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After COVID-19: How Have Social Outcomes Evolved in Latin America Five Years On?

By

Ivonne Acevedo and Miguel Székely

Centro de Estudios Educativos y Sociales
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Ivonne Acevedo and Miguel Székely¹

Centro de Estudios Educativos y Sociales (CEES)

Abstract: This paper provides an ex-post analysis of the medium-term social legacy of COVID-19 in Latin America by benchmarking post-2019 social outcomes against pre-pandemic baselines. We construct harmonized, comparable series for poverty, inequality, labor markets, and education, and complement them with selected health indicators from published sources, classifying trajectories as persistent scarring, transitory disruption with recovery, no deviation, or post-pandemic acceleration. The data show that poverty and inequality declined relative to 2019 in most countries, yet labor-force detachment and job quality weaknesses persist. School attendance recovered for primary and post primary age groups, although learning losses remain. Health outcomes show resilience in infant mortality but setbacks in maternal mortality and immunization coverage. Cross-country evidence is used to classify three recovery regimes: (i) comparative improvement (El Salvador, Chile, Guatemala, Mexico); (ii) partial adjustment (Peru, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia); and (iii) underperformance relative to pre-pandemic baselines and regional benchmarks (Honduras, Paraguay, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Panama, Ecuador). Country divergence appears driven less by policy type than by implementation differences and pre-existing structural conditions.

Keywords: Poverty, inequality, labor market, education, health.

JEL Classification: I32, D60, E24, I21, I10

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic represented an unprecedented, multi-dimensional shock to social and economic outcomes around the world. Unlike typical cyclical downturns, the crisis combined abrupt declines in economic activity with large-scale mobility restrictions and prolonged disruptions to labor markets, schooling, and care systems, among others. In Latin America and other developing regions, it impacted in a context of pre-existing structural vulnerabilities such as high labor informality, limited access to social insurance, unequal educational opportunities, and persistent gender gaps in labor markets (ECLAC, 2020; World Bank 2020; OECD, 2020; IMF, 2020). Early assessments from the United Nations system emphasized that the pandemic unfolded in a context of weak social protection, fragmented health systems, and high inequality, creating conditions for a severe and highly unequal social impact across countries and population groups (United Nations, 2020).

During 2020 and 2021, a rapidly expanding body of policy-oriented studies produced projections regarding the expected social impacts of the pandemic. On poverty and social structure, microsimulation exercises based on household survey microdata and macroeconomic scenarios consistently anticipated sharp reversals in previous gains, with large numbers of individuals expected to fall into poverty or vulnerability because of employment and labor income losses (Busso et al., 2020; CEPAL, 2021). For Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), several studies projected increases of up to 44 million additional people living in poverty under plausible scenarios, alongside a substantial contraction of the consolidated middle class and an expansion of economically vulnerable groups (Acevedo et al., 2020, Busso et al., 2020; Lustig et al., 2020). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) assessments further highlighted the intergenerational dimension of the shock, estimating that the economic fallout could push up to 86 million additional children in the region into household poverty (UNICEF, 2020).

Parallel analyses underscored the crisis's distributional nature. Early evidence suggested that the pandemic would disproportionately affect lower-income households, informal workers, and individuals with lower educational attainment, thereby increasing income inequality and inequality of opportunity (Clavijo et al., 2021; CEPAL, 2021). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) regional diagnostics emphasized that, in a region already characterized by high inequality, the pandemic risked reinforcing a structural trap of low

growth and persistent inequality, increasing the likelihood that short-term shocks would translate into longer-term social setbacks (UNDP, 2021). Concerns were also raised that asymmetric recovery paths could further widen disparities even after aggregate indicators began to improve (Clavijo et al., 2021). Acevedo et al. (2024) documented increases in inequality in most countries during the pandemic and linked these patterns to labor-market and income-distribution dynamics observed in household survey data.

Labor market projections during the initial stages of the pandemic warned of historically large employment losses and severe contractions in labor income. The International Labour Organization (ILO) placed the LAC region among the regions most affected globally in terms of hours worked and labor income, emphasizing that labor-market deterioration would be shaped by pre-existing slow growth and incomplete labor-market transitions (ILO, 2020). ILO subsequent regional reporting documented the depth of labor-market dislocation and the challenges of restoring employment and job quality during the recovery phase (ILO, 2021). Given the region's high levels of informality, several studies emphasized that conventional unemployment indicators would understate the true magnitude of labor-market distress, as many informal workers transitioned directly into inactivity, with important implications for poverty dynamics and the interpretation of post-pandemic labor indicators (Acevedo et al., 2021; Leyva & Urrutia, 2022; Maurizio et al., 2023). In particular, Acevedo et al. 2021 showed that pandemic labor-market adjustment operated largely through exits into inactivity, masking underlying welfare losses and complicating the interpretation of post-pandemic labor statistics.

In education, global and regional studies projected severe learning losses and increased dropout risks operating through two main channels: prolonged school closures and household income shocks (Azevedo et al., 2021; Busso & Messina, 2020). UNICEF documented that the LAC region was disproportionately represented among countries with the longest full school closures worldwide, highlighting prolonged disruption as a key mechanism for potential scarring (UNICEF, 2022). UNDP recent assessments reported partial recovery in school attendance by late 2021, although still below prepandemic levels and characterized by uneven re-engagement across socioeconomic groups (UNDP, 2022). More recently, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) synthesis emphasized that without targeted recovery policies, pandemic-era disruptions could leave lasting effects on learning and human capital accumulation in the region (UNESCO, 2024).

In the health domain, early assessments similarly warned that the pandemic could generate both immediate and potentially lasting setbacks in population health, particularly in a region characterized by fragmented health systems and unequal access to effective primary care.

Beyond direct COVID-19 mortality, analyses emphasized the risk of substantial indirect health effects arising from disruptions to essential services, including maternal, newborn, and child health care, routine immunization, and the management of chronic conditions (WHO, 2020; United Nations, 2020). For LAC, these risks translated into concerns about increases in maternal and child mortality, declines in life expectancy driven by excess mortality, and the potential resurgence of vaccine-preventable diseases, such as measles, as routine services and immunization campaigns were interrupted during 2020–2021 (PAHO 2021; WHO and UNICEF 2021). As in other social domains, these effects were expected to be unevenly distributed across population groups, reinforcing broader concerns that pandemic-related shocks could translate into persistent and unequal social scars.

A growing strand of literature focused on heterogeneous impacts across population groups. Gender-focused analyses warned that the pandemic could trigger a “she-cession,” as containment measures disproportionately affected service sectors with high female employment shares while simultaneously increasing unpaid care burdens due to school closures (Alon et al., 2020; Albanesi and Kim, 2021; Bluedorn et al., 2021, Filippo et al. 2021). For Latin America, harmonized household-survey evidence showed that women—particularly younger and less educated women—experienced larger employment losses during the acute phase of the crisis and greater cumulative income losses over time, even where aggregate gender gaps did not permanently widen (Acevedo et al., 2024). Youth were also identified as a high-risk group, facing simultaneous disruptions to education and early labor-market attachment, with potential long-term consequences for earnings trajectories and social mobility (ILO, 2020; Khamis et al., 2021).

Taken together, this literature converged on a central concern: that the COVID-19 pandemic could leave lasting social scars in Latin America and the Caribbean, defined as persistent deviations from prepandemic trends in poverty, inequality, educational attainment and learning, labor-force participation, employment, informality, earnings, health levels and gender gaps (CEPAL, 2021; IMF, 2021; United Nations, 2020). At the same time, a consistent finding across studies was that outcomes were not mechanically determined. Emergency policy responses—particularly cash transfers, labor-market support measures, and education mitigation strategies—played a critical role in cushioning short-term losses and shaping recovery trajectories, even under tight fiscal constraints (Busso et al., 2020; Lustig et al., 2020; ILO, 2021; Acevedo et al., 2020).

Five years after the pandemic began, a key question is: what has really happened? Specifically, do we observe: (i) persistent negative or scarring effects; (ii) temporary disruptions followed by a return to pre-COVID trends; (iii) no detectable impact relative to

previous trajectories; or (iv) an acceleration of progress in the post-pandemic period due to new opportunities? Addressing these questions requires systematically benchmarking post-2021 outcomes against counterfactual pre-pandemic trends using comparable data across countries.

This paper processes nationally representative household and labor force surveys for 16 Latin American countries, covering from 2015 to the most recent year available between 2021 and 2025, depending on the country, to produce harmonized indicators that allow systematic updates and comparisons across a broad set of social outcomes. These include poverty, inequality, labor-market indicators (participation, unemployment, informality, and wages), education, and gender gaps. For health, we perform a similar exercise using country-comparable indicators from accredited published sources.

Overall, our analysis provides a region-wide descriptive comparative perspective, highlighting both common patterns and cross-country heterogeneity in recovery paths and offering evidence on whether and where COVID-19 has left enduring social scars in the region. This approach enables a systematic classification of outcomes into persistent negative effects (“scarring”), temporary disruptions followed by recovery, lack of detectable impact, or post-pandemic acceleration relative to pre-COVID dynamics, while maintaining comparability across countries and indicators.

The paper is organized into six sections. Section 2 focuses on the evolution of poverty and inequality. Section 3 analyzes labor market conditions and indicators. Section 4 examines educational outcomes, while Section 5 provides a brief overview of health indicators. Section 6 compares individual country’s performance with regional trends. Section 7 concludes.

2. Poverty and Inequality

In the initial stages of the COVID-19 crisis, a central concern for Latin America was that the sharp contraction in labor income, combined with limited fiscal space and high employment informality, would translate into a substantial and persistent increase in poverty and inequality. Simulation exercises conducted during 2020 consistently projected large short-term increases in poverty in the absence of mitigation measures, alongside potential reversals in the region’s gradual pre-pandemic progress in income distribution (Acevedo et al., 2020; ECLAC, 2020; Clavijo et al., 2021). These concerns were closely linked to expectations about labor market disruptions and school closures, which were anticipated to disproportionately affect lower-income households and to generate medium-term distributional scars even after economic activity resumed. The evidence presented below

allows an ex-post assessment of these predictions by comparing pre-COVID trends with post-pandemic outcomes across countries and population groups. For this Section, we use poverty data from the LAC Equity Lab from the World Bank to facilitate comparisons across countries.² We examine changes in poverty defined as the population with incomes below \$8.30 per day (2021 PPP), changes in vulnerable populations (living on \$8.30–\$17 per day, 2021 PPP) and the middle class (living on more than \$17 per day, 2021 PPP). Table 2A in the Annex presents the data for poverty indicators.

Before the pandemic, poverty dynamics in the region were already heterogeneous. Between 2015 and 2019, eleven countries in the sample reduced poverty rates, although the magnitude of these reductions was generally modest, with an average reduction of 2.7 percentage points across Latin America. At the same time, other countries experienced rising poverty, with particularly large increases in Argentina and Brazil (Figure 1). This pre-existing divergence is analytically important, as it implies that countries entered the pandemic with different levels of vulnerability and momentum. In contexts where poverty had been declining prior to 2020, even a return to pre-pandemic levels may conceal a meaningful deviation from the counterfactual trajectory that would have prevailed in the absence of the shock.

