REGIONAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2025

OVERVIEW

UNDER PRESSURE

Recalibrating the Future of Development in Latin America and the Caribbean

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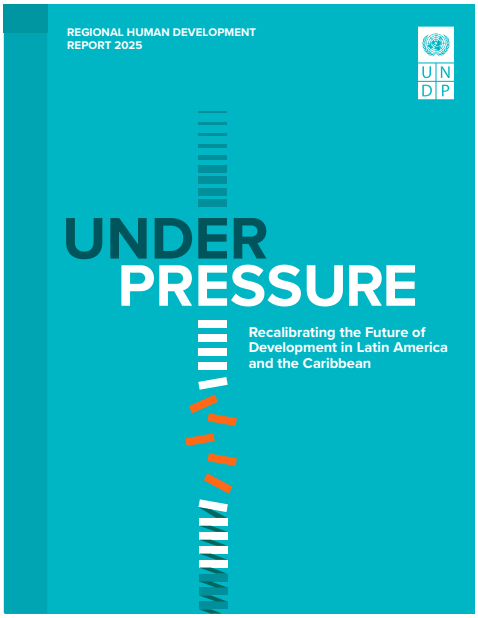

Regional Human Development Report for Latin America and the Caribbean 2025

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OVERVIEW

Under Pressure

Recalibrating the Future of Development in Latin America and the Caribbean

Regional Human Development Report for Latin America and the Caribbean 2025

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Foreword

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has seen remarkable development progress: the lowest poverty levels on record so far, a vibrant and engaged population, democratic systems that —while strained— have largely endured, and extraordinary cultural and biological diversity, demonstrating adaptability and signs of innovation.

Yet this development progress is under pressure.

After decades of sustained gains, human development in the region has slowed. The COVID-19 pandemic marked a critical turning point, disrupting the region's development trajectory and revealing the depth of its structural vulnerabilities. It exposed just how fragile the achievements of recent decades have been. The way human development has been built in LAC has not proved resilient in the face of shocks. In times of crisis, the scaffolding gives way.

Today, the region is navigating a landscape defined by uncertainty. Development is being tested by compounding pressures: rapidly evolving technologies, deepening social fragmentation, and an increasingly changing climate. These trends, taken together, stretch the limits of what existing development models can sustain.

Uncertainty is no longer the exception—it is the new normal. But while uncertainty brings risks, it is also embedded with opportunities. Learning to operate, and thrive, within uncertainty, is at the heart of this Report.

"Under Pressure: Recalibrating the Future of Development in Latin America and the Caribbean" takes stock of where the region stands and where it is headed. Elaborated through a process of extensive consultations, the Report reflects the voices of numerous stakeholders from the region. It also builds on the insights of recent global Human Development Reports—on inequality, the Anthropocene, uncertainty, polarization, and artificial intelligence—while grounding those themes in the realities of LAC. It complements the global analyses by offering not only diagnosis, but a shared vision for the future of development in the region.

And it leaves us with a clear message: more of the same will not be enough.

What the region needs is not just a course correction, but a new playbook. One that accepts complexity rather than resists it. One that recognizes that the instruments, institutions, and infrastructure that carried us this far may not carry us further. And one that places resilient human development—rooted in agency, inclusion, and the ability of people to shape their future—at the center of the regional agenda.

This is not a call to despair. It is a call to recalibrate. To shift from reactive to proactive. To release the pressure by equipping societies with tools to navigate uncertainty, by designing institutions that adapt to evolving contexts, and by investing in the capacity of communities to imagine and build better futures.

This Report is not only a reflection of today's challenges—it is a hopeful proposition: pressure can be a catalyst for action, and while human development continues to be our guiding post, how we achieve it needs to adapt with the times. In times of uncertainty, resilience is at the very core of human development in LAC.

In a year that marks the 60th anniversary of UNDP, this Report reaffirms our enduring commitment to human development in LAC. It reflects UNDP's ongoing efforts to remain at the forefront of public debate, policy innovation, and multilateral cooperation—offering bold ideas and pragmatic pathways in a time of global flux. And as always, placing human development, social justice, and the well-being of the planet at the centre.

Achim Steiner
Administrator
United Nations Development Programme

Foreword

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) holds a unique potential for sustainable development. It is home to vibrant and diverse cultures, extraordinary biodiversity, and abundant reserves of clean energy and strategic minerals. The region's young population and entrepreneurs are creating technology-driven solutions to address pressing social and environmental challenges. Though it faces significant obstacles, LAC continues to show a strong vocation to peace, democratic governance, and social innovation.

Despite this potential, the effects of global economic volatility, geopolitical tensions, and accelerating technological and social change converge in the region with deeply rooted structural vulnerabilities, elevated levels of uncertainty, and the exposure to more frequent, intense and interconnected shocks. These factors, compounded by governance challenges and insufficient institutional capacity to address emerging crises, are pushing down on the region's hard-earned development gains.

LAC's significant—but unequal—progress in terms of human development and poverty reduction, democratic consolidation, and economic growth achieved in the previous decades started to stall even before the COVID-19 pandemic, signaling a vulnerable development trajectory that is no longer keeping up with a changing context.

Acknowledging the intense pressure that this context exerts on today's decisionmakers and the fact that more of the same is no longer enough, we approached this Report with a critical question: What would it take for the region to fully harness its immense potential, transforming pressure into a catalyst for redefining its development trajectory? The answer is complex, as individuals, societies, markets, and institutions also face varying degrees of pressure, exacerbated by a pervasive sense of uncertainty about the future and their ability to cope with it. When uncertainty erodes a society's ability to imagine a future with hope, and act upon it, the very essence of human development—freedom and agency—is compromised.

This dual nature of pressure—as both strain and potential—led us to move the concept of **resilience** to the front of the development agenda as the differentiating element. Building on the concepts introduced by UNDP's previous Human Development Reports, such as human development, human security and agency, this Report goes further, proposing a forward-looking concept of **Resilient Human Development** both as an enabler of agency and protector of effective freedoms, as well as a path forward for development in LAC.

While uncertainty cannot be prevented altogether, thriving under it is possible, if individuals are confident that the mechanisms to withstand adversity are available to them, and that rebounding and flourishing can happen. Placing resilient human development at the heart of public agendas and development strategies would open a path for innovative, context-sensitive solutions that enable people to build or creatively rebuild valuable lives in response to shifting contexts, inspiring collective action and driving meaningful progress.

Beyond a solid and rigorous conceptual framework, this Report is designed to serve as a practical resource to support the region, its people, and decision-makers to navigate uncertain times by recalibrating the institutions, infrastructure, and instruments to match the urgency of today's most pressing challenges with equally audacious solutions. It is an invitation to jump on the opportunity and reimagine a future full of possibilities; to forge bold alliances and inspire collective action across governments, civil society, academia, private sector, and multilateral institutions—and to jointly unlock the promise of resilient human development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Michelle Muschett
Assistant Secretary-General and Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean
United Nations Development Programme

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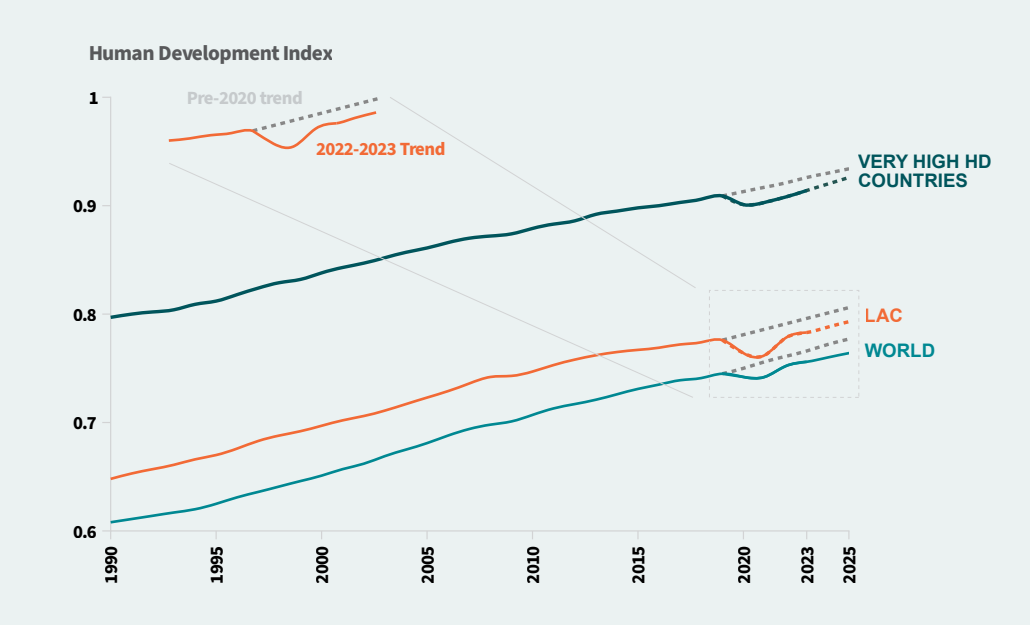
Overview

Development progress in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is under pressure. The region is navigating a complex landscape marked by heightened uncertainty, recurring and overlapping crises and multiple interlinked stressors—rapidly evolving technologies, deepening social fragmentation, and an increasingly changing climate. These factors have exposed profound vulnerabilities in the region's development trajectory, challenging its ability to sustain and advance human development. This Report argues that reimagining development strategies with resilience at their core is not merely beneficial, but imperative for shaping a future in LAC where human development can be secured and sustainably advanced.

