

Migration and COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean

Simone Cecchini
Director

CELADE – Population Division of the ECLAC



Overlapping crises are impacting migration and migrant persons

- Effects of **COVID-19 pandemic** and **war in Ukraine** add to the structural gaps of Latin America and the Caribbean.
- In 2022, high **inflation** (7.3%), **slow growth** (3.7%), high **unemployment** (7.3%), **poverty** (32.1%), **hunger** and **inequality**.
- **Social unrest**, political polarization, violence.
- Climate change, **environmental degradation** and loss of biodiversity.
- Potential increase of migration, as most persons in LAC migrate to **satisfy basic needs and improve economic conditions**.

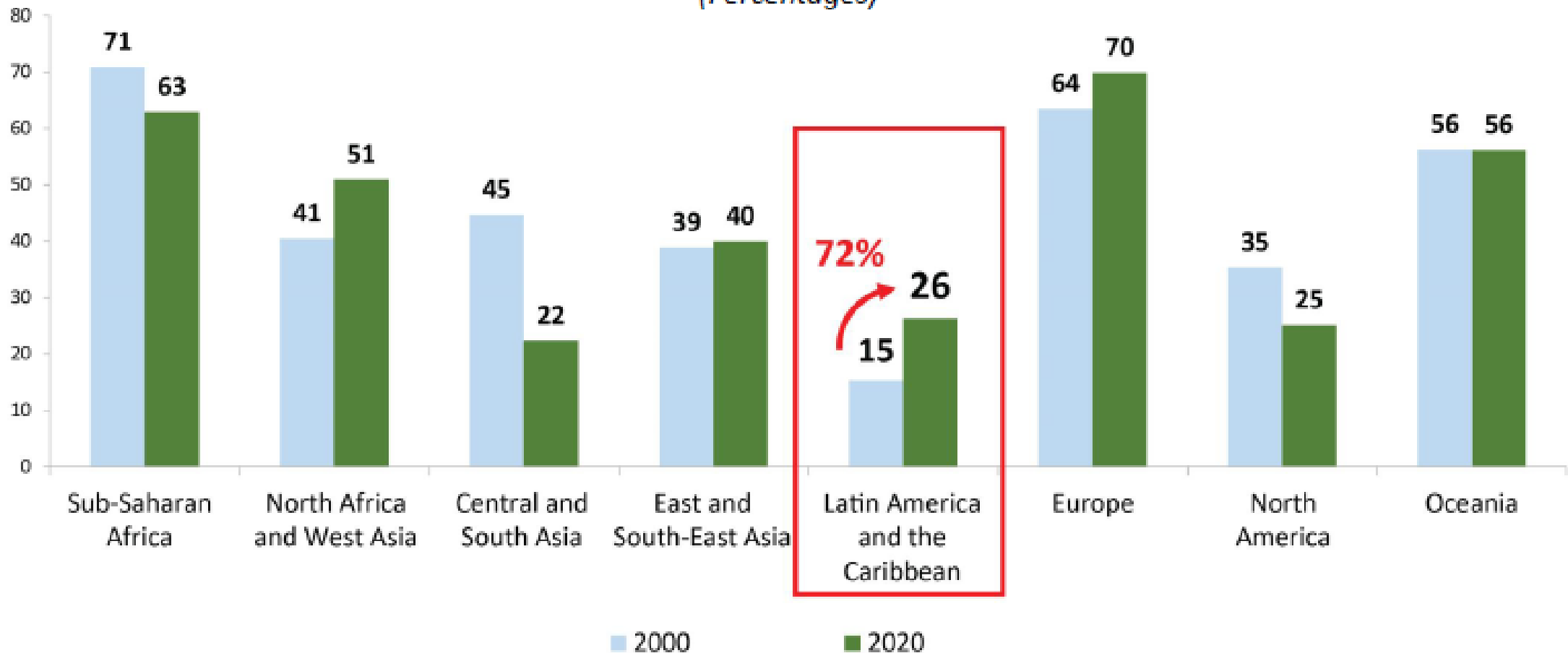


Migrants were among those most affected by the pandemic

