

Extended Abstract

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Paper/Poster Title	<i>COVID-19 pandemic and early trends of food insecurity in Latin America and the Caribbean: a multi-country analysis</i>
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Abstract prepared for presentation at the 96th Annual Conference of the Agricultural Economics Society, K U Leuven, Belgium

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Abstract	200 words max
<p>Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has been one of the hardest hit regions of the world by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a simulation by Laborde et al. (2021), households in LAC recorded the steepest drop in consumption at 4.4% compared to the 2.5% average for developing countries overall in 2020. Focusing on thirteen countries across LAC, we undertake an empirical analysis of the early impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on household food security. We exploit three rounds of a rich High Frequency Phone Survey data collected by the World Bank across these countries from May to August 2020 in our empirical analysis. Our preliminary results show that the prevalence of food insecurity increased in the region in the early months of the pandemic compared to period preceding the pandemic and this was particularly pronounced in Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Honduras. These results have important implications for public policy across the different countries in the region.</p>	
Keywords	COVID-19, food insecurity, Latin America, and the Caribbean
JEL Code	e.g. Energy: Demand and Supply Q41 see: www.aeaweb.org/jel/guide/jel.php?class=Q)
Introduction	100 – 250 words
<p>Two years after the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and development of vaccines against the virus, the pandemic is still ravaging the world. Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has been one of the hardest hit regions of the world by the pandemic. In fact, less than six months after COVID-19 reached LAC, the World Health Organisation declared the region¹ to be the global epicentre of the pandemic on account of its growing number of cases and deaths. Overall, the pandemic has continued to cause extreme health and economic suffering across LAC. According to a simulation by Laborde et al. (2021) on the early welfare impacts of the pandemic, households in LAC recorded the steepest drop in consumption at 4.4% compared to the 2.5% average for developing countries overall. This worsening of the household consumption trends and by extension food security could be attributed to both access and availability challenges resulting from imposition of lockdown measures by governments to reduce the spread of COVID-19. These lockdowns ended up causing severe disruption of economic activities leading to massive unemployment and loss of income (International Labour Organisation, 2021) thereby reducing household's purchasing power. However, there were other factors at play as well such loss of remittance income (World Bank, 2020). Additionally, there was disruption of both intra and inter country flow of goods thereby leading to price</p>	

¹ While the aggregate number of rising cases and deaths was attributed to the entire LAC region, the actual data shows that this was mostly true for South and Central America but not the Caribbean.

increases effectively pricing out poor segments of the population. While some studies such as Udmale et al. (2020), Benites-Zapata et al. (2021), and Kansime et al. (2021) and have started shedding light on the early impacts of the pandemic on food security, there has been a gap in regional analysis especially using comparable data. Our main contribution therefore lies in providing a regional comparative analysis across multiple countries.

Methodology

100 – 250 words

We use three rounds of a High Frequency Phone Survey conducted between May – August 2020 which included a specific module on household’s food security experiences in the preceding 30 days to the interview in addition to modules on other household characteristics in our empirical analysis. The key food security variables monitored included *ate less than normal*, *ate few kinds of food*, *ate non healthy food*, *were hungry but did not eat in a whole day*, *ran out of food to eat*, *skipped a meal*, and *worried about running out of food*. We estimate the early impact of COVID-19 on household food security across some selected countries² in LAC using dynamic random effects probit model.

Results

100 – 250 words

The preliminary results show that overall, the prevalence of food insecurity increased in the region in the early months of the pandemic compared to the period preceding the pandemic. Specifically, the prevalence of households that ate few kinds or non healthy food, ran out of food to eat, skipped a meal, and worried about running out of food stood at over 30%. The most affected countries in the region included Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Honduras. While these results may not provide a strong basis to examine the magnitude of the problem since the question on the food security indicators in the survey by design only elicited qualitative responses, it still gives us a good idea about the general trend and importantly the direction of the problem.

Discussion and Conclusion

100 – 250 words

The increased prevalence of food insecurity in Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Honduras compared to other countries in the region could be explained by the pre-existing vulnerability they had before the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, prior to the pandemic, Colombia had been facing rising prevalence of food insecurity partly driven by the influx of migrants from Venezuela. On the other hand, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua that collectively make the dry corridor countries in recent years have suffered endemic droughts, drastically reducing food production. These results therefore show that in countries with high levels of vulnerability among the population, COVID-19 pandemic may have drastically worsened the food security situation. The implication of these results for policy are that there needs to be increased investment in both social protection for the poor combined with building their resilience capacity to withstand shocks in the future.

References

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² These countries include Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru.

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