LAC is under pressure

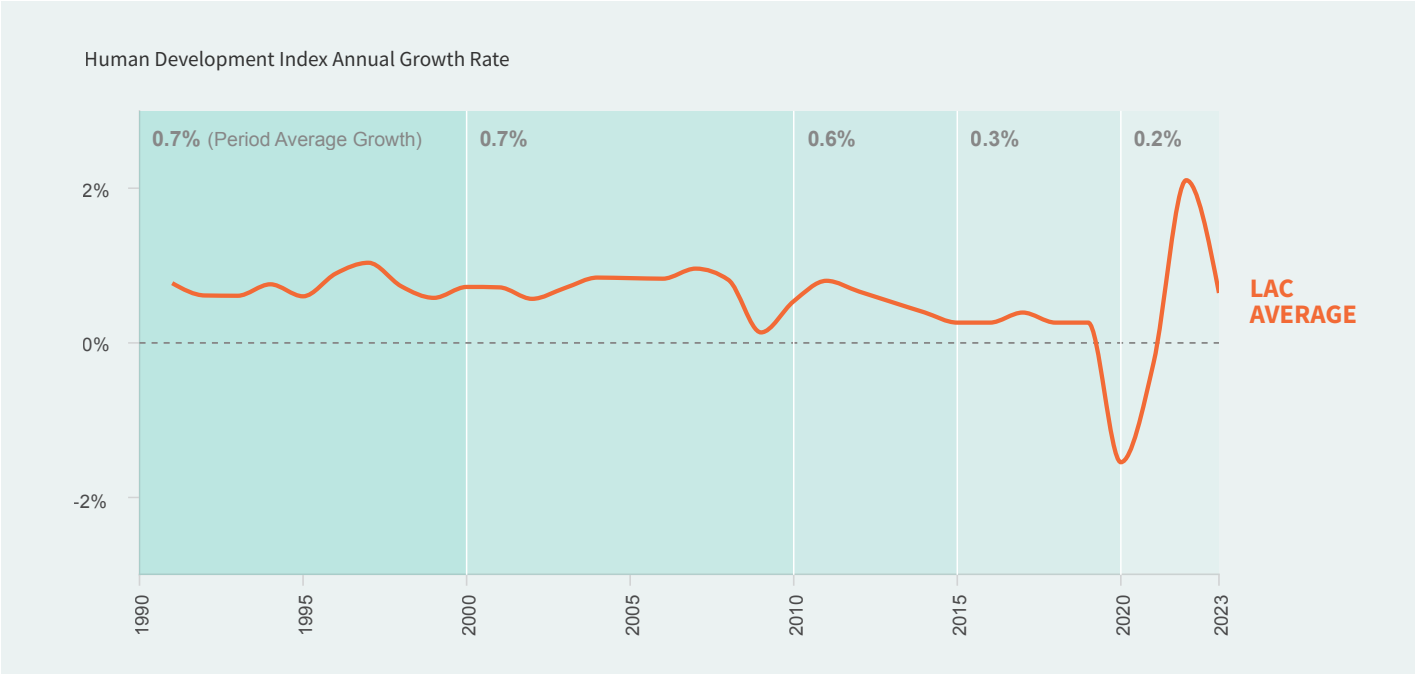
The patterns of development progress in LAC over the last decades can be summarized in four simple tenets: significant progress has occurred; that progress has been unequal; it has slowed in recent years; and it is vulnerable to reversals. After decades of sustained progress, advances in human development across LAC began to slow, particularly from the mid-2010s onwards. The rate of growth on the Human Development Index (HDI) in LAC decreased from a steady 0.7 percent between 1990 (when the indicator was first measured) and 2015, to 0.3 percent in the five-year period before the pandemic, and 0.2 percent since—signalling a stagnation in progress (figure 1, panel B).[1] The COVID-19 pandemic marked a critical turning point, triggering the first-ever decline in the HDI since its inception (figure 1, panel A). Although the region has since recovered, the pace of advancement remains sluggish, showing little indication of returning to its pre-pandemic trajectory.

Figure 1 **HDI progress has been slowing since mid-2010s and has yet to recover its pre-pandemic trajectory (Panel A)**



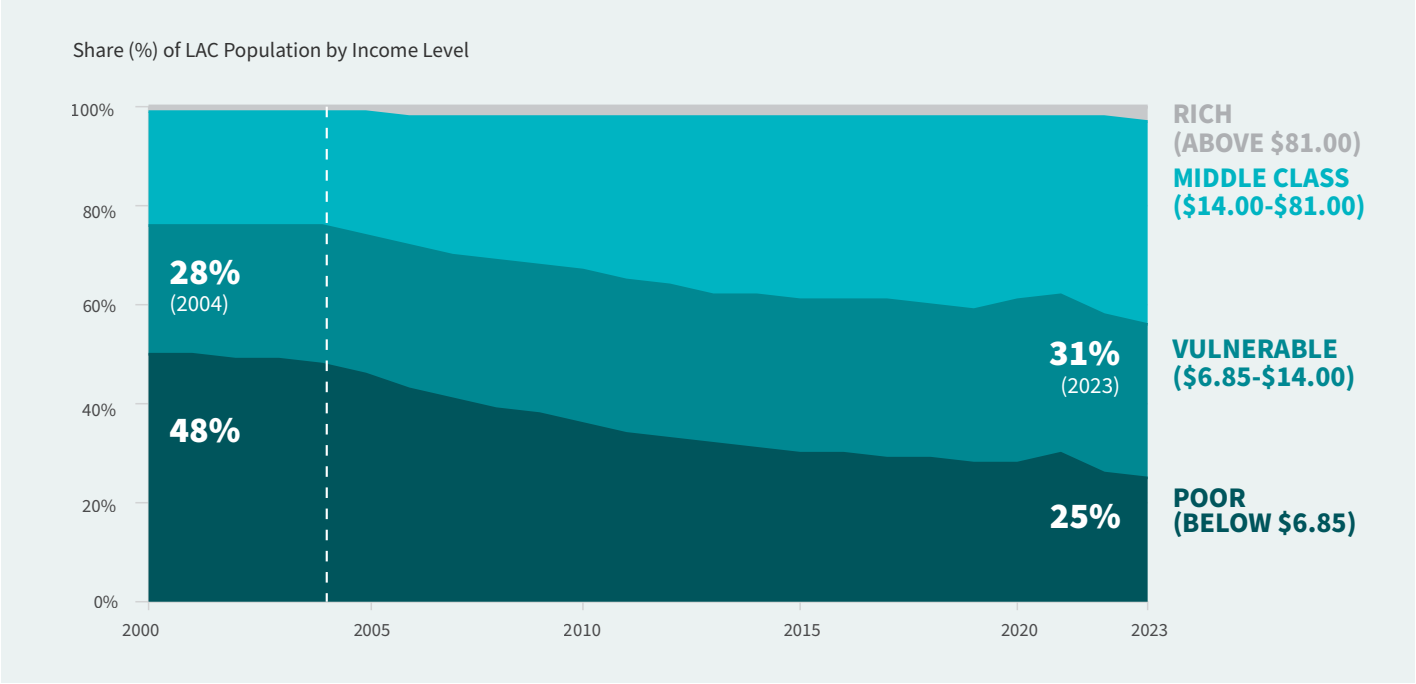
Notes: The "Pre-2020 trend" projects HDI levels to 2025 using each region's pre-pandemic HDI and growth rates. The "2022–2023 trend" uses HDI levels and growth rates from those two years. All regional aggregates are population-weighted and calculated by UNDP's Human Development Report Office (2025).
Source: UNDP's calculations based on the Human Development Report 2025.

Figure 1 **HDI progress has been slowing since mid-2010s and has yet to recover its pre-pandemic trajectory (Panel B)**



Notes: All regional aggregates are population-weighted and calculated by UNDP's Human Development Report Office (2025).
Source: UNDP's calculations based on the Human Development Report 2025.

Figure 2 **Despite decreasing poverty levels, vulnerability in LAC remains unchanged**



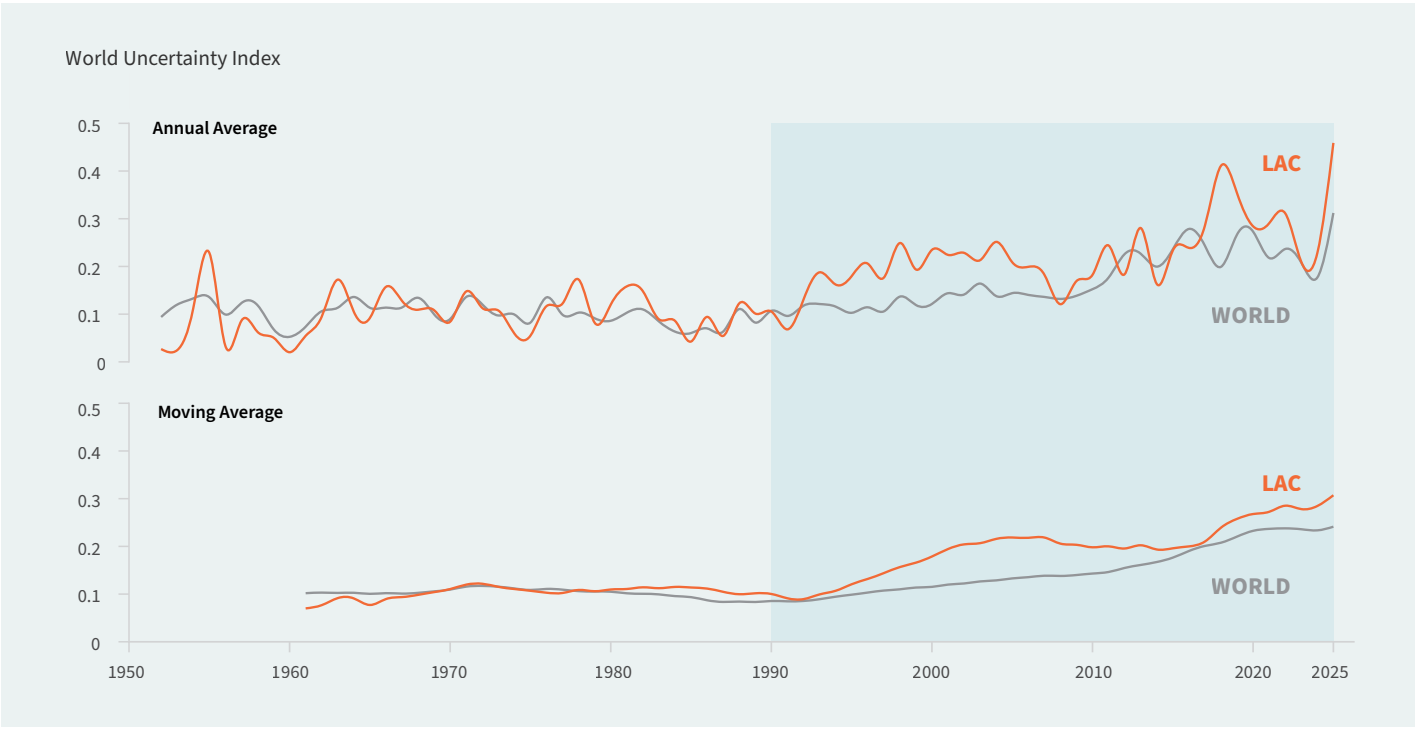
Notes: Monetary thresholds are expressed in terms of 2017 US Dollars, Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). The Caribbean includes data for the Dominican Republic.
Source: World Bank's LAC Equity Lab (October 2024 update).

