

Economy on a steady rise in Latin America and Caribbean region 'despite international turbulence' – UN report

Amid external uncertainty and volatility, the economies of Latin America and the Caribbean will grow by an average of 1.5 per cent this year, thanks to a rebound in private consumption and a slight increase in investment, according to a [United Nations flagship report](#) issued on Thursday.

“Our [region continues to grow](#), although at a slower pace than what was projected several months ago, despite international turbulence, said Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean ([ECLAC](#)) during a press conference in Mexico City.

While she noted that this steady growth is “positive,” she noted that “it demands that we redouble our efforts to prompt a reactivation, without resorting to excessive fiscal adjustments.

“Regional integration can play an important role here, and we must aim in that direction,” she added.

The report, which covers a total of 30 countries, highlights great heterogeneity among the various economies and sub-regions: South America is expected to grow by 1.2 per cent in 2018, while Central America will notch 3.4 per cent growth and the Caribbean, 1.7 per cent.

Regarding countries, the Dominican Republic and Panama will lead the region's growth, with increases in gross domestic product (GDP) of 5.4 per cent and 5.2 per cent respectively, followed by Paraguay, Bolivia, Antigua and Barbuda, Chile and Honduras, which range between 4.4 and 3.9 per cent.

The survey notes that this growth is occurring in the midst of a complex global scenario, including trade disputes between the United States, China and other nations; growing geopolitical risks; a decline in capital flows toward emerging markets in the last few months and a rise in sovereign risk levels; depreciations of local currencies against the US dollar; and a global economic expansion that is tending to lose momentum.

According to the findings, average inflation remains within expected values overall, the regional urban unemployment rate has stopped growing (forecast at 9.2 per cent), thanks to greater creation of salaried jobs. Measures aimed at fiscal consolidation in Latin America have brought about an expected reduction in the primary deficit, which is forecast to narrow from an average deficit of 0.8 per cent of GDP in 2017 to 0.5 per cent in 2018.

While the report shows that the region has increased its investment levels in the last two decades and closed the gap with other regions of the world, ECLAC warns that additional efforts are needed to promote the productive

linkages of this investment and thereby bolster economic growth.

As, in 2017, private investment levels (80.3 per cent) surpassed those of public investment (19.7 per cent), the head of ECLAC stressed that “it is necessary to have a strategic vision regarding public investment, since it plays an important role in boosting private investment... as well as in the provision of central public goods to drive growth”.

“The region has made significant efforts to increase investment flows, but we face the challenge of improving its sectoral composition to incentivize our economies’ productivity. There is still much to be done,” Ms. Bárcena insisted.

[Remembering slave trade offers chance to raise awareness, ‘oppose all forms of modern slavery’ – UNESCO](#)

On this 20th anniversary of the International Day for Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition, the United Nations is inviting the world to reflect on the legacy of slavery and remember to guard against racial prejudices, which continue to fuel everyday discrimination against people of African descent.

“[UNESCO](#) invites everyone, including public authorities, civil society, historians, researchers and ordinary citizens, to mobilize in order to raise awareness about this history that we share and to [oppose all forms of modern slavery](#),” Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization said in her message for the Day.

On the night of 22 August 1791, an uprising began in the western part of Saint-Domingue island, which, throughout the century, would greatly contribute to the abolition and dismantling of the transatlantic slave trade.

“The war that ensued culminated in 1804 in the independence of that part of the island, which took the name of Haiti, and led to the recognition of the equal rights of all its inhabitants,” the UNESCO chief continued, explaining the inspiration for the Day.

Each year UNESCO reminds the international community of the Day’s importance – which also pays tribute to those who worked hard to abolish slave trade and slavery throughout the world.

Ms. Azoulay pointed out that since 2001, trafficking and slavery have been recognized by the international community as crimes against humanity.

“Yet,” she added “these scourges resurface at regular intervals in different ways and in different places,” saying that new forms of slavery can be prevented by knowing the slave trade history.

The [Slave Route Project](#), launched by UNESCO in 1994, has made it possible to identify the ethical, cultural and socio-political issues of this painful history.

“By developing a multidisciplinary approach, which links historical, memorial, creative, educational and heritage dimensions, this project has contributed to enriching our knowledge of the slave trade and spreading a culture of peace,” Ms. Azoulay said.



ILO

Domestic workers participate in a demonstration for labour rights. (file)

Domestic workers' rights

Meanwhile, the UN [International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#) underscored that domestic workers are one of the groups most vulnerable to exploitation, violence, harassment and forced labour, saying that “many women end up being trapped in [abusive work](#) situations which in some cases may amount to modern forms of slavery.”

Sixty-seven million domestic workers who care for our homes and loved ones frequently suffer violence, harassment, exploitation and coercion – ranging from verbal abuse to sexual violence, and sometimes even death. Those who live -in-home are especially vulnerable.

“At the root of this situation is discrimination,” explains Philippe Marcadent, Chief of the ILO Branch related to Inclusive Labour Markets, Labour Relations and Working Conditions.

“Domestic workers are often not recognized as workers, and face

discrimination as women, often from poor and marginalized groups, such as migrants and indigenous peoples.”

