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Keynote Lecture Series The Covid-19 Crisis and Pathways to Sustainable Recovery in in the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean

- Concept Note -

Background

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and following its mandate to promote dialogue on priority issues for the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean, the EU-LAC Foundation has organised webinars and dedicated different publications to the analysis and comparison of national and regional approaches to address the health crisis and its consequences and to debate on the current challenges that the relations between the two regions are facing.¹

Likewise, since 2020, the Latin American Studies Programme of the University of Hamburg has been collecting reflections and experiences of students, lecturers and partners that address the connection between coronavirus and Latin America from different perspectives, including everyday life to global contexts or its relation to Germany.² In addition, in a joint project of the universities of Hamburg, Bochum and Gießen, and in cooperation with the Museum of Medical History and the Hamburg Historical Museum, the experiences, thoughts and memories of Portuguese and Spanish-speaking people related to the pandemic have been published in a digital “coronavirus archive”.³

Based on the interest that these forms of dialogue and articulation of perspectives have generated in audiences in both regions, and the need felt by both institutions to engage in the joint search for sustainable and transformative ways out of the crisis in its different dimensions, the EU-LAC Foundation and the Latin American Studies Programme of the University of Hamburg propose to develop, throughout 2021, a series of virtual Keynote Lectures under the title “The Covid-19 Crisis and Pathways to Sustainable Recovery in the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean”.

Introduction to the theme of the Keynote Lectures

This series of Keynote Lectures is set at the beginning of “year n. 2 of the pandemic” in which several countries are facing new “waves” of infections or implementing new sets of containment measures or other restrictions to save lives and prevent the collapse of their health systems. Far from being under control, different Coronavirus mutations have emerged, some of which are spreading with increased contagiousness, resulting in high rates of infection and mortality. At

¹ See recordings: <https://vimeo.com/458062989>;

Report: <https://eulacfoundation.org/es/documentos/seminarios-web-eu-lac-sobre-covid-19>;

Newsletter: <https://eulacfoundation.org/sites/eulacfoundation.org/files/files/ES-EU-LAC-Boletin-10-20.pdf>;

[https://eulacfoundation.org/sites/eulacfoundation.org/files/files/EULAC%20Boletin%2008-20\(2\).pdf](https://eulacfoundation.org/sites/eulacfoundation.org/files/files/EULAC%20Boletin%2008-20(2).pdf);

<https://eulacfoundation.org/en/new-multilateralism-age-covid-19-perspective-european-union-latin-america-and-caribbean-relations>

² See: (only available in Spanish or German) <https://www.slm.uni-hamburg.de/last/forschung/lateinamerika-und-corona.html>

³ See: <https://coronarchiv.geschichte.uni-hamburg.de/projector/s/coronarchive/page/welcome>



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unprecedented speed, laboratories in different regions of the world have developed vaccines against Covid-19, and while several European, Latin American and Caribbean countries have begun vaccinating the priority sectors of the population, the bottlenecks for the months ahead lie in mass production and rapid and equitable distribution to the world's population.

Beyond the imminent health challenges, the pandemic has highlighted the fragile state of our planet and our societies. In an unmistakable and abrupt way, the coronavirus outbreak reminded us of what scientists have been warning us about for some time now: that in the Anthropocene epoch, it is the actions of humans - such as overexploitation of land and natural assets, deforestation, pollution, and the expulsion of wild animals from their habitats - that lead to inequities in our ecosystems and considerable losses in biodiversity and, as well as, to the spread of zoonotic viruses such as the coronavirus which, so far (25 May 2021), is already associated with the deaths of 3.4 million people globally⁴.

A special mention should also be made on the specific situation of indigenous peoples in Latin America, whose traditional livelihoods have been severely affected by the pandemic. The territories that indigenous communities inhabit are often more vulnerable to the ecological and social changes outlined above. Pre-existing barriers in accessing health care, social security and education were amplified in the aftermath of the pandemic. In addition, quarantine periods were exploited by several illegal loggers and drug traffickers to extract resources and extend their routes and operating grounds in various forest regions, thereby increasing the loss of livelihoods, access to land and food insecurity of indigenous communities.

As far as Western societies are concerned, the pandemic increased poverty and widened social, economic and ethnic gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) found the worst contraction of gross domestic product since 1946 and an increase of structural problems such as low productivity, high labour informality, low social protection coverage, thus causing a considerable increase in poverty.⁵ Limited fiscal space, insufficient investments in the health sector, public education and decent housing, and also the low regional presence of institutes, laboratories and companies specialised in medical equipment, vaccines, medicines and logistics, meant that countries found themselves with limited capacities to adequately respond to the enormous challenges of the pandemic.

In 2020, the European Union countries also experienced a contraction in several economic sectors, accompanied by rising unemployment rates and income inequality, which was at least partially offset by the financial support packages put in place within countries and the EU recovery fund. The pandemic highlighted the consequences of the decades-long trend towards privatisation of the health sector, due to the prioritisation of principles such as austerity and efficiency. Several European governments also had to face critical questions about the sensitive dependence on medical supplies from producers based, for example, in China, and about austerity programmes that affected the health system, although to a lesser extent than in other regions of the world.

In both regions, medical personnel were stretched to the limits of their capacities; many school children and adolescents have lost valuable time for learning and developing skills needed to assume important tasks and roles in their societies in the immediate future. From the perspective of gender relations, the pandemic led to a sharpening of inequalities between men and women, as

⁴ As of 25 May 2021, the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center recorded 3,474,911 deaths associated with the pandemic; see: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu>

⁵ <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/46504-preliminary-overview-economies-latin-america-and-caribbean-2020>



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both in Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean, many women have left their jobs and/or faced a high burden of roles such as education and care in households⁶. However, it is noted that the pandemic situation offers at the same time an opportunity to openly discuss and question gender roles.

