



Organization of American States
Department of Social Development and Employment

Gender Equality for Decent Work

Proposals for mainstreaming gender
into labor and employment policies
within the framework of the IACML





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(Informative Document of the XV IACML)

GENDER EQUALITY FOR DECENT WORK

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AND EMPLOYMENT POLICIES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF
THE IACML**

PRESENTATION

The Department of Social Development and Employment de la OAS (DSDE) presents this background document to the XV Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML) in response to the mandate received from the XIV IACML to prepare studies, make proposals and promote the sharing of successful practices with regard to the incorporation of a gender perspective into public policies.

In pursuit of this objective, in March 2007 the DSDE organized a meeting with the Interamerican Commission of Women (CIM) and the International Labour Office (ILO) with a view to establishing a framework for future action. At this meeting, which was also attended by the Canada Department of Labour in its capacity as donor of funds for this initiative, the conclusion was reached that it was necessary to prepare a report resuming the current status of inclusion of the gender perspective into labor policies and identifying relevant areas where labor administrations needed strengthening. Accordingly, the main output of the meeting consisted of the guidelines for the terms of reference to be used in the preparation of the report in question.

The author of this report, entitled “Gender Equality for Decent Work”, is consultant Ana María Muñoz Boudet. During its preparation valuable suggestions were received from consultants Lylian Mires and Janina Fernández, along with comments from Claudio Santibañez (IDB), María Elena Valenzuela (ILO), and the Permanent Secretariat of the CIM. To all of them go DSDE’s acknowledgment and gratitude. Important contributions were also received from María Claudia Camacho, DSDE specialist, and Erika López, consultant to this department.

Additionally, Labor Ministries across the Hemisphere y National Women’s Mechanisms were consulted through the IACML Secretariats and the CIM about programs and initiatives undergoing implementation. Their answers to our queries have been incorporated into this report.

The opinions expressed in this report are only those of the Department of Social Development and Employment.

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Director, Department of Social Development and Employment
Organization of American States

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I. INTRODUCTION

The promotion of decent work as a development objective—defined as productive, adequately remunerated work performed under conditions of freedom, equity, safety, and human dignity—has gender equality as a constitutive element. Differences and inequalities of situation between men and women and discrimination against women are obstacles that have to be overcome in order to achieve decent work for all. *“The current decent work deficit cannot be overcome without progress against gender inequities with regard to rights, employment opportunities, social protection and social dialogue.”*¹.

The fight for gender equality is a part of the more general effort needed for women and men to achieve full enjoyment of their human rights. Gender equality depends on equal opportunities, treatment and power for women and men. This means it is not only about having an equal share in the benefits of development, but also equal rights and opportunities to contribute to the development process with whatever capacities one has, and to develop those capacities as a necessary condition for achieving a model of integral development supportive of democratic and productive societies. Such a model helps accelerate poverty reduction, promote sustainable development, improve the living conditions of women, men and children, and builds democracy. In other words, greater access by women to economic resources through decent work and greater exercise of their rights at all levels are interdependent, mutually reinforcing variables. The final outcome, as stated by the Interamerican Commission of Women CIM (2005), is a virtuous circle through which decent work increases the economic empowerment of women and, with it, democratic governance.

1. Framework for Commitment to Decent Work and Gender Equity

The decent work concept was introduced by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1999, in association to four strategic objectives: (1) promote and realize standards and fundamental principles and rights at work; (2) create greater opportunities for women and men to secure decent employment and income; (3) enhance the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all; and (4) strengthen tripartism and social dialogue. In turn, these objectives matched a number of cross-cutting objectives, chief among them promoting gender equality, working out of poverty and strengthening democracy.

In response to this proposal, the OAS has been increasingly incorporating the recognition of the value of decent work creation into the agendas of its various summits and ministerial meetings, and member countries have been committing themselves to adopt proactive policies aimed at generating more and better jobs under this paradigm. This commitment has been reaffirmed at the Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML) of the OAS, especially beginning with the XII IACML (Ottawa, 2001), where the decent work principle, as defined by the ILO, was adopted as a requisite of sustainable development and as a component element of hemispheric economic integration. In the same spirit, the XIII IACML (Salvador de Bahía, 2003) pronounced the decent work agenda to be an axis of national and regional development policies. This position was reaffirmed at the XIV IACML (Mexico City, 2005), and then further confirmed as a central issue at the XV IACML (Port of Spain, 2007).

At the IV Summit of the Americas (Mar del Plata, 2005) the creation of decent work took center stage on the strength not only of its intrinsic value, but also of the role played by dignified, decent and productive work as a mechanism for challenging poverty, building fairer societies and strengthening democratic governance.

¹ Daniel Martínez in Abramo (2005) Trabajo Decente y Género en las Américas, ILO. p. 13

As the decent work concept gained ascendancy, awareness spread of existing gender-based discrimination and disparities between women and men in the world of work as barriers to the achievement of decent work for all. The integration of a gender perspective into employment policies, equal access to education and training, and equal pay, have been increasingly visible issues at Summits of the Americas and IACML meetings, and found explicit expression at the 2001 Conference:

“We are committed to integrate a gender perspective into the development and implementation of all labor policies, to promote work-life balance, to protect the rights of women workers, and to take action to remove structural and legal barriers, as well as stereotypical attitudes to gender equality at work; to address gender bias in recruitment, working conditions, occupational segregation and harassment, discrimination in social protection benefits, women’s occupational health and safety, unequal career opportunities and pay.”(XII IACML, Ottawa, 2001)

At the XIV IACML (Mexico City, 2005) gender perspective mainstreaming was included among the dimensions of decent work, and the Ministers made the commitment to articulate and promote proactive policies in line with that approach. Their commitment was reaffirmed at the Summit of the Americas of Mar del Plata, where heads of state and government leaders made the commitment to increase women’s access to decent work by combating gender-based discrimination at work, promoting equal opportunities, eliminating existing disparities between men and women in the world of work, and mainstreaming the gender perspective into employment policies.

These commitments are translated into action plans that establish priorities for state intervention. At the Mar del Plata Summit, it was agreed to implement decent work and gender policies in the following areas: (i) women’s training and education; (ii) equality at the workplace; equal pay for equal work and for work of equal value; (iii) women’s rights protection; (iv) equal access to the benefits of social protection, with a special focus on those in domestic employment; and (v) attention to gender issues in labor and social policies, in line with the Action Plan of the XIV IACML held a few months before. To accomplish the purposes of the Mexico Declaration, that IACML has created two Working Groups in charge of developing the analysis of those issues that have been already identified, supplying relevant information and studies, and monitoring hemispheric initiatives. Thus, Working Group 1 is responsible for decent work promotion, with a special focus on integrating the gender perspective into labor and employment policies, and fostering non-discrimination. Specifically, it is tasked with conducting enquiries, formulating proposals and promoting the sharing of good practices in the area of gender perspective mainstreaming into public policies with regard to wages, access to and advancement at work, and elimination of existing disparities between women and men². As to Working Group 2, its task, intimately linked to that of Working Group 1, is to engage in the institutional strengthening of Labor Ministries in the area of decent work promotion.

The above actions are performed within the broader framework of the Interamerican Program on the Promotion of the Human Rights of Women and Gender Equity and Equality (IAP)³, which has among its specific objectives to strengthen and promote women’s full and equal access to work and productive resources by formulating public policies with a gender perspective; revising, reformulating and enforcing national legislation to comply with international commitments regarding gender equality and the human rights of women; giving women equal access to employment and productive resources; promoting policies aimed at ensuring equal pay for equal work as between women and men and for work of equal value; and recognizing the economic value of unpaid work.

The IAP has in place a mechanism known as SEPIA - Pursuance of the Interamerican Program, for presenting recommendations at ministerial meetings and following up on them. In 2001

² Mexico Plan of Action (OEA/Ser.K/XII.14.1/Trabajo/DEC.2/05)

³ CIM/RES. 209/98 and AG/RES. 1625 (XXIX-O/99)

SEPIA drew up a number of recommendations for mainstreaming gender into the Programs and Policies of Labor Ministries in the Hemisphere⁴. These proposals are contained in the Follow-Up Plan on the Interamerican Program on Gender and Labor (SEPIA I) for the year 2001, and are grouped around the following issues:

- Institutionalizing the gender perspective
- Conducting enquiries and preparing studies on gender and employment
- Training women in order to improve their employability, and training civil servants and members of the Judiciary on gender issues
- Revising, strengthening and enforcing labor laws.