For many, daily abuses like lack of rest and non-payment of wages can quickly turn into forced labour.

After a year of abuse, one domestic worker recounted to the police: “Every day, she would tell me that I’m crazy and stupid [...] Whenever they beat me up, I just cried in a corner.”

Today domestic workers are beginning to organize, and ILO is discussing a new legal instrument to combat violence and harassment in the world of work.

[‘Greater support needed’ for refugees and migrants from Venezuela – UN](#)

As hundreds of Venezuelans continue to pour into neighbouring countries due to social and political upheaval at home, the heads of the United Nations refugee and migration agencies [called](#) for greater international support to meet the most basic needs of the displaced.

As of June, there were about 2.3 million Venezuelans living abroad. Nine out of 10 have sought refuge in countries within Latin America, especially Ecuador, Peru, Colombia and Brazil. The trends are accelerating with a total of about 2,700 to 4,000 arrivals in those neighbouring countries daily.

According to the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#), close to half a million have fled to Ecuador in 2018 alone.

The [UN High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#), Filippo Grandi, and the Director General of the UN migration agency ([IOM](#)), William Lacy Swing, applauded neighbouring countries for hosting so many Venezuelan asylum-seekers in recent months and years, but expressed concern over recent developments, such as new passport and border entry requirements in Ecuador and Peru, or changes to the temporary stay permits for Venezuelans in Peru.

“We commend the efforts already made by receiving countries to provide Venezuelans with security, support and assistance,” Mr. Swing told the press in Geneva on Thursday. “We trust that these demonstrations of solidarity will continue in the future.”

Mr. Grandi explained that while they “recognize the growing challenges” associated with the large-scale arrival of migrants and refugees, “it remains critical that any new measures continue to allow those in need of international protection to access safety and seek asylum”.

The two UN agency chiefs stressed their concern for the most vulnerable, including adolescent boys and girls, women, people trying to reunite with their families, and unaccompanied and separated children who are unlikely to be able to meet documentation requirements and are therefore more at-risk of facing exploitation, trafficking and violence.

Various UN agencies and their partners are working to support national governments' response plans and address the needs of those arriving, in what has become one of the largest population movements in Latin American history.

"This current situation underlines the urgent need to increase international engagement and solidarity" to address "the most pressing humanitarian needs", and ensure that "safe transit is guaranteed and social and economic integration can be provided in line with larger development strategies," read the joint UNHCR/IOM statement.

The two agencies reminded that following the commitments of the 2016 [New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#), "timely and predictable support by the international community is needed for fairer sharing of responsibilities and to complement the efforts of host countries".

[UNICEF warns of 'lost generation' of Rohingya youth, one year after Myanmar exodus](#)

The refugee crisis in Bangladesh created by the mass exodus of people from Myanmar almost a year ago risks creating a "lost generation" of Rohingya children who lack the life skills they will need in future, the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) said on Thursday.

Hundreds of thousands of mainly Muslim Rohingya continue to live in cramped and rudimentary camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, after fleeing a military operation in Myanmar that was [subsequently](#) likened to "ethnic cleansing" by the UN's top human rights official, Zeid Ra'ad al Hussein.

According to UNICEF, the international community needs to do more to prevent some half a million youngsters "falling prey to despair and frustration".

One key need is better education facilities, which some older children say is almost more important than food, according to Simon Ingram, Senior Communication Advisor for UNICEF.

"Now they are starting to look forward, they're starting to wonder, 'What next?'" Mr. Ingram said, citing a new report. "They are starting to think,

you know, what sort of future that they really have, and this is where a new level of anxiety and fear starts to come in.”

Although huge advances have been made in the living conditions of those forced to flee Myanmar, including in disease outbreak prevention, improved water provision and stronger shelters, UNICEF warns that children in Cox’s Bazar face a bleak future.

“If we don’t make the investment in education now, we face the very real danger of seeing a lost generation of Rohingya children,” UNICEF Bangladesh Representative Edouard Beigbeder said in a statement.

“Children who lack the skills they need to deal with their current situation, and who will be incapable of contributing to their society whenever they are able to return to Myanmar.”

Inside Cox’s Bazar, some 1,200 education centres were operational by July this year for around 140,000 children – a significant achievement, given the level of demand.

But there is no agreed curriculum and few learning opportunities for all those above 14 years old, problems that UNICEF is intent on resolving, by providing a higher quality education that focuses on literacy, language and numeracy, as well as “essential life-skills”.

“It’s about an insurance against a loss of a generation of children to hopelessness and despair -something that we really must avoid at all costs,” Mr. Ingram said. “We really want to see everybody accepts that this is not a crisis that is going to go away anytime soon and that we have to plan in a more sustainable way for the future, whether that be in terms of providing water and sanitation or health care, or in need of education.”

According to the UN agency report, girls and teenagers are especially at risk of being excluded when it comes to educational opportunities in Cox’s Bazar.

It also calls on the Government of Myanmar to ensure that in Rakhine state – where more than half a million Rohingya remain children from all communities have equal access to quality education.

