

THE WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SECTOR AND ITS RESPONSE TO COVID-19: INITIATIVES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Annex 1: Measures adopted in Latin American countries in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Last update:

Updated until: April 15, 2020



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In recent weeks, both governments and utilities have implemented a set of measures to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 emergency on both public health and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services. This annex presents an overview of initiatives that countries and WASH stakeholders have launched or are implementing in the COVID-19 response to assure WASH services for all in Latin America and the Caribbean¹.

In general terms, it is observed that:

1. Direct economic financial transfers have been provided to households to maintain their consumption levels and contribute to their food security, generally with no explicit mention of water. In addition, many countries have implemented measures prohibiting the disconnection of users and enforcing the reconnection of previously disconnected users, as well as measures requiring water to be distributed to unconnected households and vulnerable groups. However, it is likely that these mechanisms will not be sufficient to cover the entire population.

¹ This Annex presents a mapping of measures that the WASH sector has implemented in the COVID-19 response in the Latin American and Caribbean region. It has been prepared based on web searches of initiatives and measures taken by governments, utilities and bilateral and multilateral cooperation agents in Latin America and the Caribbean, as of 15th April 2020. Therefore, the main sources of information used have been the official websites of governments (national and/or provincial in the case of federal countries), websites of utilities and their national and international associations, news stories published in the media, references on Twitter and other social networks, and interviews with UNICEF staff, regulators and local stakeholders.

2. These measures could lead to an increase in household water consumption, which could compromise the capacity of systems. Several countries have promoted campaigns for the good use of water and sanitation services, while other countries rationed water by the hour.
3. In terms of access to and management of sanitation, there are fewer concrete measures. This may be especially important for people in confinement who do not have access to sanitation at home and need to use shared or public toilets and for essential workers if public infrastructures are not available.
4. Hygiene promotion campaigns and the distribution of basic products like soap have been stepped up but other measures such as the construction of hand washing facilities in schools, markets and prisons have been scarce.
5. Some countries are implementing technical and financial support measures for utilities, but this support may need to be extended if the period of confinement is prolonged. Some utilities are putting their own measures in place to protect workers and guarantee service provision.
6. The request to suspend payment for water and sanitation services has generally been heeded by national governments and is expected to have a substantial impact on rural systems, which lack the liquidity and solvency of large urban utilities. There are no special measures to support these rural systems, which may suffer from a lack of liquidity and supplies in the short term.
7. Some countries are facing two problems that can exacerbate the situation for vulnerable populations: droughts and the spread of dengue fever, which, according to the Pan American Health Organization, infected more than three million people in Latin America in 2019, six times the number infected in 2018.² The spread of dengue fever is strongly linked to poor water storage in homes.
8. The funding sources of all measures identified could only be verified in a small number of cases.

The changing and dynamic situation in all countries will probably result in new measures and initiatives to be adopted by countries over the coming weeks. Therefore, these annexes will be updated fortnightly to provide an overview of how the WASH sector is responding over time to COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean.

² Pan American Health Organization (2020). Epidemiological Update: Dengue. 7 February 2020. Available at: <https://www.paho.org/en/documents/epidemiological-update-dengue-7-february-2020>

Table 1: Strategic measures adopted in Latin American countries in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as per 15th April 2020