Contrary to the most pessimistic early projections, the post-pandemic period shows that most countries have reduced poverty relative to their pre-COVID levels. By the latest available data, ten countries exhibit lower poverty rates than in 2019, with Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Honduras, Paraguay, and the Dominican Republic recording particularly large declines (Figure 1). At the regional level, Latin America experienced an average reduction in poverty of 5.7 percentage points relative to 2019, a pattern broadly consistent with CEPAL's assessment that poverty levels in the region fell below their pre-pandemic benchmark by 2022–2023 (CEPAL, 2023). This aggregate improvement stands in contrast to early simulations that anticipated increases of 2.8 to 7 percentage points in poverty during 2020 in the absence of policy responses, and highlights the role of large-scale social protection measures, income support, and the subsequent recovery of labor earnings.

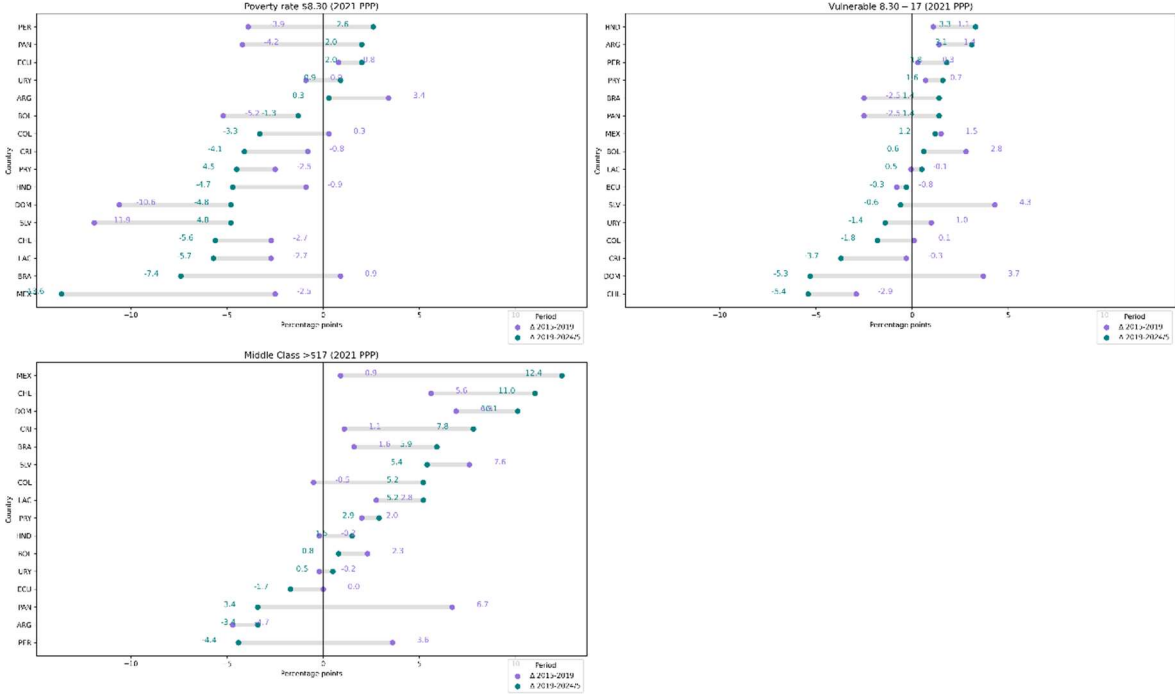
However, this regional recovery remains incomplete and uneven. Five countries have not yet returned to their pre-pandemic poverty levels, with Ecuador, Panama, and Peru registering

² We computed monetary poverty rates using international poverty lines that consider only reported labor and non-labor household income. To have a more comprehensive source of poverty data and to facilitate comparisons across countries, we used external harmonized data from the LAC Equity Lab from SEDLAC and The World Bank, which includes, among other concepts, labor income, capital income, rentals, monetary and nonmonetary internal transfers, imputed rent, and other non-classifiable non-labor income.

the largest increases in the share of the population living below the \$8.30 per day (2021 PPP) poverty line. These cases illustrate that the post-COVID decline in poverty is not universal and that national trajectories depend critically on the pace of labor market recovery, inflation dynamics, and the durability of emergency social programs. In this sense, the observed outcomes align with scenarios discussed during the pandemic in which temporary mitigation could offset immediate income losses, but structural weaknesses would reassert themselves once extraordinary support was withdrawn.

Movements between poverty, vulnerability, and the middle class further illuminate the nature of post-pandemic adjustment. Prior to COVID-19, the region experienced a slight decline in the share of the vulnerable population, alongside an expansion of the middle class. After the pandemic, the vulnerable population slightly increased on average, while the middle class expanded by more than five percentage points relative to 2019. This pattern suggests that, in several countries, post-pandemic income recovery has been sufficient not only to reduce poverty but also to facilitate upward mobility into more secure income brackets.

Figure 1. Change in poverty rate, Latin America, 2015-2023, in percentage points



Note: For Chile and Panama, the last available data is 2022. For Bolivia, it is 2023. For the rest of the countries, it is 2024. For Guatemala, there is only one data point during the analysis period; thus, this country is excluded from the analysis. Argentina’s survey only covers urban areas.

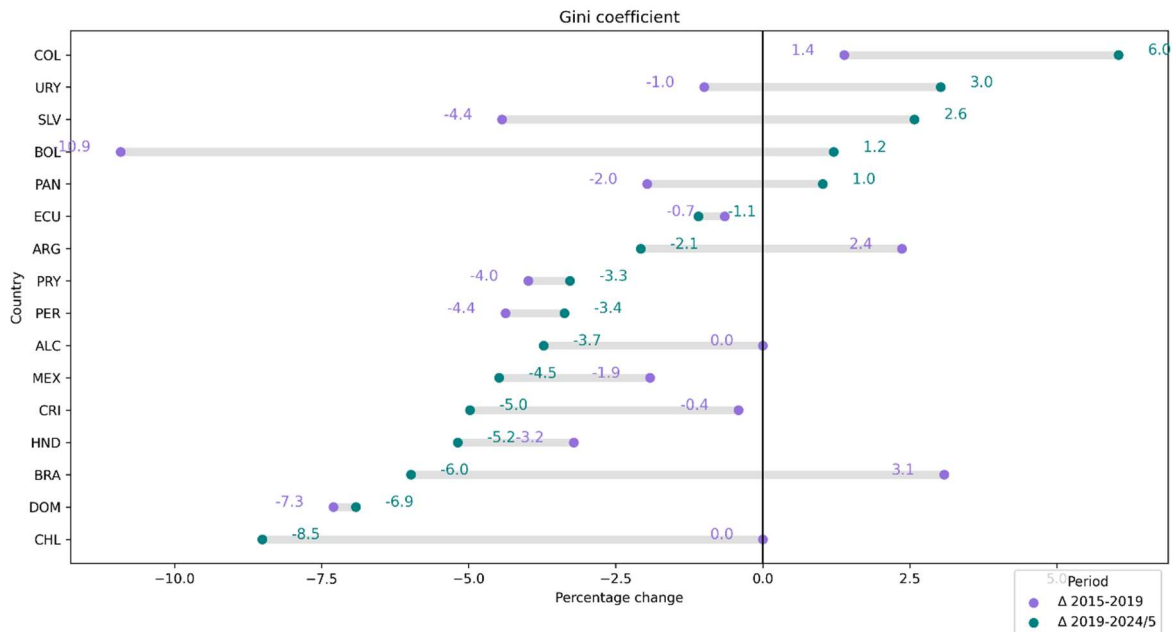
Source: Data from LAC Equity Lab, CEDLAS and the World Bank.

Turning to inequality (as characterized by the Gini coefficient), pre-pandemic trends again reveal substantial cross-country variation. Between 2015 and 2019, most countries experienced stable or declining inequality, while Brazil, Argentina, and Colombia recorded increases in the Gini index (Figure 2). Following the pandemic, inequality declined at the regional level, with the Gini coefficient falling by 3.7 percent relative to 2019 and only five countries displaying higher inequality than in the pre-pandemic year. This regional decline is consistent with evidence that emergency transfers, pension top-ups, and other redistributive policies disproportionately benefited lower-income households during the crisis, thereby compressing the income distribution in the short run. Table 3A in the Annex presents the full inequality time series.

At the same time, several studies cautioned early on that pandemic-related shocks could have longer-term implications for inequality through channels not immediately visible in contemporaneous income measures, including learning losses, scarring effects in labor market attachment, and differential asset accumulation (Narayan et al., 2022; CEPAL, 2022; Acevedo et al., 2024). The post-pandemic reduction in measured inequality should therefore be interpreted with caution. While current Gini trends suggest an improvement relative to 2019, they may coexist with latent distributional pressures that could re-emerge as temporary support measures fade and as cohort-specific effects materialize over time.

Inequality dynamics across countries also point to differentiated adjustment paths. In countries where overall inequality declined, reductions were often driven by income gains at the bottom of the distribution associated with transfers and minimum income floors, rather than by broad-based improvements across the distribution (Gasparini & Lustig, 2011; Lustig et al., 2013). In contrast, countries that experienced rising or stagnant inequality typically combined weaker income growth among poorer households with faster recovery at the top, often linked to capital income or high-skill occupations that are more resilient to mobility restrictions (Rodríguez-Castelán et al., 2016). This heterogeneity underscores that post-pandemic inequality trajectories are shaped by both policy choices and underlying economic structures (Lustig et al., 2020; CEPAL, 2023; Narayan et al., 2022; Acevedo et al., 2024).

Figure 2. Changes in the Gini coefficient, Latin America, 2015-2023, in percentage



Note: For Bolivia and Peru, the last available data point is 2023. For Chile and Panama, it is 2022, and for the Dominican Republic, it is 2021. For Costa Rica, Honduras, Paraguay, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Uruguay, the last data point is for 2024. For Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico, the last data point is 2025. Argentina’s survey only covers urban areas.

Source: Data from LAC Equity Lab, CEDLAS and the World Bank.

Taken together, the evidence suggests a rather a complex adjustment characterized by partial recovery and persistent disparities. Aggregate poverty and inequality indicators have, in many cases, improved relative to their pre-COVID levels, defying the most severe early predictions. Yet these improvements coexist with unresolved vulnerabilities and uneven recovery across countries. In line with the broader argument of this paper, the legacy of COVID-19 in poverty and inequality appears less as a permanent collapse in average welfare and more as a reconfiguration of risks and opportunities, with implications that will continue to interact with labor market dynamics and human capital accumulation in the years ahead.

