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FEATURED Q&A

What Is Driving Chile's Success With Vaccinations?

Chile has one of the world's highest rates of vaccination against Covid-19. A Chilean who received a dose of the vaccine last month in the town of Rauco is pictured. // Photo: Chilean Government.

Q Chile has so far administered at least one Covid-19 vaccine dose to more than 18 percent of its population, surpassing all other Latin American countries, according to The New York Times' vaccination tracker. The statistic places the country at the forefront of global inoculation efforts. However, rollout rates are lagging in other countries across the region, including Ecuador, Venezuela and Colombia. What makes Chile's mass vaccination program so successful, and will it continue on this course? Given social, political and economic differences, to what extent can other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean emulate Chile's vaccine plan? Will unequal vaccine distribution directly translate to unequal economic recoveries among countries in the region?

A Carolina Nazzal, associate professor in the School of Public Health of the University of Chile: "The success of the vaccination campaign for SARS-CoV-2 in Chile is based on several pillars: first, Chile has a national immunization program implemented more than four decades ago, with universal coverage, and therefore the population is sensitized to vaccines. Moreover, the public health system, which serves more than 80 percent of the Chilean population, has a wide network of health centers at the primary level, which has made it possible to reach all sectors of the population in a short time. Additionally, new centers at the community level have been implemented in locations with the highest population density. Finally, the intersectoral work of several ministries—finance, science and health—has helped carry

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Bukele Headed for Supermajority in El Salvador Vote

With more than 90 percent of the ballots counted, Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele's party and its allies had 70 percent of the vote in Sunday's legislative elections.

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ECONOMIC

Remittances to Mexico Rise More Than 25 Percent in January

Mexico received approximately $3.3 billion in remittances in January, a 25.8 percent rise, year-on-year.

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CAPITOL HILL WATCH

U.S. Congress Eyes Expedited Citizenship Path for Some Workers

The U.S. Congress is considering legislation, sponsored by lawmakers including Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-Tex.), that would create a path to citizenship for undocumented essential workers.

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Castro // File Photo: U.S. Congress.

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POLITICAL NEWS

Bukele Headed for Supermajority in El Salvador Elections

President Nayib Bukele's New Ideas party and its allies are on track to win a two-thirds majority of the seats in El Salvador's Legislative Assembly following Sunday's elections, Reuters reported Monday. With more than 90 percent of the votes counted, the ruling party and allies had approximately 70 percent of the vote. "The citizens heeded the president's call to give him enough lawmakers to be able to govern without any opposition," Eduardo Escobar, an electoral expert and executive director of nongovernmental organization Citizen Action, told Reuters. "The results give him a free rein to rule." Critics have blasted Bukele for autocratic tendencies in governing. He has ignored rulings of the country's Supreme Court and in February 2020 sent heavily armed soldiers into the Legislative Assembly in a show of force in support of anti-crime legislation. "Despite criticisms of his autocratic style and showman-like tendencies, Bukele's popularity with voters is undeniable," Christine Wade, a professor at Washington College in Chestertown, Md., told the Advisor in a **Q&A** published Feb. 19.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Mexico's Remittances Rise More Than 25 Percent in January

Mexico received approximately $3.3 billion in remittances in January, a 25.8 percent increase as compared to the same month last year, beating analysts expectations, the Bank of Mexico announced Monday, EFE reported. In the first month of this year, the average amount of a money transfer to Mexico was $343, higher than $322 from January 2020, the central bank said. The number of transfers also increased, to 9.61 million, as compared to 8.13 million in January of last year. The majority of transfers were done electronically, the Bank of Mexico said. Last year, amid the Covid-19 pandemic, Mexico received $40.6 billion in remittances, a record amount, and an increase of 11.4 percent as compared to 2019. "Generous wage/income support fiscal transfers in the U.S., a very competitive MXN/USD level and a deep contraction of activity and employment in Mexico have acted as both push and pull drivers of dollar remittances from the U.S. to Mexico," Alberto Ramos, managing director and head of Latin America economic research at Goldman Sachs in New York, said in a note. "The expectation

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out mass vaccination of the population with great efficiency in a short time, as the purchase of vaccines was managed in advance, and Chilean centers were included in ongoing clinical trials. Therefore, the entire population is being vaccinated in an equitable manner, according to the priorities established by the health authorities, privileging those of older ages and health personnel. To date, this process has been carried out in an orderly and transparent manner. The population is confident that the process will continue to develop successfully. The countries of the region should educate the population with massive campaigns, using the media, so that participation is massive, and countries should provide access to the vaccine in different locations, including rural areas. This can be implemented through health centers and community centers."

