

The Sociodemographic and Economic Context of Aging in Latin America



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**Decade of Healthy Aging in the Americas
situation and challenges**

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Contents

Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	1
Geographical considerations and demographic composition of older people	2
Geographical differences in statistics on older people.....	2
Age-sex distribution.....	6
Ethnic origin	8
Sociocultural and family characteristics of older people	9
Marital status.....	9
Living arrangements and roles of older people in the home.....	12
Illiteracy and access to formal education.....	17
Socioeconomic characteristics of older people	21
Access to pensions in old age.....	23
Poverty and extreme poverty	26
Access to safe drinking water and sanitation	28
Access to clean water in households with older people	29
Access to sanitation services in households with older people	31
Conclusions	32
References	34

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This publication is part of a series entitled *The Decade of Healthy Ageing in the Americas: Situation and Challenges*, and is the result of an interagency interinstitutional initiativeeffort. The series was coordinated and edited by Patricia Morsch, Enrique Vega, and Pablo Villalobos, under the supervision of Luis Andrés de Francisco Serpa from PAHO.

The purpose of the series is to provide regular updates on the different action areas of the Decade of Healthy Aging (2021–2030) in the Region, as well as other related issues.

The collaboration from PAHO, the United Nations system, the Inter-American system, and the academic world who participated in the initiative and formulated essential feedback and recommendations for the project to see the light is appreciated.

Introduction

The objective of this publication is to describe the current socioeconomic situation of older people from an individual, non-population perspective, taking care to incorporate different demographic, social, and economic dimensions. To this end, we used data from countries with recent demographic censuses to characterize older people (aged 60 and older) and whenever possible, to show the differences between different age subgroups within this population. In the last two years, many countries put off conducting a population census due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. In this context, only five countries of Latin America have more recent census data. The countries and dates included in this analysis are: Peru and Chile (2017), Colombia and Guatemala (2018), and Mexico (2020)¹. In addition, whenever possible, indicators will be disaggregated by sex and area of residence (urban or rural), which will show differences in those population characteristics.

Each section of the report presents information on older people in Latin America based on the indicators included in demographic censuses: demographic and geographical considerations (second section); sociocultural and family characteristics (third section); economic characteristics (fourth section), and lastly, health characteristics (fifth section).

¹ The indicators are not always available for all five countries.

Geographical considerations and demographic composition of older people

The goal of this section is to provide a sociodemographic profile of the population. To do so, the most recent demographic census conducted by the countries (close to 2020) will be used as a source of information. The data covers sex, age, ethnicity, and urban or rural area of residence. In addition, given that large cities are generally where most of the older population is concentrated, an overview of the aging of people living in these cities is provided, based on data from the last census of cities with more than one million inhabitants.

Geographical differences in statistics on older people

The population aging process at the national level masks geographical differences within the countries. Demographic transition, a process consisting of a decline in fertility and mortality, could indicate that urban areas where the transition occurs earlier would be the furthest ahead in the population aging process. However, this trend is not seen in all countries, mainly due to the process of selective migration from rural to urban areas where the working-age population moves the most, leaving the older population in rural areas (1,2)². Therefore, the stage of population aging depends on the specific features of urbanization in each country in terms of the volume and degree of selectivity of migration by age, among other factors, and on differences in fertility and mortality rates in the different areas. The most recent census data indicate that in 2018, 46.1% of Guatemala's total population still lived in rural areas, compared to a rural population of roughly 23% in Colombia and Mexico. Chile, meanwhile, is very advanced in the urbanization process: only 12.2% of the population lived in rural areas in 2017.

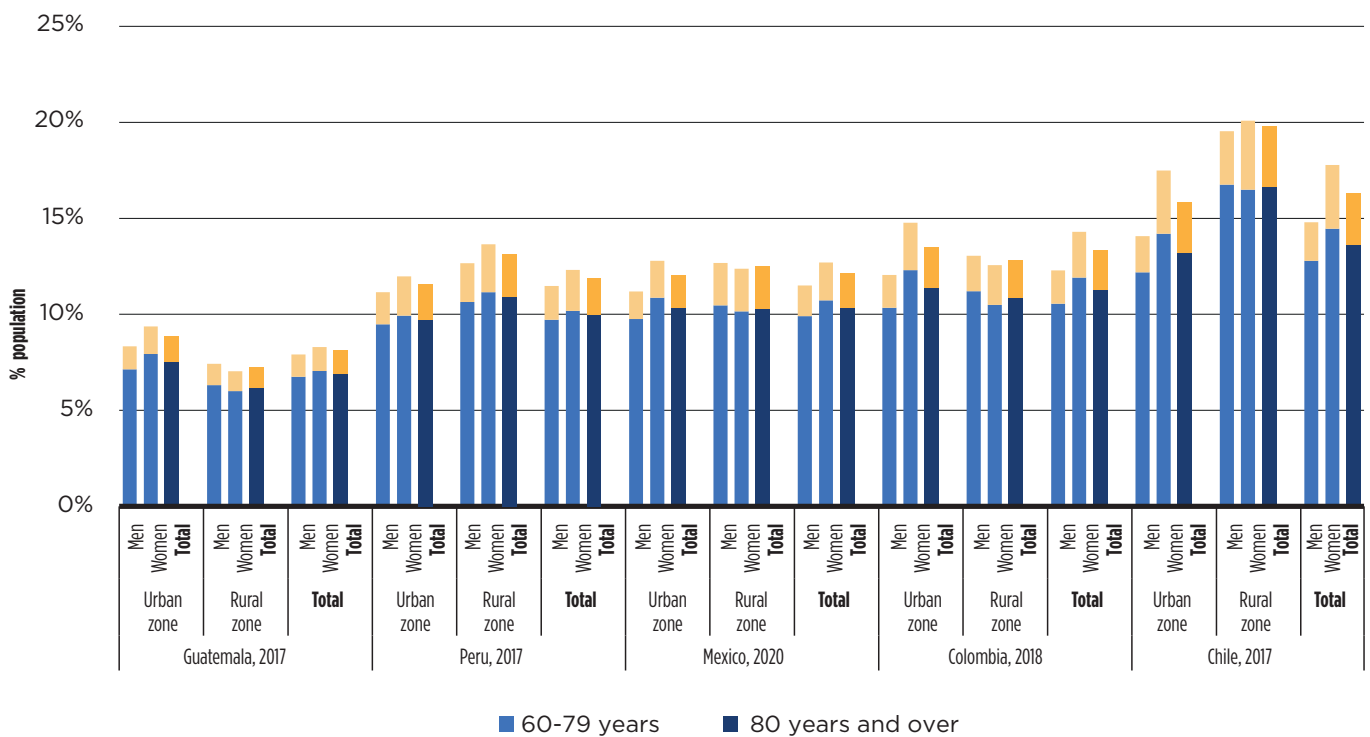
Figure 1 shows the percentage of the population aged 60 and over from five countries, based on the most recent demographic censuses. In addition to being disaggregated by area of residence, data on the older population is shown by sex and age group (60–79 years and 80 years and older). The scenario varies from one country to another:

² It should be clarified that this does not mean that urban areas are undergoing less population aging than rural areas. The data in Figure 1 show that aging in urban areas is currently almost the same as the national total. However, because of the much more advanced stage of demographic transition in urban areas, the percentage of older people should be higher but it is not, because young people are moving from the countryside to the city. The sex-selective nature of internal migration in Latin America and the Caribbean—with women moving more than men—is illustrated by differences between urban aging and rural aging of men and women. See Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Population, territory and sustainable development. Santiago: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; 2012. Available in Spanish at: https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/42654/1/S1701063_es.pdf Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Spatial distribution and urbanization in Latin America and the Caribbean. Santiago, ECLAC; [undated] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://celade.cepal.org/bdcelade/depualc/>.

Some countries such as Chile and to a lesser extent Mexico, show more advanced aging of the rural population than the population living in urban areas, while in other countries, the urban population is older, as in the case of Guatemala and Colombia.

When analyzing the data by sex, a difference can be seen in the aging process in all countries, with a higher percentage of older women. This is partly explained by the higher survival rate of women compared to men, but is also due to the sex selectivity of migration flows in each country. Accordingly, in Mexico, Guatemala, and Colombia, men living in rural areas comprise an older group than rural women because of the higher rate of younger women moving to urban areas.

Figure 1: Latin America (five countries): Population aged 60 and over, by age group, sex, and area of residence



Source: Demographic censuses of Chile (2017), Peru (2017), Guatemala (2018), Colombia (2018), and Mexico (2020). Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE), ECLAC Population Division. Redatam7. Santiago, CELADE, ECLAC; [c2022] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://www.redatam.org/redbin/RpWebEngine.exe/Portal?lang=esp>.

The above analysis leads to the conclusion that as a result of urbanization, the majority of the population, including older people, live in urban areas and that premature aging in the countryside is due to age and the sex selectivity of migration. These features of the aging process are extremely important and they influence the

requirements for guaranteeing the rights that give the population greater access to appropriate services and better living conditions, which is why planning must be based on these profiles. In general, the aging process in rural areas has disadvantages of a social and economic nature, including access to basic services, and especially to more complex health services (2, 3). People living in scattered rural areas are far away from urban centers that have more hospital or services infrastructure. Policies and programs should anticipate the need for adequate transportation for this population, which usually has some form of physical limitation or disability in terms of traveling to urban areas.

At the same time, a high percentage of the population of most Latin American countries lives in large urban centers and faces particular challenges in accessing the best highly complex hospital infrastructure (1-3). The size of cities in Latin America and the Caribbean ranges from a few thousand inhabitants to millions of people living in sprawling urban areas. Although the population aging process in cities follows different trajectories, most large cities are further along in this process than the average population of their respective countries (1).

Table 1 shows the population aging indicators of 19 Latin American cities with more than one million inhabitants (based on data from the 2010 census round).³ Montevideo, Cali, Santiago, the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, and Medellín are the cities with the oldest populations; Montevideo has the highest percentage of people aged 60 and over (nearly 20%). As a result, these same cities have the highest old-age dependency and aging ratios. The old-age dependency ratio ranges from 33 to 22 people aged 60 years and over for every 100 working-age people aged 15 to 59. As for the aging ratio, for every 100 people under 15 years of age in Montevideo there were 104 people over 60 years of age in the population, compared to 65 and 92 older people (60 years and older) in the other four large cities with older populations.

The other large cities included in Table 1 have old-age dependency ratios below 20%. For example, the city of Tegucigalpa, which is still considered a younger city, has 12 people aged 60 and over for every 100 people of potential working age.

³ This table with data from the most recent demographic census available offers a more complete picture, and assumes that the population volume of these large cities has not significantly decreased in recent years.

Table 1. Latin America (19 cities): Total population, population aged 60 and over, and aging ratios

City	Country	Year	Population			Old-age-dependency ratio ^a	Aging ratio ^b
			Total	De 60 años o más	Porcentaje		
Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area	Argentina	2010	13,578,548	2,091,150	15.4	25.2	65.5
La Paz	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	2012	1,687,426	137,999	8.2	13	28.5
São Paulo	Brazil	2010	19,459,583	2,079,309	10.7	15.8	48.8
Rio de Janeiro:	Brazil	2010	11,777,368	1,569,295	13.3	20.2	64.0
Santiago	Chile	2017	6,683,556	1,030,510	15.4	23.6	80.1
Bogota:	Colombia	2018	8,621,795	1,086,689	12.6	18.5	65.5
Medellin	Colombia	2018	3,534,843	541,865	15.3	22.6	91.5
Cali	Colombia	2018	2,226,988	365,292	16.4	25.0	91.3
San Jose	Costa Rica	2011	1,202,680	142,381	11.8	17.9	53.9
Quito	Ecuador	2010	1,607,734	149,984	9.3	14.6	34.8
Guayaquil	Ecuador	2010	2,509,530	210,652	8.4	13.4	29.1
Guatemala City	Guatemala	2018	2,645,002	261,873	9.9	15.4	38.1
Tegucigalpa	Honduras	2013	1,055,729	77,694	7.4	12.3	25.1
Mexico City	Mexico	2020	19,608,611	1,938,371	9.9	15.2	39.7
Panama	Panama	2010	1,577,959	158,024	10.0	15.6	38.9
Lima	Peru	2017	9,601,434	1,215,536	12.7	19.5	56.6
Santo Domingo	Dominican Republic	2010	3,119,494	253,277	8.1	12.9	28.3
Montevideo	Uruguay	2011	1,318,755	264,093	20.0	32.9	104.4
Caracas	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	2011	2,901,918	369,677	12.7	19.3	59.8

Notes: This table shows data from the most recent demographic census available and assumes that the population of these large cities has not significantly decreased in recent years.