More than half of the population in LAC lack adequate coping mechanisms to manage even a moderate adverse event without enduring lasting negative impacts on their well-being. Despite remarkable progress in recent decades, during which LAC successfully halved its poverty rate, approximately 1 in 4 people still live in poverty (figure 2).[2] Moreover, the region has not yet consolidated a stable middle class; an additional 31 percent of the population are categorized as vulnerable, hovering just above the poverty line.[3] With limited access to assets that could serve as buffers when adversity strikes, this group remains at risk of slipping back into poverty.

While uncertainty has been on the rise globally, it reached especially acute levels in LAC by early 2025—standing nearly 50 percent above the global average and more than double what the region's own level had been in 1990.[4] This divergence became even more pronounced during a significant spike in early 2025; at that time, uncertainty increased globally by 77 percent relative to the previous year, while in LAC it surged dramatically by 101 percent over the same period (figure 3). Such elevated uncertainty levels underscore the region's heightened sensitivity to global threats.

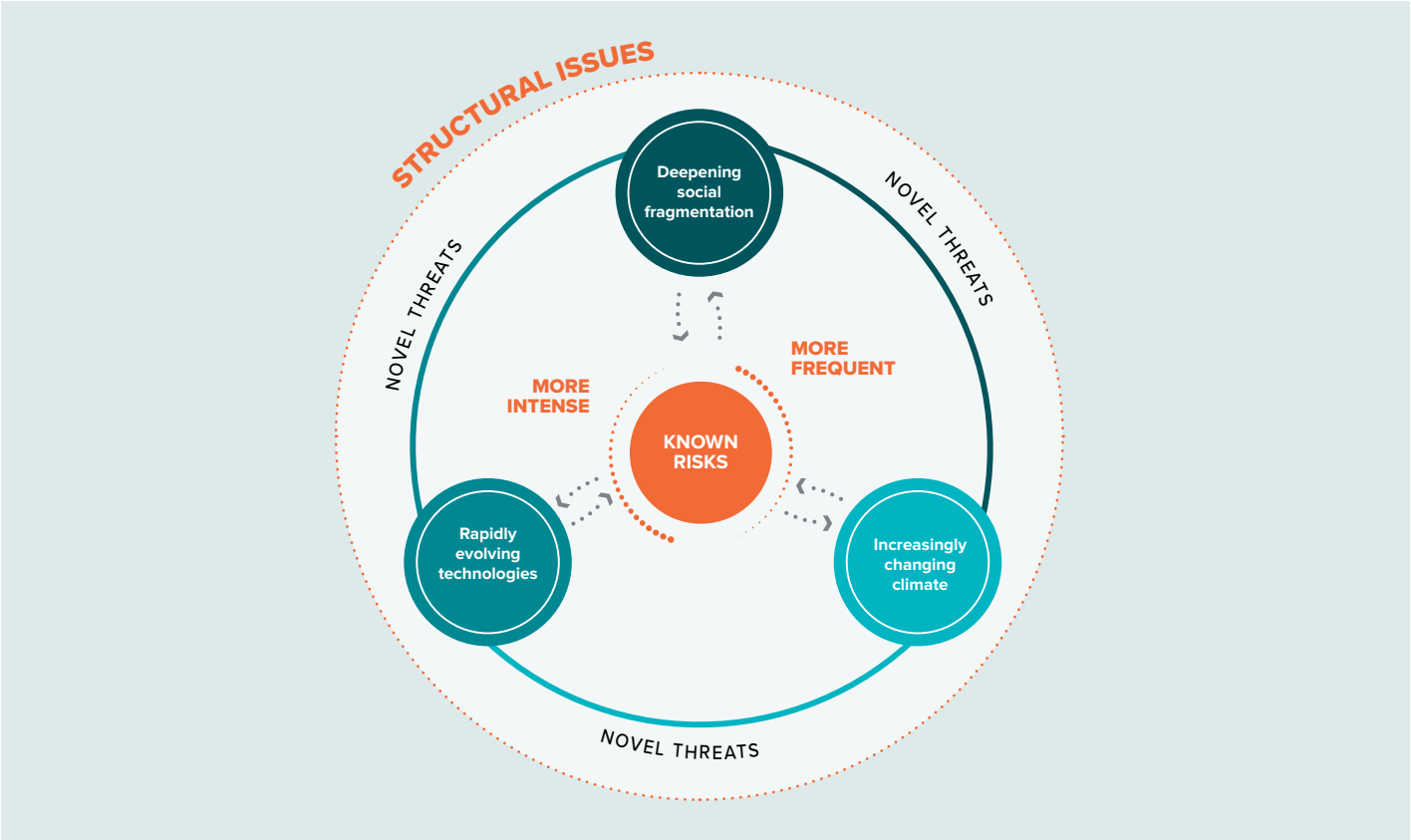
Uncertainty is not new in LAC, but the types of adverse events that the region is now facing are unlike those that came before. Traditional risks are both more frequent and more intense, and novel threats are emerging due to rapidly evolving technologies, deepening social fragmentation and an increasingly changing climate. Moreover, multiple adverse events and hazards are interacting with each other —and with underlying structural vulnerabilities, such as slow growth and inequality—in complex and, often, unforeseen ways (figure 4). The term *polycrisis* has entered the mainstream to describe this increasingly common reality—a world where shocks are no longer isolated but interlinked through feedback loops and systemic interdependencies. This environment places enormous pressure for decision makers tasked with making effective choices in contexts where the range of possible outcomes is unknown. Recognizing this complexity marks a paradigm shift in development thinking—one that demands a transformation in policy approaches to address overlapping and interlinked threats.

Figure 3 **Uncertainty in LAC has more than doubled since 1990, surpassing global averages**



Notes: The World Uncertainty Index is calculated by counting the frequency of the word "uncertainty" (and its variants) in Economist Intelligence Unit country reports. The indices are normalized by the total word count and rescaled by multiplying by 1,000, with higher values indicating greater uncertainty. Moving averages have a 10-year window.
Source: UNDP's calculations are based on the World Uncertainty Index data for 1952 to 2025 (first quarter), Ahir and others (2022).

Figure 4 **A new era of uncertainty in LAC**



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Resilience at the core of human development

Growing pressure propels the concept of resilience to the front of the development agenda, framing it as the way forward in LAC. The recent trends described above evidence that focusing solely on progress and doing more of the same is no longer enough. Traditional development thinking in the region implicitly assumed a linear path of social mobility; once people escaped poverty, they would naturally continue upward into a stable middle class. However, this promise has remained mostly unfulfilled in many countries. Development progress turned out to be fragile while threats accumulated.

Additionally, uncertainty breads fear, a state that is mutually exclusive from freedom. Resilience, which allows individuals to trust the future knowing they have the tools to withstand adversity and a safety net to rely on, provides hope. Inherent in hope is agency, the power to act and shape the future. In a context of elevated uncertainty and frequent adverse events, human development without resilience is no longer viable. **Resilience, as an enabler of agency and a protector of effective freedoms, constitutes the very essence of human development.**

The Report proposes a conceptualization of resilience from a human development perspective. This concept aims to enable people to enjoy valuable lives in terms of capability and agency in such a way that the impact of critical pervasive shocks on their lives is prevented or mitigated, and that people and communities, especially the most disadvantaged, can shape their lives and, if adversity strikes, rebound and flourish again. Human development is resilient when people's capabilities are safeguarded such that most shocks are prevented or mitigated, and people can rebuild worthwhile lives after the shocks. This shift reframes development not only as progress but as protection of life, of dignity, and of possibility.[5]