The will to promote decent work with equal opportunities for men and women is reaffirmed by applying the international labor Conventions and Recommendations of the ILO— particularly the Convention concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation⁵, under which the Member States undertake to declare and pursue national policies designed to promote equality of opportunity and non-discrimination on the basis of sex, race, color, ancestry, national extraction or social origin, among others. The Convention concerning Equal Remuneration⁶ establishes the principle of equal pay between women and men for work of equal value. The Conventions concerning Workers with Family Responsibilities; and the Maternity Protection Convention⁷, are also of key importance in ensuring equality and rights protection for women workers. To these should be added the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998), broadly recognized by the IACML and the Summit of the Americas, as framework instrument orienting action in this area.

Box 1

ILO. Decent Work Hemispheric Agenda, 2006-2015

With a view to the achievement of decent work in Latin America and the Caribbean, the ILO has proposed an hemispheric agenda for the generation of decent work in the Americas, based on the premise that women as well as men aspire, among other things, to productive work performed under conditions of freedom, equity, safety, and dignity.

The agenda pursues the following strategic objectives: to promote compliance with labor standards and rights; to create greater employment opportunities for women and men; to enhance the effectiveness and coverage of social protection; to promote social dialogue, and strengthen organizations and social actors participating in it.

The context in which these objectives are pursued is one of persisting gender-based discrimination problems both within and without the labor market: “Men and women do not join and participate in the labour market on an equal footing in regard to opportunities, resources and bargaining power”, and have access to different opportunities of employment and income regardless of their aspirations, abilities and knowledge.

Furthermore, women’s increasing entry into the labor market and the new opportunity created by this increase have not been accompanied by equal pay for work of equal value, or by a reduction in occupational gender segmentation, or by a fair distribution of household responsibilities.

In view of the above, and with specific regard to gender equality, the ILO’s hemispheric agenda addresses the challenge of promoting public policies aimed at reducing gender inequality in the world of work by means of both cross-cutting actions, and women-specific actions in order to ensure application of the non-discrimination principle, increase women’s participation and employment rates, improve the quality of jobs in the informal economy, narrow the wage gap, and achieve a more balanced representation of

⁴ Drawn up by the CIM, the ILO, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Unit of Social Development and Education of the OAS and the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)

⁵ Convention n.111 of 1958

⁶ Convention n.100 of 1951

⁷ Conventions n.156 of 1981 and n.183 of 2000

men and women in social organizations and dialogue frameworks. The target in this area is: over a ten-year period, increase the participation rate of women by 10 per cent and raise the employment rate by a similar proportion, while reducing the current gender gap in informal work and wages.

Source: Decent Work in the Americas: An Agenda for the Hemisphere, 2006-2015

Lastly, mention must be made of other international instruments that reaffirm commitments to gender equality in the world of work, reflecting the political will of the States in the hemisphere in this regard. First among these instruments is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), to this day is the principal international legal instrument providing a framework for women to exercise their human rights. With regard to work and to economic enfranchisement, it establishes the need to pursue a policy of eliminating discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure women: a) The right to work as an inalienable right of all human beings; b) The right to the same employment opportunities, including the application of the same criteria for selection in matters of employment; c) The right to free choice of profession and employment, the right to promotion, job security and all benefits and conditions of service, and the right to receive vocational training and retraining, including apprenticeships, advanced vocational training and recurrent training; d) The right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value, as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work; e) The right to social security, particularly in cases of retirement, unemployment, sickness, invalidity and old age and other incapacity to work, as well as the right to paid leave; f) The right to protection of health and to safety in working conditions, including the safeguarding of the function of reproduction⁸.

Also important is the commitment by all the world's nations and the premier development institutions to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), based on the Millennium Declaration, which declares the resolve "To promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable"⁹. By setting verifiable goals, MDGs provide an important framework for measuring progress. Goal 3 is about promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, and uses indicators ranging from gender equality at all levels of education, to gender parity in young adult literacy, to a higher percentage of women in waged employment in the non-agricultural sector¹⁰. Achieving the gender equality MDG is critical to the achievement of the other MDGs, because gender equality and women's empowerment are the necessary means to achieve universal primary education (MDG 2), reduce the mortality rate among children under five (MDG 4), improve maternal health (MDG 5), and reduce the probability of contracting HIV/AIDS (MDG 6).

2. The Economic Value of Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective into Labor and Employment Policies

Limitations to economic opportunities for women not only affect their rights and violate the equality ethical mandate, but also cause the loss of essential resources needed by society to achieve full development and economic growth¹¹. The World Bank (2006) recognizes as inefficient for an "intelligent economy" those practices that make economic opportunities for

⁸ Part III Art. 11-1

⁹ Paragraph 20

¹⁰ Indicators 9-11. Indicator 12, also a part of this MDG, refers to the percentage of seats in national parliament held by women.

¹¹ Caselli, Esquivel and Lefort, 1996; Forbes, 2000; Hill and King, 1993, 1995; Dollar and Gatti, 1999; Klasen, 1999; Knowles, Lorgelly and Owen, 2000

women fall short of women's capacities¹². In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, for instance, women surpass men in academic achievement in most countries¹³, and the average schooling of economically active women is higher than that of their male peers (8.8 against 8.4 years in 1990 and 9.7 against 9.2 years in 2003)¹⁴ (Table 1), Nevertheless, women's rates of entry into the economy continue to be lower than men's, women's employment rates continue to be higher, and the wage gap persists, whatever the level of education attained¹⁵.

The World Economic Forum (2005) has recognized, with reference to gender inequalities, that "countries that do not capitalize on the full potential of one half of their human resources may compromise their competitive potential."¹⁶ Women's greater participation in the workforce may have a positive effect on growth, and economic development usually increases women's participation in the labor market.¹⁷ Barriers to female labor participation may reduce productivity and growth by preventing society from making full use of its talent. This exclusion has a direct impact in terms of lower human capital formation, which in turn limits the workforce's potential.

Investment in equal opportunities for men and women in the economic sphere releases and skill-enables human resources; fosters initiative and risk-taking ability; and reduces vulnerability. Women's participation in the labor market and other productive activities generates income essential to the home, especially among low-income households, reducing the number and degree of vulnerability of households living in poverty (see Chart 1). Women's contribution is of fundamental importance both in the ever more numerous female-headed households and in biparental households vulnerable to falling into poverty. Moreover, money in a woman's hands not only increases her autonomy and economic well-being, it also results in greater investment in education, nutrition and clothing for her children, and helps break the intergenerational transmission of poverty¹⁸.

¹² The principle that gender equality is sound economic strategy underlies the World Bank's new 2006-2010 action plan to open new economic opportunities to women in key economic spheres of developing countries.

¹³ Statistics from ECLAC, UNESCO and other institutions show that gender gaps have been reversed in many cases, especially in the Caribbean, where school dropout has increased among males. On average, women are achieving higher levels of education, with a number of exceptions, such as young girls in the indigenous communities of Guatemala and Bolivia.

¹⁴ ECLAC, Women and Development Unit, Gender Statistics. Based on special tabulations of household survey data. Available at: <http://www.cepal.cl/mujer/proyectos/perfiles/default.htm>

