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Latin America and Caribbean at risk of ‘irreversible damage’ from climate change - WMO report

By [Liv Martin](#)



A new report from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) outlines dire climate-related impacts in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Glaciers in the Andes mountains, the Amazon rainforest, and ecosystems in the Pacific and the Atlantic oceans are all facing serious consequences from climate change, says [the 22 July WMO report](#). Focusing on the Latin American and Caribbean, the second annual report tracked climate change impacts in the region during 2021.

These increasingly vulnerable regional systems are “approaching critical conditions under risk of irreversible damage” due to climate change, the report says. Scientists are especially concerned by elevated deforestation, glacier melt, drought and flooding, and rising temperatures and sea levels.

The report found deforestation rates in 2021 were the highest since 2009. Deforestation of the Amazon rainforest has implications everywhere, because the six million-square-kilometre forest – the largest in the world – plays an important role in absorbing carbon and releasing oxygen back into the atmosphere.

Environmental activists have been raising the alarm for years on destruction to the Amazon, and many blame current Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro for the rapid uptake in deforestation.

The Andes, the longest mountain range in the world spanning from southern Latin America to the northern Caribbean, is also under threat. The report says the mountain range’s glaciers have depleted by 30 per cent in less than 50 years. The Andes are a key water source in Latin America. A premature depletion of glaciers could potentially cause water scarcity across Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina.

Drought is a continuous concern. The report cites the “central Chile mega drought”, which has been happening for the past 13 years and placed Chile in an urgent water crisis. Central-southern Brazil and parts of Paraguay and Bolivia have also suffered from the Parana-La Plata basin drought, which has affected soybean and corn production.

At the other end of the spectrum, extreme rainfall has led to disastrous floods. Record rainfall in 2021 also caused landslides, hundreds of deaths, property damages and hundreds of thousands of people to be displaced, the report says. Latin America and the Caribbean were also impacted by seven hurricanes in 2021.

Temperatures are on the rise, a trend happening everywhere. According to the report, Latin America and the Caribbean’s average temperature has increased twofold in the past four decades. The temperature rose by 0.2°C per decade between 1991 and 2021, whereas from 1961 to 1990, it was only increasing at a rate of 0.1°C per decade.

Heatwaves are becoming the new norm. Record-high temperatures occurred all over the region, with multiple examples above 40°C. In Cipolletti, Argentina, temperatures reached 43.8 °C and in Aragarças, Brazil, up to 43 °C.

Following another global trend, sea levels have also risen along the Atlantic coast, in the north Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico, notes the report. This can lead to further disaster, including the contamination of water supply, shoreline degradation, storm surges and displacement of coastal communities.

“Addressing such interconnected challenges and their associated impacts will require an interconnected effort,” said Mario Cimoli of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in the press release. “No matter how it is taken, action must be informed by science.”

The report predicts the region will continue to face serious ramifications from climate change if it stays on the same course. This could look like shortages of food and water, compromised health and well-being, increased poverty, more droughts and an uptick in hurricanes.

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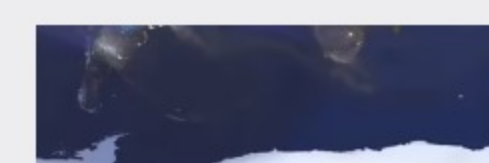
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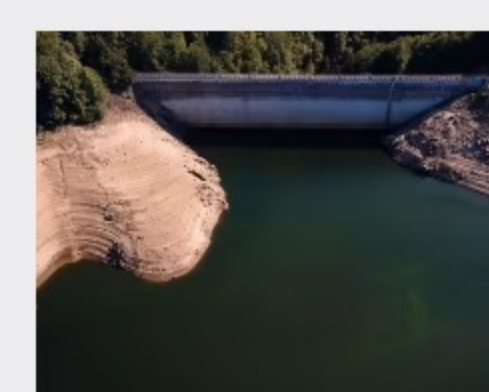
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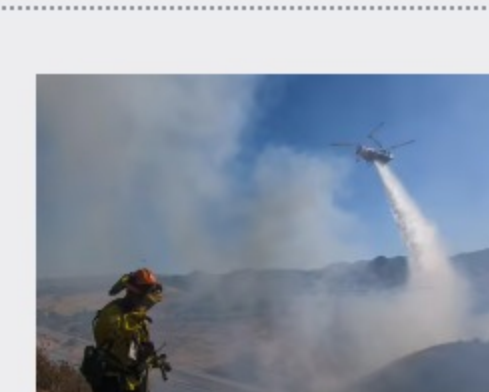
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