3. Labor Markets

Labor markets in Latin America were expected to experience a steep and uneven deterioration during the COVID-19 shutdown, with sharp falls in labor force participation and employment, a temporary spike in unemployment, and—through the region’s typical adjustment mechanisms—a medium-term expansion of informality and a rise in inactivity among groups facing binding constraints to re-enter work. Early evidence and forecasts emphasized that containment measures would disproportionately affect women, youth, and workers in contact-intensive and informal activities, potentially translating into persistent

scars in participation and job quality even after mobility restrictions were lifted (Arboleda et al., 2020; ILO, 2020; Altamirano, Azuara, & González, 2020; Acevedo et al., 2021; David, Lambert, & Toscani, 2021). The post-pandemic data assembled for this paper allow an ex-post assessment of these expectations. Tables 4A to 8A in the Annex present the times series for the labor market outcomes for each country and year.

Across countries, pre-pandemic dynamics already pointed to heterogeneous labor market trajectories. Between 2015 and 2019, most countries in the sample registered rising labor force participation among people aged 15 and over, with particularly large increases in Paraguay and Bolivia (above 3 p.p.), while a smaller group displayed mild declines, including Costa Rica (−2.8 p.p.) and Colombia (−1.1 p.p.). This pre-COVID heterogeneity matters analytically because it conditions both exposure to the pandemic shock and the plausibility of a rapid reversion to trend. If participation had been rising steadily prior to 2020, a post-COVID return to the 2019 level would still represent a meaningful shortfall relative to the counterfactual path (Figure 3).

Only Guatemala (+6.3 p.p.), Chile (+2.8 p.p.), and Argentina (+1.6 p.p.) display increases relative to 2019, with Uruguay broadly returning to its pre-pandemic level. By contrast, many countries remain below their 2019 participation rates, and the largest declines are concentrated in Panama (−9.2 p.p.), Honduras (−7.5 p.p.), and Bolivia (−3.2 p.p.). These patterns suggest that the pandemic shock operated not only through job destruction, but also through entry and re-entry constraints—health risks, care burdens, discouraged-worker effects, and the slow normalization of local labor demand—that can keep individuals out of the labor force even after economic activity improves (Figure 3).

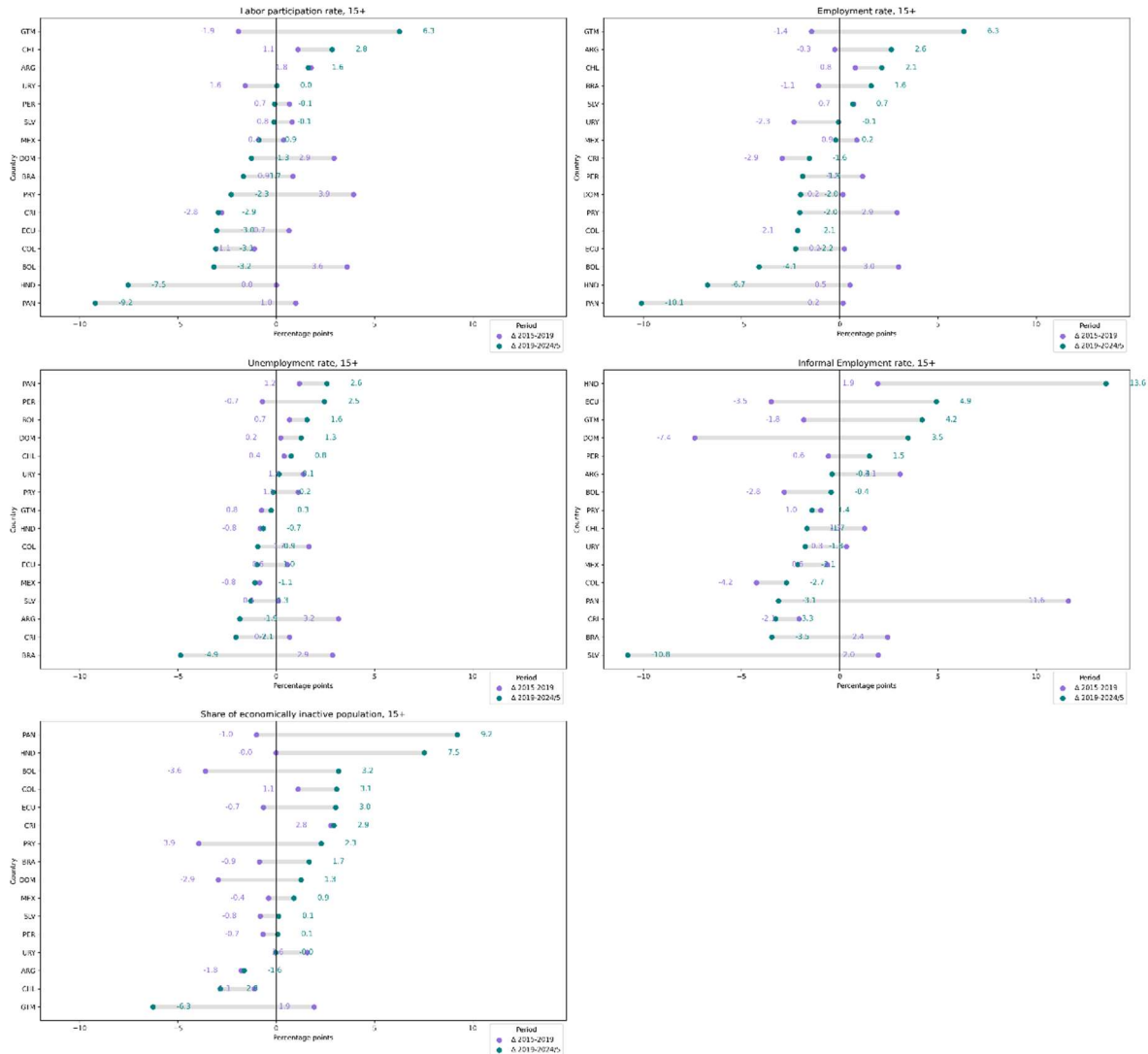
The employment rate shows a closely related, but not identical, picture. In the pre-pandemic period, six countries recorded declines in employment, with Costa Rica showing the largest drop (−2.9 p.p.), while the remaining countries trended upward. After the pandemic, however, only five countries increased employment relative to 2019, and Guatemala again stands out with the largest rise (+6.3 p.p.). For most countries, employment remains below its pre-COVID level, broadly consistent with the sharp employment contractions expected during lockdowns and with projections of sizable losses in formal employment (Arboleda et al., 2020; ILO, 2020; Altamirano et al., 2020). Importantly, the cross-country contrast between participation and employment suggests that, in several cases, weaker employment is compounded by reduced labor supply rather than being fully captured by unemployment rates.

Indeed, unemployment dynamics underscore a classic feature of labor adjustment in the region. Unemployment rates are often comparatively low in Latin America because downturns tend to be absorbed through the margin of informality and inactivity rather than open unemployment (David, Lambert, & Toscani, 2021). Consistent with this, in 2015–2019 unemployment rose in many countries, ranging from small increases to a sizable rise in Argentina (+3.2 p.p.), while a smaller set experienced modest declines. Post-pandemic changes are mixed: six countries show increases in unemployment (from +0.1 p.p. in Uruguay to +2.6 p.p. in Panama), while ten record declines, with the sharpest decrease in Brazil (−4.9 p.p.). This two-sided pattern indicates that the post-COVID phase did not produce a uniform, persistent unemployment crisis; instead, the distribution of labor market adjustment across unemployment, participation, and job quality differs markedly across national contexts.

Job quality is captured here through the share of informal employment, defined as employed workers without access to institutionalized social security. Before COVID-19, informality fell in nine countries—most notably in the Dominican Republic (−7.4 p.p.) and Colombia (−4.2 p.p.)—and increased elsewhere, with a large rise in Panama (+11.6 p.p.). During the pandemic, confinement measures led to a sharp decline in informal employment, reflecting the collapse of many informal activities and the selection of those able to continue working under restrictions. The post-pandemic picture shows that only five countries register informality above its 2019 level (Honduras +13.6 p.p., Guatemala +4.2 p.p., Ecuador +4.9 p.p., the Dominican Republic +3.5 p.p., and Peru +1.5 p.p.), while several others reduced informality, with El Salvador displaying the largest decline (−10.8 p.p.). This outcome runs counter to the direction of some early projections that anticipated a generalized rise in informality in the region (Acevedo et al., 2021), although it is compatible with the view that informality would rebound quickly toward pre-pandemic levels in specific settings (e.g., Mexico in Leyva & Urrutia, 2023).

A complementary lens comes from economic inactivity, which captures the working-age population who are neither working nor looking for a job. The pre-COVID period saw inactivity fall in most countries, with especially large declines in Paraguay and Bolivia (above 3 p.p.), and only Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Uruguay recording increases. After the pandemic, the pattern reverses: only Guatemala (−6.3 p.p.), Chile (−2.8 p.p.), and Argentina (−1.6 p.p.) reduced inactivity relative to 2019, while several countries show pronounced increases, notably Panama (+9.2 p.p.) and Honduras (+7.5 p.p.). Taken together with the participation, informality, and employment results, this indicates that a central channel of persistent post-COVID labor market weakness is the elevated share of the working-age population that remains outside the labor force.

Figure 3. Change in labor market outcomes for the population 15 years old and over, Latin America, 2015-2025, in percentage points



Note: For Bolivia and Peru, the last available data point is 2023. For Chile and Panama, it is 2022, and for the Dominican Republic, it is 2021. For Costa Rica, Honduras, Paraguay, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Uruguay, the last data point is for 2024. For Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico, the last data point is 2025. Argentina’s survey only covers urban areas.

Source: Author’s calculations based on household surveys. See Table 1A in the Annex for details.

These aggregate patterns conceal substantial heterogeneity across population groups, which is critical for assessing the distributional implications of the pandemic shock and for evaluating the plausibility of ‘K-shaped’ recoveries. Figure 4 summarizes the percentage changes in labor market indicators, by gender, education, age cohort, and area for the countries in the sample. The green color indicates that the absolute change in the indicator during the period under analysis is positive, while red indicates it is negative. The Tables in

Annex A in the supplementary files show the disaggregated data for these indicators. For the labor force participation shown in Figure 4, Guatemala is the only country with an increase during the post-pandemic period across all groups. This rise is particularly pronounced among women (+11.8 p.p.), implying that female participation is a key driver of the national recovery. At the other extreme, Panama records some of the largest declines in the sample, with female participation falling by -11.9 p.p. and rural participation by -12.4 p.p. Also, Uruguay, which converged to the prepandemic level on average, shows a reduction in the labor force participation of males, the 15 to 24 cohort, and those with primary education or less. The contrast between these two cases illustrates that the same regional shock can translate into very different gender and territorial trajectories, likely reflecting differences in sectoral composition, the reopening of contact-intensive services, the availability of care arrangements, and the strength of labor demand in urban versus rural areas.