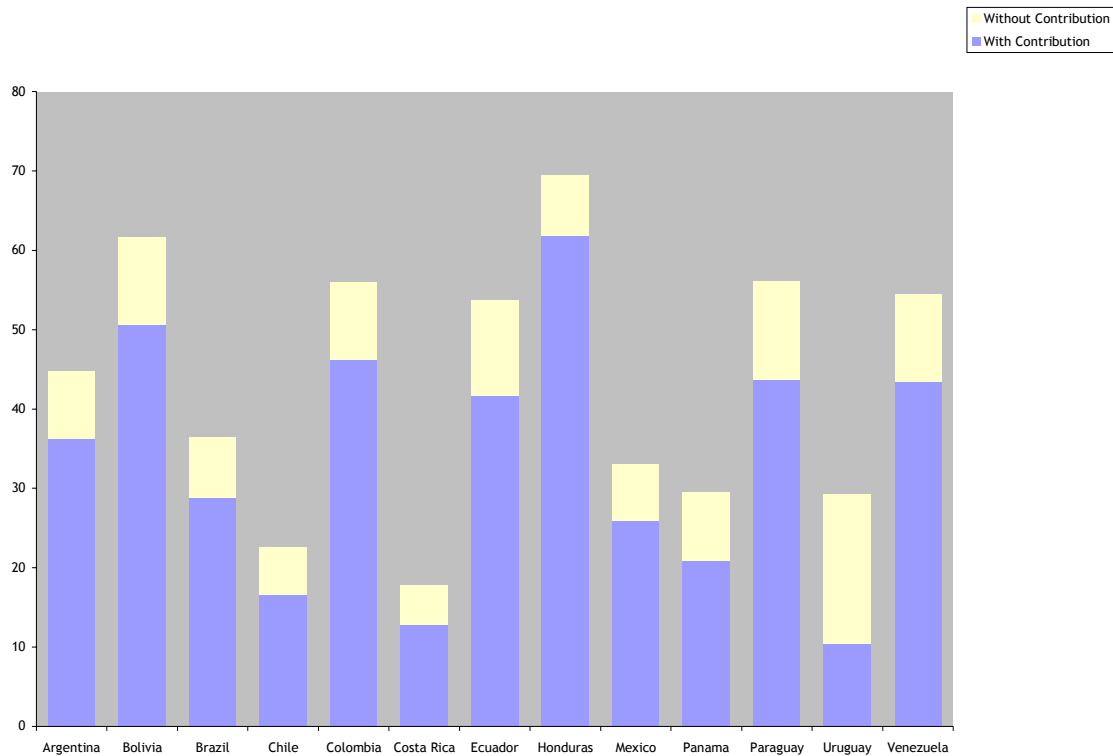
¹⁵ These figures are given in greater detail in section II of this document.

¹⁶ The Global Gender Gap Report presents a correlation analysis between the Gender Gap Index and the Competitiveness Growth Index as indication of a link between women's empowerment and long-term growth potential.

¹⁷ This effect has been documented by demographers and economists alike. The demographic transition that is part and parcel of the development process causes relative labor shortage and relative wage increases, which in turn boost female labor participation. According to Becker (1981), household decisions—including each member's labor supply—would be affected by the wages/reserve wages ratio. Women's access to education would increase this ratio, and higher women's labor participation would be the result.

¹⁸ Handa, 1994, Thomas and Strauss, 1997; Quisumbing and Maluccio, 2000; World Bank 2007. This is proven beyond any reasonable doubt by the successful achievement of higher nutrition and school attendance levels through conditional money transfer programs implemented in Latin America—Oportunidades (Mexico), Bolsa Familia and Bolsa Escuela (Brazil), Plan Familias (Argentina), Juntos (Peru) among them—which hand out the money directly into mothers' hands.

Chart 1
Extent of poverty in biparental households with and without women's contribution to household income.
Urban areas (circa 2002)



Source: ECLAC, Women and Development Unit, Gender Statistics. Based on special tabulations of household survey data. Available at: <http://www.cepal.cl/mujer/proyectos/perfiles/default.htm>.

More recently, in the case of Chile, which presents one of the lowest labor participation rates among low-income women in Latin America, a joint World Bank and Interamerican Development Bank study has proven that doubling women's participation in the workforce among low-income groups with respect to its 2003 level would reduce total poverty by 2% and extreme poverty by over 12%¹⁹.

3. Mainstreaming as a Strategy for the Promotion of Decent Work with Gender Equity

The above described hemispheric commitments express a political will that stems from acknowledgement that relations between the genders are asymmetric, and that existing inequalities between women and men are linked to the prevalence of a model of sexual division of labor, and of gender roles, where women's work and contribution to development is valued differently from men's. ECLAC (2003) recognizes that the division of labor by sex assigns domestic tasks of a reproductive and caregiving nature almost exclusively to women. In addition to overburdening women with work, this takes time away from training and recreational activity and limits women's options in joining the labor force, obtaining more diversified work and earning sufficient income; it also limits their ability to take part in social and political activity²⁰.

¹⁹ World Bank, IDB, SERNAM (2007)

²⁰ ECLAC (2003). Social Panorama of Latin America 2002-2003 p.136

To overcome this state of affairs it is necessary to design and implement public policies that recognize existing differences between men and women in terms of power, resources and access to opportunities, and incorporate whatever measures are required to eliminate those differences where they are arbitrary or unfair, whilst at the same time respecting and recognizing those characteristics that are specific to women, so as to facilitate the creation of a level playing field where they can make the most of all available opportunities.

The strategy to be followed is, therefore, one aimed at mainstreaming a gender perspective into public policies—in the labor area, in the specific case of concern to this report—in order to evaluate the possible implications for women and men of any action taken, whether it be legislation, or policy or program, in any area and at any level. This would convert the concerns and experiences of women as well as men into a cross-cutting dimension of the design, implementation, follow-up, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs, as a way to ensure that women and men benefit from them equally, and inequality is not perpetuated (ECOSOC, 1997).

The purpose of this document is to help build Labor Ministries' capacities to successfully mainstream gender into their policies and programs aimed at achieving decent work for all in Latin America and the Caribbean, in accordance with the mandates and agreements of the Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML).

These proposals seek to address the most urgent issues, where the impact of ministerial action in support of employment and social protection is greatest, making the most of the advantages enjoyed by OAS bodies and agencies in terms of high level dialogue and regional coordination. In addition, they will find support in the memorandum of understanding existing between the OAS and the ILO, and will benefit from use of the Inter-American Labor Administration Network (RIAL), IACML's horizontal cooperation mechanism.

The measures proposed are focused on those areas that have been identified by various existing assessments regarding women's entry into the region's economy and labor market, as those where considerable gender gaps and discrimination persist. Special emphasis is placed on the priorities outlined by the CIM through SEPIA and ILO's Decent Work Agenda. The areas of intervention proposed have been adjusted to Labor Ministries' capacities and scopes of action and to the hemispheric cooperation framework.

Based on the above methodological approach, this report consists, in the first place, of an appraisal of the main issues to be addressed with regard to gender and employment in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is followed by a description of a number of policies and good practices that were implemented within and without the region to address these issues, and could be used as reference and even be replicated by Ministries within the framework of horizontal cooperation. Lastly, a number of strategic guidelines are proposed for a gender and employment mainstreaming action plan to be implemented within the IACML framework through use of high level dialogues among authorities participating of both IACML and CIM fora; and of RIAL as a mechanism for building the institutional capacities of Labor Ministries to mainstream gender and address priority issues through cooperation.

II. BACKGROUND OF WOMEN'S SITUATION IN THE LABOR MARKET

This section provides an overview of a number of fundamental indicators of gender inequality in employment and in economic participation, or areas where positive action is required in favor of women. Given the vastness of the subject, rather than an exhaustive assessment, it is an attempt to pinpoint the issues that are most urgent and most amenable to being addressed by Labor Ministry policies and programs. For that, it uses assessments already prepared by different institutions and researchers²¹.

Among the main trends described here, the following are particularly worth mentioning:

- *The potential for progress created by a very considerable increase in female labor participation is not being exploited to the full. The increase in question is not being accompanied by a better distribution of reproductive work.*
- *Women's higher education is not associated to easier entry into the labor market.*
- *Women's overrepresentation in sectors most affected by a lack of social security coverage affects not only their safety, but also their present and future income.*
- *The wage gap persists, with women continuing to receive lower income than men for equal work or for work of equal value.*

1. Changes in Total Work: Productive and Reproductive Work

a. *Women's labor participation is on the increase*

There can be no doubt that the dramatic rise of women's participation in the workforce has been among the major steps forward in gender equality made by the region over the past three decades. Never before there were so many economically active women in the region. In 1970 the female labor participation rate in the region was 23%. Over the past three decades it doubled, reaching 52% in 2006, which is the average rate for developed economies²². According to ECLAC²³, between 2002 and 2005 2.8 million women and 2.5 million men entered the workforce every year, as against 2.2 million and 2.0 million, respectively, between 1990 and 2002—a clear indication of the increasing rate at which women are entering the labor market, reducing the participation gap with respect to men by 16% over the same period of time²⁴.

On the other hand, this increase in participation is not homogenous across the region. It varies from less than 40% in Chile to more than 60% in Barbados (Chart 2). In Jamaica's and other cases, it actually dropped with respect to the levels attained in the nineties.