^a Old-age dependency ratio: people aged 60 and over for every 100 people of potential working age aged 15–59.

^b Aging ratio: people aged 60 and over for every 100 people under 15 years of age.

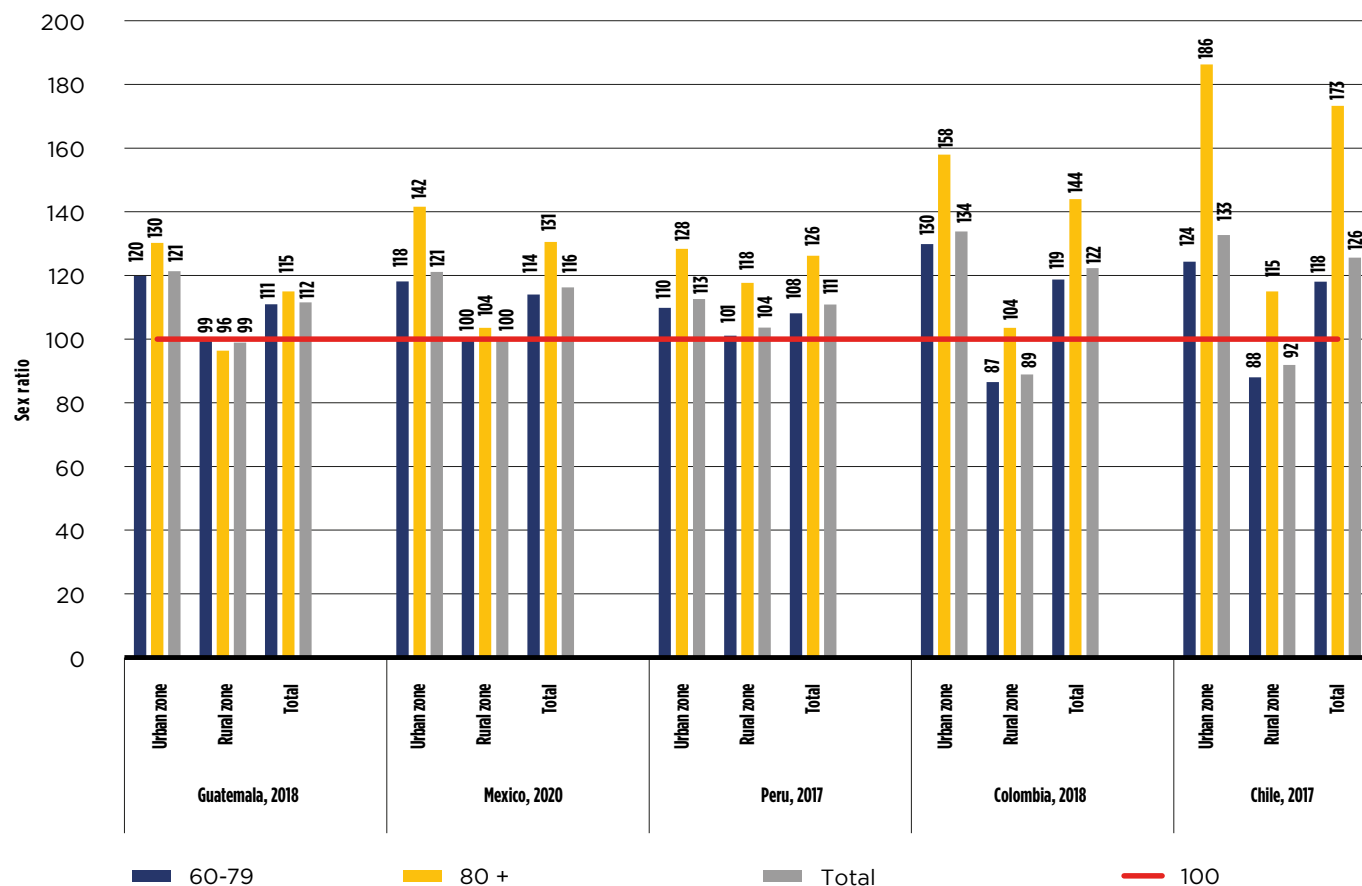
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Spatial distribution and urbanization in Latin America and the Caribbean. Santiago, ECLAC; [undated] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://celade.cepal.org/bdcelade/depualc/>.

Age-sex distribution

In general, more men than women are born in human populations. Due to differential mortality at the beginning of life, sex distribution is balanced in young people and adults, but then reverses in older ages and favors the survival of women (4). Figure 2 shows the ratio between the number of women for every 100 men in the population aged 60 and over, where women outnumber men in all groups. Despite this regularity, there are some exceptions: when taking the group of people aged 60 to 79 in rural areas of Colombia and Chile into consideration, there is a predominance of women, even in the age 80+ population in rural areas. The rural areas of Guatemala and Mexico fall more in the middle, where the sex ratio is more balanced in the older population, even in the oldest group aged 80 and over. At the other extreme, women 60 and over are the majority in urban areas in the five countries where except for Peru, there are about 120 women aged 60 to 79 for every 100 men of the same age, and in the oldest group, there are as many as 180 more women for every 100 men aged 80 and over in Chile.

As mentioned above, this predominance of women in older age groups reflects not only differences in female survival but also the dynamics of internal migration in the countries. This has a number of consequences in terms of formulating policy actions intended to ensure healthy aging, which as we will see later also involve domestic living arrangements.

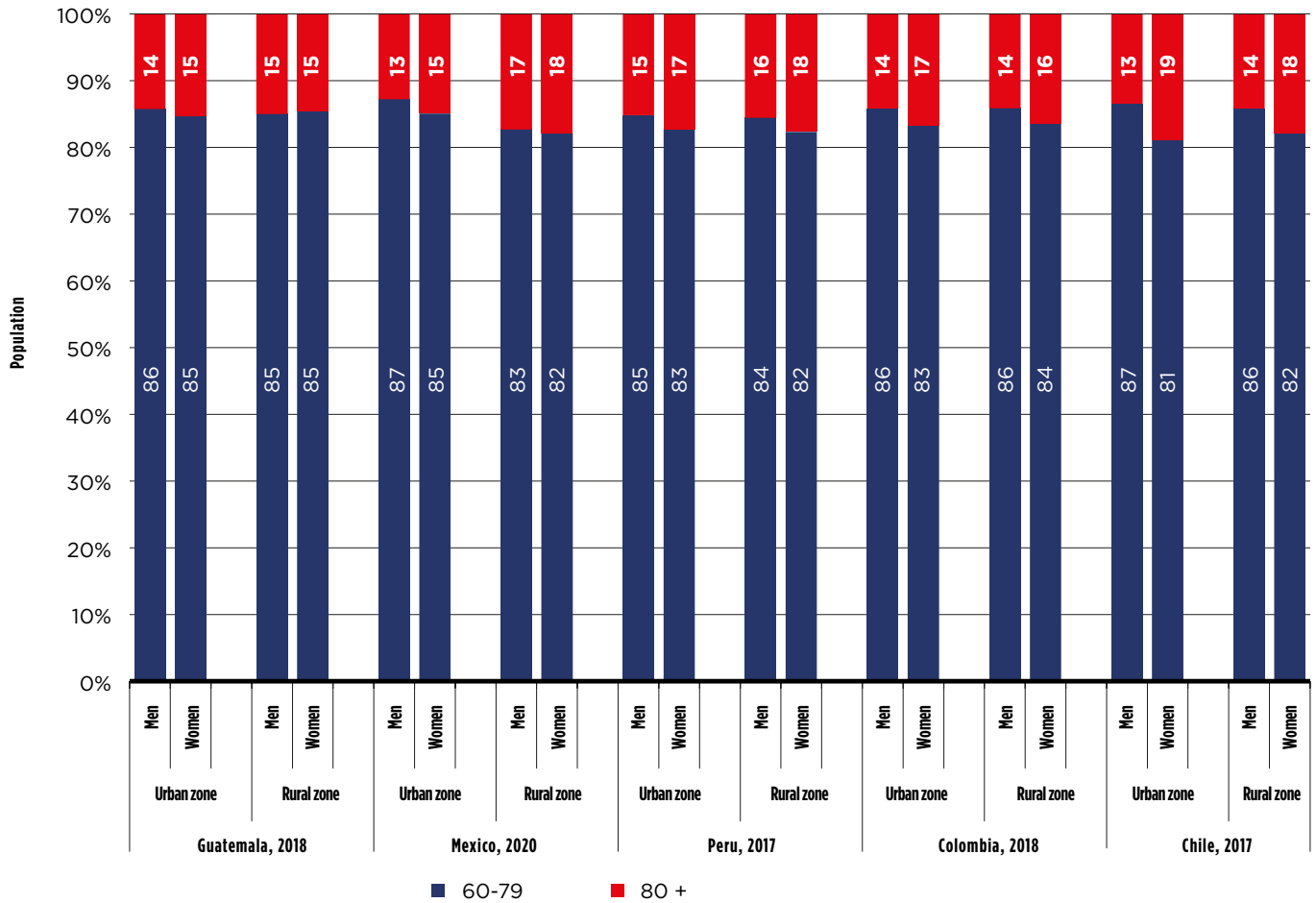
Figure 2. Latin America (five countries): Sex ratio of the population aged 60 and over, by area of residence



Source: Demographic censuses of Chile (2017), Peru (2017), Guatemala (2018), Colombia (2018), and Mexico (2020). Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE), Population Division of ECLAC. Redatam7. Santiago, CELADE, ECLAC; [c2022] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://www.redatam.org/redbin/RpWebEngine.exe/Portal?lang=esp>.

To analyze the aging of older people based on area of residence, see the sex distribution of the population aged 60 to 79 and 80 years and over in Figure 3 below. In all of the countries observed, recent data show that about 85% of older people are between the ages of 60 and 79. In Chile, the percentage of women in this age group is the lowest of the five countries (81.1%), while the highest is in women aged 80 and over (18.9%). The percentage of men aged 60 to 79 in urban areas is the highest in Mexico (87.2%). Trends in the increasing rate of population aging indicate that in the group of older people, the number of older women living in rural areas is increasing the fastest, so differentiation by sex, age subgroup, and area of residence must be considered when formulating public policy actions, particularly in the area of health and caregiving.

Figure 3. Latin America (five countries): Distribution of the population aged 60 and over, by age group, sex, and area of residence



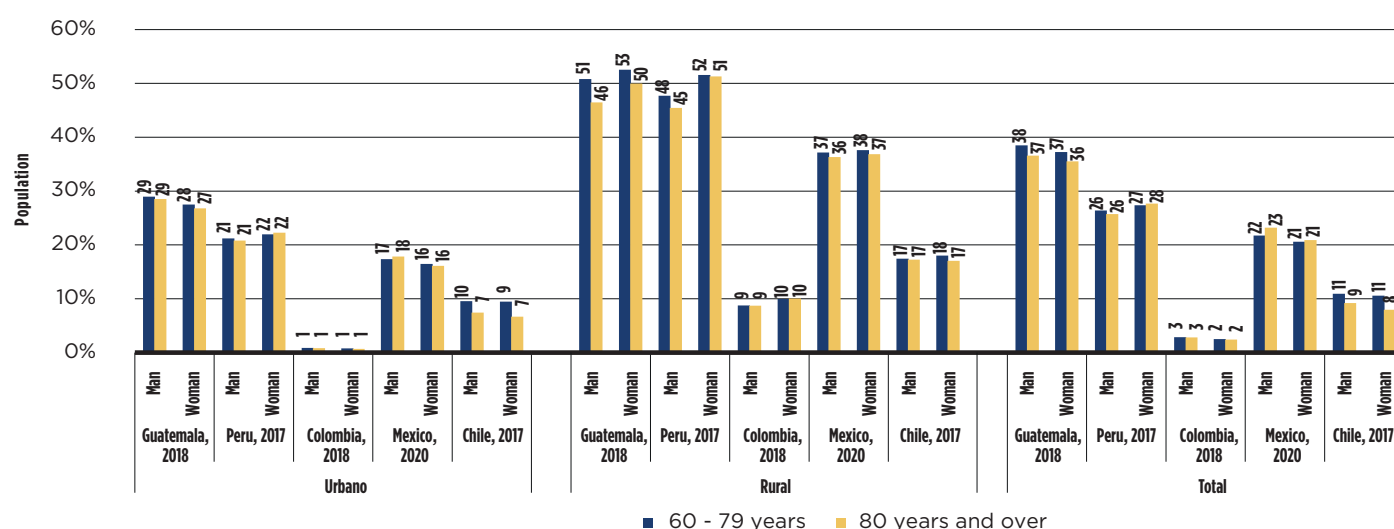
Source: Demographic censuses of Chile (2017), Peru (2017), Guatemala (2018), Colombia (2018), and Mexico (2020). Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE), Population Division of ECLAC. Redatam7. Santiago, CELADE, ECLAC; [c2022] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://www.redatam.org/redbin/RpWebEngine.exe/Portal?lang=esp>.