Parsifal D'Sola, executive director of the Andrés Bello Foundation–China Latin America Research Center:

"Chile's vaccination program probably owes its success to the government's institutional framework and state-society coordination. The Chilean government negotiated early on to acquire vaccines regardless of where they

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NEWS BRIEFS

Brazil Health Secretaries Call for Lockdowns as Covid-19 Cases Surge

Brazilian state health secretaries on Monday wrote an open letter calling for lockdowns and curfews in many parts of the country as hospitals continue to struggle amid a renewed wave of Covid-19 infections, the Associated Press reported. Brazil's National Council of Health Secretaries wrote that there should be "restriction at the maximum level" in areas where more than 85 percent of hospital beds are occupied and spread is growing in order to "avoid the imminent national collapse" of the country's health system, the AP reported.

Biden, López Obrador Vow to Cooperate on Migration in Virtual Meeting

U.S. President Joe Biden and Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador issued a joint declaration Monday, vowing to work together on migration issues, including the goal of creating more jobs in southern Mexico and Central America, The Washington Post reported. The leaders met via video conference for about 90 minutes and also discussed issues including the pandemic and climate change.

Colombia Receives First Shipment Of Vaccines Through U.N.'s Covax

Colombia on Monday became the first country in the Americas to receive a shipment of Covid-19 vaccines from the U.N.-backed Covax initiative, the Associated Press reported. The country received its first batch of 117,000 doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine through the program, which aims to ensure that the world's most vulnerable people also have access to the vaccine. The Pan American Health Organization says it plans to distribute about 280 million vaccines to the Americas and the Caribbean by year-end.

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of continued fiscal stimulus and robust growth profile in the U.S. should keep remittances flow strong in 2021." Mexico's record level of remittances have more than offset the country's loss of income from international travel and tourism and led the country to have a current account surplus of 2.4 percent of gross domestic product last year, "the strongest current account outturn in more than 30 years," Ramos added. Mexico's income from remittances far outpaced the $14.6 billion that the country received from exports of crude oil, Ramos added. "At a time when the Mexican economy is one of the world's hardest hit by Covid-19, the additional income from family members in the United States is crucial to sustaining living standards," Alma Caballero, director at McLarty Associates, told the Financial Services Advisor in a **Q&A** published Dec. 16. "Many of the essential industries in the United States, including the entire food industry, professional maintenance contractors and agriculture, among others, are powered by migrants who have continued to work amid the pandemic," Caballero added.

BUSINESS NEWS

Brazilian Tobacco Exporter Accused of Using Slave Labor

CTA Continental Tobaccos Alliance, a large Brazilian tobacco exporter, has been charged with using slave labor in the South American nation's first government action against a tobacco company for conditions on a farm, a labor inspector said Monday, Reuters reported. Nine people, among them five children aged nine to 16, were rescued last week from a tobacco farm in Venâncio Aires, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Inspectors said the workers had poor living conditions and were paid less than a third of Brazil's minimum wage. They also did not have protective gear, exposing them to high concentrations of nicotine, according to the inspectors. CTA said it was not responsible for the workers, adding that it had a contract with the owner of the farm, who oversaw hiring.

CAPITOL HILL WATCH

A Look at U.S. Congressional Activity on Latin America

U.S. Congress Considering Expedited Path to Citizenship for Essential Workers

U.S. Representatives Joaquin Castro (D-Tex.) and Ted Lieu (D-Calif.) and U.S. Senators Alex Padilla (D-Calif.) and Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) on Feb. 26 announced the Citizenship for Essential Workers Act during a virtual roundtable, Castro's office said in a statement. The proposed legislation would create an expedited path to citizenship for undocumented essential workers by immediately changing their status to legal permanent residents. "From farmworkers in the fields to nurses in the ICU, immigrant essential workers have risked their lives, and their families' lives, every day during this pandemic," Castro said. There are nearly five million undocumented essential workers in positions from nurses and janitors to domestic caregivers and farmers, according to Castro's office. The act is intended to be part of a more inclusive Covid-19 recovery plan.