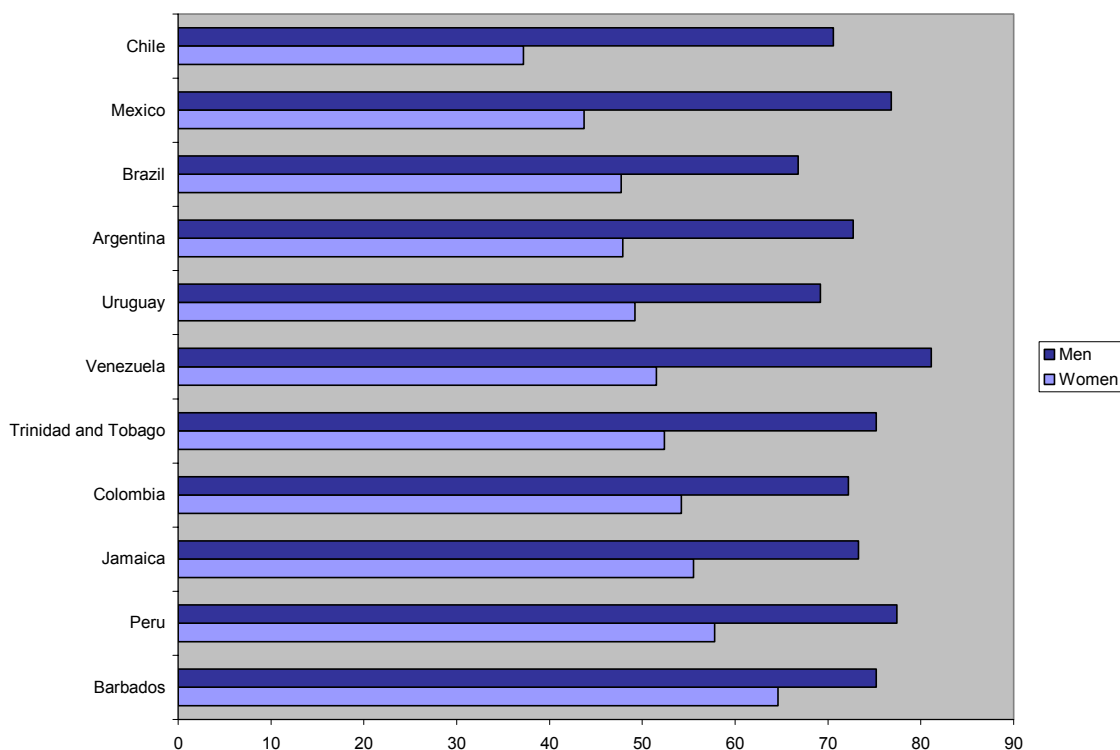
²¹ The issues addressed here have been identified in analyses and assessments contained in the following documents: Abramo (ed) (2006) Trabajo Decente y Equidad de Género en América Latina. ILO; ILO (2006) Labour Overview of Latin America and the Caribbean; ECLAC (2007) Social Panorama of Latin America 2006; Oxman (2001) Género y Trabajo. Balance Regional y Desafíos. Paper submitted at the first session of SEPIA I – Gender and Work. Galvez (1999) Aspectos Económicos de la Igualdad de Género. 7th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. ECLAC.

²² In developed economies, the rate is 52.7% according to data presented by the ILO (2007) in Global Employment Trends for Women. Source: ILO, Global Employment Trends Model 2006.

²³ ECLAC (2006). Social Panorama 2006

²⁴ ECLAC (2003). Social Panorama of Latin America 2003. +++It should be pointed out that this gap reduction is due by one fourth to the decrease of men's labor participation from 85% to 81% over the period considered.+++

Chart 2
Average annual rate of labor participation by sex. Urban Sectors 2005



Source: ILO. Labour Overview 2006 based on special tabulations of household survey data.

Nevertheless, as shown in the following pages of this report, this increase in participation does not translate into greater access by women to decent work, for women's labor market entry in Latin America tends to occur by way of precarious employment—self-employment or employment in low productivity sectors. Women generate between 30 and 50% of household income²⁵, according to poverty levels. Their contribution is of critical importance in lowest-income households. Nevertheless, household surveys show that low-income women still have a comparatively lower workforce participation those in the upper income quintiles. In fact, workforce participation is directly related to earning capacity and educational level, and inversely related to fertility. Over 80% of women aged 30 to 45 years with post-secondary education participate in the labor market, as against only 50% of women with primary education. In the case of men, the correlation between education and employability is less strong, given that the difference in participation between men with primary education and men with post-secondary education is less than 5%²⁶. On the other hand, over 60% of women in the top decile work for pay, as against 35% of those in the three lower deciles²⁷.

The central reasons for low labor participation among less educated women can be found in their family care responsibilities, which restrict both their capacity to enter the formal labor market and their mobility, and in their lack of human capital and the requirements of formal employment with regard to hours of work and location. As a result, their entry into the labor market, when it takes place at all, tends to occur in the informal sector or under labor

²⁵ IADB Research Department, based on a Household Survey covering 18 countries.

²⁶ ECLAC, Women and Development Unit, Gender Statistics. Based on special tabulations of household survey data. Available at: <http://www.cepal.cl/mujer/proyectos/perfiles/default.htm>

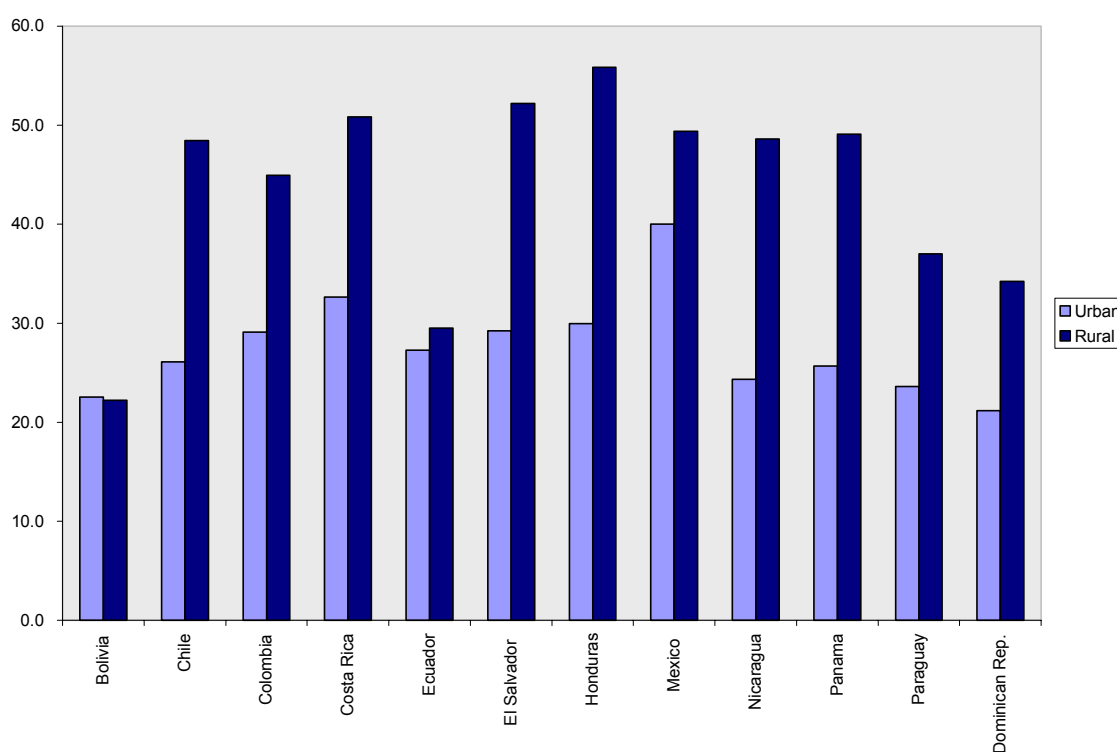
²⁷ ECLAC, Women and Development Unit, Gender Statistics. Based on special tabulations of household survey data. Available at: <http://www.cepal.cl/mujer/proyectos/perfiles/default.htm>.

arrangements that enable them to balance family and work responsibilities, and that in general have a cost in terms of lower wages and lack of social security coverage.

b. A considerable proportion of women still engages only in housework

In spite of recent labor market inclusion, a large number of women is still economically inactive, largely due to being engaged in study or reproductive work (domestic activities). In 1994, the domestic activity rate of urban women in Latin America was 35%; by 2002 it had dropped to 28%, albeit it still hovered around 40% in households with more than two minors among its members. This inactivity is higher among rural women (Chart 3) with exceptions as in the case of Bolivia and Ecuador, where differences are less marked.