Ethnic origin

In addition to geographical differences, the trajectory of population aging varies by ethnic group. The entire demographic transition process for indigenous peoples is covered in another publication in this series (*The Sociodemographic Situation of Indigenous People in Latin America and the Caribbean. Analysis in the Context of Aging and COVID-19*), but for these purposes it is important to identify the composition of this group for the five countries with data from recent population censuses. Figure 4 shows the percentage of the indigenous population aged 60 years and over compared to the total older population of the countries, by age group, sex, and area of residence. In two countries, Guatemala and Peru, about half of the population aged 60 and over living in rural areas identifies as indigenous, while in urban areas of these countries, older indigenous

people represent 30% of the older population. In Mexico as well as in Chile, the indigenous population is mostly concentrated in rural areas, but in relatively smaller numbers than in Guatemala and Peru. Colombia is the country with the lowest percentage of elderly indigenous people, although this group still accounts for nearly 10% of older people.

Figure 4. Latin America (five countries): Indigenous population aged 60 and over by age group, sex, and area of residence



Source: Demographic censuses of Chile (2017), Peru (2017), Guatemala (2018), Colombia (2018), and Mexico (2020). Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE), Population Division of ECLAC. Redatam7. Santiago, CELADE, ECLAC; [c2022] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://www.redatam.org/redbin/RpWebEngine.exe/Portal?lang=esp>.

Sociocultural and family characteristics of older people

This section profiles the sociocultural and family characteristics of older people in the selected countries. Although it includes one demographic variable (marital status), the objective is to provide an overview of the roles of older people in the home and describe the circumstances of older people who live alone. It also discusses access to formal education and illiteracy among older people.

Marital status

People have different life courses as individuals, but aggregate behaviors are quite similar in all countries, with a few exceptions. In terms of being in a relationship, the vast majority of the population has a partner (whether or not through formal marriage) at some point in their life and a small percentage of men and women remain single

even in old age. Separation or divorce often occurs over the years, but widowhood occurs very frequently in the older population, mainly among women who because of their longer life expectancy, are much less likely to reach old age accompanied by their partners (2, 3). Data on the distribution of older people by marital status shown in Figure 5 for urban areas and Figure 6 for rural areas reflect this expected behavior in four countries (Guatemala, Peru, Colombia, and Mexico). At first glance, they show similar behaviors, but significant variations can be seen in the details, mainly between subgroups of the older population (60 to 79 years and 80 years or older) and by sex.

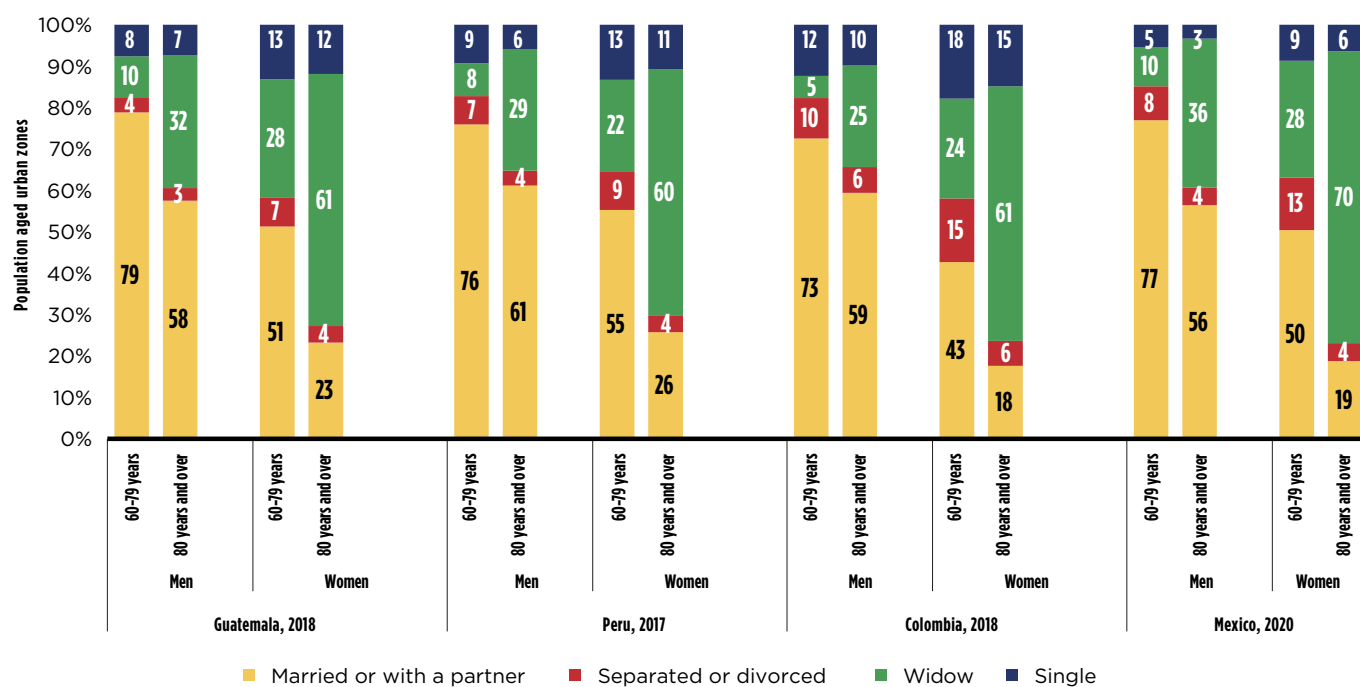
Reaching older adulthood as a single person is not as common, but occurs more frequently among women and in urban areas (Figure 5). The percentage of single Colombian women aged 60 to 79 living in urban areas is 17.8%, compared to around 13% of Peruvian and Guatemalan women in the same age group, and a smaller percentage (8.7%) of single women in this age group in Mexico. Among women aged 80 and older, the relative percentage of single women is lower, not because they enter relationships at those ages, but because widowhood is more common in very old age. Mexico has the lowest percentage of single men: only 3.4%, among those aged 80 and older. The same occurs in the 60 to 79-year age group, where the highest percentage of single men is 12% (in Colombia), compared to nearly 18% for women.

Separated individuals account for the smallest percentages among older people. Once again, women are without a partner relatively more frequently than men among people who had been married or lived together and are currently separated, except in rural areas of Peru and Colombia where a very similar number of men and women are separated. This is due to the greater likelihood of men finding another mate after being separated, especially in urban areas where the chances of becoming a couple seem to be higher for them (2, 3).

Widowhood has always represented a high percentage of all marital situations that leave people without their partner, a fact that has been documented for several decades now (1-3, 5). Again, older women of all ages, but mainly those 80 years and older in both in urban and rural areas, are the ones who reach this stage without a partner. In fact, for women aged 80 and over, widowhood is the most prevalent marital status in all countries in both urban and rural areas, which is not the case for older men, since the vast majority of them are either married or have a partner.

In addition to differences based on sex and place of residence, it is important to note that there is a very pronounced and significant change between the 60-79 and 80+ age groups, particularly when comparing those with or without a partner in old age. For example, in 2018, the percentage of single men between the ages of 60 and 79 in urban areas in Guatemala was 21.2%, but 42.5% in those aged 80 and over, a pattern that is repeated in other countries. Furthermore, nearly 50% of women aged 60 to 79 do not have a partner, a figure that rises to around 80% for those aged 80 and over in urban areas of Colombia and Mexico.

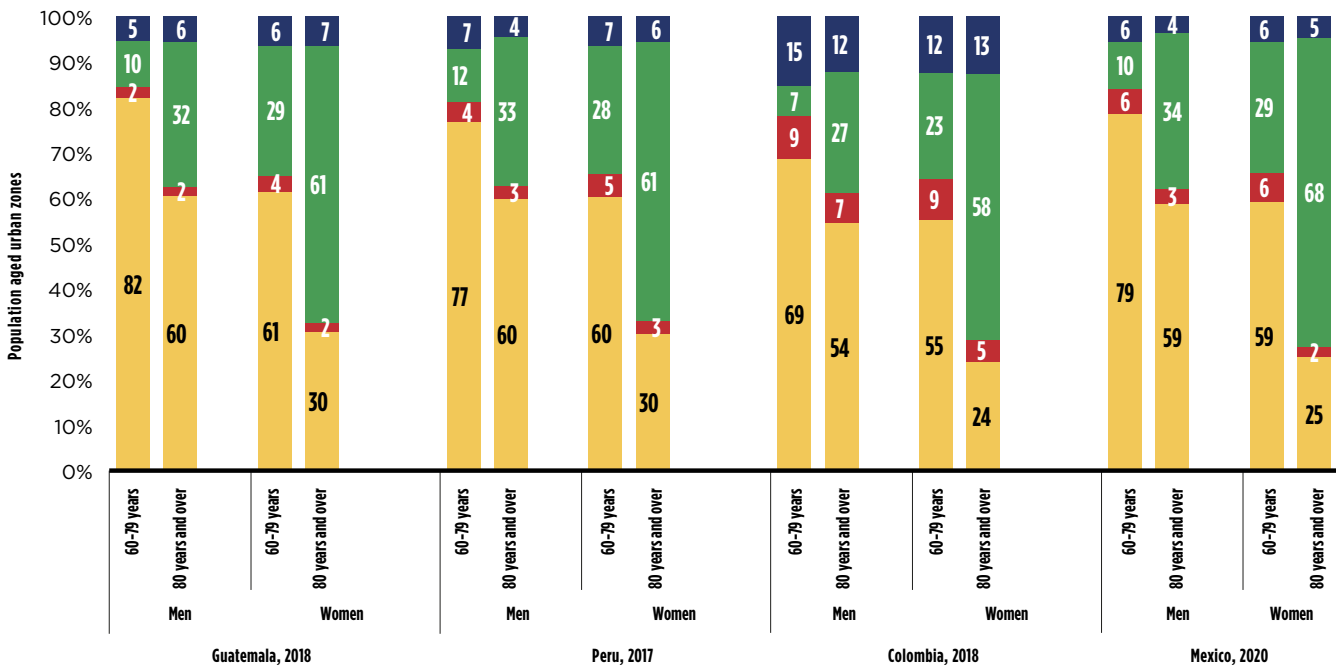
Figure 5. Latin America (four countries): Marital status of the urban population aged 60 and over, by age group and sex



Note: There is no data for Chile because the country did not include the variable “marital or civil status” in the census since it was a more abbreviated version.

Source: Demographic censuses of Peru (2017), Guatemala (2018), Colombia (2018), and Mexico (2020). Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE), Population Division of ECLAC. Redatam7. Santiago, CELADE, ECLAC; [c2022] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://www.redatam.org/redbin/RpWebEngine.exe/Portal?lang=esp>.

Figure 6. Latin America (four countries): Marital status of the rural population aged 60 and over, by age group and sex



Note: There is no data for Chile because the country did not include the variable “marital or civil status” in the census since it was a more abbreviated version.

Source: Demographic censuses of Peru (2017), Guatemala (2018), Colombia (2018), and Mexico (2020). Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE), Population Division of ECLAC. Redatam7. Santiago, CELADE, ECLAC; [c2022] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://www.redatam.org/redbin/RpWebEngine.exe/Portal?lang=esp>.

Living arrangements and roles of older people in the home

It is important to note that not having a partner in older ages does not mean being alone. However, for many people without a partner, the likelihood of living alone in their homes increases. Figures 7 and 8 show an overview of the different types of living arrangements of older people living in urban and rural areas, respectively. These figures indicate how many people live alone and how many live with other people (under or over 14 years of age).

