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## FEATURED Q&A

# Why Is Teen Pregnancy Rising in Latin America?



Pregnancy rates among adolescents in Latin America are among the highest in the world, according to the Pan American Health Organization. // File Photo: Mexican Government..

**Q** Latin American and Caribbean countries have made “insufficient progress” in reducing high teenage pregnancy rates, the Pan American Health Organization said in a report this month. The global adolescent pregnancy rate is estimated at 46 births per 1,000 girls, while adolescent pregnancy rates in Latin America and the Caribbean continue to be the second highest in the world, estimated at 66.5 births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 years, behind only Sub-Saharan Africa, according to the report. And things could be getting worse. Latin America is the only region to see a rising trend in pregnancies among adolescents younger than 15. Why has Latin America fallen behind its peers in addressing teen pregnancy? What public policies need to be changed in order to address the problem? What sorts of public-private partnerships have worked elsewhere in the world to address teen pregnancy that might be applied to Latin America and the Caribbean?

**A** Francisco Becerra, assistant director of the Pan American Health Organization: “There are many factors that contribute to Latin America’s high adolescent pregnancy rate, including sexual violence; adolescents lacking comprehensive information on sexual and reproductive health and being unable to access related health services, including effective family planning methods; child marriage, including informal unions; reluctance among parents, schools and religious leaders to recognize that adolescents are sexually active; society’s unwillingness to protect girls from sexual violence from adults;

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## TODAY'S NEWS

### ECONOMIC

## Trump Bans U.S. Transactions With Venezuela's Digital Currency

U.S. President Donald Trump issued an order barring transactions involving Venezuela's new digital currency, the petro. The order applies to U.S. citizens as well as any transactions within the United States.

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### POLITICAL

## Bolivia Calls on Court to Order Chile Into Talks on Ocean Access

Attorneys representing Bolivia called on the International Court of Justice to order Chile to participate in talks on granting the landlocked Andean nation access to the Pacific Ocean.

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### POLITICAL

## Charges Sought Against Former Uruguayan VP

Raúl Sendic, who resigned last year, is facing corruption allegations.

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Sendic // File Photo: Uruguayan Government.

## ECONOMIC NEWS

## Trump Bans U.S. Transactions With Venezuela's 'Petro'

U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday issued an executive order banning any transactions within the United States involving Venezuela's new digital currency, the petro, CNBC reported. The order applies to U.S. citizens as well as anyone within the United States. Venezuelan

**The ban also applies to any transactions with Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA.**

President Nicolás Maduro lashed out at the declaration on state television on Monday, decrying Trump's proclamation as "imperialist." Venezuela launched its digital currency in February, claiming to have raised billions of dollars in cash through the natural resource-backed petro. The U.S. ban also applies to any transac-

tions with state oil company PDVSA, the White House said in a statement. The sanctions came just two months before Maduro is scheduled to stand for re-election, although the main opposition coalition has boycotted the race. The United States is among the countries that have declared they will not recognize the results, The New York Times reported. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the March 16 issue of the Advisor.]

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Colombia Proposes IMF Support for Venezuelan Refugees

Colombia's government on Monday proposed that the International Monetary Fund provide assistance to Venezuelans who have fled their country's political and economic crises and have streamed into neighboring countries, Reuters reported, citing officials attending the G20 summit of finance ministers and central bankers. Officials from the Western Hemisphere, the European Union and Japan discussed the proposal at the two-day gathering in Buenos Aires. "The consensus is that the

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Bolivia Calls on World Court to Order Chile Into Talks on Access to the Sea

Attorneys representing Bolivia on Monday called on the International Court of Justice, the United Nations' highest judicial body, to order Chile to enter talks over granting it access to the Pacific Ocean, the Associated Press reported. "It will remain a constant source of conflict until it is resolved," Payam Akhavan, a lawyer representing Bolivia, told the court in the Netherlands. Chile's lawyers are scheduled to present their case later this week. Rulings by the court are final and binding, although judges generally take months to decide cases.

## Uruguayan Prosecutor Seeks Charges Against Former Vice President

An Uruguayan prosecutor is seeking formal charges against former Vice President Raúl Sendic, Agence France-Presse reported. Sendic resigned last year amid graft allegations stemming from his tenure as head of state oil company ANCAP. Sendic has denied wrongdoing. Prosecutor Luis Pacheco is also seeking charges against eight other ANCAP officials.