Chart 3
Female Domestic Activity Rate. Population aged 15 years and over. Circa 2004



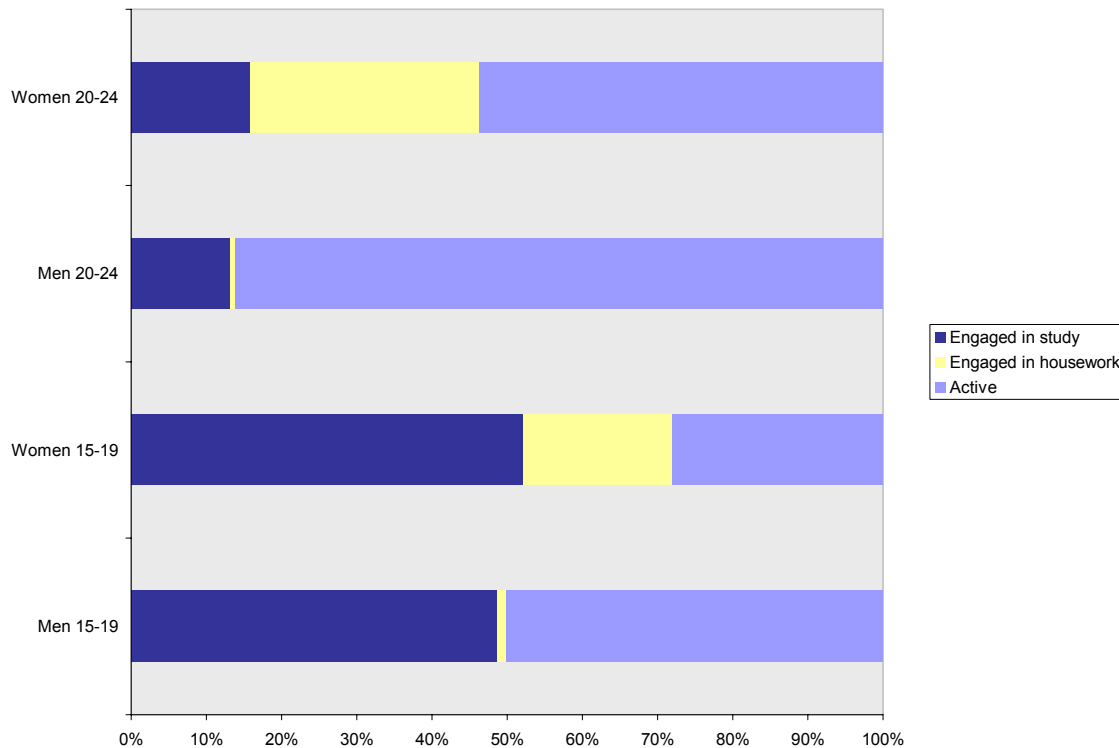
Source: ECLAC - Women and Development Unit, Gender Statistics. Based on special tabulations of household survey data from the respective countries. Available at: <http://www.cepal.cl/mujer/proyectos/perfiles/default.htm>.

Although the tendency to remain outside the workforce is lower among the younger population, the ILO recognizes the existence of nearly 22 million young people who “neither study nor work”, 75% of whom are women, many of them mothers at an early age²⁸. A majority of them are engaged in housework, in a proportion which increases as education cycles are completed, from 19.2% among women aged 15 to 19 years, to 33.5% among those aged 25 to 29 years. This finding, together with education entry data (Chart 4), tells us that, in spite of women’s higher academic achievement in the region, a considerable group of those women makes a direct transition from school to the creation of her own home, without using their education

²⁸ ILO (2006) Hemispheric Agenda

advantage to enter the labor market. On the other hand, men’s inactivity is largely caused by their presence in the educational system.

Chart 4
Activity Status per Sex and Age Group. Circa 2002.
Simple Averages for 17 countries in Latin America



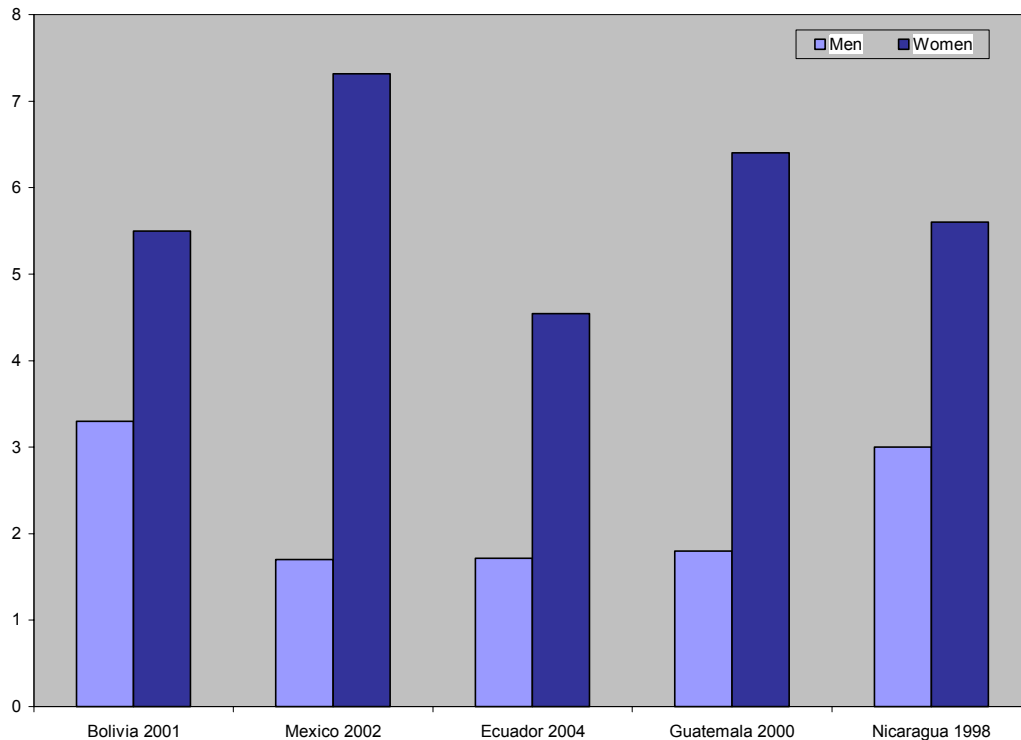
Source: Weller, J. (2005).

c. Family responsibilities continue to be unequally distributed

The unequal distribution of domestic and care responsibilities between women and men is one of the determining factors of women’s low labor participation (Almeras 1997, Jelin 1999). Time use surveys in the region show that men tend not to share either in housework or in care-associated activities. In Mexico, for instance, among couples where both partners work, women spend 48 hours per week engaged in domestic activities, whereas men only devote 25 hours to the same tasks, independently of whether both partners devote the same amount of time to paid work²⁹. Much the same situation has been found in other countries, e.g. Bolivia, Guatemala and Nicaragua (Chart 5), where, even though in some cases the number of hours devoted to paid work may be slightly lower for women, the latters’ dedication to domestic activities is far higher than their male peers’.

²⁹ The main difference are found in the number of hours devoted to personal time (17). Source: INEGI – Encuesta Nacional sobre el uso del tiempo 2002.

Chart 5
Total Working Time: Number of Hours Devoted to Paid Work and Unpaid Domestic Work among the Employed Population, by Sex.



Source: ECLAC - Women and Development Unit, Gender Statistics. Based on special tabulations of household survey data from the respective countries. Available at: <http://www.cepal.cl/mujer/proyectos/perfiles/default.htm>.

A study on participation in domestic activities by sex carried out on a household sample in Buenos Aires, Argentina, shows that these activities are more equably distributed between women and men only when women are the sole economic providers for the family, not so when both partners share in the providing. In the latter case, most of the burden of cooking and washing, in addition to parenting work—feeding, dressing and bathing the children, helping them do their homework, attending school meetings and taking them to the doctor—continues to be shouldered by women³⁰.

2. Women's Access to the Labor Market

a. *Women's unemployment rate has increased*

Unemployment among women is out of proportion to their relative number. According to the ILO, during the nineties unemployment rates among women were 30% higher than among men in Latin America and the Caribbean. From 1990 to 2004, urban male and female unemployment rates increased by 4% and 6% respectively³¹.

³⁰ Wainerman, C. (2007). Tasks with highest male participation in households where women are the only providers are house repair and taking children to school.

