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THEDIALOGUE

FEATURED Q&A

Will Chile Be Able to Solve its Migrant Housing Issues?

Chile has been struggling to house a large number of migrants that have arrived there. A house construction project in Chile in 2020 is pictured. // File Photo: Fundacion Vivienda.

Q The Chilean government is struggling to house the large number of migrants that have arrived in the South American country, mostly from Venezuela. Informal settlements in Chile have peaked at 114,000 this year, an increase of 142 percent since 2019, according to a survey by nonprofit group TECHO, which studies housing in Latin America. How much has the migrant crisis contributed to a sense of insecurity among Chileans? How are national and local politicians in Chile seeking to resolve migration and housing issues? What kinds of measures should the government take to address labor inclusion, access to services and immigration pathways?

A Daniela Jara, director of the School of Sociology at the University of Valparaíso: "In recent years, a series of crises have intensified, which reflects difficulties that politics, institutions and decision-makers have had in responding to citizens' needs, compounded by three additional crises of legitimacy within politics and authority: access to housing, security and irregular migration. These demands have deepened the feeling that neither public policies nor authorities can handle what's going on. The crisis in the housing situation consists of a housing deficit in which supply is greater than the demand in a sustained manner in all communities. According to estimates, almost 700,000 families lack access to housing in Chile, similar to 30 years ago. From 2017 onward, the deficit has increased and has reached the worst levels of all time. In vulnerable sectors, this has meant an increase in camps as an informal housing solution, and in middle sectors, an

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Gang Leader Vanishes From Prison in Ecuador

The leader of Ecuador's Los Choneros criminal group vanished from his cell at a prison in Guayaquil, and authorities launched an operation to locate him.

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ECONOMIC

Argentina, Banks Discuss Economic Program: Report

Argentina's economy minister and bank representatives reportedly discussed the country's economic program as the government looks toward a potential debt swap.

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POLITICAL

Colombia Cites Progress in Talks With EMC Rebels

Colombia said it had extended a cease-fire with the EMC dissident rebel group and achieved the freeing of 10 hostages amid talks between the two sides. Government negotiator Camilo González said the EMC must disarm and halt kidnappings.

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González // File Photo: @camiloIndepaz via X.

POLITICAL NEWS

Notorious Gang Leader Disappears From Ecuador Prison

The leader of Ecuador's Los Choneros criminal group vanished from his prison cell, and authorities launched an operation to recapture him, officials said Sunday, Reuters reported. José Adolfo Macías Villamar better known as "Fito," was being held in the maximum-security unit of the La Regional prison in Guayaquil, BBC News reported. Police said he disappeared on Sunday and could not be found anywhere in the prison wing. As of Sunday night, it was unclear whether Macías had escaped from the prison compound or if he was hiding somewhere inside it. Macías is suspected of involvement in the assassination last year of presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio. Macías had sent death threats to the candidate, who was fatally shot in August as he was leaving a campaign rally in Quito. Macías was sentenced in 2011 to 34 years in prison for several crimes, including murder and drug trafficking, Reuters reported. Officials said Sunday that thousands of people were involved in the operation to find him. "We're grateful for the courage and commitment of the law enforcement forces, who, in an operation involving more than 3,000 people, have intervened in the prison in search of the most-wanted prisoner," presidential spokesman Roberto Izurieta said at a press conference, Reuters reported.

Colombian Gov't Cites Progress in Talks With Rebels

Colombian government negotiators announced Friday that peace talks with the Estado Mayor Central (EMC), the nation's largest dissident FARC faction, had secured an extension of an ongoing cease-fire, alongside a suspension of kidnappings and the liberation of 10 hostages, Reuters reported. Colombia has been in negotiations with the EMC as part of President Gustavo Petro's "total peace" plan. Six decades of armed struggle in Colombia has resulted in more than 450,000 casualties, but a major step toward peace was made with the demobilization of the FARC, although dissident factions like the EMC have continued fighting. Camilo González, coordinator of Colombia's negotiating team, told Reuters the talks must close with the EMC disarming and suspending its kidnapping and extortion operations. González also highlighted the importance of regional and multilateral cease-fires to reduce the intensity of violence in areas where the EMC is fighting other illegal groups for control of territory.