Three dynamics stressing development

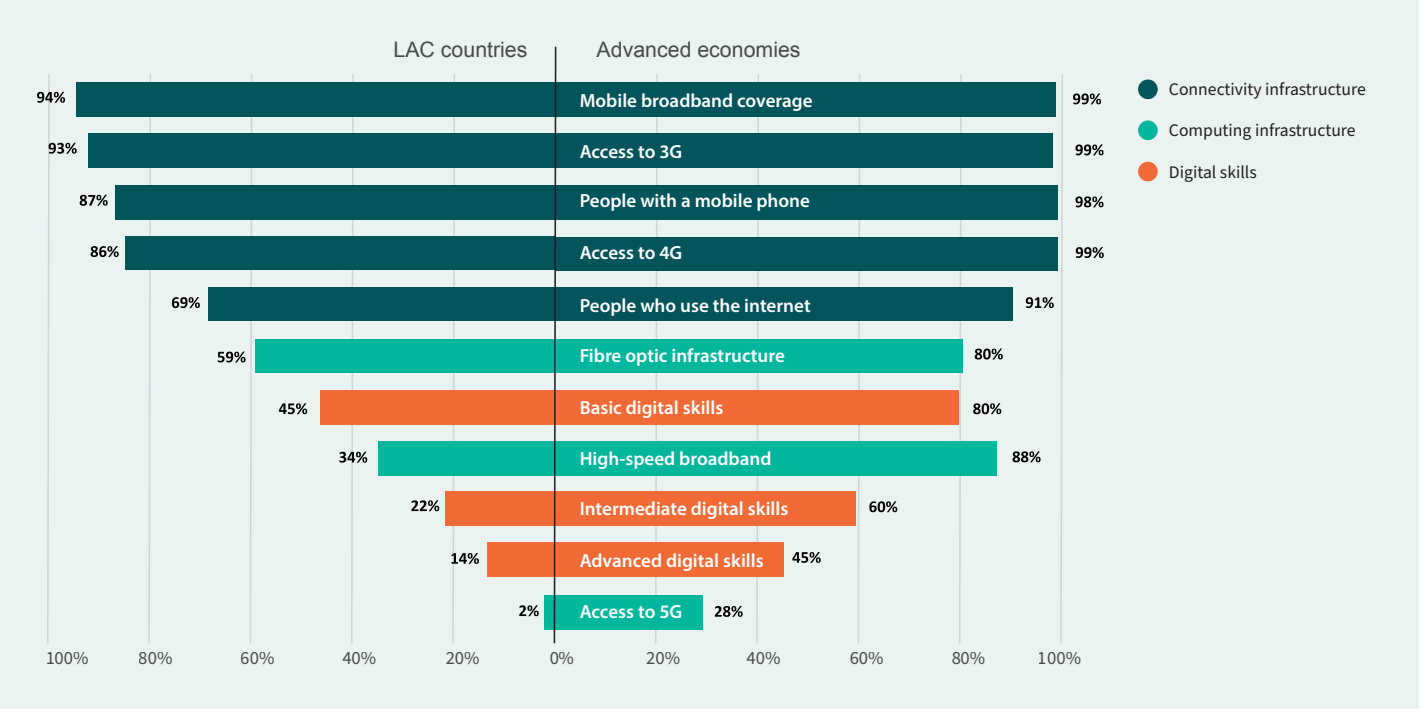
The Report explores three interconnected dynamics currently placing development under stress in LAC: (1) rapidly evolving technologies; (2) deepening social fragmentation; and (3) an increasingly changing climate. The ultimate impact of these will largely depend on how they are managed. These pressures interact and amplify each other's effects. Digital technologies are reshaping political discourse and altering civic engagement. Climate shocks are fuelling migration and placing additional strain on governance structures. And increasing social fragmentation is undermining the collective action required to effectively address climate change and technological disruptions.

Rapidly evolving technologies: Potential waiting to be unleashed

Thus far, LAC's technological transformation has been characterized by: significant progress, especially in expanding basic digital infrastructure; highly uneven adoption, often reinforcing existing inequalities; an accelerated pace of artificial intelligence (AI) deployment revealing signs of innovation and adaptation; and significant structural barriers that risk leaving LAC behind in terms of translating digital advancements into broader human development gains.

Despite notable progress, digital transformation in LAC remains incomplete. The region continues to lag behind more advanced economies, especially in terms of more sophisticated infrastructure and advanced digital skills. While digital coverage has expanded, the region still faces significant disparities in connectivity, affordability and digital literacy, all of which create barriers to equitable and meaningful participation in the digital economy. Only 2 percent of people in LAC have access to 5G networks, compared to 28 percent in advance economies (figure 5). Broadband costs in the region are four times higher than in advanced economies, representing 5.4 percent of the average per capita income in LAC compared to 1.3 percent in the OECD.

Figure 5 **In LAC, digital coverage has expanded, but this alone has not ensured meaningful use**



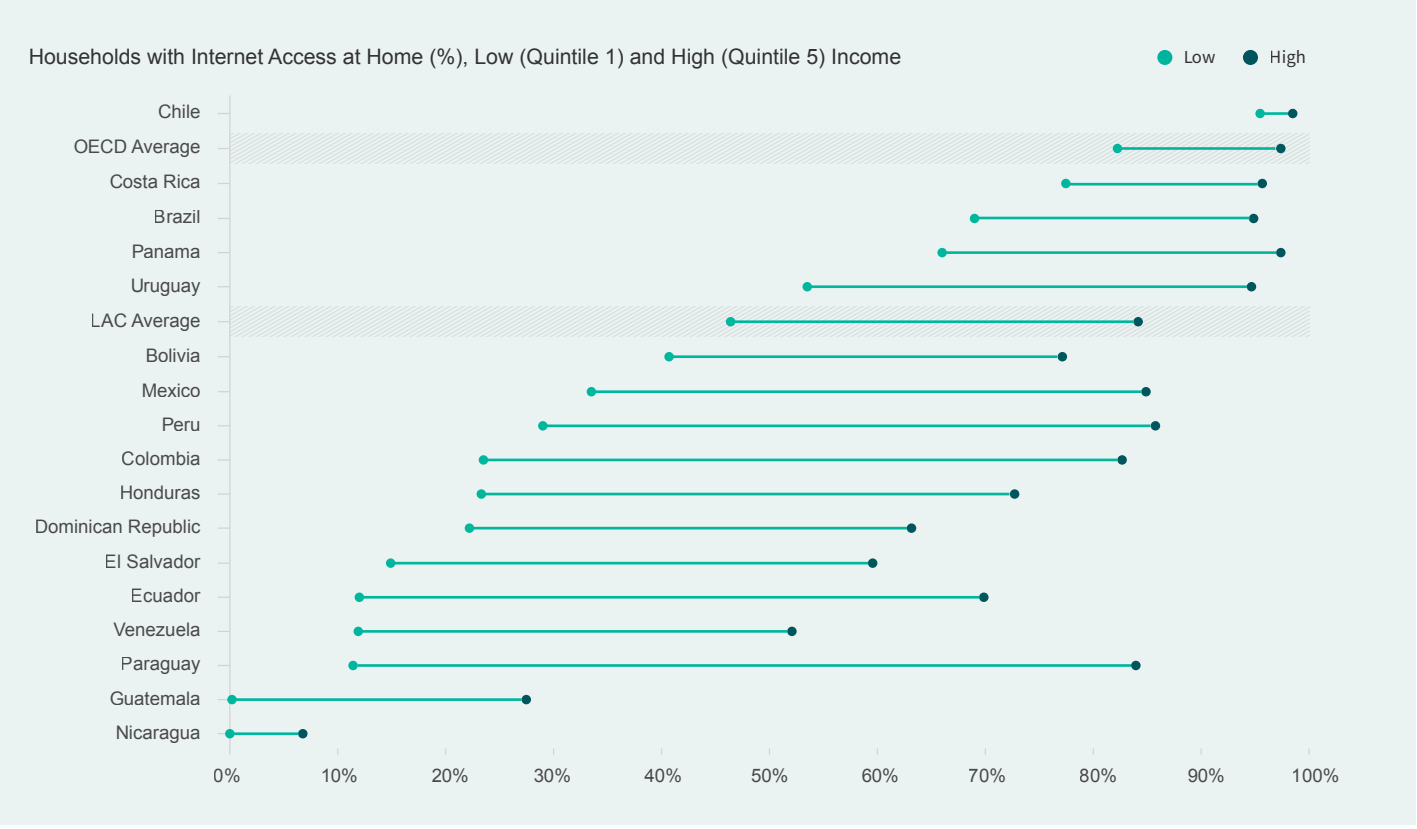
Notes: Percentage of total population.
Source: Authors' elaboration using data from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and UNDP (2025).

There are also significant differences in Internet access, both between and within countries, in LAC. On average, high-income households are nearly twice as likely to have Internet access as the poorest households (85 versus 46 percent) (figure 6). A similar split is evident among households in urban and rural areas (75 versus 36 percent).[6]

The expansion of the gig economy[7] has emerged as a potential source of employment in a region characterized by high informality. Gig jobs offer flexibility and income opportunities, with 74 percent of gig workers in LAC using these platforms to generate a secondary source of income.[8] They also serve as an entry point into the labour market for young people and migrants. However, gig workers often lack social security coverage, replicating existing patterns of informality. The absence of regulatory frameworks leaves gig workers without adequate social protection, with only 27 to 65 percent contributing to pension systems—often self-financed.[9]

AI promises to reshape the way we work, yet its ability to enhance productivity in LAC remains mostly unknown. Evidence shows that while 26 to 38 percent of jobs in LAC are "exposed" to GenAI,[10] only 1 to 6 percent of employment is at risk of direct automation.[11] At the same time, 8 to 14 percent of jobs exhibit augmentation potential, with GenAI offering opportunities for increased efficiency and productivity. However, if access to AI-related skills remains concentrated in certain sectors or demographic groups, the technology could deepen existing labour-market inequalities rather than fostering more inclusive economic growth. Thus, rather than eliminating jobs outright, AI likely will reshape job functions, underscoring the importance of workforce upskilling and reskilling, and digital literacy and education.

Figure 6 **Internet access in LAC displays significant heterogeneity, both between and within countries**



Notes: The ECLAC and OECD define households with internet access as those with an internet connection at home, whether through fiber optic, coaxial cable, Cooper pair, or terrestrial or satellite antennas. In all cases, access through mobile devices is excluded. The regional average is a population-weighted average calculated by ECLAC. Data reported for each country is the most recent available: Bolivia, Colombia, and Honduras (2021); Brazil (2019); Ecuador (2017); Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Venezuela (2014); and all other countries (2022). OECD countries average is reported for 2023.
Source: UNDP's calculations based on the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) CEPALSTAT data (2023); OECD Going Digital Toolkit data (2024).