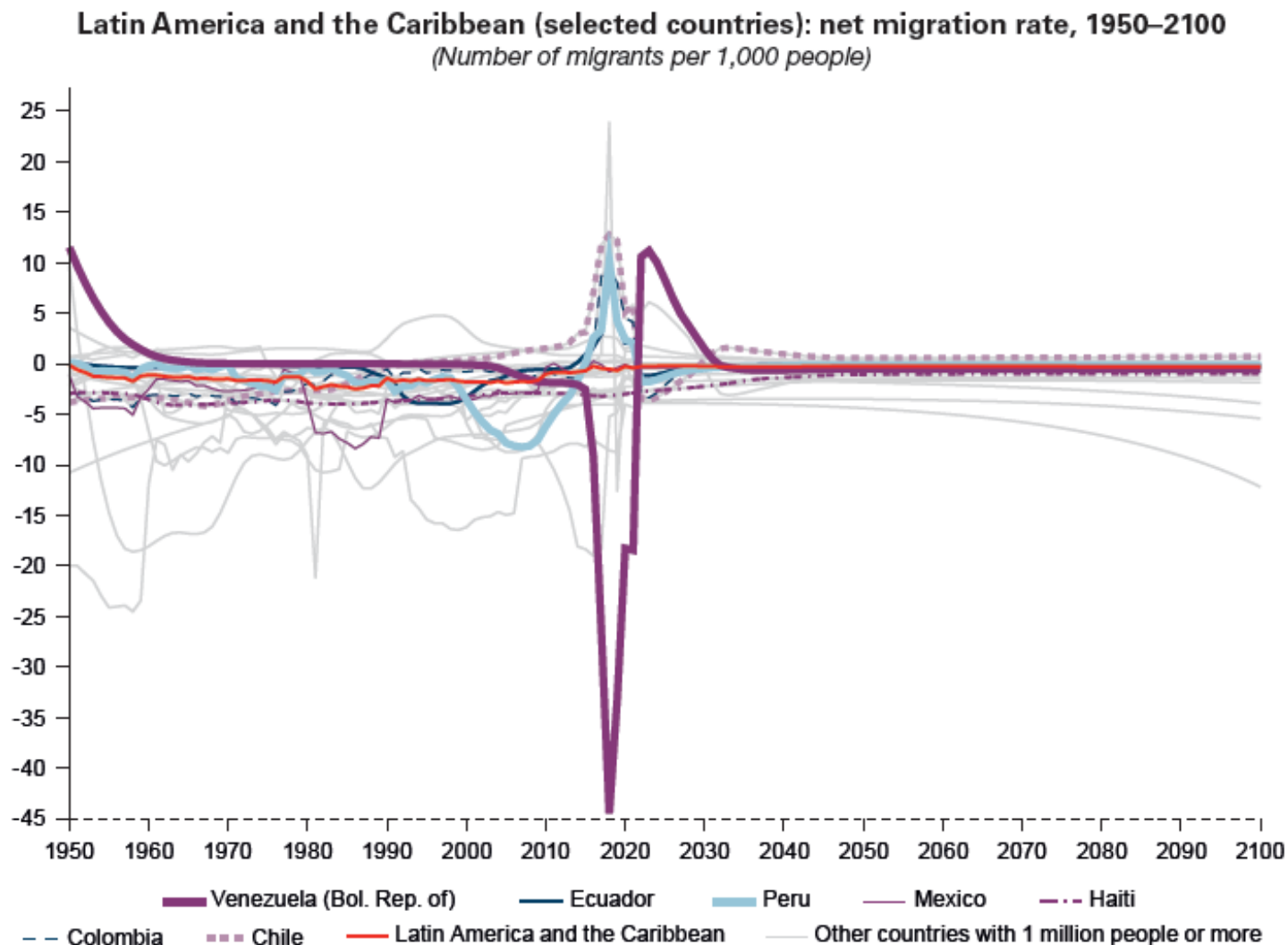
- Although official information is scarce, migrants (especially **women**) were very affected in economic and social terms by the pandemic because of their **vulnerability**.
- **Access to vaccination** and **social emergency transfers** by migrants **differed** among countries. In Chile, 73% of migrants received the Emergency Family Income.
- **Discrimination, xenophobia, racism** against migrants.
- Migrants were **indispensable in front-line occupations** in response to the pandemic.
- In 2022, **remittances** to LAC countries (142 billion USD) increased 9.3% compared to 2021.
- Impact on data of the COVID-19 pandemic: almost all **countries had to postpone their population censuses**, which are an important source of information on migration.