³¹ ILO based on household survey data from the respective countries. In Abramo and Valenzuela (2006) p. 40

Table 1
Unemployment Rate per Sex. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. 1995-2003

Country	1995		2003	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Latin America				
Argentina	15.6	20.3	15.5	19.5
Bolivia	3.3	4.0	7.0	11.7
Brazil	4.5	4.8	10.1	15.2
Chile	5.5	8.9	7.9	9.7
Colombia	6.8	11.3	14.0	19.6
Costa Rica	5.2	6.3	6.1	7.6
Ecuador	5.5	8.9	9.1	15.0
El Salvador	8.7	5.9	8.6	3.1
Honduras	10.7	4.1	7.1	7.7
Mexico	6.1	6.5	3.2	3.5
Panama	10.8	20.1	13.2	19.6
Paraguay	5.1	5.5	10.5	12.2
Peru	6.0	8.7	8.5	10.7
Dominican Republic	10.2	26.2	12.3	25.0
Uruguay	8.4	13.6	14.0	19.6
Venezuela	8.9	12.9	16.3	21.1
The Caribbean				
Bahamas	10.1	11.8	10.0	11.7
Barbados	16.5	22.9	9.6	12.6
Belize	9.9	17.9	8.6	20.7
Jamaica	10.8	22.5	7.8	16.0
Trinidad and Tobago	15.2	20.5	8.0	13.8

Source: ILO. Labour Overview 2006

Young women have the most difficult time in finding jobs. Their unemployment rate is twice the total female unemployment rate and three times the total male unemployment rate³². Moreover, women take longer to find jobs, stay unemployed longer than their male peers. In many cases, those driven out of the labor market by inability to find employment join the ranks of hidden unemployment, disguised as inactivity³³.

b. Changes in Occupational Segregation

Labor markets in Latin America and the Caribbean continue to present high levels of gender-based segregation with regard to occupational sector and occupation. This results, for a considerable portion of workers, in restriction from participating in several occupations, and generates a cost to the economy of the region in terms of flexibility, efficiency and equity. Sector segregation is equally present in vocational training, vocational choices, and access to employment, limiting the range of choices and labor opportunities for individuals, and often, in the case of women, restricting them to occupations and positions of lower economic value (Gálvez 2000). A study carried out for Costa Rica, Ecuador and Uruguay shows that this is one area where no progress was made during the nineties, with higher levels of horizontal segregation among the population with lower education levels³⁴. Data show that female

³² ILO (2007b) Global Employment Trends for Women. Global Employment Trends Model.

³³ Gálvez (1999)

³⁴ Deutsch et al (2004). Galvez (2000) shows a similar process for 5 countries—Brazil, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama and Venezuela—which reduced their occupational sex segregation indices by an average of 3% between 1990 and 1997.

employment is concentrated in two sectors, namely “trade, hotels and restaurants” and “communal, social and personal services”. Between the two, these sectors employ 75% of urban employed women in Latin America and the Caribbean ³⁵.

As to vertical segregation, the presence of women in top managerial positions is extremely low, especially in the private sector. Women hold only between 1 and 3% of top executive positions in the world’s largest corporations. Among the factors limiting women’s advancement to leadership positions in the corporate world, particularly worth mentioning are exclusion from informal networks, the stereotype about woman’s lack of leadership capacity, and difficulties in reconciling work with family and domestic responsibilities³⁶.

Lastly, women are overrepresented in low-productivity sectors, e.g. domestic service and retail trade, with consequences to the quality of employment they have access to, as well as to the level of pay and income they are able to earn.

Box 2

Implication of Sex-Based Occupational Segregation

High levels of sex-based occupational segregation can have significant implications for the well-being of men and women, and also for the efficiency of labor markets, to the extent that:

- They hamper labor market mobility by effectively excluding women from “male” occupations and men from “female” occupations. This lack of mobility affects the ability of the labor market to adjust to shocks and aggregate changes in trade patterns.
- They affect the education and training of future generations. What parents decide about their children’s education is based on perceived labor opportunities. Occupational segregation could result in insufficient investment in educating and training women for technical occupations, and in insufficient investment in educating and training men for service-related activities.
- They have an impact on poverty, for “female” occupations in general offer low wages, a legacy from ancient social models where men were the breadwinners and women’s wages were nominal. This low wage scale may affect poverty levels in households headed by, or mostly composed of, women.
- They help perpetuate gender stereotypes about women’s proper roles, as well as gender-based income differentials.³⁷

c. *Education levels play a role in women’s employment opportunities*

Women’s advancement in education is one of the region’s major achievements, with higher enrollment rates for girls than for boys in the majority of countries for both primary and secondary schools³⁸. Nevertheless, this gender equality in educational achievement is a relatively recent development: among adults aged 41 to 50 years, women have more years of schooling than men only in three countries in the region³⁹. Even though gender equality between women and men is highly advantageous, school dropout are still very much present among young girls, particularly among the poorer and indigenous sectors of the population. Given the higher marginal cost of school dropout for women, this poses a problem (Chart 6).

³⁵ Data referring to 2002. ECLAC, Women and Development Unit, Gender Statistics. Based on special tabulations of household survey data. Available at: <http://www.cepal.cl/mujer/proyectos/perfiles/default.htm> y ILO Caribbean Labour Statistics

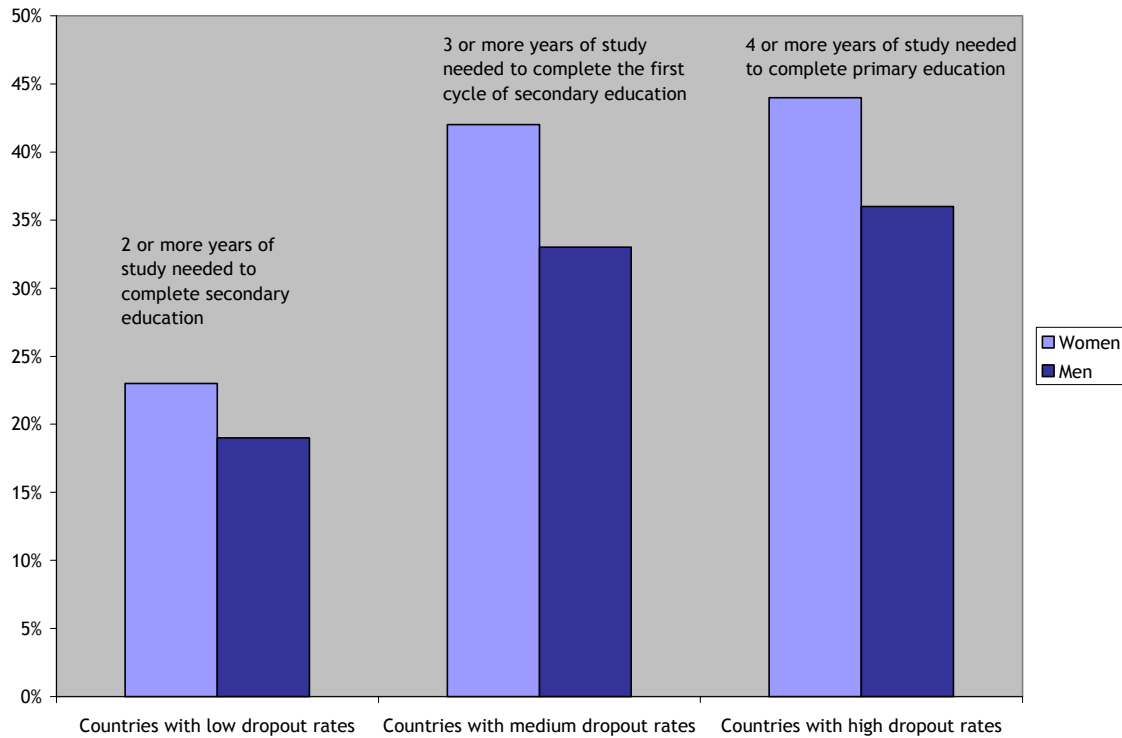
³⁶ Márquez and Lejter. (2000)

³⁷ See Jacobs and Lim (1992), Tzannatos (1999) and Anker (1998).

³⁸ According to UNESCO (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, www.uis.unesco.org), by 2001 or thereabouts only the Dominican Republic y Grenada were yet to reach gender equality in primary education, whereas Anguilla and Peru had not yet achieved it in secondary education. Guatemala is the only country where girls rank behind boys in both primary and secondary education.