## Mexican Police Complicit in Dozens of Abductions, Killings: Rights Agency

Mexico's state-run National Human Rights Commission on Monday said local police were complicit in at least 38 drug gang-related abductions and killings in 2011 in the town of Allende in northern Coahuila state, the Associated Press reported. The commission, which found after a years-long investigation that the Zetas drug cartel carried out the killings "with the authorization, support or acquiescence" of local police, called on authorities to take action within six months that would make amends to the victims' families and ensure they could return home.

## FEATURED Q&amp;A / Continued from page 1

and inequalities related to gender, wealth, ethnicity, place of residence (urban/rural), and education level. Countries around the world, including some in the Americas, have implemented policies that promote and protect access to quality secondary education and incorporate comprehensive sexuality education; these have been shown to be effective in delaying the age that adolescents begin engaging in sexual activity. Likewise, policies aimed at reducing poverty and increasing girls' opportunities to participate in society affect adolescent pregnancy rates. Adolescents also need access to trustworthy information and quality and efficient sexual and reproductive health services. In-

terventions that involve entire communities and convince them that reducing adolescent pregnancy is in everyone's best interest have been successful in other parts of the world in reducing child marriage and increasing boys' and girls' access to sex education and modern contraceptives, as have programs that specifically target girls in vulnerable situations. The Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization is working with other United Nations agencies to implement these and other recommendations put forth in the recently launched report 'Accelerating progress toward the reduction of adolescent pregnancy in Latin America and the Caribbean.' "

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situation is extremely negative, and we must by any means possible try to influence a solution to the problem and a change in Venezuela's situation, mainly from the humanitarian point of view," said Brazilian Finance Minister Henrique Meirelles. The funding would only be for use outside of Venezuela and would not aid Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's "regime," said Meirelles. The IMF is expected to make a decision on the fund next month. "We look forward to subsequent discussions in which we would be involved," said an IMF spokesman. Meirelles added that countries are also discussing sanctions and debt repayment in efforts to find ways to end to Venezuela's crises. More than half a million Venezuelans have entered Colombia, and 40,000 have fled into Brazil. U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said the United States could host a follow-up meeting on the subject on the sidelines of next month's World Bank/IMF meeting in Washington, according to a Treasury spokesperson. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Feb. 26 issue of the Advisor.]

## BUSINESS NEWS

### Alunorte Launches Audit Involving Brazilian Unit

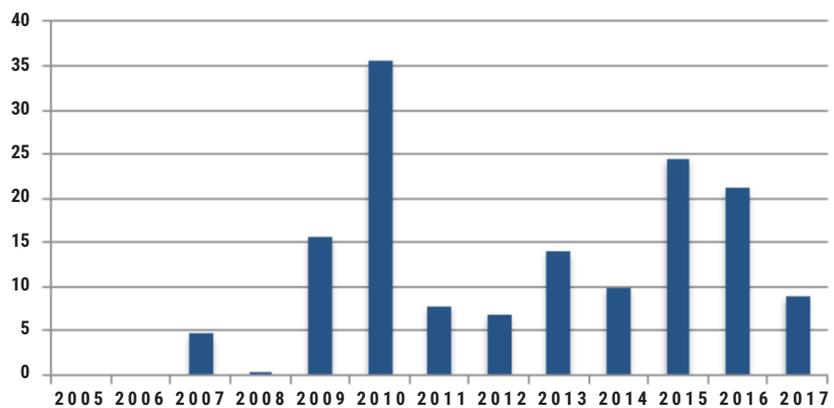
Norway-based aluminum producer Hydro on Monday said it expanded a review and launched an audit following discovery of more untreated rainwater discharges from Alunorte, its Brazil unit. The decision follows an infraction notice last week from Pará State's Environment and Sustainability Secretariat, or SEMAS. "We have discharged untreated rain and surface water into the Pará River," the company said in a statement. "This is completely unacceptable and in breach with what Hydro stands for." Hydro became South America's largest aluminum company after acquiring Brazilian mining company Vale's aluminum assets in Pará State in 2011. Alunorte is the world's largest alumina refinery, employing approximately 2,000 people. Hydro owns 92.1 percent of Alunorte.