Figure 4. Changes in labor force participation rate by gender, area, educational attainment and age cohort, in percentage points, Latin America, 2015-2025

Country	Δ 2015-2019									Δ 2019-2024/5															
	Female	Male	Rural	Urban	15 to 24	25 to 49	50 to 65	>65	Primary or less	Lower-secondary	Upper-secondary	Tertiary Education	Female	Male	Rural	Urban	15 to 24	25 to 49	50 to 65	>65	Primary or less	Lower-secondary	Upper-secondary	Tertiary Education	
ARG	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
BOL	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
BRA	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
CHL	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
COL	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
CRI	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
DOM	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
ECU	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
GTM	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
HND	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
MEX	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
PAN	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
PER	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
PRY	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
SLV	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
URY	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

Note: For Chile and Panama, it is 2022, and for the Dominican Republic, it is 2021. For Costa Rica, Honduras, Paraguay, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Uruguay, the last data point is for 2024. For Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico, the last data point is 2025. Argentina’s survey only covers urban areas. For El Salvador, for urban and rural areas, we used 2023 for since the 2024 survey does not include this variable.

Source: Author’s calculations based on household surveys. See Table 1A in the Annex for details.

Employment by subgroup shows a similarly uneven recovery. Prior to the pandemic, female employment increased in ten countries, but in the post-pandemic period, only seven countries registered increases for women, and nine remain below the 2019 level. Among men, only five countries show employment above the pre-pandemic baseline, and the largest declines among males occur in Panama (-9.6 p.p.) and Honduras (-9.3 p.p.). A particularly salient pattern is the post-pandemic employment shortfall among individuals with lower-secondary education or less, with exceptions concentrated in Argentina, Guatemala, and Uruguay. This

educational gradient is consistent with mechanisms emphasized during COVID-19—where low-skill workers were more exposed to job losses in face-to-face occupations and less able to transition to remote work—and suggests that part of the recovery has been uneven across the skill distribution (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Changes in employment rate by gender, area, educational attainment and age cohort, in percentage points, Latin America, 2015-2025

Country	Δ 2015-2019										Δ 2019-2024/5													
	Female	Male	Rural	Urban	15 to 24	25 to 49	50 to 65	>65	Primary or less	Lower-secondary	Upper-secondary	Tertiary Education	Female	Male	Rural	Urban	15 to 24	25 to 49	50 to 65	>65	Primary or less	Lower-secondary	Upper-secondary	Tertiary Education
ARG	Green	Red	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
BOL	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
BRA	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
CHL	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
COL	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
CRI	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
DOM	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
ECU	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
GTM	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
HND	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
MEX	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
PAN	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
PER	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
PRY	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
SLV	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
URY	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red

Note: For Chile and Panama, it is 2022, and for the Dominican Republic, it is 2021. For Costa Rica, Honduras, Paraguay, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Uruguay, the last data point is for 2024. For Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico, the last data point is 2025. Argentina’s survey only covers urban areas. For El Salvador, for urban and rural areas, we used 2023 for since the 2024 survey does not include this variable.

Source: Author’s calculations based on household surveys. See Table 1A in the Annex for details.

Unemployment by subgroup reinforces the role of youth and gender in post-pandemic labor market stress, while also highlighting country-specific exceptions. In the pre-COVID period, only Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Peru experienced declines in unemployment across all groups, while most countries saw increases. In the post-pandemic period, Bolivia, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Peru, and Uruguay show increases across most subgroups. In almost all countries with broadly rising unemployment, women and those aged 15–24 tend to face the largest increments, aligning with expectations that these groups would be hit hardest by the shock and would recover more slowly. Panama stands out as an exception: males, rural residents, and people aged 50 and above show the largest increases. This suggests that the composition of sectoral contractions and the structure of re-employment opportunities can overturn the ‘typical’ pandemic distributional pattern in specific settings (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Changes in unemployment rate by gender, area, educational attainment and age cohort, in percentage points, Latin America, 2015-2025

Country	Δ 2015-2019										Δ 2019-2024/5														
	Female	Male	Rural	Urban	15 to 24	25 to 49	50 to 65	>65	Primary or less	Lower-secondary	Upper-secondary	Tertiary Education	Female	Male	Rural	Urban	15 to 24	25 to 49	50 to 65	>65	Primary or less	Lower-secondary	Upper-secondary	Tertiary Education	
ARG	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
BOL	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
BRA	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
CHL	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
COL	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
CRI	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
DOM	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
ECU	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
GTM	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
HND	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
MEX	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
PAN	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
PER	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
PRY	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
SLV	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
URY	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

Note: For Chile and Panama, it is 2022, and for the Dominican Republic, it is 2021. For Costa Rica, Honduras, Paraguay, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Uruguay, the last data point is for 2024. For Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico, the last data point is 2025. Argentina’s survey only covers urban areas. For El Salvador, for urban and rural areas, we used 2023 for since the 2024 survey does not include this variable.

Source: Author’s calculations based on household surveys. See Table 1A in the Annex for details.

Informal employment by subgroups also signals significant distributional consequences. Female informality rises sharply in Honduras (+16.4 p.p.) and increases in Guatemala (+6.6 p.p.), the Dominican Republic (+4.1 p.p.), and Ecuador (+3.5 p.p.) in the post-pandemic period, while El Salvador and Panama reduce female informality by -11.4 p.p. and -8.9 p.p., respectively. Moreover, in almost all countries, informality increases more among those with lower-secondary education or less, reinforcing the interpretation that job quality adjustments have been concentrated among lower-skill workers (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Changes in the share of informal employment by gender, area, educational attainment and age cohort, in percentage points, Latin America, 2015-2025

Country	Δ 2015-2019										Δ 2019-2024/5														
	Female	Male	Rural	Urban	15 to 24	25 to 49	50 to 65	>65	Primary or less	Lower-secondary	Upper-secondary	Tertiary Education	Female	Male	Rural	Urban	15 to 24	25 to 49	50 to 65	>65	Primary or less	Lower-secondary	Upper-secondary	Tertiary Education	
ARG	■	■		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
BOL	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
BRA	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
CHL	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
COL	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
CRI	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
DOM	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
ECU	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
GTM	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
HND	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
MEX	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
PAN	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
PER	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
PRY	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
SLV	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
URY	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

Note: For Chile and Panama, it is 2022, and for the Dominican Republic, it is 2021. For Costa Rica, Honduras, Paraguay, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Uruguay, the last data point is for 2024. For Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico, the last data point is 2025. Argentina’s survey only covers urban areas. For El Salvador, for urban and rural areas, we used 2023 for since the 2024 survey does not include this variable.

Source: Author’s calculations based on household surveys. See Table 1A in the Annex for details.

Finally, subgroup patterns in inactivity point to the risk that post-COVID labor market normalization remains incomplete for many workers. Before the pandemic, only Colombia, Costa Rica, and Uruguay recorded increases in inactivity across all subgroups. After the pandemic, only Argentina and Guatemala exhibit reductions relative to 2019, suggesting that in most countries a larger share of working-age individuals remains outside the labor market across multiple demographic and socioeconomic categories. This reinforces the interpretation that, five years on, the pandemic’s labor market legacy may be less about a permanently higher unemployment or informality rate and more about altered participation and re-attachment dynamics (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Changes in the share of the economically inactive population by gender, area, educational attainment and age cohort in percentage points, Latin America, 2015-2025

Country	Δ 2015-2019										Δ 2019-2024/5													
	Female	Male	Rural	Urban	15 to 24	25 to 49	50 to 65	>65	Primary or less	Lower-secondary	Upper-secondary	Tertiary Education	Female	Male	Rural	Urban	15 to 24	25 to 49	50 to 65	>65	Primary or less	Lower-secondary	Upper-secondary	Tertiary Education
ARG	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
BOL	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
BRA	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
CHL	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
COL	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
CRI	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
DOM	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
ECU	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
GTM	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
HND	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
MEX	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
PAN	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
PER	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
PRY	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
SLV	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
URY	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

Note: For Chile and Panama, it is 2022, and for the Dominican Republic, it is 2021. For Costa Rica, Honduras, Paraguay, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Uruguay, the last data point is for 2024. For Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico, the last data point is 2025. Argentina’s survey only covers urban areas. For El Salvador, for urban and rural areas, we used 2023 for since the 2024 survey does not include this variable.

Source: Author’s calculations based on household surveys. See Table 1A in the Annex for details.

Overall, the evidence in this Section suggests a post-COVID labor market adjustment that is heterogeneous across countries and indicators, and unequal across population groups. The data do not support a single regional narrative of persistent, across-the-board labor market collapse; rather, they point to a combination of partial recoveries, country-specific reversals, and distributional ‘scars’ that remain visible in participation, inactivity, and job quality. This aligns with the broader conclusion of the paper: aggregate social outcomes may appear more resilient than initially feared, yet the medium-term imprint of COVID-19 is more clearly detected in the unequal pace and composition of recovery across groups, which is likely to shape inequality and poverty dynamics beyond the immediate post-pandemic period.

4. Education

During the pandemic, the education sector was expected to experience sizeable setbacks in both participation and learning due to: (i) prolonged school closures and the abrupt shift to remote learning, (ii) household income shocks that raised the opportunity cost of schooling—

especially among poorer households—and (iii) unequal access to connectivity, devices, and supportive learning environments. Together, these channels were expected to translate into higher dropout, delayed entry and re-entry into schooling, and a widening of inequalities by socioeconomic background, gender, and place of residence (ECLAC, 2020; Azevedo et al., 2021; Acevedo et al., 2021, 2023). At the same time, several studies cautioned that even if enrollment and attendance recovered relatively quickly, learning losses and reductions in accumulated human capital could persist for years (Neidhöfer, Lustig, & Tommasi, 2021; World Bank, 2021; Monroy, et al., 2022, Bracco et al., 2025).

This Section focuses on two sets of outcomes, using harmonized household survey microdata for 16 Latin American countries. First, we analyze school attendance rates (the share of each age cohort reporting current enrolment in a formal education institution) for five cohorts (4–5, 6–11, 12–14, 15–17, and 18–23). Second, we examine the share of youth who are simultaneously out of school and out of the labor force (economically inactive, i. e., not working and not actively seeking work) for the 15–24 and 15–29 cohorts. To connect these outcomes to the pandemic shock, we make comparisons similar to the previous sections to verify whether post-2019 trajectories are consistent with the pessimistic expectations formed during 2020–2021.

Two interpretive caveats are important. First, survey end years are not uniform across countries (the latest observation ranges from 2021 to 2025), so cross-country comparisons of ‘post-COVID’ changes should be interpreted as changes between 2019 and the latest available year for each country. Second, school attendance is a necessary but not sufficient measure of educational recovery: participation can rebound even when learning does not, particularly in contexts where students remain enrolled but experience persistent learning deficits. Table 9A in the Annex presents the times series for the school attendance rates.

Age patterns in Figure 9 summarize changes in school attendance rates by cohort for each country. Taken together, the results suggest a broadly transitory participation shock: many countries experienced declines around 2020–2021, but attendance rates subsequently stabilized or improved for most school-age cohorts. The main exception is early childhood (ages 4–5), where recovery is weaker and more heterogeneous.