³⁹ ECLAC. Gender Statistics www.eclac.cl/mujer/

Chart 6
Occupational Earnings Lost Due to School Dropout, by Sex and by Country Group



Source: ECLAC (2002) Social Panorama of Latin America 2001-2002.

Silveira (2006) recognizes the connection between educational level and labor market entry chances, especially in the case of women: more years of study increase the chance to gain access to an occupation, as well as, in the case of women, to enter the formal sector. This confirms the continued existence of the situation described in the ILO’s Labour Overview 1999, according to which the formality gap between men and women stood at the time at 20% for the cohort with 0 to 5 years of education, at 16% for the next cohort (6-9 years of education) and only 2% for those with over 10 years of education.

The progress of education has not been matched by vocational training, skills development, and vocational education. One of the main problems of education for work is its high level of segregation that concentrate women in only a few sectors, thereby limiting their ability to acquire the assets that are needed to meet the demands of the opportunity structure. According to an analysis carried out by ECLAC (2005) on the relevance of education to working life, at the level of secondary education, where vocational and occupational orientation begins, education contents are usually not adapted to the requirements of the world of work. Moreover, the education given to young women reflects gender stereotypes and the type of labor performance considered appropriate for women.

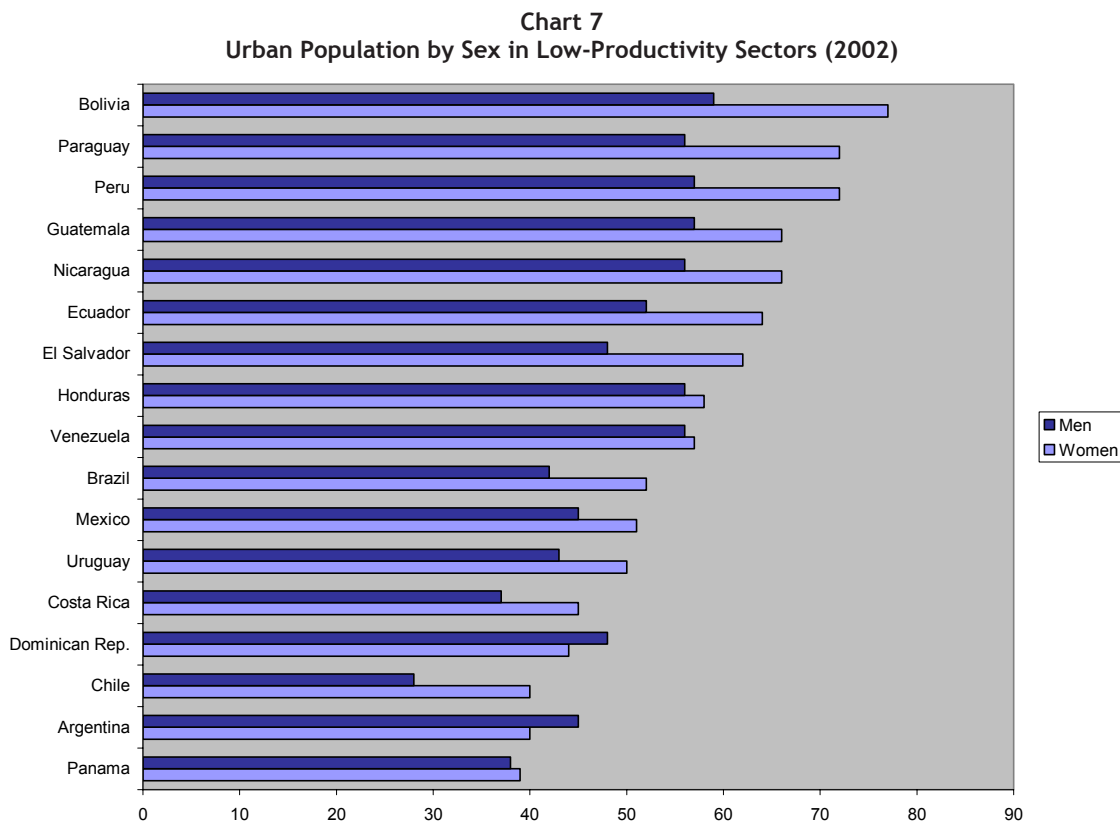
To this should be added that women have less access to workplace vocational education and training programs. Where attendance must be paid for by the trainee, the costs associated to skills development and training in terms of money, time, child care, etc. and the low priority given to such activities in family choices, or low access to adequate information to available facilities, make attendance of training programs particularly difficult, and even more so in the case of women at the low end of the income scale.

3. The Quality of Female Employment

a. Women have a higher participation in the informal sector and in work in low productivity sectors

Women are overrepresented in the informal sector. In fact, according to the ILO's Labour Overview of Latin America, in 2006 51.4% of economically active women worked in the informal sector, only 2% less than a decade earlier, mainly due to their higher (twice men's) participation in unpaid self-employed work and domestic service (an almost exclusively female activity). Bolivia has the highest proportion of women in the informal sector (76.7% in 2002), against around 60% in Paraguay, Nicaragua, Ecuador, El Salvador, Colombia and Peru. This means that a majority of women workers are not protected by labor legislation, are not covered by social security and other instruments of protection against accidents, illness, retirement and unemployment. In fact, only 33.4% of all workers in the informal sector are covered by some form of health care insurance and/or pension.

With regard to low productivity sectors, ECLAC has observed similar trends, as shown by Chart 7.



Source: ECLAC - Women and Development Unit, Gender Statistics. Based on special tabulations of household survey data from the respective countries. Available at: <http://www.cepal.cl/mujer/proyectos/perfiles/default.htm>

In addition, women working in the informal or low productivity sector suffer the consequence of this state of affairs in terms of income, which is lower than in formal employment. IDB studies show that in 12 out of 16 countries of the region, women are more likely to earn

“poverty wages”⁴⁰, and that job insecurity is greater among indigenous and Afrodescendant women⁴¹. Gender inequality is aggravated by ethnic discrimination: a large number of women from indigenous and Afrodescendant groups face disadvantages and various forms of segregation in the labor market. In Guatemala, 89% of the indigenous population works in the informal sector, 20% more than non-indigenous workers, whilst in Brazil the gap between black and white women with regard to formal employment is 10%⁴².

b. Domestic work is still an important source of employment for women

During the nineties, domestic employment grew at an average rate of 2.4% per year (ECLAC, 2001), representing 15.4% of urban employment in 1995 and 14.2% in 2005 (ILO, 2007). This occupation is a clear example of gender-based occupational segregation, with over 90% of women’s participation. It is associated to a form of precarious employment, for it is usually featured by very low wage levels, unclearly defined hours of work, lack of labor contracts, low social security contributions, and high levels of segregation.

Box 3

Indigenous Women and Domestic Employment

Economic migration to urban areas tends to place indigenous women in self-employment, informal street trade, or in the service sector, mostly as domestic servants. In most cases, domestic service is characterized by nearly complete lack of social security coverage, deficient social services and wages around or below minimum. ECLAC (2004) recognizes that indigenous women are overrepresented in domestic service. In Bolivia, 70% of domestic women workers were indigenous in 2002. In Mexico, one fourth of indigenous women in employment are domestic workers⁴³. An example of double discrimination is provided by the “criadita” (little servant) phenomenon in Paraguay, where a young girl-usually of rural or indigenous origin-is delivered into the hands of an urban family on the understanding that they will allow her to attend school in exchange for domestic services. In general this practice involves different levels of exploitation, not to mention that it amounts to child labor and reproduces the domestic service trap for indigenous women. These women workers face ethnic gaps, for they are paid lower wages than their non-indigenous peers. In Chile, according to the Casen 2000 survey, the average income of Chilean indigenous domestic workers amounted to 71% of the income of non-indigenous domestic workers.

Source: United Nations (2004); ILO (2003); Alvarenga, Benitez and Walder (2005).

c. Unequal pay persists

In spite of the fact that within the economically active population women have higher levels of education than men, gender-based wage differentials remain. According to the ILO (2006), in 1990 women were earning 59% of men’s monthly income, and 66% in 2000—indicating a slight decrease in the wage gap. Among the factors contributing to this state of affairs are occupational structure, occupational segregation, occupational qualification of the workforce, career paths and employment experience. Table 2 shows that, unlike what might be expected, the higher the level of education, the greater tends to be the gap between women and men. According to Abramo y Valenzuela (2006) this is due to the occupational segmentation by gender of the labor market.