Latin America and the Caribbean recorded the largest increase in intraregional migration in the world between 2000 and 2020

Proportion of intraregional migrants among total migrants, by region of origin, 2000 and 2020
(Percentages)



The flow of Venezuelan migrants to countries in the region is unprecedented in the recent history of Latin America and the



Source: Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE)-Population Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of United Nations, World Population Prospects, 2022 [online] <https://population.un.org/wpp/>.

Note: only countries or territories with 1 million or more inhabitants in 2022 are included individually; others are included in the total for Latin America and the Caribbean, but are not presented separately.

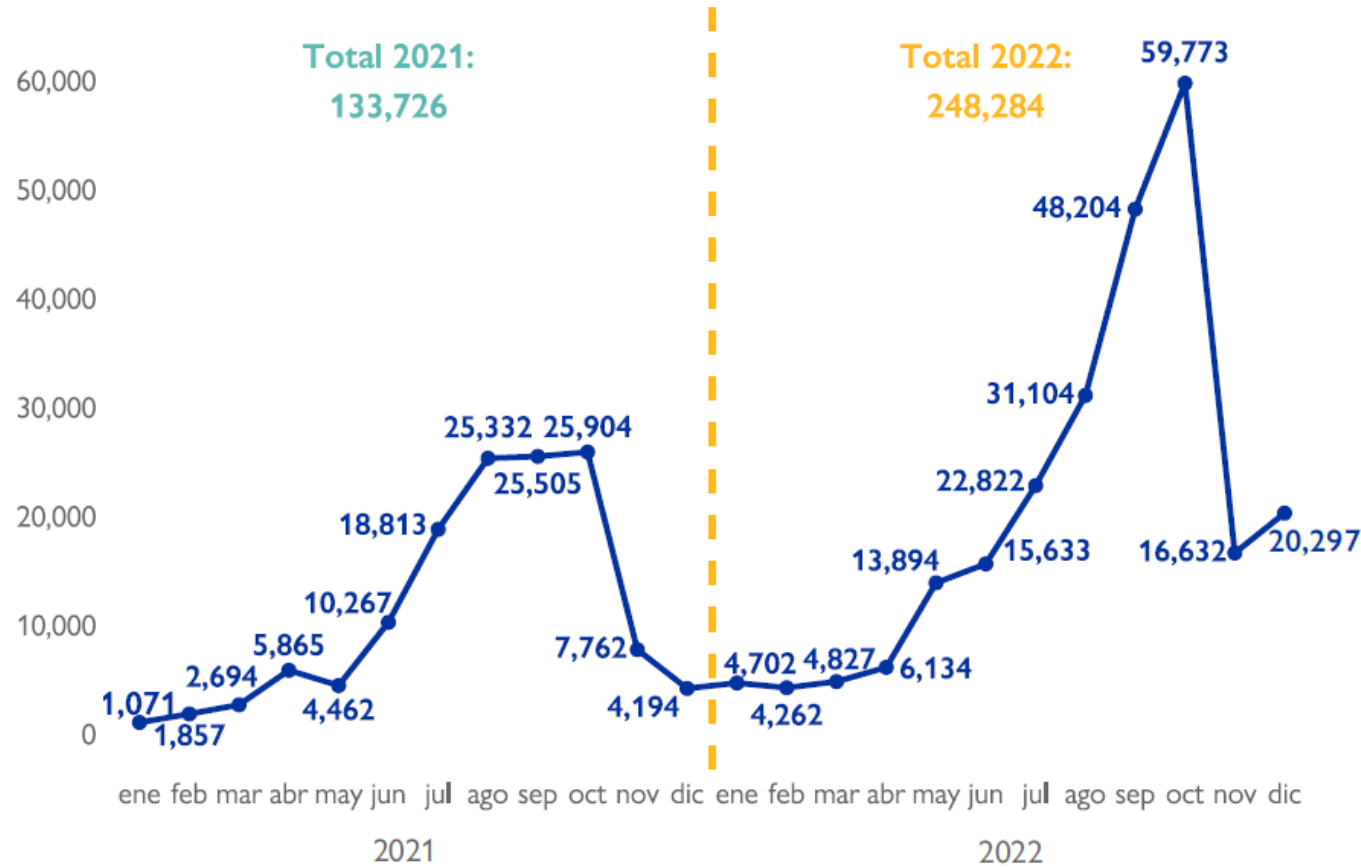
During the pandemic international migration continued despite border closings