School attendance at ages 4-5 was expanding rapidly in several countries between 2015 and 2019, with Costa Rica, Bolivia, and the Dominican Republic registering the largest increases (27, 18.7, and 11.2 p.p., respectively). Six countries still show positive changes relative to 2019, with Colombia and El Salvador exhibiting the largest increases in the sample, while the remaining countries record declines—most notably Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and

Chile. Overall, early-childhood attendance rates had not returned to pre-pandemic levels in nine countries, underscoring that education and care for ages 4–5-year-olds appear to be some of the slowest segments to normalize after the pandemic shock (Figure 9).

For children aged 6–11, the overall picture is comparatively stable. During 2015–2019, the countries in the sample did not show significant variance, with Guatemala, Peru, and Colombia recording some decreases. In the post-COVID period, four countries register increases exceeding 2 percentage points (Guatemala, Peru, Colombia, and Uruguay), while Honduras and Panama show declines of 2.2 and 1.9 percentage points. Most other countries display changes within ± 1 percentage point. Taken at face value, these patterns point to limited medium-run damage to primary school attendance in most countries, though specific cases—especially Honduras and Panama—stand out as warranting closer scrutiny of barriers to participation and re-entry.

Among adolescents aged 12–14, there is a broad post-COVID rebound, with attendance increases in nearly all countries, suggesting substantial re-entry and/or retention gains relative to 2019. The main exceptions are Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic, each of which shows a small decline compared to the pre-pandemic baseline. This pattern is consistent with the interpretation that the pandemic generated a short-lived participation shock for most countries, but that some systems entered the pandemic with weakening trends and did not fully revert to previous trajectories.

For ages 15–17, all countries increased attendance between 2015 and 2019 except Colombia (–0.3 p.p.) and Guatemala (–4.8 p.p.). Changes ranged from 0.3 percentage points in Mexico to 6.3 percentage points in Costa Rica. In the post-COVID period, only the Dominican Republic (2019–2021) exhibits a decline. All other countries record increases, with El Salvador showing a particularly large gain (10.1 p.p. between 2019 and 2024), followed by Uruguay, Colombia, Chile, and Paraguay (each increasing by more than 3 p.p.). These results are noteworthy given the expectations of higher dropout during the pandemic (CEPAL, 2020; Azevedo et al., 2021; Acevedo et al., 2020). They suggest that for upper secondary, the combination of re-opening, economic recovery, and—potentially—policy responses aimed at retention may have offset the initial risks, at least as captured by household survey attendance measures.

Heterogeneous but mostly positive post-COVID changes are observed also for the 18–23 cohort. Pre-COVID changes were more heterogeneous, with five countries experiencing reductions and Paraguay recording the largest decline (–5.5 p.p.). Bolivia and Uruguay registered the largest pre-COVID increases (6.8 p.p. and 5.7 p.p., respectively). In the post-

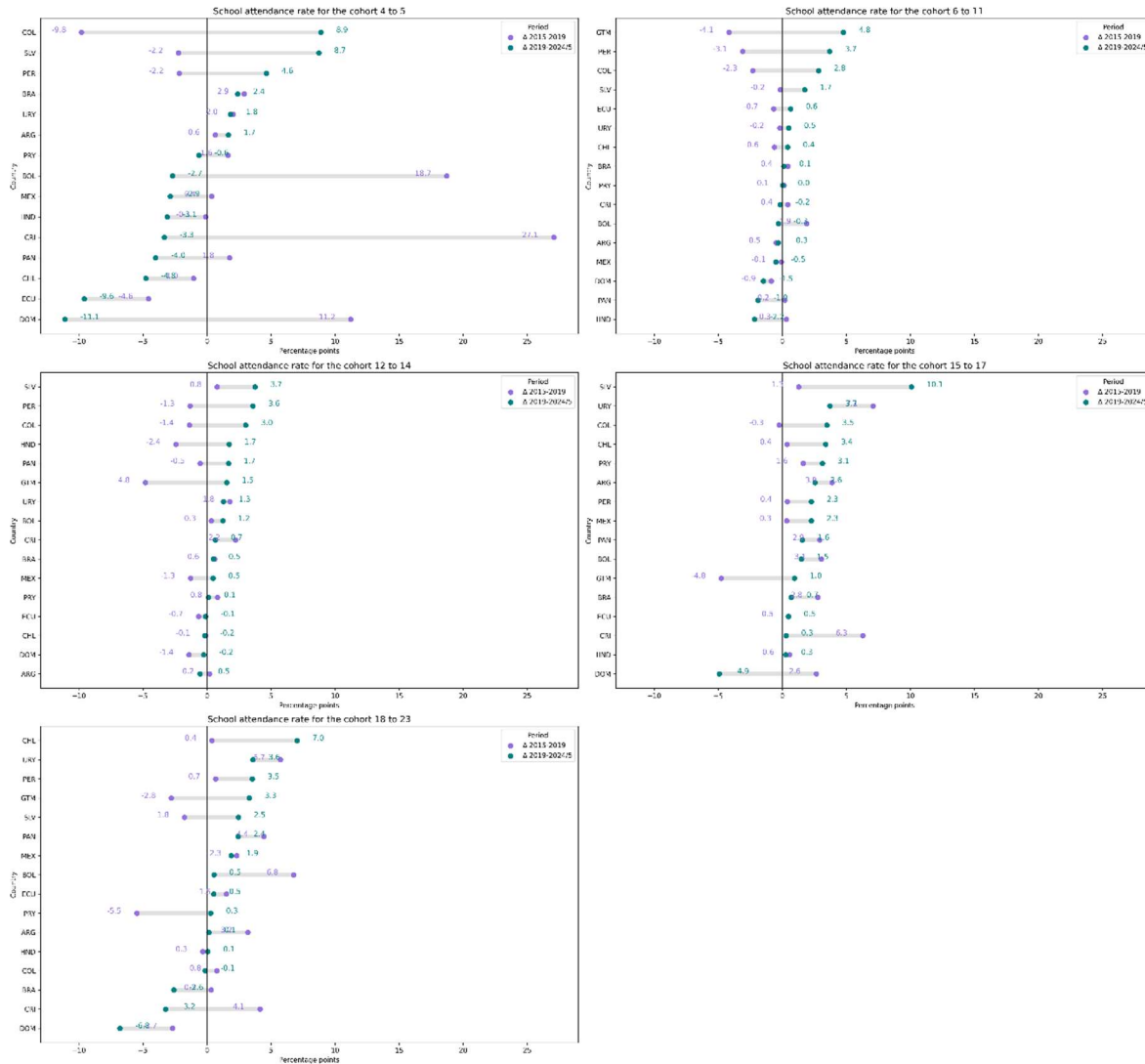
COVID period, 12 countries show increased attendance for this cohort, and Chile records the largest gain (7 p.p.).

This broad-based improvement may reflect delayed transitions during the crisis (e.g., postponement of labor-market entry) and eventual resumption of post-secondary study. Nonetheless, cross-country differences remain sizeable and merit additional analysis alongside labor-market conditions and higher-education financing constraints.

The relative resilience—and in several cases, improvement—of attendance rates after 2019 does not rule out substantial learning losses. Early projections for Latin America suggested that school closures could translate into human capital losses ranging roughly from 0.3 to 3.7 years of schooling, depending on assumptions about the duration of closures and the effectiveness of mitigation policies (Neidhöfer et al., 2021; Clavijo et al., 2021; Székely et al., 2024; Bracco et al., 2025).

Evidence from international assessments is broadly consistent with concerns about learning: PISA 2022 results show that, in mathematics, only the Dominican Republic, Peru, and Paraguay improved relative to 2018 among the countries in this sample; most others stagnated or declined (Arias Ortiz et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2024). In this sense, the post-COVID attendance rebound documented here should be interpreted as a necessary—but insufficient—condition for educational recovery, and it reinforces the need to distinguish between participation and learning.

Figure 9. Change in the school attendance rate by cohort, Latin America, 2015-2025, in percentage points



Note: The school attendance rate measures the total number of people in the age cohort who stated in the survey that they were enrolled in a formal education institution, divided by the total number of people in the age cohort. Guatemala is omitted in the 4 to 5 cohort Figure because the survey excludes people under 7 years old. For Bolivia and Peru, the last available data point is 2023. For Chile and Panama, it is 2022, and for the Dominican Republic, it is 2021. For Costa Rica, Honduras, Paraguay, El Salvador, and Uruguay, the last data point is for 2024. For Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico, the last data point is 2025. Argentina’s survey only covers urban areas.

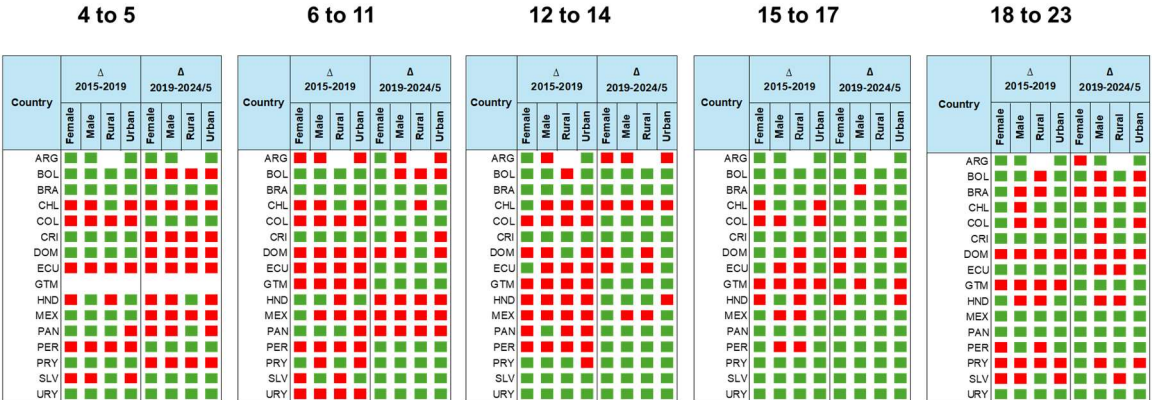
Source: Author’s calculations based on household surveys. See Table 1A in the Annex for details.

Figure 10 disaggregates changes in attendance rates by cohort, gender, and area of residence. The green color indicates that the absolute change in the attendance rate during the period under analysis is positive, while red indicates it is negative. In the post-COVID period, female attendance rates have increased on average in several countries, while male attendance rates rose for the 12- to 14-year-old and 15- to 17-year-old cohorts. Urban/Rural

differences are apparent for these same two cohorts, with higher attendance recovery rates in the latter.

The overall message is that post-COVID changes are not uniform across population subgroups, which is consistent with the view that the pandemic’s schooling and income shocks interacted with heterogeneous constraints—such as differential exposure to paid work, care responsibilities, and access to remote learning—implying that aggregate recovery can mask subgroup-specific scarring.

