-economic consequences now it is estimated that this number could increase by 265 million people.

In Latin America, according to the *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)*, by 2019 9% of the population, 55 million people, suffered from extreme food insecurity, i.e. hunger (FAO, 2019). It is estimated that this number has increased considerably in certain countries of the region. In the case of the Latin American countries where the *WFP* works (Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and Peru), it estimates that the number of hungry people has quadrupled as a result of the pandemic, rising from 3.4 million to 14 million. Also, the *WFP* explains that of these countries the most worrying is Haiti where there are currently 700,000 people suffering from hunger and this number could increase to 1.6 million. It also expresses concern about Venezuelan migrants in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, as those suffering from hunger could increase from 540,000 to more than 1 million (WFPa, 2020).

The pandemic has socio-economic consequences that have led to an increase in severe food insecurity in the region. The paralysis in the country's economic activity and the fact that a large part of the population works in the informal economy have led to losses in employment and in the population's purchasing power. International transfers, on which so many families depend, have also fallen due to the loss of work of their migrant relatives as well as the paralysis of some money transfer systems.

The paralysis in the region's economy has had consequences both for the availability of food on the markets and for its affordability.

With regard to food availability, the *WFP*, on the basis of an online survey of 41,000 people in Latin American countries, reports that half of the interviewees expressed that the availability of food in markets has been considerably reduced, with the reduction being greater in rural areas than in cities (WFPb, 2020).

In addition, 80% of those interviewed said that there has been an increase in the price of food, making it difficult to afford. Also, 69% of the respondents have experienced a decrease in their income due to covid-19, with the decrease being greater for women than for men. Thus, seven

out of ten people express concern about not having enough food, especially women in rural areas (WFPb, 2020).

According to the Panamanian newspaper *La Prensa*, since the beginning of the pandemic there has been general food price inflation in the region, with Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Mexico being the countries where inflation has been highest. In the latter, the goods that have increased the most, 83% on average, are fruits, vegetables and fresh meat. In Colombia, the products that have increased most are onions, creole potatoes, black potatoes and eggs. However, products such as pears and apples have greatly decreased in value so that farmers in many cases have not even harvested them. Due to the closure of restaurants, bars and schools, their consumption has decreased and since supply is greater than demand, their sale price does not cover the costs of production and harvest. *FAO* estimates that 87% of producers in the country have been affected by losses in sales of their crops.

The increase in food prices is related, among others, to the difficulties that the food supply chain has suffered in many countries. Containment and border closure measures have limited the movement of workers, many of them immigrants from neighbouring countries, who have been unable to harvest. There have also been several episodes of delays and interruptions in food transport within and between countries.

Different measures have been taken in order to address this decline in the availability of products and the purchasing power of food. The Government of Panama has decided to promote the livestock sector and the production of cereals such as rice, beans, maize, tubers and vegetables with interest-free loans. The Mexican government has committed to providing food to 20 million Mexicans, despite the fact that by the end of May, according to the newspaper *La Jornada*, it had reached 3.5 million people. In addition, the president of the country's *National Agricultural Council (CNA)* denounced that the Mexican government, due to the economic crisis caused by the virus, has cut by 27.5% the budgets for agricultural development, making it even more difficult for this sector to survive as well as reducing its productive capacity.

The government of Chile, the second country in the world with the most cases of covid-19 per capita, had also committed to distribute food to its most vulnerable population. However, food is not reaching the households causing discontent among a population already disappointed by its government's poor health management. This has led to several protests with barricades and bonfires where civilians and police have clashed.

Chile is not the only country in the region where violence has increased in recent months. The president of the *ANC* in Mexico warns that assaults on machinery and fertilizer in agricultural fields are becoming more frequent. Also, assaults on food during the distribution chain and in some cases in stores are starting to occur.

The socio-economic consequences of the pandemic have caused and will cause an increase in food insecurity in the region, therefore it is necessary for governments to support both the country's agricultural systems and the most vulnerable families.

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*The research group BIOCOS-SC from the Polytechnic University of Catalonia is in contact with different research groups and governmental offices in order to jointly predict the evolution of the pandemic covid-19. Moreover, we follow up local media in 35 African countries and 9 Latino American countries and complemented it with interviews to field experts.*

*<https://biocomsc.upc.edu/en/covid-19>*