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increase in families living with relatives. Precarious settlements have increased in Santiago, Valparaíso, Bio Bio and Antofagasta. Among the causes are, on the one hand, a deterioration in the economic situation, with high inflation that has recently been controlled; a stagnant employment market and, on the other hand, an increase in the value of rentals, influenced in part by the great difficulties that Chilean workers with insufficient salaries experience in accessing mortgage loans and the obstacles that migrants have in complying with the requirements of a formal lease. This crisis means cities cannot cope or provide basic services or public spaces for a dignified and sustainable life, neither for children, young people, workers nor older adults. Paradoxically, the housing crisis is parallel to the intensification of property concentration. The government of President Gabriel Boric diagnosed this crisis and proposed an emergency housing plan for the construction of 260,000 homes, 40 percent of the current deficit. That's why the political crisis for Housing Minister Carlos Montes is sensitive for the government, but so is the urgency of working on long-term housing solutions."

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NEWS BRIEFS

Foreign Armed Forces Would Face Serious Obstacles in Haiti: Report

Any foreign armed forces that seek to help Haiti to combat gang violence will encounter serious obstacles, a report from the International Crisis Group warned on Friday, the Associated Press reported. The report highlights corruption in Haiti's police force and political class, as well as the ever-shifting dynamics of the nation's gang allegiances. "Preparation will be of critical importance" the report warned. Kenya's government wants to send police officers to the Caribbean nation, but the deployment has been delayed as Kenya's high court has not yet ruled on whether the force can be sent.

Brazil Postpones Reimplementation of Tourist Visa Requirements

Brazilian officials announced the nation will postpone the reimplementation of tourist visa requirements for U.S., Canadian and Australian citizens, Reuters reported Friday. The requirements were lifted under former President Jair Bolsonaro. Current President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva had set the deadline for reintroduction of the visa requirements as Jan. 10, but the rule has now been postponed until April 10. The statement cited the high tourist season around Carnival as one reason for the delay.

India Planning to Sign Deal to Cooperate With Guyana in Hydrocarbons

India's government is planning to sign a memorandum of understanding with Guyana to work together in the hydrocarbons sector, Reuters reported Friday. The agreement is being planned as India is seeking to diversify its sources of oil imports. The proposed deal will include areas such as sourcing crude from Guyana, cooperation in refining and participation of Indian companies in exploration and production.

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ECONOMIC NEWS

Argentina, Banks Reportedly Discuss Economic Program

Argentine Economy Minister Luis Caputo and bank representatives held a discussion about the country's economic program, but neither side made any official proposals on a potential debt swap, Reuters reported Friday, citing an unnamed source at the Economy Ministry. In the talks, which happened late Thursday, the government expressed "its intention" to swap local debt maturing this year for notes maturing next year and through 2027 in an amount that could reach the peso equivalent of approximately $71 billion, an unnamed source with knowledge of the matter told the wire service. "There wasn't and isn't a concrete proposal. The economic program was presented and there was an exchange of ideas regarding liability management" said the ministry source, Reuters reported. A new debt swap could be the largest in Argentina's history, exceeding the size of a $28.5 billion swap last year by Caputo's predecessor, Sergio Massa, Bloomberg News reported on Friday. Caputo and Finance Secretary Pablo Quirno told bank representatives at their meeting that new bonds could be issued in February, Bloomberg News reported.

BUSINESS NEWS

Verano Energy Sells Photovoltaic Project in Argentina

Chilean energy firm Verano energy has sold a major solar photovoltaic project in Argentina to an unnamed company, PVTech reported today. Ramiro Marquesini, Verano Energy's Argentina country manager, told PVTech that the project "means a reactivation of the Argentine market, which has been sluggish in recent years despite being a large country with high demand and abundant resources." The 150 megawatt-peak solar project is located in Argentina's Mendoza region, and construction is planned to begin this year. Verano Energy operates projects across Colombia, Chile and Peru—with a total combined capacity of nearly three gigawatts—and is now seeking to increase its presence in Argentina, PVTech reported. Interest in solar photovoltaic energy has been on the rise in Argentina, and the nation's renewables auction in 2023 wound up being oversubscribed, with 630 megawatts of capacity ultimately awarded out of an initially intended 620 megawatts put up for auction, PVTech reported. Argentine President Javier Milei announced an energy sector "emergency" last month, declaring his intent to rein in the nation's local gas and electricity regulators to allow prices to rise, Reuters reported. In a government decree, Milei's administration blamed a lack of investment in the electric and gas grid on low energy prices and said it would allow for temporary rate increases.

THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

How Successful Has Lula Been in the Year Since His Return?