House Republicans Urge Biden to Hold Cuba Accountable for Rights Abuses

U.S. Rep. Mark Green (R-Tenn.), who also serves as the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, and subcommittee members María Elvira Salazar (R-Fla.) and August Pfluger (R-Tex.), on Feb. 26 sent a letter to President Joe Biden over their "deep concern" regarding Cuba. In the letter, Green, Salazar and Pfluger called on Biden to preserve U.S. policies toward Cuba that were enacted under former President Donald Trump. "We strongly urge you to implement a Cuba policy that holds the regime accountable for its continued human rights abuses and direct support for authoritarian regimes in the region," they wrote.

Lawmakers Praise Administration's Backing of Special Drawing Rights

U.S. Rep. Jesús "Chuy" García (D-Ill.) and U.S. Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) on Feb. 26 applauded Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's announcement that the Biden administration will support their proposal to release Special Drawing Rights, or supplementary foreign-exchange reserve assets, also known as SDRs, to mitigate the economic fallout caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, according to García's website. Durbin, García and U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) are the lead sponsors of legislation that directs the Treasury Department to use its vote at the International Monetary Fund to free up more SDRs for member nations, which can then be used to buy essential goods such as food and vaccines. "Strong U.S. leadership is crucial for a global recovery," García said, adding that "the Covid-19 pandemic is global, and our solutions should be as well." The praise followed a Jan. 25 letter that Durbin, García, Sanders and 10 other colleagues sent to Yellen regarding the need to address the economic impact of Covid-19 on developing countries and U.S. trading partners, Durbin's office said.

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came from. Chile worked with Pfizer/BioNTech, Sinovac, Johnson & Johnson, AstraZeneca and the Covax initiative to guarantee the acquisition of vaccines for more than 90 percent of its population. The Chilean government also spent the second half of 2020 devising a vaccination rollout plan for when vaccines arrived. Furthermore, there is no skepticism among the public about getting vaccinated, as Chileans are lining up to get their shots across the country. Odds are that

> **Chile's vaccination program probably owes its success to the government's institutional framework and state-society coordination."**
>
> **— Parsifal D'Sola**

Chile will be among the first countries in the world to turn the page on Covid-19. As for vaccine distribution in the rest of the region, it is not so much an economic issue as it is a political one. Several low-income countries worldwide managed to control the pandemic as a result of their organizational capacity. For example, Bhutan only reported its first Covid-related death in January. Countries mired in political dysfunction such as Brazil, Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras will have a tough time vaccinating their populations. Venezuela is a case of its own. Aside from the crises ravaging the country, it is likely that the millions of Venezuelans who have fled their homeland will undermine vaccination efforts in other countries, especially in Colombia, where there are around one million undocumented Venezuelans. Politically stable countries such as Costa Rica, Paraguay and Uruguay have a better chance of emulating Chile's success."

Francisco Márquez, Washington office director, and Javier Marín, senior director for health care in the Americas, both at LLYC: "The speed with which the Covid-19 vaccines were created was an amazing achievement of modern medicine. But, with innovation, factors such as distrust and misinformation will continue to be a major concern in Latin America and the rest of the world. Vast disparities in the region in health infrastructure and governments' abilities to purchase vaccines have also had a big impact and make it difficult to compare one country to another. If there is a clear lesson that can be replicated from the Chilean experience, as well as others in the world, it is the importance of commitment from a country's leadership in the political and private sector to provide credible and timely information to citizens. This commitment also extends to fighting and trying to stop the spread of misinformation. Many experts quote access to health care and having doctor-to-patient communications as other aspects of the success of countrywide vaccination campaigns. However, as in all moments of crisis, leadership and consistent messaging matters. We have seen in other countries where the unequal and often corrupt distribution of Covid-19 vaccines has further eroded credibility. Leaders won't gain trust by just telling a story; they must be part of the story they want to communicate and lead by example."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at **gkuleta@thedialogue.org**.

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