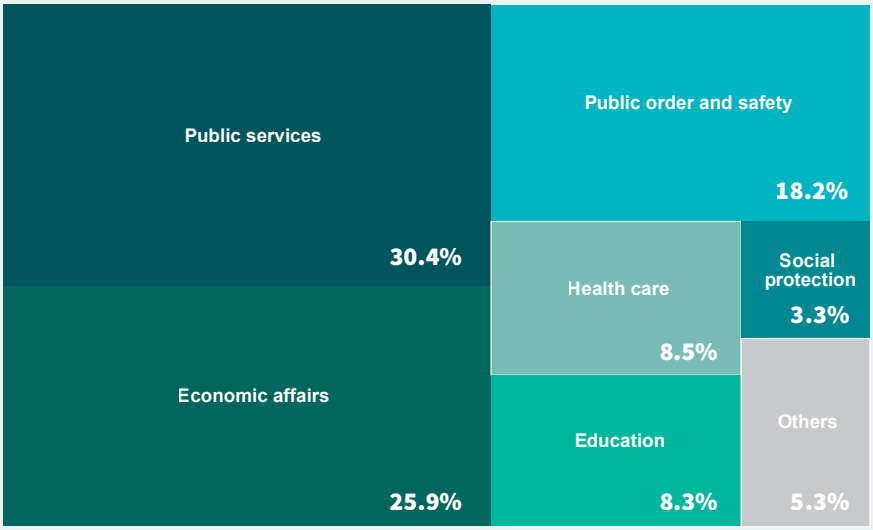
While digital platforms have expanded access to information, they have also contributed to growing social fragmentation, undermining mental health and weakening social cohesion. LAC leads globally in social media usage, with an average of 3 hours and 32 minutes per day, far surpassing North America (2 hours and 13 minutes) and Europe (2 hours and 1 minute).[12] This disproportionate digital engagement raises mental health risks like anxiety, depression and social isolation, particularly among adolescents. At the same time, the spread of misinformation on these platforms distorts public discourse, diminishes institutional trust, and hampers informed decision-making. In contexts where digital literacy is limited, misinformation spreads more easily, deepening polarization and posing a serious threat to democratic governance and individual agency.

Governments in LAC are increasingly adopting AI, with 24 countries actively integrating these tools into their public sector operations. This shift holds significant potential to revolutionize how governments interact with citizens. Public institutions are not only allocating resources for AI promotion and deployment but also actively embedding these technologies in areas such as service delivery, logistics, surveillance and crime prevention (figure 7).

However, this also brings risks that demand careful management. AI systems are often trained on existing data sets that might have embedded in them societal biases–thus perpetuating and potentially deepening systemic discrimination against women and traditionally marginalized groups. If left unchecked, these biases can reinforce discriminatory practices in areas such as access to public services and social protection. Additionally, cyberattacks on AI systems, especially open data portals, threaten privacy by exposing sensitive information. In LAC, rising cyberthreats against public institutions and businesses disrupt services, facilitate identity theft and cause financial losses.

LAC's ability to harness rapidly evolving technologies will depend on investments in human capital, digital infrastructure, responsible data governance and robust digital ecosystems. The rising pressure from emerging technologies provides an opportunity to drive positive change, and, if channelled effectively, technological advancements can serve as a catalyst for resilient human development.

Figure 7 Governments in LAC are increasingly integrating AI into public administration



Notes: Examples of AI tools in public services include chatbots and solutions for service delivery. Economic affairs includes AI tools for infrastructure, logistics, and service delivery. Public safety includes applications for surveillance and crime prevention. Health care features algorithms that support disease prevention and diagnosis. Education includes AI systems that detect absenteeism and manage admissions. Social protection includes algorithms used to target beneficiaries and determine coverage. The "Other" category includes AI systems applied in environmental protection, housing and related services, defense, and recreational, cultural and sports activities.
Source: UNDP's calculations based on data from AI Systems in the Public Sector of Latin America and the Caribbean, Universidad de los Andes (April 2025 update).

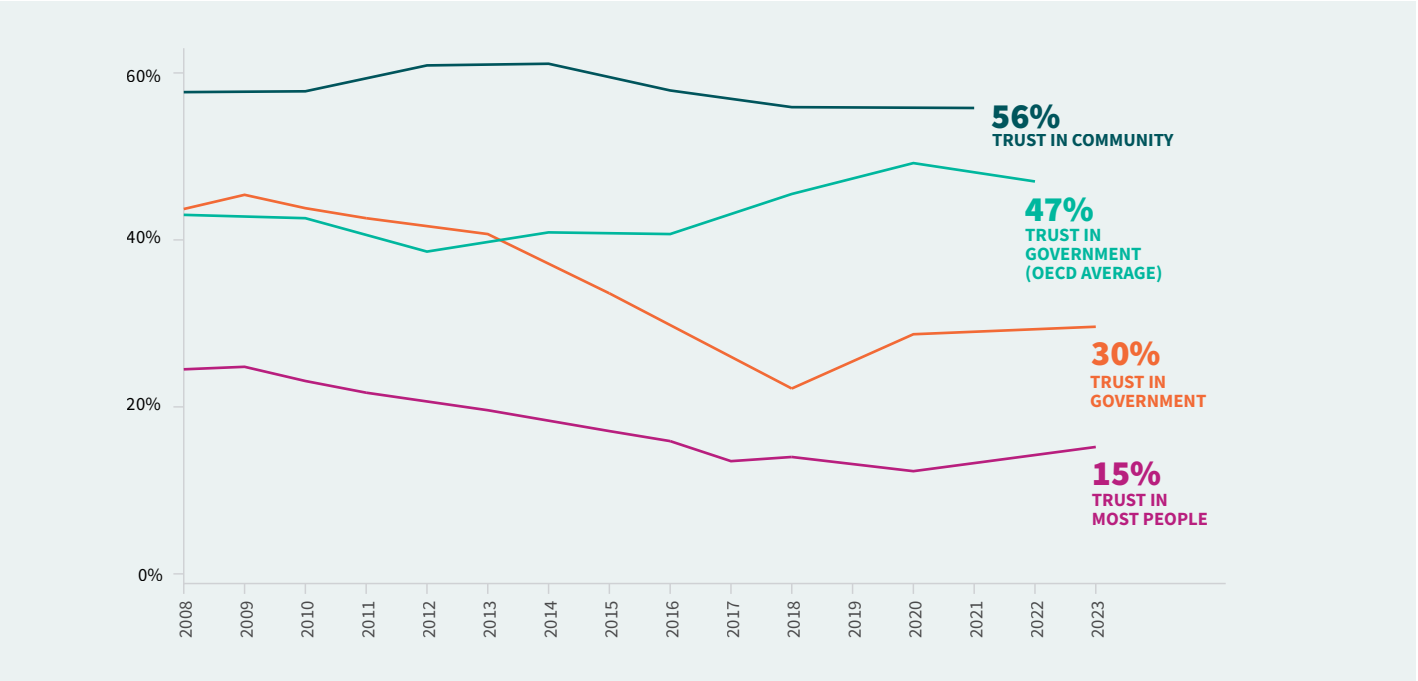
Deepening social fragmentation: Broken aspirations in disconnected societies

While social fragmentation[13] has historically been a characteristic of societies in LAC—due partly to structural issues such as economic inequality—it is now being intensified by rising uncertainty and frequent shocks. Heightened levels of uncertainty can exert an emotional toll, fuelling stress, anxiety and depression; which in turn, can erode social cohesion and influences political behaviour. Strong social bonds are essential not only for the mental well-being of individuals but also for fostering cohesive and resilient societies. Yet **in fragmented contexts, these positive feedback loops can break down, further weakening the social fabric.**

Trust, an indicator of how affective attitudes shape social relations, has declined across LAC. Trust in "most people" gradually deteriorated beginning in 2009, reaching its lowest point in 2020 (figure 8). Despite this erosion of general trust, people continue to trust their immediate social circles. While close-knit networks provide a vital safety net, excessive reliance on them—especially when accompanied by widespread mistrust of outsiders—can contribute to widening distances between groups, which results in further social fragmentation. In societies where trust is low, citizens increasingly look to governments to act as neutral arbiters to solve disputes. However, from 2009 to 2018, trust in LAC governments also dropped, driving people towards alternative and suboptimal mechanisms—some informal, others illicit—to secure justice or meet basic needs. Socioeconomic divides are at the centre of this distrust.

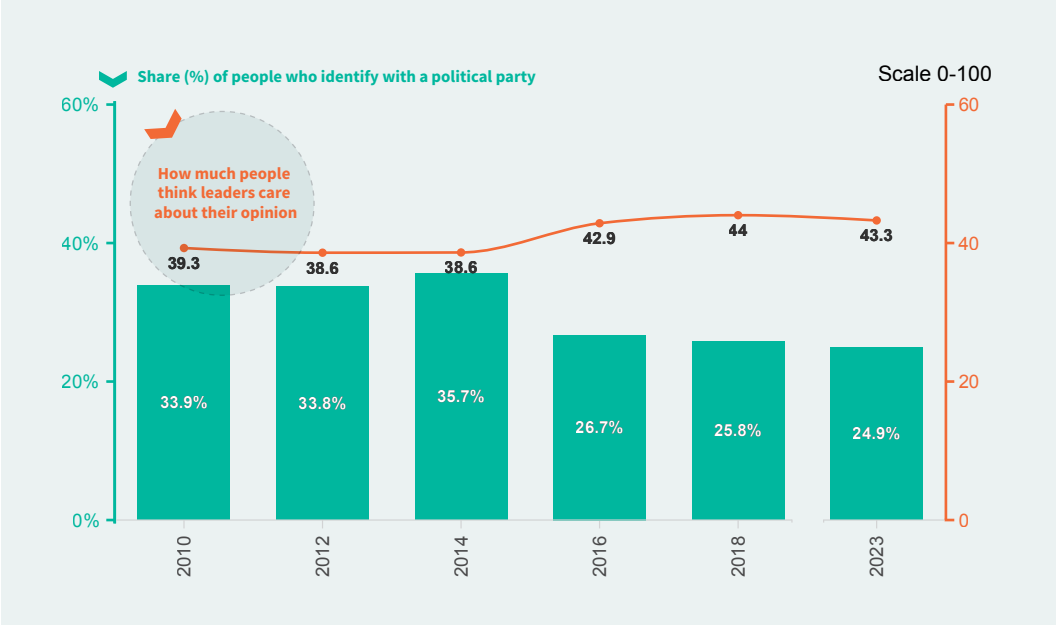
A growing discontent over limited social mobility and perceived ineffective institutions has driven people to abandon traditional political parties and often embrace personalistic leaders who have positioned themselves as anti-establishment outsiders (figure 9). This is happening at a time when the region is becoming increasingly polarized (figure 10). The divide between those who feel "represented" by the elected government and those who feel "excluded" is widening, shifting from general discontent with the establishment to direct confrontation among groups. **Social fragmentation, once subtle and latent, is becoming explicitly political.**

