

UN says COVID-19 could force 45 million into poverty in Latin American and Caribbean



United Nations, July 10 (RHC)-- The COVID-19 pandemic could push 45 million people from the middle classes into poverty in already economically troubled Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations said on Thursday.

"In a context of already gaping inequalities, high levels of informal labor and fragmented health services, the most vulnerable populations and individuals are once again being hit the hardest," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a statement.

The hard-hit region has registered more than three million cases of the novel coronavirus, more than half of them in Brazil, according to an AFP tally based on official sources.

Guterres said the region could see a stunning 9.1 percent drop in GDP, the worst in a century. The devastating impact is being magnified, the UN said, because it follows seven years of weak growth and hits countries where millions lack adequate healthcare or easy access to potable water.

The world organization foresees a seven percent rise in the poverty rate this year, adding 45 million to the ranks of the poor, for a region-wide total of 230 million, more than one-third the total population there.

The UN also predicted a 4.5 percent rise in extreme poverty, those threatened with hunger. Guterres urged countries to provide an emergency basic income -- averaging \$140 a month per person -- plus food subsidies for those in need.

Guterres also called on the international community to provide financial aid, help ensure the region's liquidity, and provide debt relief.

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