- **Border closings** evolved towards opening with restrictions and later without restrictions.
- Some flows continued (such as the flow of Central Americans northward and of Venezuelans), while **returning migrants and regular movement stalled**.
- Emerging trend of **mixed, irregular migration**, in transit towards the United States and other countries.
- Increase in flow of migrants through the **Darién Gap** (one of the most dangerous migration routes in the world: in 2022, almost 250,000 irregular entries, almost twice than the 2021 figure) and in irregular crossings at the **Colchane border crossing** in the Chilean-Bolivian highlands.
- Dangerous flows, including with loss of human life, mainly affecting **women, children and the elderly**.

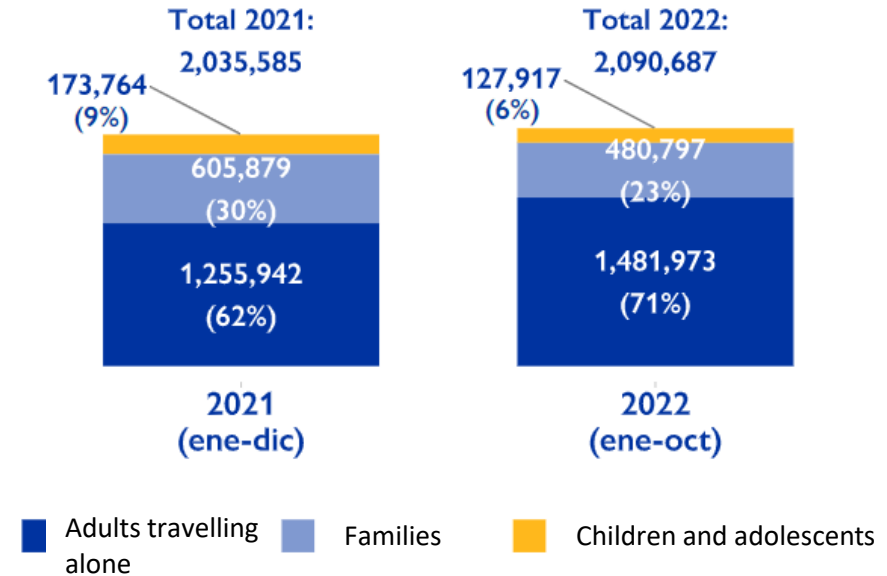


2021 and 2022 trends in irregular crossings in the Darién Gap and in US Southwest land border encounters

Irregular entries of migrants into the Darién Gap 2021-2022



United States Southwest Land Border encounters by month, 2021-2022 (January - October)



Source: United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) (U.S. Department of Homeland Security), Southwest Land Border.

Source: Servicio Nacional de Migración de Panamá, Irregulares en tránsito frontera Panamá-Colombia.

Recommendations for post-pandemic migration governance

- Strengthen **information systems** and data production.
- Facilitate **regularization** processes of the migrant population.
- **Prevent** discrimination, xenophobia, racism.
- Recognize the importance of the **contribution of migrants** to development.
- Include migrants in the coverage of countries' **health and social services**.
- **Strengthen regional coordination** to promote safe, orderly and regular migration.