Area/Activity		LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES														
Legend:	<div><div>x</div><div>There is a governmental initiative at national level</div></div> <div><div>x</div><div>There is a governmental initiative at sub national level or a non governmental initiative</div></div> <div><div></div><div>No information</div></div>	ARG	BRA	PAN	CHL	PRY	GTM	ECU	HND	CRI	PER	COL	BOL	ELS	VEN	MEX
1. Preserve the ability of all people, including the most vulnerable, to meet their basic water, sanitation and hygiene needs.																
Identifying priority intervention areas, supporting national multi-sector mapping of the areas most at risk from COVID-19 (“hotspots”) with data from the water and sanitation sector.		x							x		x	x				x
Not cutting off the water supply to households who are unable to pay bills, under any circumstances.		x			x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Immediately reconnecting free of charge all households disconnected for non-payment that do not currently receive water services.				x					x	x	x	x				
Ensuring a minimum daily volume of drinking water for all households classed as vulnerable or not connected to the mains network, through infrastructure expansion and/or unconventional solutions (e.g. distribution of water to households or at specific community points, water trucks, water kiosks, etc.), respecting social distancing (one-metre spacing of taps).			x	x				x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
Ensuring provision of services to all groups living outside a home.								x			x				x	
Establishing, maintaining and/or extending (in collaboration with social protection services) the financial instruments needed to facilitate service payments for vulnerable households: implementing some form of subsidy system, freezing bill collection, writing off debts for non-payment, exempting households from reconnection costs, etc.		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		
Evaluating the possibility of introducing a free minimum basic consumption for families in anticipation of an increase in consumption due to better hygiene and the confinement of many people to their homes.					x	x						x	x			
Providing non-centralized basic sanitation solutions using unconventional technologies (e.g. compact toilets, latrine emptying and faecal sludge management, etc.) to all households not connected to the sewerage system, preventing the need to practice open defecation.																
Ensuring public or community bathrooms are open, available and accessible free of charge to people who do not have them at home and/or are doing essential work outside.												x				
Ensuring the availability of basic products for family hygiene (soap, hand sanitizing gels, menstrual hygiene products, toilet paper, etc.) and domestic water treatment (chlorine tablets, water filters, etc.), either through direct distribution, cash-based interventions or market control mechanisms.		x	x	x		x			x			x		x	x	
Guaranteeing access to electricity and communications for users so they can communicate with suppliers and authorities, receive information, make online payments, etc.		x		x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Establishing communication channels between utilities and users.		x			x				x		x	x	x			x
2. Intensify awareness-raising campaigns for handwashing with soap and water and efficient water use in the home																
Encouraging the immediate restoration or new construction of handwashing points in priority sites or “hotspots,” including schools, health facilities, markets, prisons, stations and other public places, respecting social distancing (one-metre spacing of taps).								x	x	x		x	x		x	x
Strategies to promote handwashing with soap and water to the entire the population and different age groups, focusing on the most vulnerable groups, making content available in the different languages used in countries, and using nudging techniques to encourage good practices.		x	x			x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Identifying and training community leaders in prioritized areas to promote handwashing with soap and water in their respective communities and participation in monitoring.			x										x		x	
Combating misinformation and fake news campaigns on COVID-19 (e.g. in relation to mechanisms of spreading of the COVI=19, symptoms, treatments, etc.).		x		x				x		x					x	
Promoting home water treatment if there is no access to safe water (e.g. boiling water, chlorine tablets, filters, etc.).								x			x		x		x	
Introducing measures and campaigns for water-saving and efficiency.				x				x		x	x	x			x	x
3. Guarantee the continuity and safety of water and sanitation services																
Identifying critical intervention areas (“hotspots”) in the utility’s service area to prioritize COVID-19 response interventions.		x														x

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	Conducting a rapid assessment of the WASH situation in health care facilities prioritized to deal with COVID-19 to ensure quality and continuity of water and sanitation services 24/7 in health care facilities , using unconventional mechanisms if necessary and ensuring the cleaning and disinfection needs of the facilities are met.			x		x				x		x					x	x
	Ensuring proper operation of drinking water systems at all stages: collection, production, treatment and distribution to the final consumer. Planning preventive maintenance tasks at all critical points of the system (e.g. at the intake, in the pipeline, in the treatment plant and in the distribution network). Monitoring residual chlorine at specific key points.					x		x		x	x	x				x		x
	Ensuring proper operation of the sewerage system and non-centralized sanitation solutions at all stages: emptying of latrines and septic tanks and transport, treatment and disposal of faecal sludge.							x		x				x				
Expanding infrastructure and extending coverage of water and sanitation services to unconnected areas			x									x		x				x



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Advocacy to ensure the government guarantees access to electricity for utilities to ensure the operation of water and sanitation services.										x								x
Strengthening the supply chain of all products and materials needed to operate water and sanitation services (disinfectants, chemicals, spare parts, etc.).						x				x			x	x	x		x	x
Ensuring correct management of waste generated in the process of water purification and wastewater treatment (e.g. sewage sludge). Given that international supplies will be difficult to obtain in the coming months, optimizing and prioritizing the use of domestic products.															x			
Ensuring the availability, quality and continuity of water and sanitation and handwashing services in schools , using unconventional mechanisms if necessary, in anticipation of reopening.								x		x				x	x			
Ensuring access to protective equipment for workers of service suppliers who may need it during operation and maintenance tasks. Developing protocols for action in cases of contagion among operational personnel.							x	x		x	x	x					x	
Distributing protective equipment to informal workers in the sanitation sector.									x				x	x				
Introducing online payment services if they do not already exist.							x							x				x
4. Provide technical and financial support to utilities																		
Providing technical assistance to utilities for management, financing, planning, operation and maintenance, etc. Supporting the creation/updating and implementation of emergency response plans or contingency plans.						x	x			x			x	x	x			x
Activating special funds to guarantee the operation of and to improve, upgrade and expand water and sanitation infrastructure to meet the specific needs of the pandemic.						x	x							x				
Ensuring urban service providers receive the necessary financial support and supplies (including personal protective equipment) to guarantee the proper operation of services.				x		x	x											
Ensuring rural and community service providers (both formal and informal) receive the necessary financial support and supplies (including personal protective equipment) and technical assistance to ensure continuity of service							x										x	
Promoting correct monitoring of the utilities and smaller operators . Developing a simple monitoring system to facilitate early detection of service delivery failures and promote corrective action.							x											
Establishing a coordination platform between government and service providers and their associations for the exchange of experiences, good practices, crossover learning processes, etc.						x				x								
Developing short- and medium-term economic viability plans for utilities.															x			
Establishing multi-actor emergency coordination mechanisms , including international and multilateral organizations and other actors				x	x		x	x		x	x	x		x	x		x	x