Figure 10. Changes in the school attendance rates by cohort, gender and area, in percentage points, Latin America, 2015-2025



Note: The school attendance rate measures the total number of people in the age cohort who stated in the survey that they were enrolled in a formal education institution, divided by the total number of people in the age cohort. Guatemala is omitted because the survey excludes people under 7 years old. For Bolivia and Peru, the last available data point is 2023. For Chile and Panama, it is 2022, and for the Dominican Republic, it is 2021. For Costa Rica, Honduras, Paraguay, El Salvador, and Uruguay, the last data point is for 2024. For Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico, the last data point is 2025. Argentina’s survey only covers urban areas. For El Salvador, for urban and rural areas, we used 2023 for since the 2024 survey does not include this variable.

Source: Author’s calculations based on household surveys. See Table 1A in the Annex for details.

Youth out of school and out of the labor force

A second education-related risk highlighted during the pandemic concerned youth transitions. With schools closed and labor demand collapsing, a rise in the share of young people neither studying nor accumulating labor-market experience was expected—particularly among groups facing higher barriers to re-entry (ILO, 2020; Acevedo et al., 2022). Table 10A in the Annex presents the times series for these indicators.

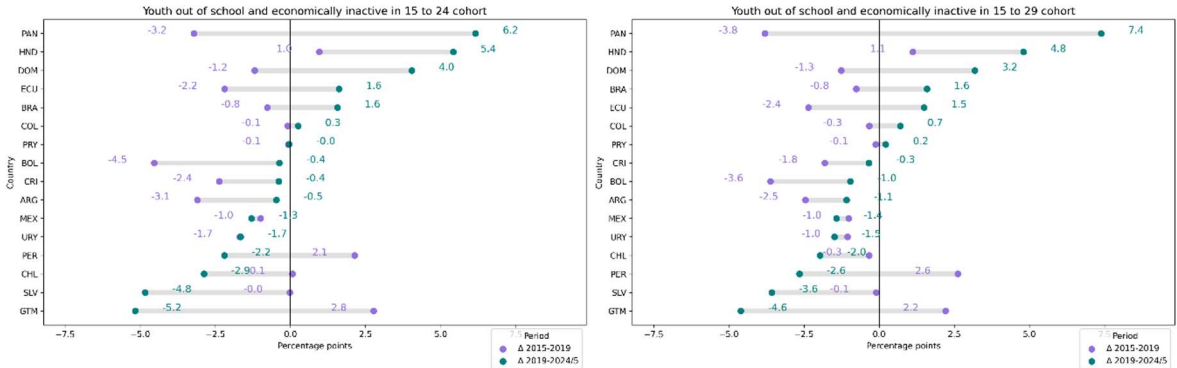
Figure 11 presents changes in the share of youth who are simultaneously out of school and economically inactive for ages 15–24 and 15–29, respectively. The data shows that, with a few exceptions, before the pandemic, most countries were making progress in reducing youth inactivity. Between 2015 and 2019, all countries in the sample reduced the share of 15–24-year-olds out of school and economically inactive, except Peru, Guatemala, and Honduras.

The sharpest declines were in Bolivia (−4.5 p.p.), Argentina (−3.1 p.p.), and Panama (−3.2 p.p.).

For the broader 15–29 cohort, Peru, Guatemala, and Honduras stand out as countries where this indicator increased prior to COVID-19, pointing to vulnerabilities in youth transitions that predate the pandemic. Post-COVID changes are mixed and, in several cases, consistent with concerns about persistent youth detachment. Among 15–24, six countries increased the share of youth out of school and inactive, ranging from 0.3 percentage points in Colombia to 6.2 percentage points in Panama, while Guatemala, El Salvador, and Chile show the sharpest declines. Similar patterns appear for ages 15–29, with Panama and Honduras registering the largest increases (7.4 and 4.8 p.p., respectively) and Guatemala and El Salvador showing the largest decreases.

These cross-country differences show that the pandemic’s legacy for youth transitions is not regionally uniform: some countries appear to have ‘caught up’ after the initial shock, while others exhibit increases consistent with a slower reattachment process.

Figure 11. Change in the share of the population who are out of school and economically inactive by cohort, Latin America, 2015-2025, in percentage points



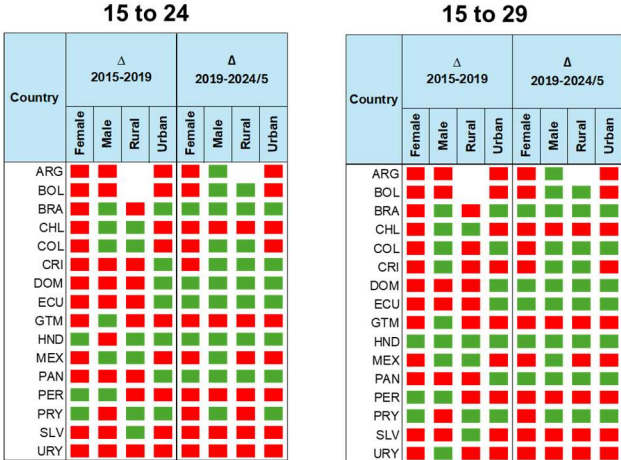
Note: The indicator is the share of the population in a given cohort who are not enrolled in school and are economically inactive, i.e., not working or unemployed and looking for work at the time of the survey. For Bolivia and Peru, the last available data point is 2023. For Chile and Panama, it is 2022, and for the Dominican Republic, it is 2021. For Costa Rica, Honduras, Paraguay, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Uruguay, the last data point is for 2024. For Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico, the last data point is 2025. Argentina’s survey only covers urban areas.

Source: Author’s calculations based on household surveys. See Table 1A in the Annex for details.

Figure 12 disaggregates the youth inactivity indicator by gender and area. Two findings stand out. First, females generally experienced negative changes (declines) in the share out of school and inactive in almost all countries, with only a small set of exceptions (Honduras, Peru, and Paraguay) in the pre-COVID period; and Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, and Panama in the post-COVID period. Second, despite these improvements, female levels remain substantially higher than male levels, indicating that convergence is

incomplete (See Table 10A in Annex A in the Supplementary Files for the levels of these indicators). Whether the post-COVID declines reflect durable improvements or a cyclical response to recovering labor markets is an open question that warrants further analysis using longer time series and complementary indicators (e.g., hours of unpaid care work, sectoral employment shifts, and educational attainment).

Figure 12. Changes in the share of the population who are out of school and economically inactive by cohort, gender and area, in percentage points, Latin America, 2015-2025



Note: The indicator is the share of the population in a given cohort who are not enrolled in school and are economically inactive, i.e., not working or unemployed and looking for work at the time of the survey. For Bolivia and Peru, the last available data point is 2023. For Chile and Panama, it is 2022, and for the Dominican Republic, it is 2021. For Costa Rica, Honduras, Paraguay, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Uruguay, the last data point is for 2024. For Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico, the last data point is 2025. Argentina’s survey only covers urban areas. For El Salvador, for urban and rural areas, we used 2023 for since the 2024 survey does not include this variable.

Source: Author’s calculations based on household surveys. See Table 1A in the Annex for details.

Taken together, the evidence presented in this Section suggests that the educational shock triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America was both deeper and more uneven than initially anticipated, and more heterogeneous in its medium-term trajectories. While early projections during the pandemic emphasized the risk of large and persistent losses in enrollment, learning, and progression—particularly among socio-economically disadvantaged groups—the post-pandemic data indicate a more complex adjustment process. In several countries, headline indicators such as enrollment rates and school attendance have recovered toward pre-COVID levels, consistent with the rapid normalization predicted in some scenarios. However, this apparent recovery masks enduring distributional scars, especially among poorer households, rural populations, and students who were at critical transition points in the education cycle during school closures.

From a policy perspective, the findings underscore the need to move beyond a narrow focus on reenrollment and to address the longer-term consequences of learning disruptions and

delayed educational trajectories, which are likely to interact with labor market outcomes and social mobility in the coming decade.

5. Health

Unlike the previous sections, which rely on harmonized microdata and original computations, this section on health does not introduce new empirical indicators constructed by the authors. Instead, it draws on published indicators, summarized in Figure 13, which maintain country comparability. While this implies a more limited contribution, the inclusion of health outcomes is essential to complete the social panorama of interest, given the significant role that population health played in shaping both the immediate and medium-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America.

During 2019–2021, early policy-oriented and academic assessments consistently warned that health impacts could be among the most immediate and potentially enduring consequences of the pandemic in LAC. These concerns reflected the region’s high baseline inequality, fragmented health systems, and unequal access to effective primary care, which were expected to amplify both direct COVID-19 mortality and indirect mortality and morbidity associated with disruptions in essential health services (WHO, 2020; Clavijo et al., 2021; ECLAC, 2020). As emphasized across the broader social literature, large labor-income shocks, increased care burdens, and mobility restrictions were expected to weaken households’ ability—particularly among poorer households and women—to sustain timely care-seeking and adherence to preventive and chronic care.

A central expectation concerned maternal health and survival. As health systems reallocated resources to address surging COVID-19 caseloads, analysts anticipated significant disruptions to routine reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health services. Simulation and review studies warned that even moderate declines in coverage of key interventions—such as antenatal care, skilled birth attendance, and emergency obstetric services—could translate into sizable increases in maternal and under-five mortality in low- and middle-income countries (Robertson et al., 2020; Chmielewska et al., 2021). Regional assessments for LAC further highlighted anticipated constraints on access to sexual and reproductive health services and risks of stock-outs of essential commodities during lockdowns (UNFPA, 2020).

Observed post-pandemic trends reveal a more nuanced picture. Consistent with pre-COVID trajectories, maternal mortality (top-right panel Figure 13) declined on average in LAC between 2015 and 2019, but this progress was partially reversed after the pandemic. Between

2019 and 2023, maternal mortality, expressed as deaths per 100,000 live births, increased by 5.1 points at the regional level.³ This pattern aligns with early concerns about service disruptions and underscores substantial cross-country heterogeneity in health-system resilience and recovery. As can be seen, the regional increase is driven by the pronounced rises in the Dominican Republic and Peru in the post-2019 period, while pre-pandemic progress was strongest in countries such as Peru, Paraguay, El Salvador, and Panama; Mexico is a notable exception in the pre-COVID period, recording a slight increase.

Expectations regarding child health similarly focused on indirect effects rather than direct COVID-19 mortality among children. The primary concern was that disruptions to preventive and curative services—immunization, growth monitoring, and management of childhood illnesses—would increase preventable infant and under-five deaths (WHO, 2020; WHO, 2021). In the post-pandemic data, infant mortality, which measure the probability that a newborn child will die before reaching age 1, and is expressed as deaths per 1,000 live births, (top-left panel Figure 13) continued to decline in most countries relative to 2019, with only Costa Rica and Chile recording modest increases. At the regional level, these trends suggest a degree of resilience in core child-survival outcomes, despite the scale of disruption anticipated during the acute phase of the pandemic. Figure 13 shows that, following widespread declines in infant mortality between 2015 and 2019 across all countries in the sample, post-2019 increases are limited to Costa Rica (the largest rise) and Chile, while the rest of the countries continued to improve relative to 2019.