Figure 8 People find shelter in their communities, as trust in most people and in governments falls



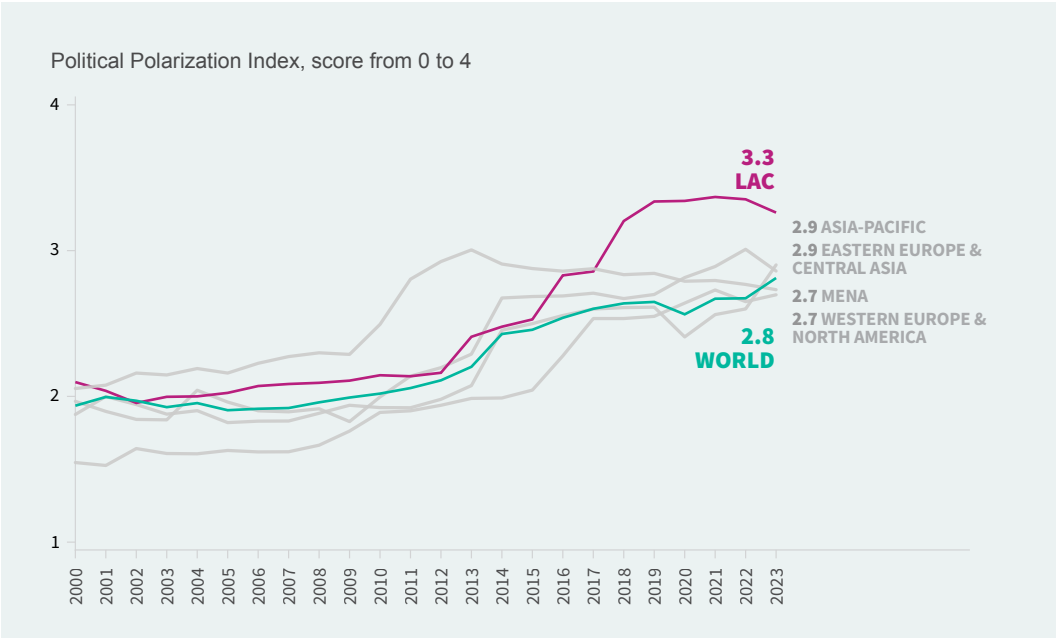
Notes: All the computed averages are simple averages.
Source: The data for "Trust in most people" and "Trust in government" was taken from Latinobarómetro 2008–2023; the source for "Trust in community" is LAPOP Americas Barometer 2008-2021. The OECD average was taken from OECD (2024) "Trust in government (indicator)".

Figure 9 **LAC is increasingly abandoning traditional parties**



Notes: The variable"Identifies with a political party' is measured by LAPOP through Yes/No questions, reflecting the share of respondents who answered 'Yes.' The variable 'Leaders are interested in what people think' is measured on a seven-point scale from 'Strongly disagree' (1) to 'Strongly agree' (7). Such displayed regional averages are recoded to a 0-100 scale and should not be interpreted as percentages.
Source: LAPOP, Americas Barometer 2010-2023. Vanderbilt University.

Figure 10 **LAC, a region polarized like no other**



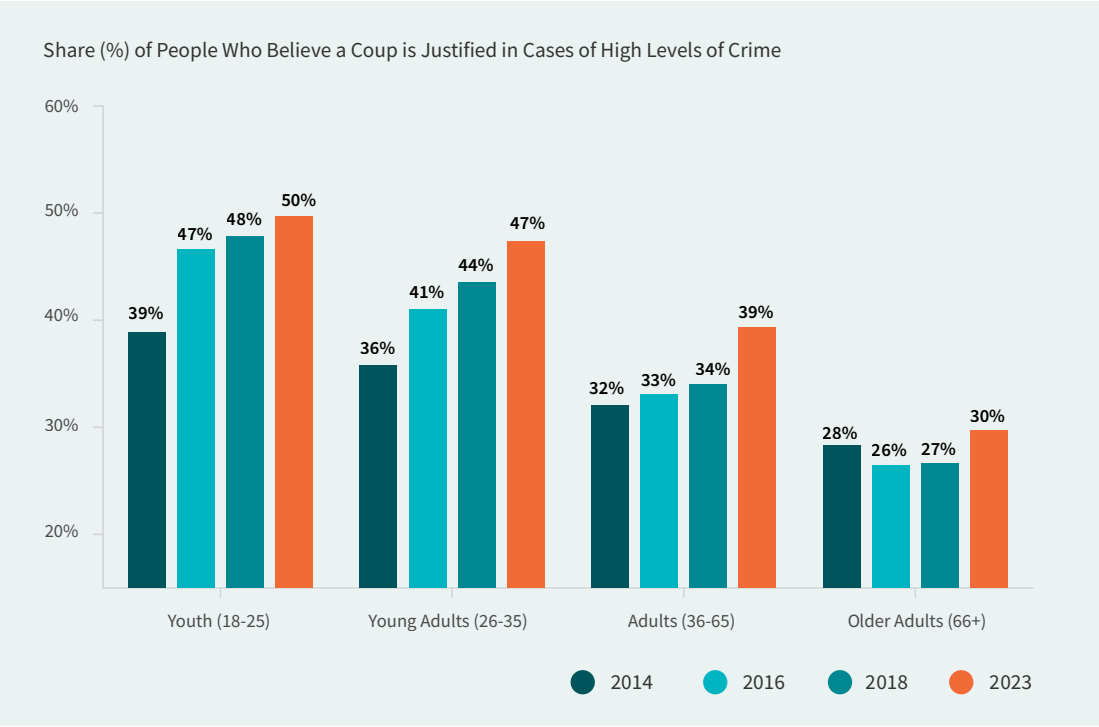
Notes: The indicator employs a five-point scale, where 0 represents that supporters of opposing political camps generally interact in a friendly manner, and 4 signifies extreme polarization where opposing political camps generally interact in a hostile manner.
Source: Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project. Values in labels represent data for 2023.

Social fragmentation in LAC has significant implications for both the outcomes and processes of human development. It can weaken governance, for example, resulting in governments prioritizing short-term measures that boost public approval at the expense of long-term investments. It can also reinforce political divisions, making it increasingly difficult to reach agreements, and effectively respond to citizen demands. This can fuel support for more radical forms of governance (figure 11), or result in citizens opting out of state services altogether, undermining the sustainability of the welfare state and the broader social contract.

Organized crime has grown in LAC's fragmented societies, capitalizing on social divisions and limited state presence. Nearly half of homicides in the region are linked to criminal organizations and gangs. Beyond the direct violence these groups perpetrate, they deeply integrate into local economies and pose a significant threat to human development by exerting a growing influence over governance and the provision of informal services. Their decentralized networks, involving diverse actors, have facilitated the rapid expansion and diversification of criminal markets. Activities such as human trafficking, illegal mining, logging and extortion have surged, in some instances rivalling the scale of drug trafficking. This diversification has extended criminal influence into areas once considered secure, contributing to a surge of violence across the region.[14]

This Report proposes two guiding principles for addressing social fragmentation: closing the economic, identitarian and geographic gaps that fuel fragmentation; and exploring whether fragmentation–despite its downsides–can be seen as a form of social energy that, if properly channelled, could contribute to advancing development. Dissatisfaction and antagonism in fragmented societies can be a catalyst for change with no predetermined trajectory. Political awareness and engagement are strong in LAC's polarized landscape, and voting continues to be the preferred tool to shape our political fortune. This represents an opportunity to continue reshaping our societies.

Figure 11 **Youth are more willing to justify a coup to confront high levels of crime**



Notes: Share of people who answered "Yes" to the question: "Would a military coup be justified when there is a lot of crime?" The "Adults (36-65)" group represents the simple average of scores from the 36-45, 46-55, and 56-65 age groups.
Source: LAPOP, Americas Barometer 2014-2023. Vanderbilt University.