Unlike the previous analysis by marital status, in terms of living arrangements, there is a significant difference in the distribution between urban and rural areas. In the four countries with recent data, there is a higher percentage of both older men and women who tend to live alone in the countryside than in urban areas. In fact, as Huenchuán points out (3), the percentage of older people living alone has increased over the years in all countries. The most recent data show that in 2018, Guatemala, a country in the early stages of population

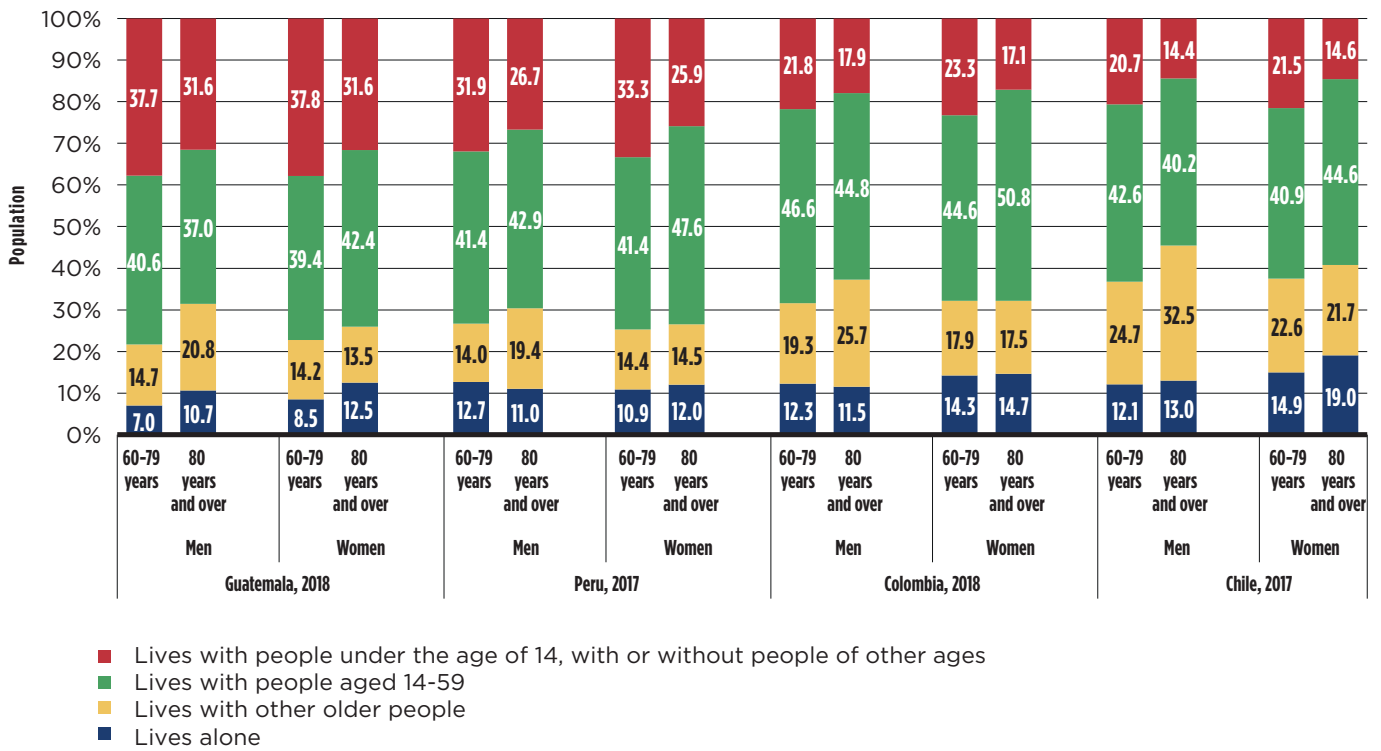
aging, has a lower percentage of elderly people living alone. About 10% of the population aged 80+ lives alone in their home, in both urban and rural areas. On the other hand, almost 30% of men aged 60 and over living in rural areas in Peru live alone, compared to 37.5% in the case of women aged 80 and over.

The second major difference between urban and rural areas is the increased incidence of living arrangements where older people live in households with no children in urban areas. In these areas where fertility is lower, even in countries that are already more advanced in the demographic transition process, living arrangements where older people live in households where there are no children are more frequent. This is also due to the fact that in more developed countries, there are fewer households with extended families, with several generations living in the same home (1,6). In addition, and also as a result of fertility levels, there is a high presence of older people living in households with children and people of other ages, as in the case of Guatemala (primarily in rural areas).

It is important to note that with a few differences, the behavior of older men and women in each country is quite similar with respect to the distribution of family arrangements where they live. Neither are there great differences between the two age groups (60–79 years and 80 years and older) in countries with recent data, for example regarding marital status. Instead, the major differences are between urban and rural areas and countries with higher and lower fertility, since family arrangements are highly dependent on prevailing fertility rates in the country and in urban and rural areas, with a significant presence of children, which all have a bearing on the stage of population aging.

It should be pointed out that the percentage of older individuals living alone or with other older people is roughly 40% in many groups, in both urban and rural areas, rising to more than 60% in the rural parts of Peru. Depending on their economic and health status, these people, mainly those aged 80 or older, may be in a vulnerable situation. Public policy actions should consider this intersectionality: a person 80 years or older living alone in isolated rural area that is often not easily accessible and has no nearby health or social services.

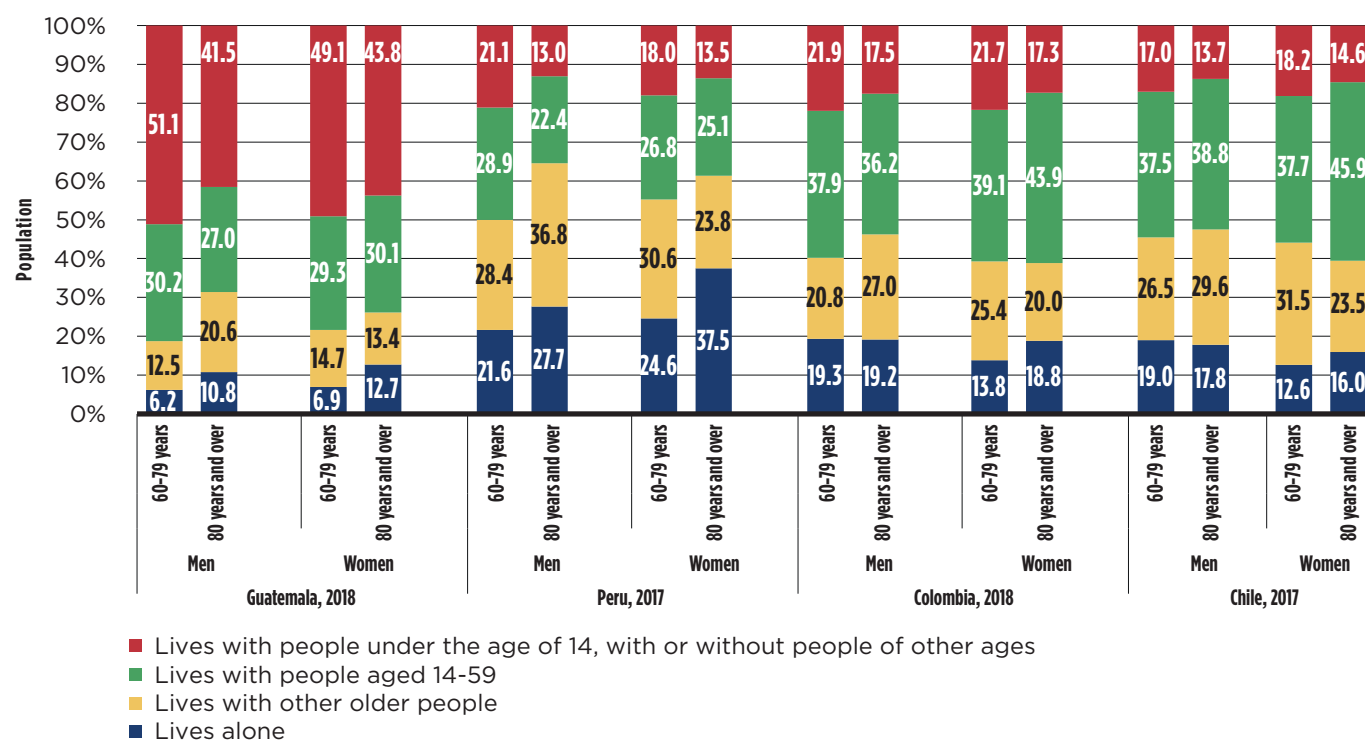
Figure 7. Latin America (four countries): Living arrangements of the urban population aged 60 and over, by age group and sex



Note: Information for Mexico is not shown because the data were not yet processed at the time of publication.

Source: Demographic censuses of Chile (2017), Peru (2017), Guatemala (2018), and Colombia (2018). Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE), Population Division of ECLAC. Redatam7. Santiago, CELADE, ECLAC; [c2022] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://www.redatam.org/redbin/RpWebEngine.exe/Portal?lang=esp>.

Figure 8. Latin America (four countries): Living arrangements of the rural population aged 60 and over, by age group and sex

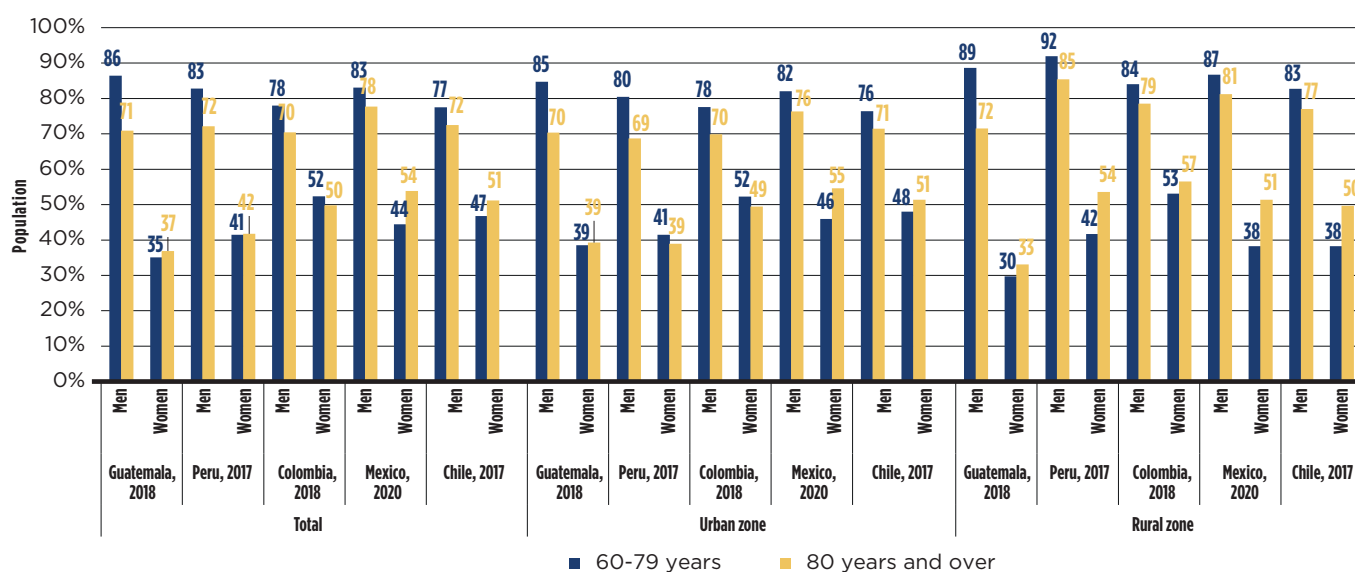


Note: Information for Mexico is not shown because the data were not yet processed at the time of publication.

Source: Demographic censuses of Chile (2017), Peru (2017), Guatemala (2018), and Colombia (2018). Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE), Population Division of ECLAC. Redatam7. Santiago, CELADE, ECLAC; [c2022] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://www.redatam.org/redbin/RpWebEngine.exe/Portal?lang=esp>.

Finally, another important characteristic of living arrangements pertains to the head of the household. Although the definition of head of household or the person responsible for it has changed in some population censuses over the years, there has been a steady increase in female heads of household at all ages, including older people (3). An individual may become the head of household as a result of opportunities or misfortunes that occur during the life course. The ways in which a person may be considered head of household include being recognized by other members of the household or self-identifying as such; based on certain criteria specified by an authority; or even based on certain economic criteria. In many households in Latin America and the Caribbean, an older person who provides the main income is designated as head of household. On the other hand, widowhood, primarily among older women, often leaves older people living alone after the death of their partner (2, 3).

Figure 9. Latin America (five countries): Head of household in the population aged 60 and over, by age group, sex, and area of residence



Source: Demographic censuses of Chile (2017), Peru (2017), Guatemala (2018), Colombia (2018), and Mexico (2020). Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE), Population Division of ECLAC. Redatam7. Santiago, CELADE, ECLAC; [c2022] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://www.redatam.org/redbin/RpWebEngine.exe/Portal?lang=esp>.

The data on heads of household show substantial gender differences in terms of the person who plays this role, with significant differences in more rural countries. Currently, in three of the five countries (Figure 9), nearly half of older women are heads of household. Colombia stands out, where the figure exceeds 50% both in urban and rural areas. Among people aged 80 and over, more than 50% of women in Mexico and Peru are female heads of household throughout the country. On the other hand, 80% of men aged 60 and over are considered heads of household, and in some cases the figures exceed 90% among men aged 60 to 79. In Guatemala, a country with more rural areas than the rest of the countries analyzed, older women living in the countryside comprise less than 30% of female heads of household. Even so, the percentage of older women who are heads of household is higher than that for women in other age groups, which shows that widowhood and living arrangements at this stage of life have an impact on the number of households headed by women (2-4).