However, other child-related indicators provide evidence more consistent with early warnings. The proportion of children under five who are moderately or severely wasted (middle-left panel) declined in most countries prior to COVID-19, but post-pandemic trends are mixed, with some countries—including Argentina (which notably already recorded small deteriorations prior to 2019) and Costa Rica—recording increases exceeding 2 percentage points, while most others continued to register reductions.⁴ These patterns are somewhat consistent with concerns that income shocks and disruptions to nutrition and health services could have heterogeneous and lagged effects on child well-being, even where mortality indicators remain relatively stable.

³ This indicator reflects the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, irrespective of the duration and site of the pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management, but not from accidental or incidental causes.

⁴ This indicator is defined as the percentage of children under five with a weight-for-height below -2 standard deviations from the WHO median.

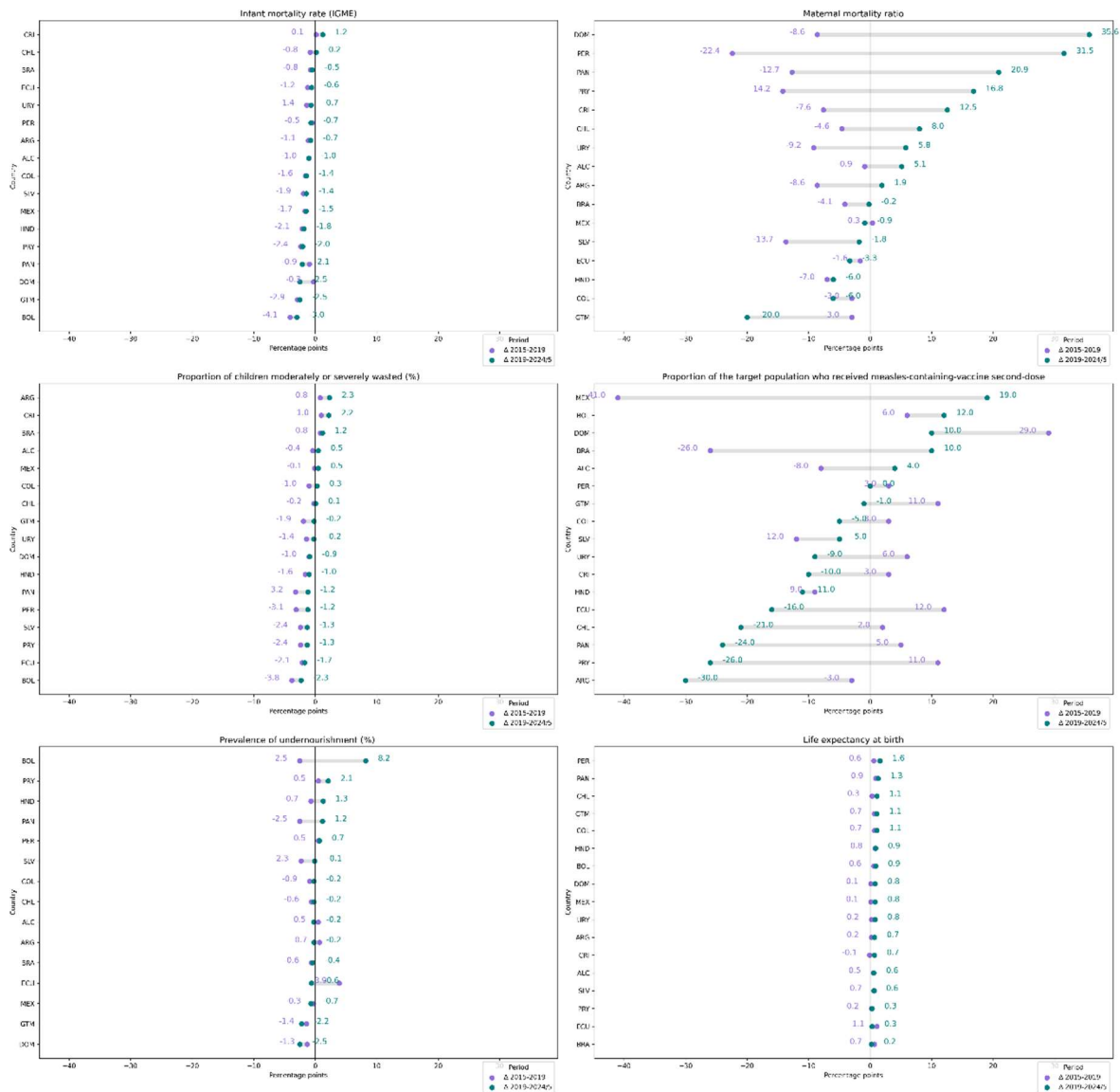
A further widely cited concern during 2020–2021 was the disruption of routine immunization and the associated risk of resurgence of vaccine-preventable diseases, particularly measles. Global agencies repeatedly warned that interruptions to routine vaccination and mass immunization campaigns could leave large cohorts of children unprotected (UNICEF/WHO/Gavi, 2020; WHO and UNICEF, 2021). The post-pandemic evidence strongly supports these concerns: for most countries in the region, coverage of the measles-containing vaccine second dose declined sharply after 2019, with reductions reaching as high as 30 percentage points in Argentina (middle-right panel in Figure 14).⁵ Only a small number of countries show obvious signs of recovery in this indicator (Mexico, Bolivia, Brazil, and the Dominican Republic), reinforcing the plausibility of heightened outbreak risks.

Finally, expectations regarding broader mortality dynamics emphasized that exceptionally high excess mortality during 2020–2021 could translate into declines in life expectancy at birth.⁶ Early analyses highlighted that several LAC countries experienced mortality well above historical norms, with implications for longevity trends (Lima et al., 2021; PAHO, 2021). Post-pandemic data indicate that, at the regional level, life expectancy has remained relatively stable and even increased slightly between 2019 and 2024 (bottom right panel in Figure 14). This apparent stabilization suggests partial demographic recovery, although it may also mask underlying heterogeneity and delayed effects not fully captured by aggregate measures. The region’s average life expectancy increased modestly in the post-2019 period, even as the pandemic years implied severe mortality shocks in specific countries.

⁵ The indicator measures the proportion of the target population who received the measles-containing vaccine second dose.

⁶ This indicator is measured in years and represents the mean length of life of individuals from a hypothetical cohort of births, whose members have been subject to the mortality rates of the period under study since birth.

Figure 13. Changes in health indicators, Latin America, 2015-2023



Note: For the Infant mortality rate (IGME), the data covers 2015 to 2023. For the maternal mortality rate, for Brazil, the period is 2015 to 2022; for Peru, it is 2015 to 2021; for Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, and El Salvador, it is 2015 to 2024; for the rest of the countries, the data is available for 2015 to 2023. The proportion of children who are moderately or severely wasted; the data are for 2015-2024. For the proportion of the target population who received the measles-containing vaccine second-dose indicator, for Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, and Honduras, the available period is 2018-2023; for Guatemala, it is 2016 to 2023; for the rest of the countries, it is 2015 to 2023. For the prevalence of undernourishment, the data for Brazil is from 2020 to 2022; for Paraguay, it is from 2016-2023; for the rest of the countries, it is from 2015 to 2023. For the life expectancy at birth (number of years), the data is from 2015 to 2024.

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

Taken together, the comparison between expectations formed during the pandemic and observed post-COVID outcomes points to a health impact that is neither uniformly catastrophic nor negligible. Some of the most severe projected effects, particularly large increases in infant mortality, did not materialize at the regional level, while other anticipated

risks, such as setbacks in maternal mortality and immunization coverage, are clearly reflected in the data. As in other social domains examined in this paper, health outcomes exhibit substantial cross-country variation and uneven recovery paths, underscoring the importance of institutional capacity and policy responses in shaping resilience. Complementary evidence on food-related health risks is also consistent with heterogeneous adjustment: Figure 14 shows that regional undernourishment rose slightly before 2019 and declined modestly after 2019, but with notable post-2019 increases in countries such as Bolivia, Paraguay, Honduras, and Panama.

6. Country performance in comparative perspective

This section synthesizes country-level trajectories using the same benchmarking framework applied in the previous thematic analysis. Table 1 classifies countries into three groups based on deviations from 2019 to the latest available data during the post-pandemic period and the simple regional average of the observed changes across all countries during the post-Covid period. Improvements (marked in green) correspond to changes that exceed the regional benchmark; neutral outcomes (in yellow) denote either a return to pre-pandemic levels or marginal deviations (change between ± 1 to the average change) around the regional average; deteriorations (in red) reflect outcomes that remain below both the pre-pandemic baseline and the regional reference. All indicators are weighted equally, providing a transparent metric of relative performance and allowing countries to be grouped into three recovery regimes: (i) recovery with sectoral caveats, (ii) partial or uneven adjustment, and (iii) persistent underperformance.

Annex B presents a detailed description of each country's performance.

Group 1: Recovery with Sectoral Caveats

(El Salvador, Chile, Guatemala, Mexico)

The first group comprises countries registering the highest number of improvements relative to both their 2019 baseline and the regional benchmark. In these cases, poverty declined, and the middle class expanded, often accompanied by reductions in inequality. Labor market indicators generally returned to pre-pandemic levels or improved relative to regional trends, although recovery was not uniform in quality. Guatemala, for example, recorded strong gains in participation and employment alongside rising informality, suggesting that job creation occurred disproportionately in lower-productivity segments.

Educational attendance rebounded across most cohorts, and youth inactivity indicators improved. Yet, consistent with findings in Section 3, attendance normalization has not translated into full learning recovery. PISA 2022 reveals stagnation or decline in performance in Chile and Mexico, indicating that human capital accumulation remains below its pre-pandemic trajectory.

Health outcomes present the clearest limitations. Persistent setbacks in measles vaccination coverage and maternal mortality underscore that normalization in income and labor indicators can coexist with fragility in essential service delivery. These cases therefore illustrate that post-pandemic gains in headline socioeconomic indicators do not imply complete restoration of pre-COVID development paths.

Group 2: Intermediate Recovery and Uneven Adjustment

(Peru, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia)

The second group reflects a mixed recovery regime characterized by substantial improvements alongside domain-specific vulnerabilities. Poverty declined in most countries in this group, though Argentina and Peru experienced a contraction of the middle class. Inequality fell in Peru, Argentina, and Brazil, but increased in Colombia and Uruguay, demonstrating that poverty reduction and distributional compression have not moved uniformly across contexts.

Labor market dynamics are similarly heterogeneous. Participation and employment recovery have been incomplete in several cases, notably Peru and Colombia, while Brazil shows comparatively stronger normalization. Informality declined in most, though not all countries. These patterns reinforce earlier findings that medium-term labor adjustment has been driven less by sustained unemployment crises than by differential participation dynamics and shifts in job composition.