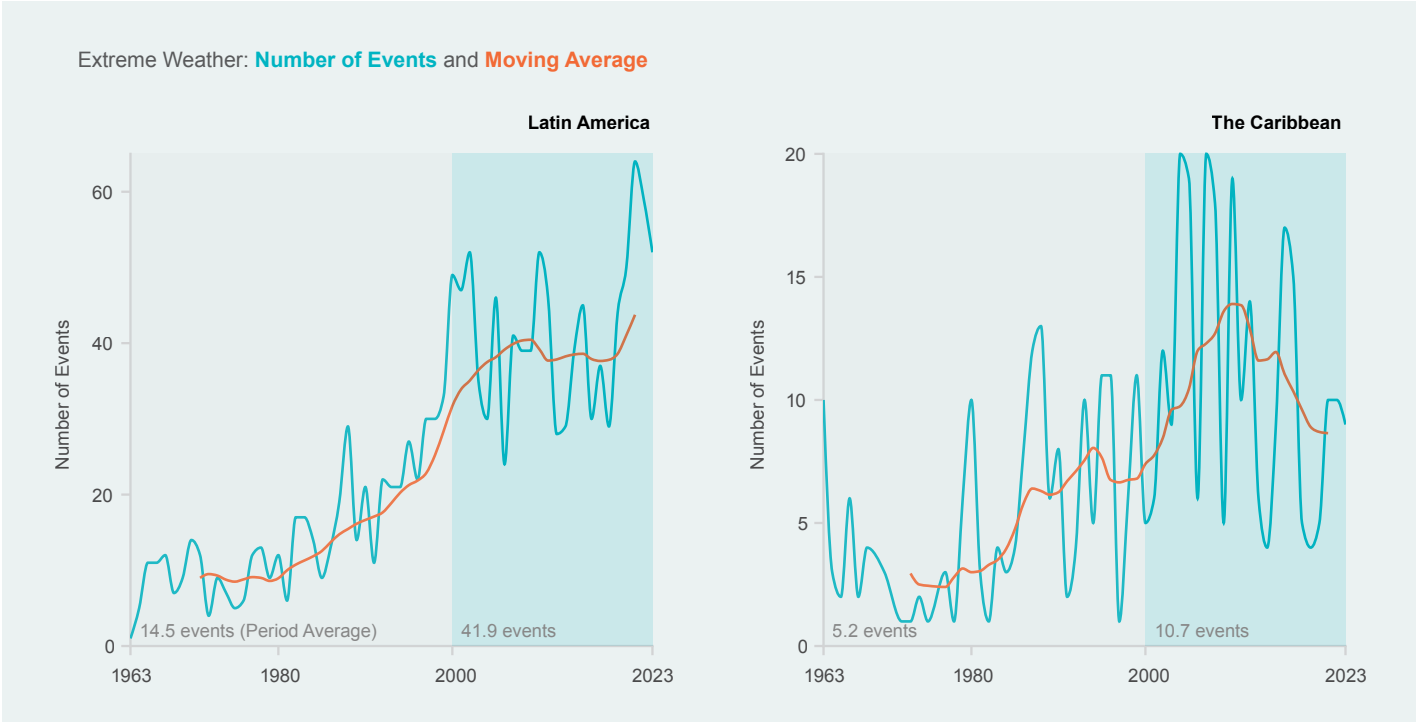
Increasingly changing climate: Managing the risks of a crisis foretold

Climate change in LAC is no longer a distant threat; it is a present reality reshaping lives, constraining human development and undermining productivity. The region has experienced a sustained warming trend culminating in the past five years being the hottest period on record. In 2024 the average surface temperature across the Americas was 2.3°C above the 1951–1980 baseline.[15] These rising temperatures have stark human consequences: from 2000 to 2019 heat-related excess deaths in LAC were approximately 36,700 annually,[16] with a dramatic increase observed in the last decade—up to 140 percent higher in Latin America[17] and 103 percent higher in the Caribbean.[18] Economic impacts have also been severe; heat-related reductions in labour productivity resulted in income losses of $1.78 billion in 2022.[19]

The number of weather-related events in LAC has more than doubled in the last few decades. In the Caribbean, the yearly average increased from 5.2 events for the period 1963–1999 to 10.7 events for the period 2000–2023. In Latin America, this phenomenon is even more pronounced; the number of weather-related events nearly tripled from a yearly average of 14.5 for the period 1963–1999 to 41.9 for the period 2000–2023 (figure 12). Estimates suggest that 31 percent of the LAC population is exposed to the risks of extreme weather hazards aggravated by climate change—particularly droughts, heatwaves and floods. While LAC as a region shows lower vulnerability to climate change than other parts of the world, some countries in Central America and the Caribbean exhibit significantly higher levels, highlighting critical hotspots within the region.

As the frequency of climate change related events rises, their impacts will be increasingly nuanced, complex and interconnected. Climate variability and extreme events already threaten nutrition, and food and water security. In 2023, roughly 28 percent of LAC's population faced moderate food insecurity while another 9 percent faced severe food insecurity.[20] Water stress will impact more countries in the coming years; under current emissions conditions, nearly half of the region's countries will face medium to extreme

Figure 12 Extreme weather events in LAC have more than doubled in frequency



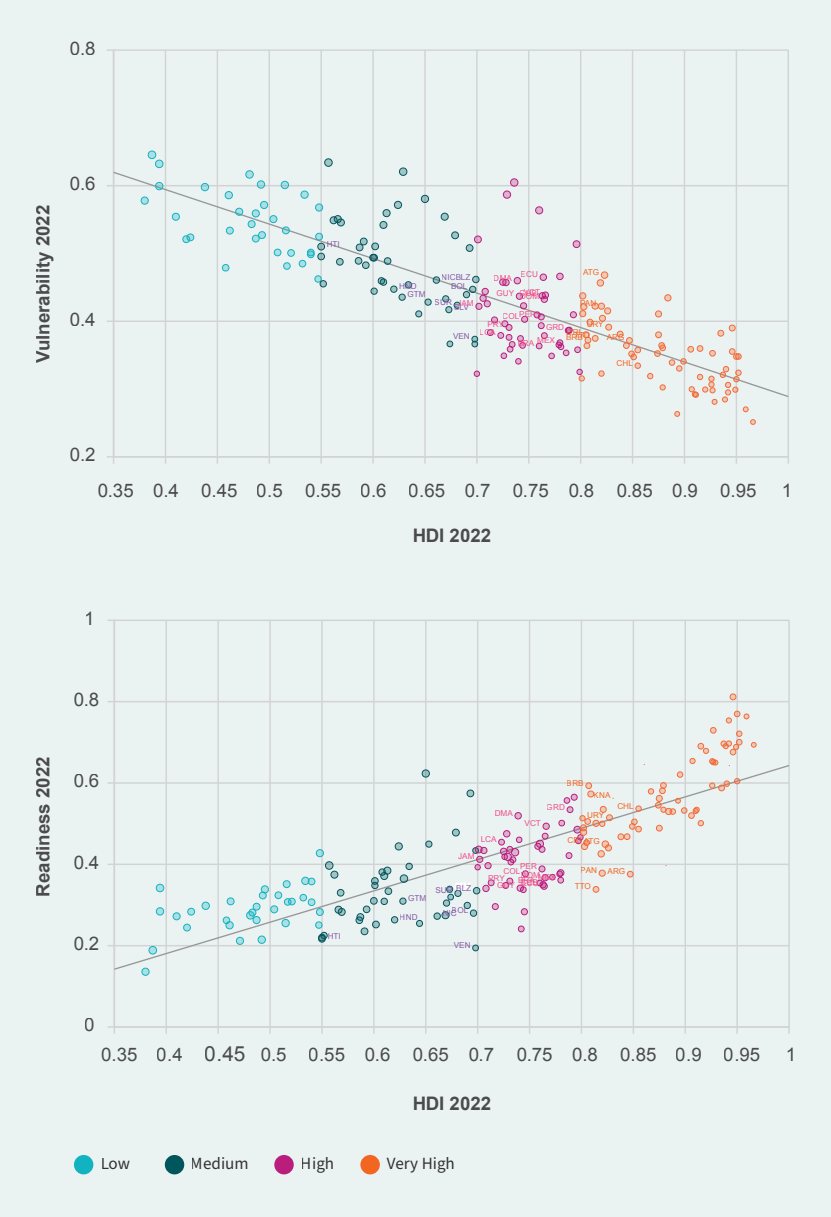
Notes: Extreme weather events include droughts, extreme temperatures, floods, storms, and wildfires. The moving averages have a 10-year time-frame.
Source: UNDP's calculations based on data from EM-DAT: The Emergency Events Database (1963–2023).

water stress by 2080.[21] Compound events like wildfires triggered by severe droughts show how climate change is amplifying systemic risks. From 2002 to 2023, wildfires affected nearly 400 million hectares, an area comparable to that of Argentina and Chile combined.[22]

Climate change and environmental degradation deepen pre-existing inequalities and intensify cascading and compounding impacts. A critical challenge is ensuring that climate resilience is not restricted to wealthier nations or communities that can afford adaptation. This would further entrench inequalities and exacerbate the impacts of the climate crisis on the most vulnerable. Evidence demonstrates an inverse relationship between HDI level and vulnerability—defined as the propensity or predisposition of societies to be negatively impacted by climate hazards (figure 13). Conversely, there is a positive relationship between HDI level and readiness, indicating that countries with higher levels of human development are typically better positioned to leverage investment for adaptation actions (figure 13).

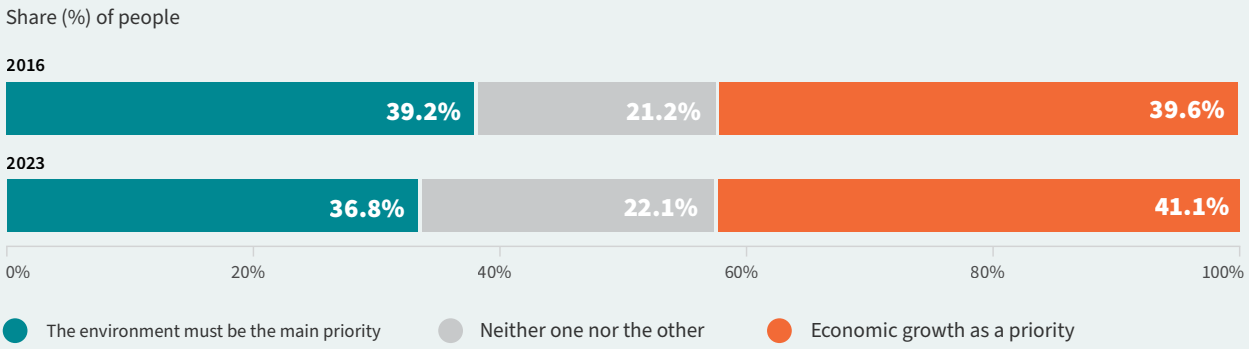
People in LAC are increasingly worried about climate change and demand concrete political and institutional responses. However, surveys over the last decade have consistently shown that a higher portion of people prioritize economic growth over environmental protection (figure 14). Nonetheless, citizens expect decisive responses from their governments on issues such as protecting and restoring nature, improving climate change education, safeguarding populations at risk, and increasing commitments to combat climate change.[23] The growing awareness about climate change in LAC is an opportunity for advancing agency and a way to move forward on green growth strategies. To seize this opportunity, it is necessary to overcome some political participation and representation challenges, such as misrepresentation (the assumption that others will not support climate action) and the incorporation of climate change issues in political agendas.