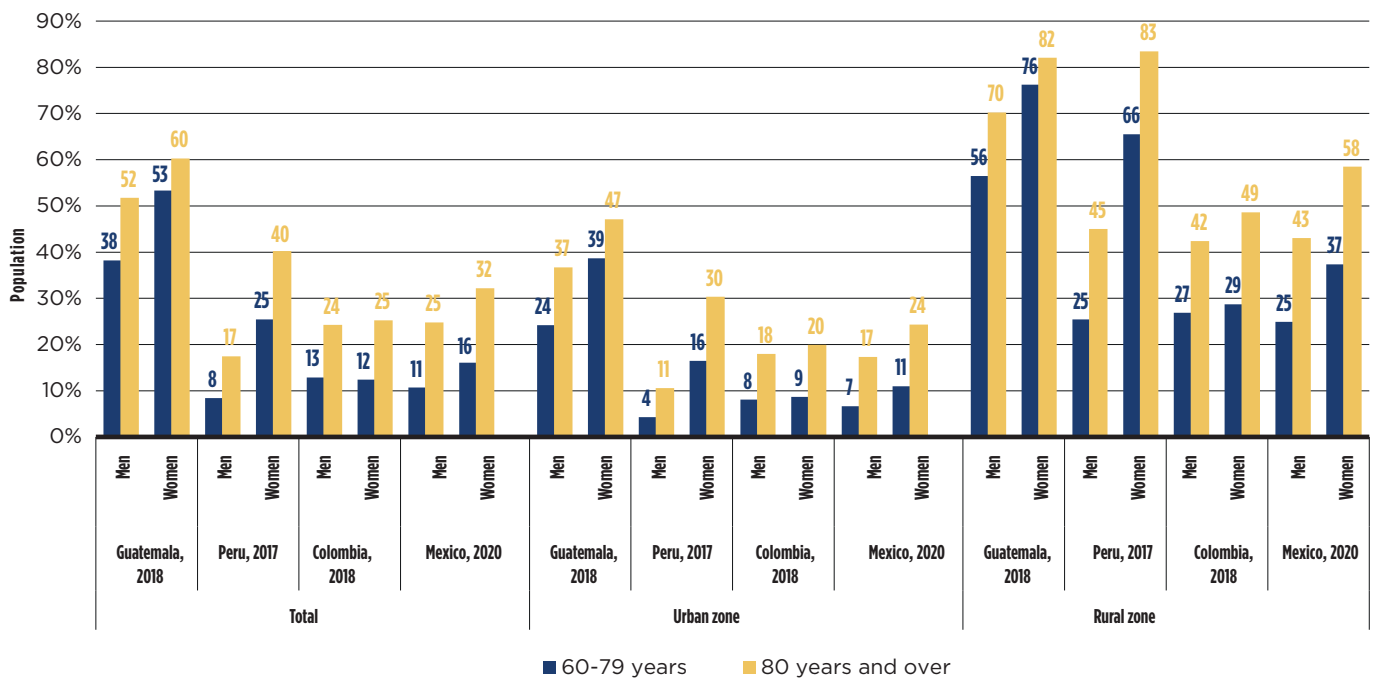
Illiteracy and access to formal education

Literacy and access to formal education is one of the essential social rights needed for people to achieve their full potential. In Latin America and the Caribbean, there are few countries where medium and high levels of education are available to the entire population, especially for women. However, as countries have made progress in universal education, inequalities in access have decreased, particularly for women, where previous gaps have narrowed (and in some countries have even been eliminated). As a result of the low level of access to education in the past, older people still have little schooling and in some cases high levels of illiteracy, but their numbers have been declining in the different cohorts (2-4).

Figure 10 shows an example of the decrease in the percentage of illiteracy in older people when comparing the figures for people aged 60 to 79 with the figures for those aged 80 or older. In all countries and regardless of sex and area of residence, the percentage of people aged 80 and over who are illiterate is higher than it is for those aged 60 to 79, and in some cases is even twice as high. For example, 32.2% of Mexican women aged 80 and over are illiterate, whereas this percentage decreases by half (16.1%) in Mexican women aged 60 to 79. This same behavior can be seen in Peru and Colombia, but in Guatemala gender differences are smaller and the literacy rate is also lower.

Gaps in the literacy of older people in the countries persist, as do gaps between urban and rural areas. In all groups, the percentage of people aged 60-79 and aged 80 and over who did not attend school is more than twice as high among those living in rural areas as for those living in cities. For example, in Guatemala 30% of the older population in urban areas is illiterate compared to 60% in rural area; in Colombia and Mexico, the figures are around 10% and 30% in urban and rural areas, respectively. Peru is notable for the high percentage of illiterate women in rural areas and a wider gender gap than in other groups. In that country, the percentage of illiterate women is equivalent to the rate for women in Guatemala, mainly among those aged 80 and over. The figures for illiterate older men in Peru show that they made more progress in terms of education than Peruvian women. These gaps illustrate that in the past, access to education was much more unequal between men and women, particularly in rural areas.

Figure 10. Latin America (four countries): Illiteracy of the population aged 60 and over, by age group, sex, and area of residence



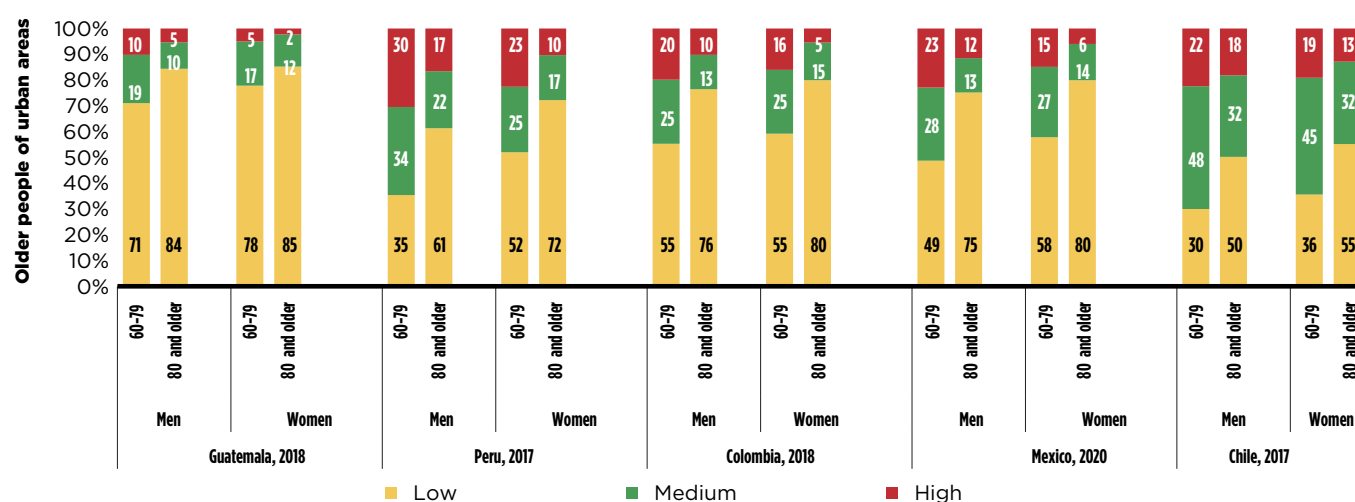
Note: Data for Chile are not shown because the country did not include the variable on literacy.

Source: Demographic censuses of Peru (2017), Guatemala (2018), Colombia (2018), and Mexico (2020). Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE), Population Division of ECLAC. Redatam7. Santiago, CELADE, ECLAC; [c2022] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://www.redatam.org/redbin/RpWebEngine.exe/Portal?lang=esp>.

Older generations, primarily those born before the 1960s, who are now 60 or older, had little access to formal education, especially secondary or high school education. Figures 11 and 12 show the distribution of this population by level of education, in three sections: low level (6 years or less); medium level (between 7 and 12 years), and high level (13 or more years). This data is available for the five countries of the Region with a recent census. Of the group of countries analyzed, Chile has the highest level of education, including among older people, reflected by a higher percentage of the adult population with a secondary or high school level of education in all age groups and areas of residence compared to the other four countries. An example of this is that urban men aged 60–79 with a low level of education account for only 30% of all men in that age group, whereas in other countries more than 70% of men in the same age group in urban areas have a low level of education. Rural and urban asymmetries become much more evident when analyzing the educational level of older people, since they reflect education in the past. In the rural areas of these countries, a low level of education (6 years or less) is quite common in almost the entire population. Even in Chile, which has a higher level, nearly 60% of men aged 60 to 79

and more than 60% of women in that age group have a low level of education. As a result of poor access to education in the past, people aged 80 and over (those born before the 1940s) have much higher rates of low education, as well as low adult literacy. This group does not achieve secondary and higher levels of education. Thus, more than 80% of women aged 80 and over in urban areas in Guatemala, Peru, Colombia, and Mexico have a low level of education.

Figure 11. Latin America (five countries): Education level of the urban population aged 60 and over, by age group and sex

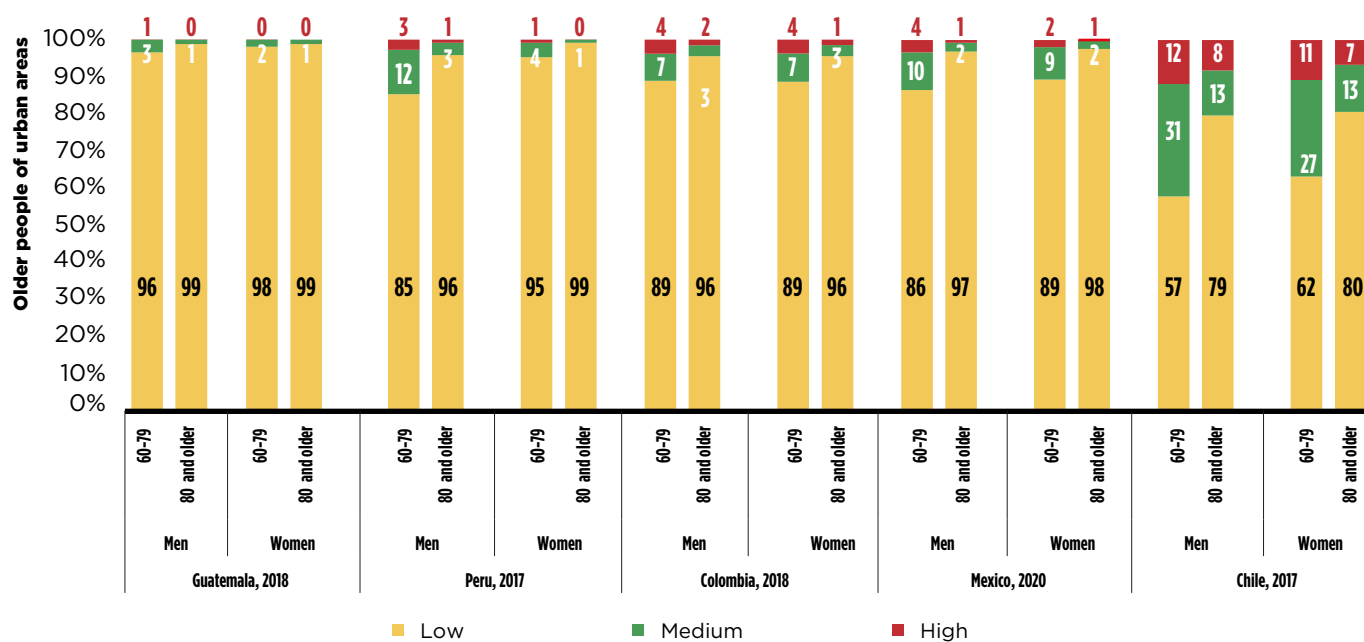


Note: Low level of education: 6 years or less; medium level: between 7 and 12 years; high level: 13 years or more.

Source: Demographic censuses of Chile (2017), Peru (2017), Guatemala (2018), Colombia (2018), and Mexico (2020). Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE), Population Division of ECLAC. Redatam7. Santiago, CELADE, ECLAC; [c2022] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://www.redatam.org/redbin/RpWebEngine.exe/Portal?lang=esp>.

Although a low level of education is practically the norm for the vast majority of the older population, this condition is much higher among women than men, regardless of where they live. Among older people living in the rural areas of these countries, a high level of education is almost non-existent: only 1 or at most 2 out of 10 rural older people manage to achieve a high level of education. It should be recalled that a person is considered to have a high level of education when they have completed 13 years or more of study (secondary education or higher). It does not necessarily mean that they completed a higher or university level of education.