In education, attendance largely returned to or exceeded pre-pandemic levels. However, learning outcomes remain uneven. Uruguay continues to rank among the region's strongest performers in the PISA test but still shows subject-specific declines relative to 2018; Peru exhibits modest gains in reading and science alongside a statistically significant deterioration in mathematics. The evidence confirms that educational scarring operates primarily through quality rather than enrollment.

Health indicators remain a source of vulnerability. Increases in maternal mortality in Peru and declines in immunization coverage in several countries highlight persistent service

disruptions. Group 2, therefore, embodies partial reversion combined with lingering structural weaknesses across key social dimensions.

Group 3: Persistent Underperformance and Incomplete Reversion

(Honduras, Paraguay, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Panama, Ecuador)

The third group includes countries with the fewest improvements relative to regional benchmarks and the pre-pandemic baseline. Recovery in these cases is either incomplete or uneven across multiple domains. Panama and Ecuador experienced increases in poverty and contraction of the middle class, while others show mixed distributional dynamics.

Labor market normalization is weakest in this group. Participation and employment frequently remain below 2019 levels, and several countries exhibit elevated unemployment or rising informality. Persistent labor force detachment, particularly among youth and women in certain contexts, suggests more durable adjustment costs.

Educational recovery is also fragile. Early childhood participation remains below pre-pandemic levels in many cases, and youth disconnection indicators remain elevated in Honduras and Panama. Although some countries, such as Paraguay, show modest improvements in selected learning measures, overall performance remains constrained relative to regional trends.

Health indicators reinforce this pattern of underperformance. Measles vaccination coverage and maternal mortality display persistent setbacks across multiple countries in this group, aligning with early concerns about disruptions to routine health services. These trajectories indicate incomplete reversion and greater exposure to medium-term scarring.

Table 1. Changes in the period 2019-2023/5 for Latin America

Indicator	SLV	CHL	GTM	MEX	PER	ARG	BRA	URY	COL	HND	PRY	BOL	CRI	DOM	PAN	ECU	Simple average	
1. Poverty and inequality																		
Poverty rate \$8.30 (2021 PPP)	Amarillo																	-1.7
Vulnerable \$8.30-\$17 (2021 PPP)																		-0.3
Middle Class >\$17 (2021 PPP)																		3.4
Gini coefficient																		-2.1
2. Labor market outcomes																		
Labor participation rate, 15+																		-1.5
Employment rate, 15+																		-1.2
Unemployment rate, 15+																		-0.3
Informal Employment rate, 15+																		-0.2
% econ. inactive population, 15+																		1.5
3. Education																		
School attendance rate 4 to 5																		-0.9
School attendance rate 6 to 11																		0.5
School attendance rate 12-14																		1.2
School attendance rate 15-17																		2.0
School attendance rate 18-23																		0.8
% Out of sc. & inactive 15-24																		0.0
% Out of sc. & inactive 15-29																		0.1
% Out-school & out-work 18-23																		-0.7
% Out-school & out-work 18-20																		-0.4
% Out-school & out-work 21-23																		-1.0
4. Health																		
Infant mortality rate (IGME)																		-1.2
Maternal mortality ratio																		6.3
% mod/severely wasted																		-0.3
% received MCV second dose																		-6.7
Prevalence undernourishment																		0.5
Life expectancy at birth																		0.8

Source: Author's calculations based on household surveys. See Table 1A in the Annex for details.

Cross-Cutting Insights

Several cross-cutting patterns emerge from this comparative perspective. First, improvements in poverty and inequality are not systematically aligned with improvements in labor market quality, educational learning, or health resilience. Second, early childhood education participation and immunization coverage appear to be among the slowest indicators to normalize across the region. Third, labor force participation and inactivity—rather than unemployment alone—remain central to understanding medium-term adjustment.

A further cross-country insight concerns the policy responses adopted during the pandemic (Annex B in the supplementary files presents a case-by-case summary). Despite differences in fiscal space and institutional capacity, most countries seem to have implemented broadly similar packages centered on expanded transfers, temporary emergency assistance, employment-protection measures, support to small firms, utility subsidies, and telework provisions, with some extending health or pension coverage. The relative uniformity of instruments suggests that divergence in post-pandemic trajectories reflects less the type of policies adopted than differences in scale, targeting effectiveness, implementation capacity, and pre-existing structural conditions.

7. Conclusions

This paper examines how social outcomes in Latin America evolved in the five years following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, relative to the expectations articulated during 2020–2021 and to pre-pandemic trends. At the time of the shock, a broad academic and policy literature anticipated severe and potentially persistent setbacks across multiple social domains, driven by unprecedented disruptions to labor markets, education systems, health services, and household incomes. By systematically benchmarking post-pandemic outcomes against pre-COVID trajectories using comparable indicators, this study provides an ex-post assessment of whether those expectations materialized and to what degree of persistence.

The evidence across poverty and inequality, labor markets, education, and health points to a complex and heterogeneous legacy rather than a uniform or permanent reversal of social progress. In several dimensions, aggregate indicators recovered to or exceeded their pre-pandemic levels, contradicting the most pessimistic early projections. At the same time, the analysis consistently reveals that recovery has been uneven across indicators, countries, and population groups, and that important forms of scarring remain visible beneath improving averages.

In the poverty and inequality dimension, early simulations warned of large and lasting increases in deprivation in the absence of mitigation. While post-pandemic data show that poverty declined relative to 2019 in a majority of countries and at the regional level, this improvement masks substantial heterogeneity and uneven recovery across population groups. Similarly, inequality declined on average following the pandemic, probably reflecting the distributive effects of emergency transfers and income support. However, the structure of these gains—often driven by short-term income compression rather than sustained income growth—raises questions about their durability as temporary policy measures were scaled back.

Labor market outcomes display a parallel pattern. Employment, participation, and unemployment recovered more rapidly than initially feared, yet the recovery remains incomplete and uneven. Low-skill, informal, and female workers experienced slower or more fragile rebounds, and informality trends suggest that labor markets remain a key channel through which medium-term social risks persist. These findings are consistent with concerns raised during the pandemic that labor market disruptions could generate differentiated and lingering effects even after aggregate employment levels recovered.

In education, the contrast between expectations and observed outcomes is particularly instructive. Prolonged school closures were expected to produce large and persistent learning losses, with long-run implications for inequality and productivity. While enrollment and attendance indicators recovered relatively quickly in most countries, the analysis confirms heterogeneity across education levels and population groups, as well as unresolved concerns about learning quality that are not fully captured by quantity-based indicators. This reinforces the view that the full educational legacy of COVID-19 is likely to unfold gradually as affected cohorts transition into higher education and the labor market.

The health analysis complements these findings using externally produced indicators and reveals both resilience and vulnerability. Some of the most severe anticipated effects—such as large increases in infant mortality—did not materialize at the regional level. At the same time, setbacks in maternal mortality, immunization coverage, and service continuity confirm that the pandemic generated meaningful health-related scars that vary substantially across countries and indicators.

When analyzing individual country trajectories across social indicators, the main conclusion is that post-pandemic adjustment has consolidated into distinct national recovery regimes rather than converging toward a single regional path. A first group—El Salvador, Chile, Guatemala, and Mexico—exhibits comparatively improvements in poverty, inequality, and

attendance, though not uniformly in labor quality or in the restoration of health services. A second group—Peru, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Colombia—reflects partial and uneven adjustment, combining recovery in selected income and distributional indicators with persistent weaknesses in participation dynamics, learning outcomes, or specific health indicators. A third group—Honduras, Paraguay, Bolivia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Panama, and Ecuador—continues to display multi-dimensional underperformance relative to both pre-pandemic baselines and regional benchmarks. A general examination of the country groupings reveals no systematic association between the type of policy instruments adopted and subsequent placement within the three recovery regimes. The observed divergence could more directly reflect differences in the scale, duration, targeting effectiveness, and institutional capacity underpinning implementation, as well as in pre-existing structural conditions such as labor informality and fiscal space.

Taken together, three overarching conclusions emerge. First, after the pandemic, there are divergent trajectories across social outcomes. Second, aggregate improvements frequently conceal important heterogeneity across countries and population groups. Third, many of the mechanisms emphasized during the pandemic—labor market disruptions, care burdens, and service interruptions—remain central to understanding post-pandemic dynamics, even when headline indicators suggest a return to pre-COVID levels.

Ultimately, assessing the long-term social legacy of COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean requires ongoing empirical monitoring and deeper causal inquiry. The five-year horizon in this paper captures medium-term adjustment, but not the full maturation of cohort effects. Learning losses may become clearer as affected cohorts enter higher education and formal employment; labor-market scarring may interact with technological change and demographic shifts; and health disruptions, especially in preventive services, may cause delayed effects that are not captured by aggregate indicators. Future research using longer time series, administrative and longitudinal data, and distribution-sensitive measures will be able to provide stronger evidence for strengthening institutional resilience and preparedness in the light of possible upcoming shocks.

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A. Tables Annex

Table 1A. List of surveys

Countries	Source of Information
Argentina	Permanent Household Survey (Urban) (EPH by its acronym in Spanish) 2015-2025
Bolivia	Household Survey (EH by its acronym in Spanish) 2015-2023
Brazil	Continuous National Sample Survey (PNADC by its acronym in Spanish) 2015-2025
Chile	National Socioeconomic Characterization Survey (CASEN by its acronym in Spanish) 2015, 2017, 2020, 2022
Colombia	Large Integrated Household Survey (GEIH by its acronym in Spanish) 2015-2025
Costa Rica	National Household Survey (ENAHO by its acronym in Spanish) 2015-2024
Ecuador	National Employment Survey Unemployment and Underemployment (ENEMDU by its acronym in Spanish) 2015-2025
El Salvador	Household Multipurpose Household Survey (EHPM by its acronym in Spanish) 2015-2024
Guatemala	National Survey of Employment and Income (ENEI by its acronym in Spanish) 2015-2024
Honduras	Permanent Multipurpose Household Survey (EHPM by its acronym in Spanish) 2016-2024
Mexico	National Survey of Occupation and Employment (ENOE by its acronym in Spanish) 2015-2025
Panama	Permanent Household Survey (EHPM by its acronym in Spanish) 2015, 2017, 2019, 2022 Census 2023
Paraguay	Continuous Permanent Household Survey (EPCH by its acronym in Spanish) 2015-2024
Peru	National Household Survey (EHPM by its acronym in Spanish) 2015, 2016, 2018-2023
Dominican Republic	Continuing National Labor Force Survey (ENCFT by its acronym in Spanish) 2015, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021
Uruguay	Continuous Household Survey (ECH by its acronym in Spanish) 2015-2024
LAC Equity LAB	https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/lac-equity-lab1/poverty/head-count
CEPALSTAT	https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/index.html?lang=es

Supplementary files

A Tables Annex available at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1q37J-6ZBQfIEHhN7s1nxWJtCbnc4Q9d3/view?usp=sharing>

B Individual Country Trajectories Annex available at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/17eD69_ddS1lavos-QTGahpS_FCKa6_qu/view?usp=sharing



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