But verifying this is challenging, given that UNICEF’s access to the state is only partial, according to Mr. Ingram, who noted that Rohingya displaced by intercommunal violence in 2012 continue to live without hope in camps located in central Rakhine.

Under an official deal signed by the UN and the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh in June, it was agreed that efforts would be made to create appropriate conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Rohingya refugees to their former communities.

To date, no such returns have happened, Mr. Ingram told journalists at a press briefing in Geneva.

“I think everybody would hope that the returns of the Rohingya people to

Myanmar would happen sooner rather than later, as soon as possible indeed,” he said. “But the position of the UN and UNICEF have been absolutely clear, that that can only happen when circumstances are right.”

Combat against devastating effects of tobacco can only be won ‘if the UN stands united’ – UN health official

United Nations agencies must join forces at the policy level and refuse interference from tobacco companies in their programmes so the destructive impact of tobacco can be effectively addressed and lives can be saved, the head of the UN tobacco control treaty watchdog ([WHO FCTC Secretariat](#)) told *UN News* on Wednesday.

The WHO FCTC – [World Health Organization](#) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which is celebrating 15th adoption anniversary this year – is a global health treaty that advocates for the control of tobacco production, sale and use, as a way to reduce tobacco-related illnesses, deaths, environmental degradation and poverty across the world.

According to a [report](#) by WHO and the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)), it is estimated that up to one billion people could die from tobacco-related diseases this century. Currently, over seven million people die every year due to tobacco use.

In addition, tobacco costs the global economy over a trillion dollars annually in medical expenses and lost productivity. As for the environmental impacts –deforestation and soil degradation for tobacco cultures, as well as water and soil pollution from cigarette littering – they cannot be overstated.

The impact of tobacco production and use on the environment, in terms of deforestation, pollution and soil degradation cannot be overstated. *UN News/Y. Guerda*

“In 15 years, we have made a lot of progress, with tobacco-control measures in place in most of the world’s countries for example,” said [Dr. Vera Luiza da Costa e Silva](#), the Head of the WHO FCTC Secretariat. “But we are still facing a great deal of interference from the tobacco companies in government decision-making and even inside our own house, within UN agencies,” she regretted.

Article 5.3 of the [Convention](#) requires that parties to the treaty ensure that their public health policies are protected “from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry”. The article is based on the idea that there is a fundamental and irreconcilable conflict between the tobacco industry’s interests and public health interests.

As early as 2008, guidelines were developed for the effective implementation of Article 5.3 but the industry’s efforts remained successful too often.

“They are wolves masquerading as sheep,” said Dr. da Costa e Silva, referring to poverty-reduction programmes and other development projects that tobacco industry giants are funding, in partnership with several international inter-governmental organisations.

“The tide is turning however and, more and more, there is a reckoning that the mission of governments and UN agencies, and the interests of the tobacco industry are simply not compatible,” she noted.

Over the past two years, the European Union’s multi-billion-dollar deal with tobacco firms ended, and the UN Global Compact ([UNGC](#)) – an initiative to engage companies “to align strategies and operations with universal principles on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption” – decided to exclude from its partners companies that “derive revenue from the production and/or manufacturing of tobacco.”

Another recent milestone was the adoption in 2017 of a [resolution](#) by the Economic and Social Council ([ECOSOC](#)) under the auspices of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force ([UNIATF](#)) on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), a group of UN and other inter-governmental entities created four years ago to help governments tackle [NCDs](#) worldwide.

The text encourages members of the Task Force to prevent tobacco industry interference, recalling the WHO FCTC model policy, which states that the UN must ensure a “consistent and effective separation between its activities and those of the tobacco industry, to preserve its integrity and reputation” and that “engagement with the tobacco industry is contrary to the United Nations system’s objectives, fundamental principles and values”. Similar language was [adopted again](#) in 2018.

The ECOSOC chamber, UN Headquarters. UN Photo.

“The ECOSOC resolutions show major progress towards the UN-as-a-whole recognising that tobacco companies represent a public health problem and that, inherently, they cannot be part of the solution,” the head of the FCTC Secretariat said. “But the issue persists and some UN agencies seem to remain unable to secure alternative sources of funding for their development programmes,” she regretted.

According to the WHO FCTC Secretariat, to date, only the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)), the World Bank, WHO, the UNCG and the [UN Children’s Fund](#) ([UNICEF](#)) have policies in place to prevent interference from the industry.

The [International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#) is also currently reconsidering its terms of cooperation with these companies, especially from a child labour perspective, as the industry relies heavily on it for its production processes.

“We are working to get more entities, especially UN agencies, to take the necessary steps to align their policies on tobacco industry interference with the overall principles of the United Nations,” said Dr. da Costa e Silva.

“It’s very simple,” she concluded. “The war against the devastating effects of tobacco can only be won if the UN stands united and remains coherent with its own values”.

In a month, a [High-Level Meeting on NCDs](#) will take place as part of the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly in New York, to discuss trends and progress made on reducing risk factors for NCDs, including tobacco-related illnesses, and to recommend steps forward.