The multiple inequalities within and between our societies are also illustrated most vividly by the example recently given by Achim Steiner, the current Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): *“the actions of an indigenous person in the Amazon, whose stewardship helps protect much of the world’s tropical forest, offsets the equivalent of the carbon emissions of a person in the richest 1 percent of people in the world. Yet indigenous peoples continue to face hardship, persecution and discrimination”*.⁷ At the same time, as they have done for centuries, indigenous peoples have been developing strategies and proposals to protect their ecological environments and social formations by passing on vital knowledge to the younger generation, thus strengthening their communities in the face of the current pandemic.

Faced with the question of how to respond to this crisis that has exacerbated the structural problems in our societies and our relationship with the environment? - To return to a “business as usual” or the status quo ante, or to bet on new ways to foster sustainable human development and alleviate planetary pressures? - The foreign ministers of the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean, gathering in a virtual meeting on 14 December 2020, demonstrated their determination to pursue the second option: *“The crisis is an opportunity to “build back better” in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Ministers agreed that, by joining forces, including in strong green and digital partnerships, the two regions can ensure a common better future for their citizens”*.⁸

Objective of the Keynote Lecture Series

With this series of lectures, the EU-LAC Foundation and the Latin American Studies Programme of the University of Hamburg want to contribute to the generation of knowledge and the exchange between scientists, civil society actors, public officials and decision-makers on concepts, best practices and public policies that have been developed in Latin American, Caribbean and European countries to promote a “better” and sustainable recovery of the sectors and areas that have been particularly affected by the pandemic.

Format of the Keynote Lectures

The Keynote Lecture series will consist of 6 virtual sessions that will take place on a regular basis of approx. two weeks, starting in July 2021 and culminating in September 2021. Each Keynote Lecture will last 1.5 hours and will focus on a particular area, such as, for example, public health systems, educational institutions, the economic sector, gender relations, urban development, environmental protection, or groups in situations of particular vulnerability and social minorities.

For each Keynote Lecture, one European and one Latin American or Caribbean speaker of high reputation and with outstanding expertise on the topic will be invited and asked to give a speech

⁶ <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/46634-economic-autonomy-women-sustainable-recovery-equality>

⁷ UNDP (2020): Human Development Report 2020: iii; see: <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2020.pdf>

⁸ Joint Statement: EU27 - Informal Ministerial Meeting of Latin America and the Caribbean, Brussels 14/12/2020: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/eu-lac-communique/2426940>



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of approx. 25 minutes, presenting, analysing and comparing strategies, solutions and transformative measures that have emerged in the past months in one or several countries in both regions towards a “better recovery”.

The Keynote Lectures will be moderated in tandem by a representative of the EU-LAC Foundation and a representative of the Latin American Studies Programme of the University of Hamburg. The moderators will have the role of introducing the topic of the lecture and the speakers and moderating the dialogue between the speakers and the audience.

Audience

The Keynote Lecture series will be open to interested members of the general public, subject to registration. Of particular interest would be a greater involvement of university students and researchers, representatives of civil society organisations and state institutions whose work focuses on the areas of the Lecture Series, but also journalists and communicators and interested members of the general public.

In order to attract the interest of these audiences, the EU-LAC Foundation and the Latin American Studies Programme of the University of Hamburg will announce the programme of the Keynote Lecture series through their respective communication channels.

For participants who will be interested in following all the lectures, the Latin American Studies Programme of the University of Hamburg will issue (upon request) a **certificate of attendance** at the end of the lecture series.

Languages

The Keynote Lectures will be held in **Spanish and/or English**, according to the speaker’s language preference. **Simultaneous interpretation** will be provided.

Technical information

The Keynote Lectures will be held in digital format and will be open to the interested public. The use of the **zoom platform** is foreseen for the delivery of the Keynote Lectures. **Registration link:** https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_7tOhBErYTFiuGkCxaa58uw

The interested audience will be asked to register in advance for the lectures in a format that will be made available through the announcement of this activity. All participants who register will receive a specific link to connect to the virtual platform at the time of the conference.

Speakers who confirm their availability to give a lecture will receive an individual link to the virtual platform and will be asked to log in about 20 minutes before the event to test the microphone, webcam, and a stable connection.



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During the session, participants will be asked to keep their microphone muted when it is not their turn to reduce background noise. Moderators and hosts may mute the microphone in case of noise when other speakers are speaking.

After the speakers' speeches, a space for questions from and dialogue with the audience will be provided.

Unless a speaker articulates his/her objection, the Keynote Lectures will be recorded and subsequently published on the social media platforms of the EU-LAC Foundation and the Latin American Studies Programme of the University of Hamburg. For this purpose, **all participants automatically declare their legal consent to be recorded during the event and especially in the discussions.**

Expected results

- Elaboration of a publication reflecting the lectures and the dialogue held during the lectures; recording of the lectures; dissemination of the lectures through the websites and communication channels of the EU-LAC Foundation and the Latin American Studies Programme of the University of Hamburg.
- Contribution to the generation of knowledge and the analysis of viable strategies and solutions aimed at a “better” and sustainable recovery in social and economic areas that have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus in Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union.
- Facilitation of knowledge transfer and dialogue between experts, civil society representatives, public officials and decision-makers on possible measures and good practices that are being developed in Latin American, Caribbean, and European countries to “build back better” and strengthen the efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.