Figure 13 Countries with higher levels of human development are better positioned to navigate climate hazards



Notes: Score calculates the values for vulnerability and readiness indicators on a scale from 0-1. When calculating the vulnerability score—the lower, the better. When calculating the readiness score—the higher, the better.
Source: Authors' elaboration using data from the Human Development Report Office and the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative.

Figure 14 **Opinions on prioritizing environment versus economic growth in LAC remain almost unchanged**



Notes: The average is based on the 12 countries included in the 2023 survey: Argentina, The Bahamas, Bolivia, Chile, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Grenada, Mexico, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay.
Source: LAPOP, Americas Barometer 2016-2023. Vanderbilt University.

Managing the risks of decoupling economic growth from greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in LAC can become an opportunity for building resilience. Many LAC economies depend heavily on material flows and GHG-intensive exports like fossil fuels and agriculture. In a global net zero scenario, fossil fuels and high-emissions products are expected to face shrinking demand over the next two decades. In addition, the Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use sector makes up a disproportionately significant component of the total regional GHG emissions. By leveraging its natural capital responsibly and investing in sustainable practices, LAC can lead the way in defining a just and equitable path forward for green growth.

A new development playbook for LAC

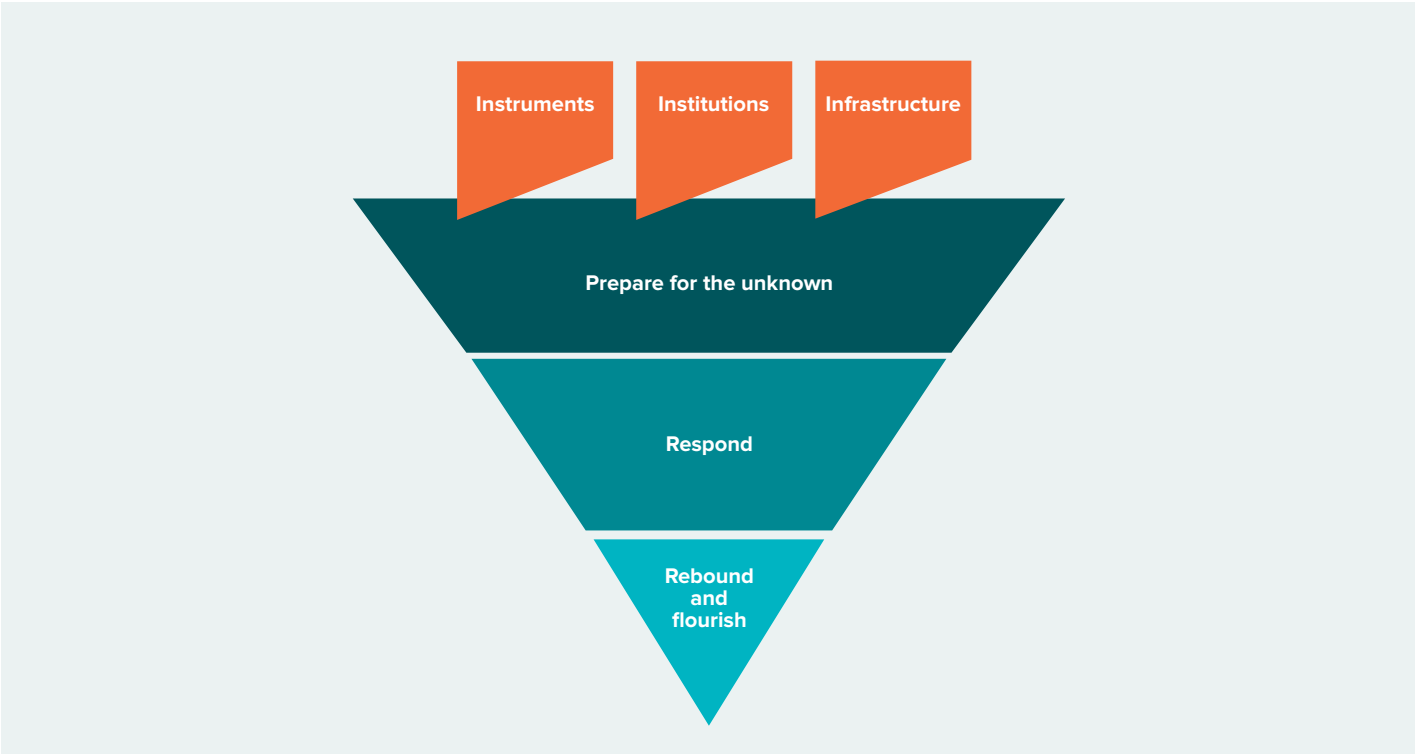
A central message of this Report is that the development agenda in LAC is in need of a new playbook, one that fits our times. What worked in the past will no longer suffice. That is partly because there is much unfinished business, but it is also because as times have changed, our instruments, institutions and infrastructure must change to meet new challenges.

At the centre of this new playbook is resilience–not as a by-product of growth, poverty reduction or climate change adaptation but as a core element of our development strategies. Without resilience, progress will continue to be sluggish at best, and face reversals at worst. This approach to resilience is multidimensional, transcending isolated responses to individual threats, and embedding within societies mechanisms that allow them to withstand, rebound and flourish when adversity strikes, regardless of the type of shock. Building resilience is inherently collective, with critical roles for governments, civil society and the private sector.

Three broad policy objectives can be defined within the concept of resilient human development: the ability to prepare for the unknown; the capacity to respond to hazards; and the means to rebound if adversity strikes. Similarly, we can think of three mechanisms through which these objectives can be achieved: instruments to navigate uncertainty; institutions that embrace complexity; and infrastructure that unleashes the power of local communities. **Together, the three objectives and three tools create a three "I" *framework*, that can provide guidance for building resilience in LAC.**

A resilient LAC demands a shift beyond traditional poverty reduction instruments towards those that actively build resilience. This requires expanding coverage for those who are vulnerable and traditionally excluded from social protection systems because they are neither poor nor formally employed. It also entails a broader and more adaptive policy toolkit that focuses on building assets, so that households have the coping mechanisms to withstand adverse events when these take place. Finally, it incorporates mechanisms to ensure that those affected by shocks have the ability to rebound and flourish, rebuilding their capabilities so that temporary impacts do not result in the permanent loss of freedoms.

Figure 15 **The three "I" framework for resilient human development**



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Resilience also requires that institutions embrace complexity, particularly through preparedness, agility and coordination, and continuous state presence. Preparedness entails equipping institutions with risk-sensitive frameworks that anticipate and respond to crises proactively. This includes investing in disaster risk management, financial contingency mechanisms, and early warning systems to prevent shocks from escalating into full-blown crises. Agility and coordination involve enhancing the capacity of institutions to adapt swiftly to evolving crises. This requires overcoming rigid bureaucratic structures and fostering intergovernmental cooperation at national and local levels. Territorial continuity is essential for ensuring state presence in all regions, particularly marginalized and rural areas. Uneven institutional reach exacerbates inequalities and leaves many populations without adequate services during crises. Strengthening local governance and enhancing community engagement mechanisms can improve institutional coverage and effectiveness.

Infrastructure is the backbone of resilient human development. It is not only about safeguarding physical assets, but also about creating systems that enable individuals, businesses and communities to thrive despite uncertainties. A way forward for LAC includes: (i) developing a robust digital foundation, with Digital Public Infrastructure emerging as a critical pillar for future-ready innovation; (ii) exploring how infrastructure, when designed thoughtfully and inclusively, can bridge geographical divides and reduce inequality; and (iii) confronting the pressing need for climate-resilient infrastructure. Together, these three dimensions form an intertwined and comprehensive foundation that societies can rely on as they navigate uncertainty.

Resilience is not only about withstanding or managing threats; it is fundamentally about agency, carving a path forward and shaping the future of development in LAC. It represents a shift from a scenario in which households face shocks alone, to one where risks are managed collectively, ensuring individuals have reliable mechanisms to cope without suffering lasting impacts. Resilience embodies hope for the future, grounded not in the expectation that adversity will never occur, but in the confidence that when it does, individuals and societies can withstand it without foregoing freedoms—and potentially emerge stronger.

Notes

1 Calculations based on Human Development Report 2025.

2 LAC Equity Lab.

3 Using the methodology from López-Calva, Luis & Ortiz-Juárez, Eduardo (2013).

4 The World Uncertainty Index measures global uncertainty by tracking the frequency of uncertainty-related terms in economic news articles and reports. The Index reflects fluctuations in global economic sentiment, indicating periods of heightened uncertainty that can affect investment, consumption and overall economic activity.

5 Based on Alkire 2025, Background paper for the Regional Human Development Report 2025.

6 UNDP (2024b).

7 The gig economy refers to a labor market characterized by short-term, task-based jobs where workers are typically paid per task or project, often coordinated through digital platforms.

8 Viollaz (2025).

9 Viollaz (2025).

10 Generative AI (genAI) refers to systems that create new content based on existing data patterns (such as ChatGPT).

11 Exposure is categorized into three primary effects: (i) automation, where tasks are fully replaced by AI; (ii) augmentation, where AI complements and enhances human work; and (iii) the "big unknown," representing jobs whose future trajectory remains uncertain as AI continues to evolve (Gmyrek, Winkler, and Garganta, 2024).

12 GWB (2024).

13 Understood as the division of society into disconnected groups, often in conflict, with weak mediation mechanisms— such as formal institutions—to resolve disputes.

14 Dammert and Sampó (2025).

15 Regionally, temperature increases varied, reaching 1.6°C in the Caribbean, 1.8°C in Central America, 1.4°C in South America, and 1.9°C in Mexico alone.

16 Zhao and others (2021).

17 Hartinger and others (2024).

18 Gordon-Strachan and others (2024).

19 Hartinger and others (2024).

20 FAO and others (2025).

21 UNDP (2024b).

22 UN (2022).

23 UNDP and Oxford University (2024).

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