Figure 12. Latin America (five countries): Education level of the rural population aged 60 and over, by age group and sex



Note: Low level of education: 6 years or less; middle level: between 7 and 12 years; high level: 13 years or more.

Source: Demographic censuses of Chile (2017), Peru (2017), Guatemala (2018), Colombia (2018), and Mexico (2020). Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE), Population Division of ECLAC. Redatam7. Santiago, CELADE, ECLAC; [c2022] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://www.redatam.org/redbin/RpWebEngine.exe/Portal?lang=esp>.

Despite the low level of education among older people, subsequent cohorts of people added to this age group are expected to achieve higher levels, given the progress made in the countries in recent decades (3). However, public policies must be formulated that seek to improve the conditions of older people and take into account these territorial and gender inequalities, even though it may take several decades to close the gaps.

Socioeconomic characteristics of older people

For several decades in Latin America and the Caribbean, it has been found that a significant percentage of older people continue to participate in the labor market, despite being past the established retirement age. There are a number of reasons why older people remain in or re-enter the labor market, with differences between age groups and countries where labor markets and retirement systems are at different levels of development (7). Causes that influence the participation of older people in the labor market include (7):

- 1) A lack of income, which may force them to keep working past the legal retirement age. This is due to fewer multigenerational households where they might receive income support, as well as weaknesses in pension systems that do not provide a living income;
- 2) Aging trends, which may have consequences on labor markets. These include workforce shortages and potentially unsustainable pension systems. This is true for intergenerational pooled systems as well as individual savings plans, and may lead to measures that incentivize extended participation in the work force or, in the case of raising the statutory retirement age, impose continued participation;
- 3) Longer life expectancy with better levels of health and having an interest in the content and social and financial aspects of work, which may encourage older people to remain in the labor market;
- 4) A gradual increase of women in general entering the labor market, leading to a reduction in participation and employment gaps between men and women in all age groups. This particularly affects the evolution of workforce participation among women over 60. In addition, issues such as the longer life expectancy of women and subsequent levels of widowhood may play a role, in a context of low economic autonomy for many older women.

With regard to the situation in some Latin American countries, Table 2 shows a decrease in the employment rate of all persons aged 60 and over between 2002 and 2020 (from 33.9% to 29.4%). However, in 2020 the employment rate of men was more than double that of women despite the employment rate decline in 2020, which in some ways was already reflecting the social and economic crisis impacting older people as a result of COVID-19.

Table 2. Latin America (18 countries): Employment rate of the population aged 60 and over, by sex and age group, 2002, 2012, 2016, and 2020

AGE GROUPS	TOTAL				MEN				WOMEN			
	2002	2012	2016	2020	2002	2012	2016	2020	2002	2012	2016	2020
60 - 64 years old	48.4	50	50.9	46.6	68.1	68	67.8	62.3	30.3	34.3	36	33.2
65 - 69 years old	37.8	37.3	35.5	33.2	55	52.9	49.6	46.3	23.5	23.7	23.5	22.1
60 years or more	33.9	33	32.3	29.4	50.1	47.5	45.8	41.8	20.3	21	21.2	19.4
70 years or more	21.9	19.3	18.1	15.8	34.2	29.6	27.6	24.4	12.3	11.4	10.8	9.2

Note: Weighted regional average and simple average of 18 countries (Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)).

Source: Based on the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. CEPALSTAT. Databases and Statistical Publications [Internet]. Santiago, ECLAC; [undated] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/index.html?lang=en>.

Employment rates decrease with age. Variations in the aggregate shown in Table 2 are due to a sharp increase in the rate for both sexes in the 60–64 age group, although it is much more pronounced for women during the period 2002–2016 (7). The sharp increase in the employment rate of men and women in this age group for that period should be analyzed in the context of the employment growth that characterized Latin America between 2004 and the beginning of the 2010s, since this age group is the most closely linked to the labor market. In 2020 the rate employment rate declined for both men and women, but more sharply among men.

The employment rate of the 65–69 age group fell more drastically, as a result of a decline in the rate for both men and women, although less so for women. Finally, the employment rate for the 70+ age group decreased as a result of the drop of the rate among men and to a lesser extent among women (7).

Access to pensions in old age

Con respecto a la situación experimentada por la población de 65 años With regard to the experience of the 65-and-over population and receiving old age pensions, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) states that total coverage in the countries for which information is available for 2020 is estimated to have decreased by 0.7 percentage points between 2019 and 2020 (8). Some of the reasons for this decrease include “the situation of those who were closest to applying for a pension when the pandemic began but who delayed the decision because of the various labor market situations confronted in 2020” (8). More than a quarter of older people in 13 Latin American countries reportedly did not have access to old age pensions during the pandemic, which is a very concerning situation. From a gender perspective, the 2020 information reveals that women continue to have less coverage than men (a gap of more than 3 percentage points), but there is a notable increase in rural areas, linked to the receipt of non-contributory pensions (8).

As mentioned above, one of the reasons that older people remain in the workforce beyond the legal retirement age is that they do not have sufficient pension income to meet their minimum needs. In 2020, 41% of older people in Latin America and the Caribbean were in this situation. Although this percentage is lower than it was 10 years ago (49%), it is still high, particularly in Honduras (92.1%), Nicaragua (87.4%), El Salvador (81.5 %), the Dominican Republic (80.4 %), the Plurinational State of Bolivia (78.6 %), Mexico (71.3%), Colombia (70 %), Paraguay (58.5 %), Ecuador (56.4 %), and Peru (56 %). In addition, the data show that in general this situation systematically affects women more, as reflected by the 5.5 percentage point gap in favor of men (38% vs. 43% for women). The widest gaps between men and women (more than 10 points) are found in Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador, and El Salvador, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Latin America (16 countries): Percentage of people aged 65+ with insufficient pensions, by sex, 2010 and 2020

COUNTRY	2010			2020		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	39.2	31.2	45.0	17.8	17.3	18.2
Brazil	76.2	70.9	80.6	70.1	66.7	72.9
Chile	37.6	29.1	44.9	31.7	22.7	38.9
Colombia	82.3	75.7	88.7	80.4	75.3	84.5
Costa Rica	78.7	73.8	83.0	56.4	50.0	61.8
Dominican Republic	94.6	93.5	95.5	92.1	90.9	93.0
Ecuador	81.1	71.5	89.3	71.3	61.9	79.2
Honduras	93.3	89.8	96.1	87.4	84.7	89.9
Mexico	39.4	31.6	46.4	34.5	26.9	41.2
Nicaragua	72.7	65.0	79.3	55.9	51.8	59.8
Panama	85.9	87.2	84.8	58.5	58.5	58.4
Peru	83.1	78.8	86.4	81.5	75.4	86.2
Paraguay	15.7	13.2	17.4	12.6	10.3	14.1
El Salvador	100.0	100.0	100.0	37.7	34.6	40.1
Uruguay	49.0	44.7	52.5	41.2	38.4	43.5
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	100,0	100,0	100,0	37,7	34,6	40,1
Latin America (weighted average)	49,0	44,7	52,5	41,2	38,4	43,5

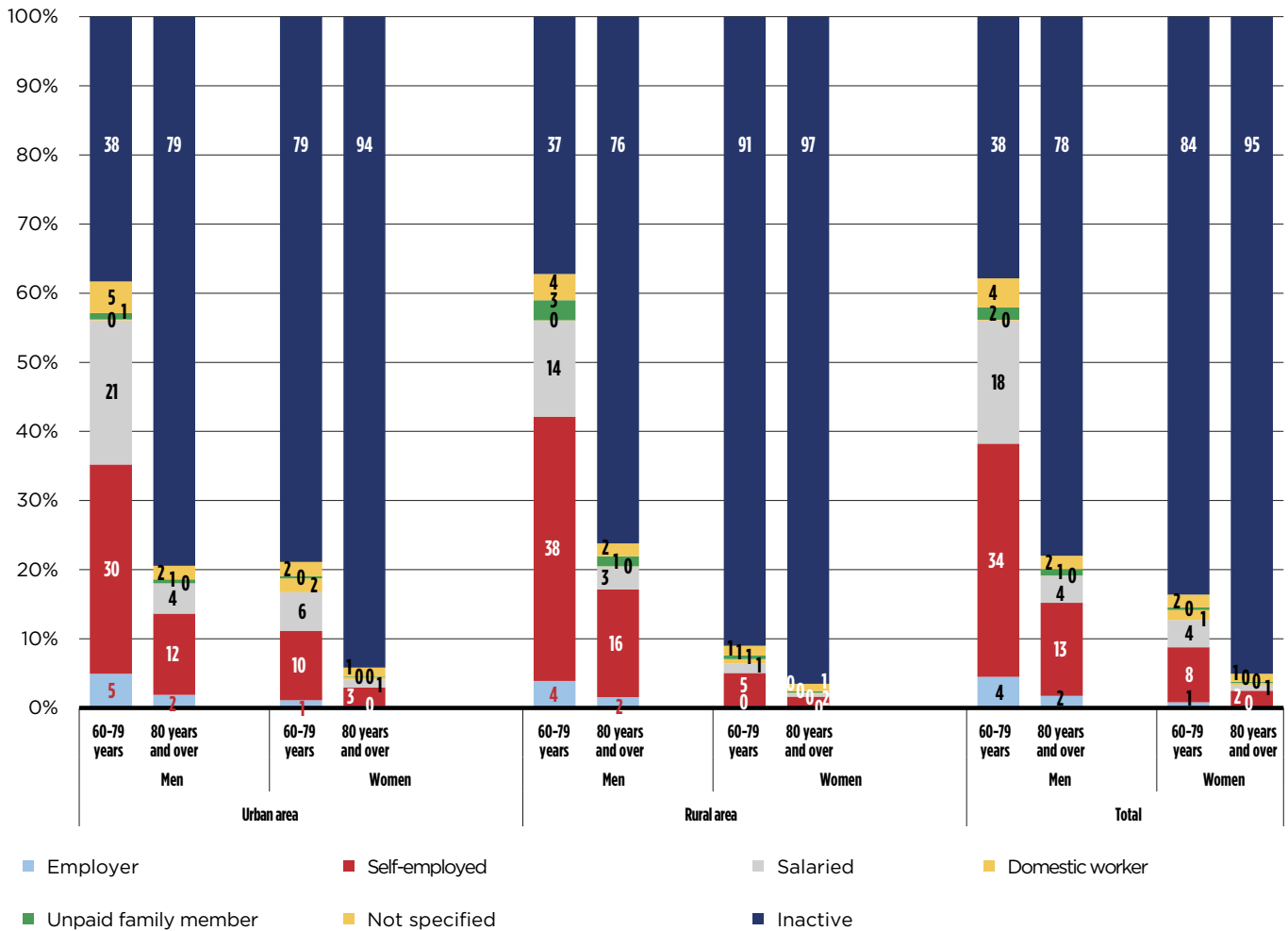
Source: Based on the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. CEPALSTAT. Statistical Databases and Publications [Internet]. Santiago, ECLAC; [undated] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/index.html?lang=en>.

The education profiles shown in Figures 11 and 12 approximate people's economic conditions since there is very little direct information regarding their economic profile in the censuses. Of the five countries with recent censuses, only Guatemala and Peru collect census data on employment profiles and none of them collect direct information on income. Figure 13 shows the distribution of older people (60–79 years and 80 years or over) by occupational category (salaried, employer, self-employed, domestic worker, unpaid or inactive family member for those who did not work), disaggregated by sex and area of residence in Guatemala, which, as shown in Figures 11 and 12, reflects the low levels of education of this group of people.

It is to be expected that older people who worked during their most productive ages are already retired or receive some type of pension. The data for Guatemala do not give us a complete picture of the employment situation, but do show that the vast majority of women aged 80 or over still report they do not work, although some say they are self-employed and work a domestic job (outside the home); however, working is more

frequent among men in this age group. Most men aged 60 to 79 still work and are either self-employed or salaried. Roughly 60% of men over 60, many of them with a low level of education, were still working in Guatemala in 2018, even at very old ages.