## RESEARCH ALERT

### China's Development Financing Declines to Lowest Level in Five Years for Latin America, Caribbean

Last year saw the lowest level of lending since 2012 for Chinese state-to-state finance in Latin America, with only \$9 billion in loans from Chinese policy banks such as China Development Bank and China Eximbank directed to Latin American governments and state-owned enterprises, according to a joint [report](#) released last week from the Inter-American Dialogue and Boston University.

#### Chinese Financing to Latin America and the Caribbean by year, 2005-2017 (USD Billions)



Source: Gallagher, Kevin P. and Margaret Myers (2017), "China-Latin America Finance Database."

However, even with the relative drop in activity in 2017, China's record of lending in the region continues to surpass that of other banks. Including 2017 estimates, CDB and Eximbank have provided more than \$150 billion in finance to Latin America and the Caribbean since 2005.

As in previous years, Chinese policy bank loans in 2017 were directed toward a relatively small subset of countries. Brazil and Argentina accounted for 91 percent of total lending to the region, with 59 percent (\$5.3 billion) issued to Brazil alone, according to the report.

Though a top recipient of CDB and Eximbank loans in the past, Venezuela received no financing from Chinese policy banks in 2017, after a loan of only \$2.2 billion in 2016, aimed at improving the country's oil production capacity. The nation's troubled economy has experienced hyperinflation in 2017, and authorities have defaulted on more than \$2 billion in debt, according to reports.

Chinese financing to the region last year again focused on infrastructure development and, to a lesser extent, raw materials extraction. The largest Chinese loan in 2017—to Brazil for \$5 billion—was given to state oil company Petrobras in exchange for oil shipments.

## FEATURED Q&amp;A / Continued from page 2

**A** Katherine Bliss, principal of Girasol Global Policy Consulting and senior associate of the CSIS Global Health

**Policy Center:** “Since the implementation of voluntary family planning programs in the 1970s and 1980s, total fertility rates in Latin America and the Caribbean have dropped, with considerable variation between and within countries. Adolescents, particularly those living in poverty in rural areas, face particular challenges in avoiding unwanted sexual activity and preventing pregnancy. High rates of sexual violence, limited access

“**Governments often fail to protect girls from sexual abuse or prosecute accusations of rape...**”

— Katherine Bliss

to sexual education, health services that ignore young peoples’ needs and restricted access to abortion services all contribute to the fact that 15 percent of pregnancies each year are among adolescents younger than 20. Despite countries’ commitments to such agreements as the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women (1994) and the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), governments often fail to protect girls from sexual abuse or prosecute accusations of rape, sometimes because police are reluctant to intervene in what officers perceive to be private, or family, matters. Yet adolescents who give birth between the ages of 10 and 14 experience a higher risk of maternal mortality, and young mothers frequently drop out of school, limiting their economic prospects. Experiences from Colombia, Argentina and elsewhere have shown that enforcing laws and providing services to victims of sexual

violence, raising public awareness about the risks of adolescent pregnancy, ensuring adolescents have access to comprehensive sexual education, and training health providers to be attentive to adolescents’ reproductive health needs can lower fertility rates and help young women prepare for motherhood when they are ready.”

**A** Ricardo Izurieta, associate professor in the Department of Global Health at the College of Public Health at the University

**of South Florida:** “Mutually reinforcing risk factors coalesce to exacerbate the dramatic increase of teen pregnancy in Latin America, in relation with an epidemic of alcohol and/or drug consumption among youngsters, an endemic problem of sexual violence, as well as a lack of educational programs. It has been demonstrated that younger populations have a higher risk of using alcohol and /or drugs which increases the risk of unprotected sex. Also, adolescents are commonly the victims of sexual violence. In addition, most of the Latin American population belongs to the Catholic Church, and the Vatican is a declared opponent of the use of contraceptives, a position that exacerbates this public health problem. I propose an ‘ABC’ policy similar to the one used in HIV prevention: A) Abstinence and postponement of coitarche; B) Be educated about the negative and social inhibition effects of alcohol and/or drug consumption as well as sexual violence; and C) Contraception use. The collaboration between the public and government sectors is critical for a successful implementation of this proposed ABC program to prevent teen pregnancy. This partnership can allow the development of culturally appropriate educational programs to encourage postponement of coitarche and awareness of the effects of alcohol and/or drug consumption, and the prevention of sexual violence against adolescents, as well as the implementation of a program to place condom dispenser machines in all restrooms of public and educational places.”

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