Q Jan. 1 marked one year since Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva returned to Brazil's presidency. The past year has been marked by numerous new measures, notably major environmental policies, as well as a focus on international relations and leadership. What have been Lula's most significant accomplishments and main missteps in his first year? What parts of Lula's agenda remain unfulfilled, and what are the largest challenges he faces in the rest of his term? To what extent has Lula changed Brazil's standing with the international community?

A Eduardo Grin, professor at Fundação Getulio Vargas in São Paulo: "The Lula government's main achievements have been: 1.) in Brazilian politics the approval of economic measures such as the fiscal framework and tax reform, which is a fundamental achievement for the country; 2.) the resumption of many social programs such as Bolsa Família, Mais Médicos, the Food Acquisition Program, Minha Casa, Minha Vida and policies for women, among others; and 3.) the resumption of democratic normality and peaceful coexistence between the branches of Brazil's government, especially with the Supreme Court. The president no longer represents a threat against institutions such as the Supreme Court and Congress. Lula has not fulfilled his promise to end the secret budget, which further reduces transparency about how deputies and senators use amendment resources. The government does not have the political strength to reduce Centrão's power in Congress and has been unable to build a stable support base, which demands a high price in amendments and positions to approve its agendas. The government also was not successful in reducing political polarization in the country (see opinion polls that show the difficulty in appealing to sectors that supported Bolsonaro, such as evangelicals, the middle class and agribusiness). However, the government made good use of the Jan. 8, 2023 riot to defend democracy. In foreign policy, the country's resumption of protagonism, especially on the environmental agenda and in the defense of Indigenous peoples, areas that the Bolsonaro government harshly dismantled. Brazil is once again considered an important interlocutor on the international scene."

EDITOR'S NOTE: The comment above is a continuation of the Q&A published in the Jan. 2 issue of the Advisor.

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Peter M. Siavelis, professor of political science and international affairs at Wake Forest University: "Chile's worsening migrant crisis mirrors that of the United States, with economic and political turmoil in Venezuela, Peru and Haiti creating the most significant immigration crisis in the history of the Americas. In public opinion surveys, Chileans consistently cite deteriorating security as the country's most serious problem, and most tie rising insecurity to the arrival of migrants. While overall crime rates remain stable, there has been a notable surge in murders and violent crimes linked to drugs and organized gangs, particularly in the northern regions of Arica and Parinacota and Tarapacá, where migrants have clustered. The connection between rising migration and deteriorating security has led Chileans to favor a 'mano duro' approach. Even leftist President Gabriel Boric has authorized the use of military force to discourage unauthorized migration, a move that Amnesty International criticized earlier this year as the 'militarization' of immigration policy. Despite these measures and increased anti-immigration legislation, these strategies have done little to significantly curb the immigration wave. An effective immigration strategy for Chile requires a dual approach. First, the government must address border security and immigration control, with biometric registration enacted earlier this year being a positive initial step. This should be complemented by financial support, training and capacity-building initiatives for local governments. The second aspect involves managing existing and future immigrants by regularizing legal migration, streamlining hiring processes, implementing educational and economic integration programs and adopting banking reforms aimed at facilitating newcomers' entry into the formal banking system. Without reforms, migration and security will remain Chileans' top concern and most important electoral issue."

Yasna Contreras Gatica, associate professor in the Department of Geography at the University of Chile's Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism and member of the Department of Racial and Migratory Studies: "Instead of talking about the 'migratory crisis,' I prefer to say that we're in a crisis of migration policy. We've advanced greatly in building migratory policy and law, and every week we see a presidential advisor or minister debate what kind of infrastructure to develop, but we don't see any actions to diminish racism and barriers to migration. There's a lack of quantitative evidence that shows how many of the crimes in Chile are committed by individuals born outside of Chile. It's necessary to think about what role the states within the region have in resolving this common problem. We have advanced in the creation of policies and law with integrationist principles as well as care toward migrants. It's a substantial advancement on paper, as they consider such questions as: 1.) how to integrate migrant parents when you give exclusive rights to their children; 2.) how you break barriers toward integration if you don't give resources to local and border governments so that they can have a migration agency; and 3.) how you integrate people when migration is administered from within the Ministry of the Interior? Within housing, there is a preoccupation with migration that is anchored in ideas about controlling the foreigner—the other. In labor, there's a lack of oversight, especially in agricultural valleys where there are more violations in human rights and labor guarantees. We must work toward more integrated migration. That is, we have to improve communication channels for accessing information about residencies, visas, work and rights with the purpose of integrating, not discriminating."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta.

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Gene Kuleta
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Reporter

Nili Blanck
Reporter

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www.thedialogue.org

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