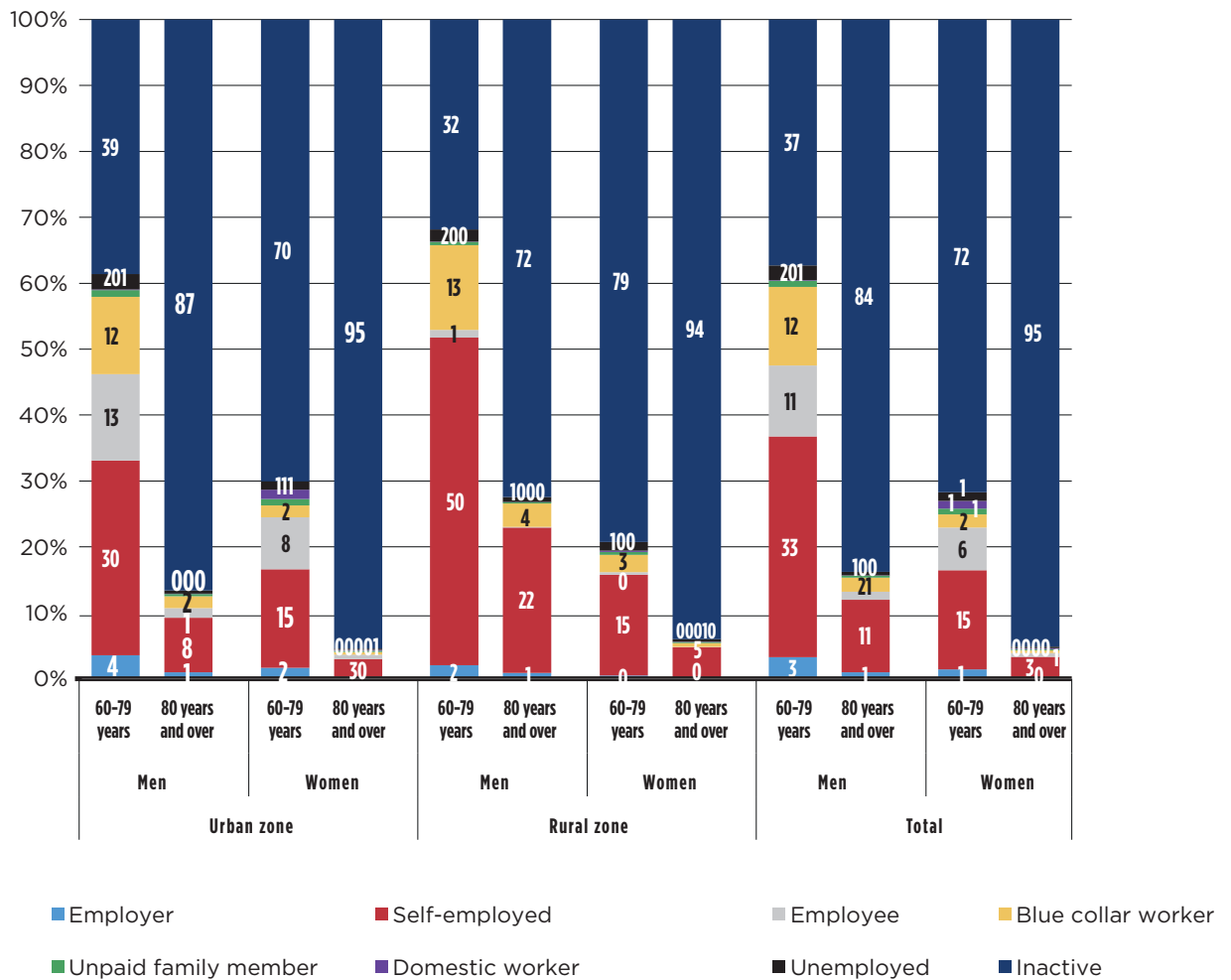
Figure 13. Guatemala: Employment profile of the population aged 60+, by age group, sex, and area of residence, 2018



Source: Demographic census of Guatemala (2018). Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE), Population Division of ECLAC. Redatam7. Santiago, CELADE, ECLAC; [c2022] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://www.redatam.org/redbin/RpWebEngine.exe/Portal?lang=esp>.

Figure 14 shows information on the employment status of older people in Peru. The distribution is very similar to the situation in Guatemala shown in Figure 13. Almost all people aged 80 and over no longer work (primarily women), but some individuals in this group are still self-employed, more often men than women. The situation in urban and rural areas is very similar: more men aged 60 to 79 are self-employed in rural areas than in cities, as would be expected.

Figure 14. Peru: Employment profile of the population aged 60 and over, by age group, sex, and area of residence, 2017



Source: Demographic census of Guatemala (2018). Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE), Population Division of ECLAC. Redatam7. Santiago, CELADE, ECLAC; [c2022] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://www.redatam.org/redbin/RpWebEngine.exe/Portal?lang=esp>.

Poverty and extreme poverty

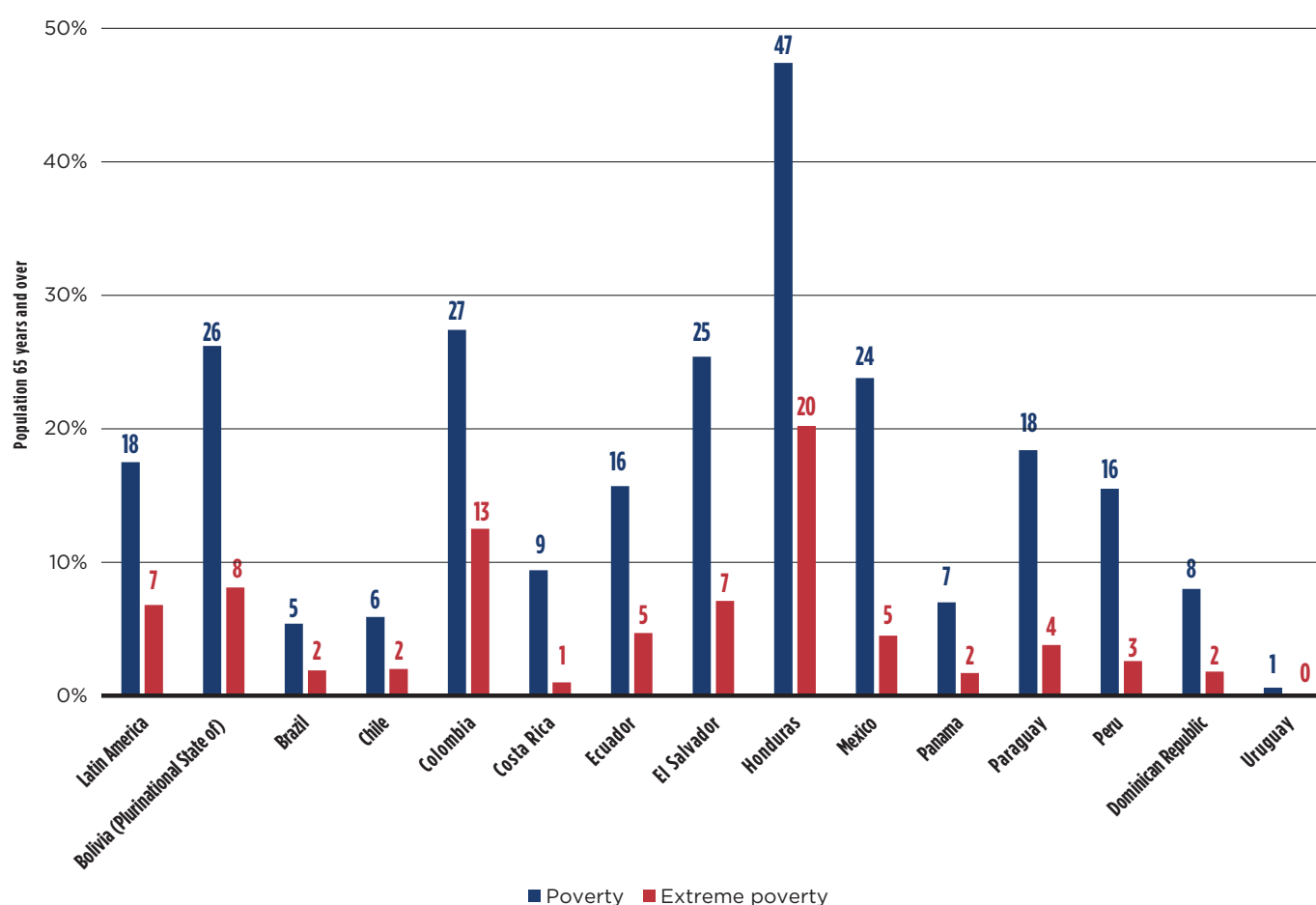
In 2021, ECLAC (8) emphasized that there was a widespread increase in both poverty and extreme across the region in 2020. Extreme poverty rose to levels similar to or higher than those recorded in 2014 in 10 countries and in some cases were even higher than those of 2008. Although the number of countries in which the rise in poverty implied such a sharp reversal is smaller, the number of people living in poverty exceeded 200 million for the first time in more than 10 years (8).

The deterioration in these indicators is the result of a sharp fall in labor incomes, which was partially offset by income transfers received by households, without which the poverty figures would have reached even higher levels (8).

By age groups, there were no significant differences except in the case of persons aged 65 years or older, among whom the poverty rate increased by less than in the other age groups in some countries (8).

As Figure 15 shows, 17.5% of people aged 65 and over were living in poverty in 2020. This percentage was highest in Honduras, where nearly half of the older population (47.4%) lives in poverty, followed by Colombia (27.4%), the Plurinational State of Bolivia (26.2%), El Salvador (25.4%), and Mexico (23.8%). Although there are no highly significant gender differences since poverty is measured by household, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and to a lesser extent Ecuador have a higher percentage of women aged 65 and over living in poverty (data disaggregated by sex are not included).

Figure 15. Latin America (14 countries): Extreme poverty and poverty among the population aged 65 and over, by country, 2020



Source: Based on the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. CEPALSTAT. Statistical Databases and Publications [Internet]. Santiago, ECLAC; [undated] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/index.html?lang=en>.

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation is an essential human right for ensuring the full enjoyment of life (9), as recognized in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 64/292 of 2010. Access to these basic goods, in addition to being a right in and of itself, is a fundamental means of guaranteeing all other human rights, especially those related to housing and health for people of all ages. In the case of greater health vulnerability, it is worth investigating the conditions of older people in terms of access to drinking water and sanitation in their households and homes, in order to assess the degree of compliance with this right in this population group.

International agreements such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Goal 6, as well as the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development, seek to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, including older persons. In addition, Priority Measure 77 of the Montevideo Consensus mentions the need to promote the development and well-being of people in all territories free of any discrimination, including full access to basic social services (9).

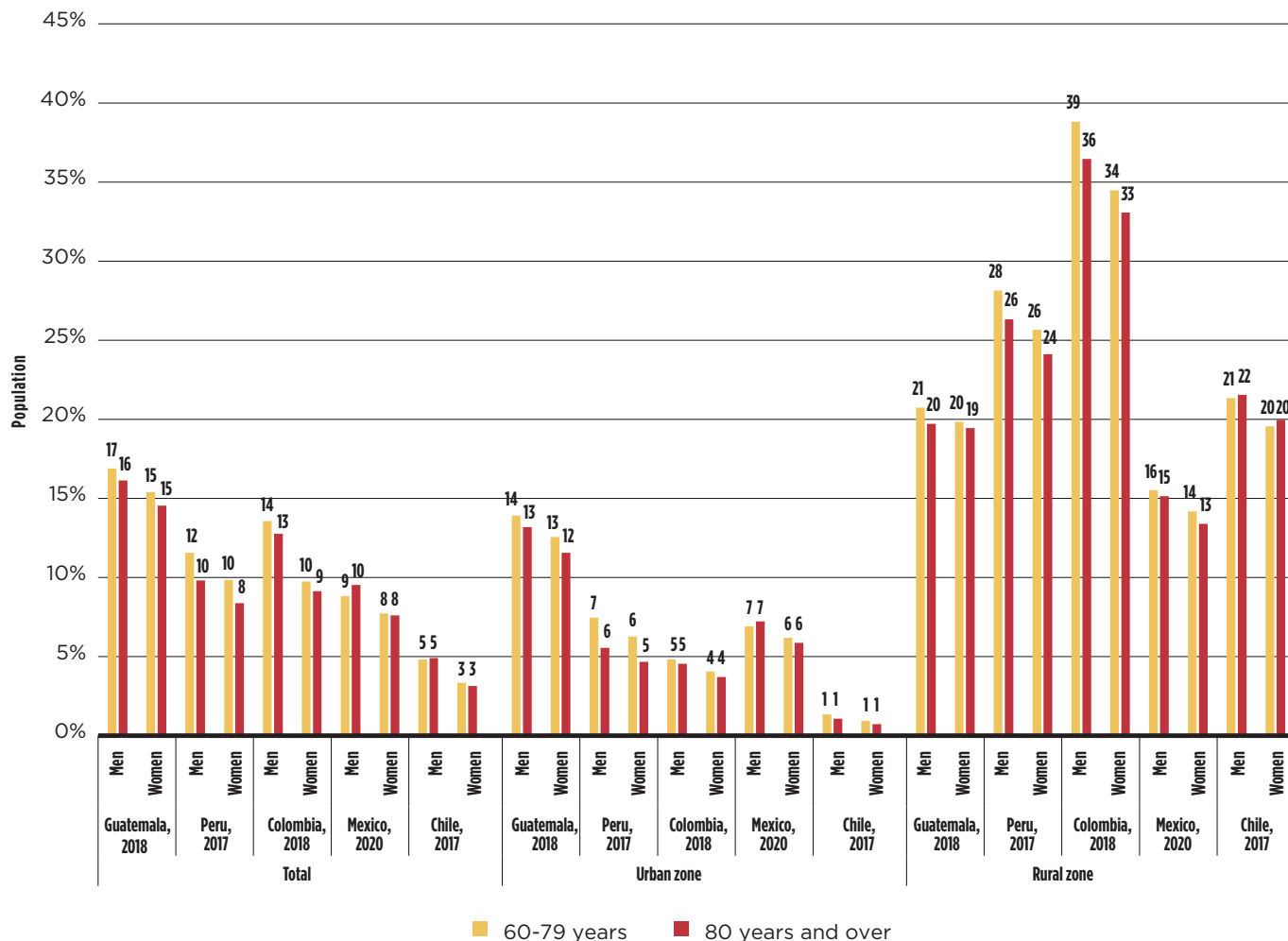
These measures agreed in recent decades as well as different national regulations encourage Latin American countries to implement public policies on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. Private and state actors associated with the drinking water supply and sanitation sector have implemented many regulations, which has led to significant progress. However, a large percentage of the population still does not have adequate access to these goods and services. Providing an accurate overview of the indicators of access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation is still difficult, especially when attempting to ascertain the situation in urban and rural areas, although population censuses provide information that should be carefully compared. This section provides a brief overview of the five countries that conducted censuses between 2017 and 2020, based on the indicators defined by the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE), Population Division of ECLAC, and using census microdata.⁴

4 According to Huenchuán, access to drinking water was selected because “this was a more rigorous indicator, as opposed to considering the availability of water on the land where the home is located, since for older people, especially those who have difficulty moving or carrying heavy things, it is not easy to haul water (for example, using a bucket or bottles) from a water source located on the land where they live to the home.” See Huenchuán S, publisher. *Envejecimiento, personas mayores y Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible: perspectiva regional y de derechos humanos* [Aging, older people and Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development: A regional and human rights perspective]. Santiago: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; 2018. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.26633/RPSP.2020.177>.

Access to clean water in households with older people

According to Huenchuán (3), the results of censuses conducted during the decade 2010-2019 indicated that around 20% of older people in Latin America and the Caribbean did not have access to drinking water inside the home where they lived. The most recent censuses conducted in four countries show that this figure ranged from less than 5% in Chile in 2017 to 15% in Guatemala in 2018 (Figure 16). Access to safe drinking water measured at the national level reveals asymmetries between urban and rural areas. In cities, almost all older people have access to drinking water in their homes, but the percentage in rural areas is much lower, particularly in Colombia where nearly half of older people do not have drinking water in the home. This implies that older people in rural areas must walk more than those in urban areas, either on or beyond the property where they live, in order to find the drinking water they need to meet their daily needs, with all the hardships that this entails, especially among those aged 80 and over who live alone or with other older people. Furthermore, these are the people most likely to use non-potable water, which may directly expose them to a higher risk of health problems.

Figure 16. Latin America (five countries): Percentage of the population aged 60+ with no access to safe drinking water, by age group, sex, and area of residence



Source: Demographic censuses of Chile (2017), Peru (2017), Guatemala (2018), Colombia (2018), and Mexico (2020). Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE), Population Division of ECLAC. Redatam7. Santiago, CELADE, ECLAC; [c2022] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://www.redatam.org/redbin/RpWebEngine.exe/Portal?lang=esp>.

Regarding the breakdown by sex and age, there were no significant differences in the five countries (Figure 16). In general, women and people over 80 have a slight advantage over their counterparts, since a slightly smaller percentage of them live without access to clean water inside the home.

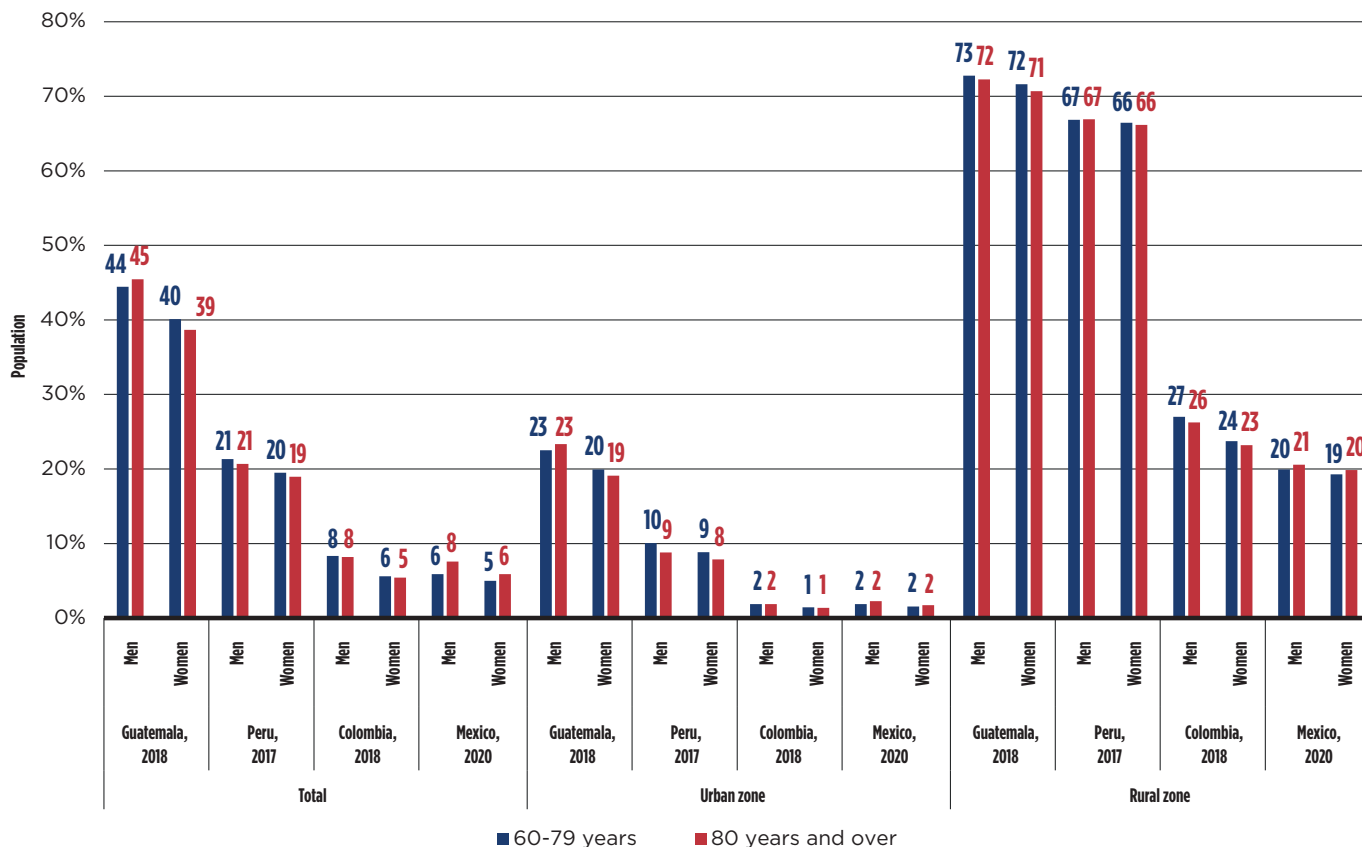
However, older people who do not have drinking water inside their home may be adversely affected by quality-of-life problems, particularly in terms of health. It is important for older people to have access to this service for many reasons, but two in particular stand out: first, it is recommended to consume at least two liters of water a day so as not to become dehydrated (older people lose more fluids than younger people, and the water to meet this daily consumption need must be potable so they do not suffer the health problems associated

with contaminated water); and second, it is necessary to have safe drinking water inside the home for cleaning and cooking, among other household activities.

Access to sanitation services in households with older people

In addition to having safe drinking water, the proper management and disposal of wastewater and excreta are critical to prevent the spread of disease. Although sanitation may be measured may differ from one census to another, it is important to have an approximate figure on access to sanitation services in households with older people, who generally have weaker immune systems than younger people. Figure 17 shows the percentage of people over 60 years of age living in homes without sanitation in Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru. As we saw in the case of safe drinking water, there are no significant differences by sex and age group, but there are very pronounced differences between rural and urban areas. In urban areas of Guatemala (the country with the largest sanitation gap of the four analyzed), 40% of older people lack access to sanitation at home, while in rural areas this figure exceeds 70%. There is also a large gap in Peru in terms of older people's access to sanitation: 20% of older people lack sanitation in urban areas, compared to more than 60% in rural areas. The situation in Mexico and Colombia is better, but in rural areas roughly 20% of older people do not have access to sanitation in the home.

Figure 17. Latin America (four countries): Percentage of the population aged 60 and over with no access to sanitation in the home, by age group, sex, and area of residence



Source: Demographic censuses of Chile (2017), Peru (2017), Guatemala (2018), Colombia (2018), and Mexico (2020). Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE), Population Division of ECLAC. Redatam7. Santiago, CELADE, ECLAC; [c2022] [accessed on: 22 June 2022]. Available at: <https://www.redatam.org/redbin/RpWebEngine.exe/Portal?lang=esp>.

Conclusions

To summarize, the sociodemographic and socioeconomic situation of older people in Latin America is heterogeneous, since it is impacted by each country’s level of development. However, certain trends remain constant, including gender differences. Although women have a longer life expectancy and reach older ages, the inequalities encountered throughout their life course are experienced more strongly at this stage of their lives, given their lower levels of education and literacy, and less access to pensions, and must continue to work in insecure jobs, even though their employment rates are lower. This is a wake-up call to decision-makers and those who formulate policies for older people to ensure that these decisions and policies take into account the gender perspective.

Aging in countryside of Latin America is not the same as in the big cities; significant gaps between urban and rural areas persist. In older age, it is even more important to have access to basic health and social services in order to ensure a good quality of life. This will not be possible if the differences between urban and rural areas continue to be so pronounced.

In summary, the future demographic situation of Latin America and the Caribbean offers opportunities, but also challenges related to fighting inequality. To take advantage of the opportunities and address the challenges, immediate actions and long-term strategies must be implemented. In this context, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents an opportunity, since its core principle is “Leave no one behind,” focusing attention on people and their rights. As stated above, this is an ambitious agenda, but achieving its 17 goals requires consistency in public policies. However, Latin America has unique characteristics and since this action plan is global it does not always directly mention the areas where demographic transformations will have the greatest impact. Still, there are several ways to approach the subject and, if considered strategically, these could shed light on the issues associated with aging and the older population.

The United Nations’ Decade of Healthy Aging (2021–2030) movement is aligned with the 2030 Agenda, with actions that are directly related to older people and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, with an emphasis on this population group. Synergies are required between the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals and the action areas and facilitators of the Decade of Healthy Ageing, as well as between these initiatives and the Montevideo Consensus and all of its priority measures, in order to fulfill the obligations of the countries in the area of human rights of the population in the context of demographic changes. Regarding population aging and the rights of older people, Section C of the Montevideo Consensus explicitly considers priority measures related to participation, social security, education, health, caregiving, dignified death, work, violence, discrimination, savings, and public policies, among others. Other international commitments that reinforce the ones mentioned above must also be taken into account. These include the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing⁵ and, especially, the Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons.⁶

5 See United Nations. Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. New York: United Nations; 2003. Available at <https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/documents/mipaa-en.pdf>.

6 See Organization of American States. Inter-American Convention on the Protection of the Human Rights of Older Persons. Washington, D. C.: OAS; 2015. Available at: https://www.oas.org/en/sla/dil/docs/inter_american_treaties_A-70_human_rights_older_persons.pdf.

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With the aim of providing an overview of the current knowledge available on the health and well-being of older people in the Region of the Americas at the beginning of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Aging (2021-2030) as well as reporting on population aging in the Region, this report provides updated information on the sociodemographic and economic conditions of older people using a multidimensional and people-centered approach. It covers the demographic, geographical, sociocultural, and family characteristics of older people in Latin America, and describes their economic and health situation based on data from the most recent demographic censuses of five countries in the subregion. This paper highlights the heterogeneity of the sociodemographic and socioeconomic conditions of older people in the Region, reflecting significant differences in the level of economic and social development of the various countries.