⁴⁰ Wages whereby a worker earns 1 dollar per hour or less according to purchasing power parity. Duryea, Jaramillo and Pagés (2003).

⁴¹ According to Duryea (2001), indigenous women make up 80% of the informal sector in Guatemala, 78% in Brazil, 90% in Bolivia and 89% in Peru.

⁴² ILO (2005).

⁴³ Calfio, M. and Velasco, L. (2005).

Table 2
Average Women's Income Compared to Men's by Number of Years of Education. *Circa 2002.*
Selected Countries

Country	0 to 3 years	4 to 6 years	10 to 12 years	13 years and more
Honduras	58.6	59.4	73.6	51.5
Brazil	58.9	54.3	57.3	54.6
Costa Rica	72.8	69.0	70.2	57.0
Bolivia	61.4	66.9	65.5	59.6
Paraguay	76.0	64.7	65.7	60.0
El Salvador	66.4	69.1	77.0	64.6
Mexico	64.8	47.8	80.2	66.8
Uruguay	67.4	66.5	70.3	69.0
Ecuador	80.3	69.2	81.6	69.2
Panama	59.4	62.8	73.8	69.2

Source: ECLAC, Women and Development Unit, Gender Statistics. Based on special tabulations of household survey data. Available at: <http://www.cepal.cl/mujer/proyectos/perfiles/default.htm>.

Wage inequality not only violates women's right to equal pay for equal work. It also means a loss to women and to the countries' well-being. According to a report authored by the World Bank, IADB and SERNAM (2007) for Chile, a 25% reduction in wage gaps for women earning wages lower than the national average would bring about an 8% reduction in extreme poverty and a 2% increase in average per capita income.

Gender-based inequality is accentuated when it combines with race-based or ethnicity-based or other inequalities, further increasing differentials. In Peru, mestizos (persons of mixed race) earn 70% less than whites, and indigenous persons earn 40% less than mestizos⁴⁴. In the year 2000 in Brazil, white women received 80% of the average value received by white men; Afrodescendant men received 46% of that same amount, as against only 40% for and Afrodescendant women.⁴⁵

4. Protection at the Workplace

a. Social security: women are less protected than men

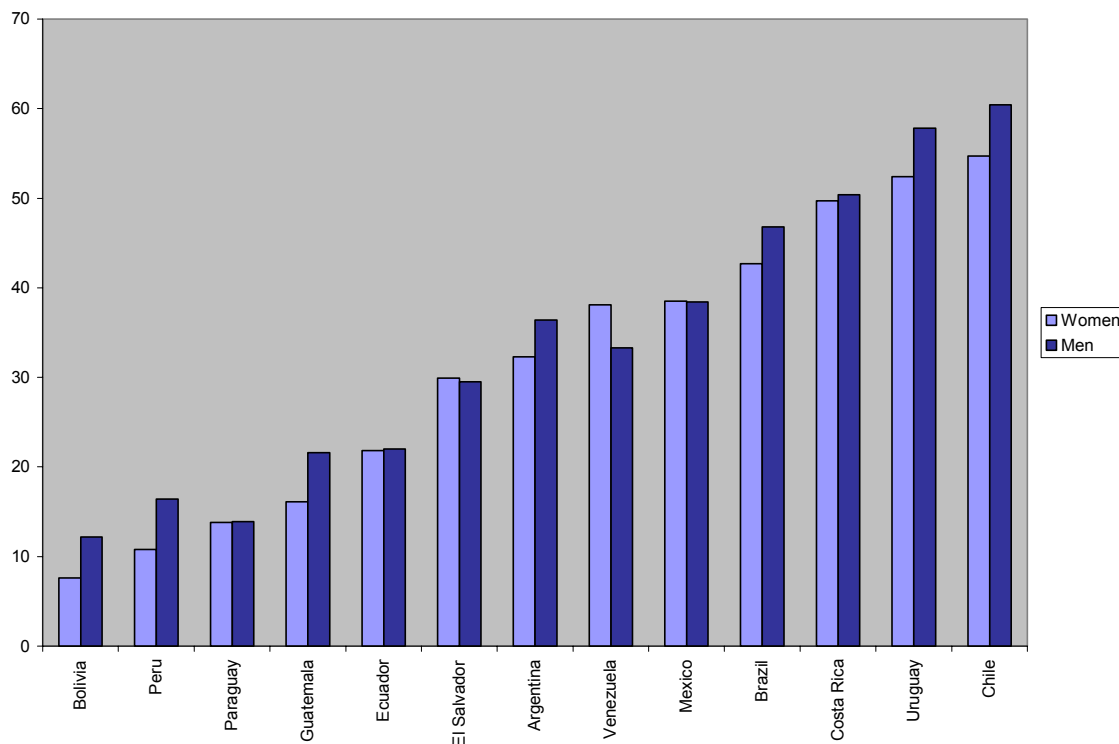
The lack of social security coverage for low-income women, informal women workers and elderly female adults is an issue that needs to be addressed. The demographic transition in Latin America and the Caribbean towards higher proportions of adult population makes it necessary to analyze the gender conditions of this process and address the needs of elderly women, whose life expectancy is higher than men's. Most social security systems existing in the region are linked to the labor market, which reproduces for elderly women the same inequalities they had to face in the sphere of work (James et al. 2003). On one hand, due to their lower level of entry into the labor market and higher participation in the informal sector, women are a minority among pensioners. On the other hand, their pension income is reduced by interruptions in labor participation associated to maternity and family care, and by wage gaps with respect to men. In the Dominican Republic the proportion of elderly adult men receiving retirement pension income is three times as high as in the case of women, and twice as high in El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico. In a few South Cone countries, differences are less marked⁴⁶.

⁴⁴ Nopo (2004) in ILO (2006)

⁴⁵ Leite (2000)

⁴⁶ ECLAC. Based on special tabulations of household survey data from the respective countries.

Chart 8
Economically Active Population Contributing to the Pension System, by Sex



Source: Rofman (2005) based on household surveys from the respective countries

As shown by Chart 8, pension fund contributions for economically active women continue to be lower. Although in a number of countries, including Venezuela, Mexico and Costa Rica, women have caught up with men with a gender gap reduction from 7 to 1.4% between 1990 and 2005, protection levels are still low. Only 55% of women in employment in Latin America regularly contribute to social security systems, and that percentage drops to a mere 20% in the case of women working in low productivity sectors⁴⁷.

b. Maternity protection continues to be a key issue

Motherhood continues to be a hindrance to women's entry into the labor market. Even though labor legislation has made progress in most countries in the region with regard to socialization of maternity leave costs and protection of mothers' labor rights, motherhood is still a limitation and a source of discrimination for women of reproductive age. In the in-bond assembly industry, for instance, there is evidence that women are required to submit to a pregnancy test as condition for employment⁴⁸. This discrimination is born of the idea that the labor cost of women of reproductive age is higher. And yet, as shown by Abramo and Todaro (2002), the actual costs to employers are nearly zero.

⁴⁷ ECLAC (2006) Social Panorama of Latin America 2006.

⁴⁸ ILO (2006) ICCIT: Examen del caso individual relativo al Convenio núm. 111. Mexico (ratification: 1961). Human Rights Watch reports the same situation in Guatemala.

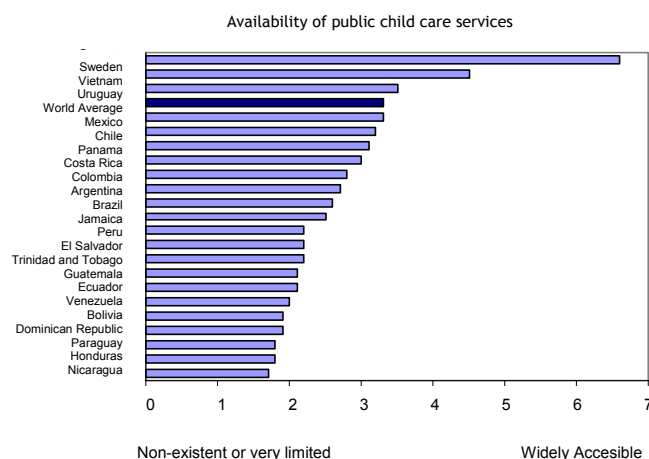
Table 3
Maternity Costs in Selected Countries. Year 2000
As a percentage of gross monthly wages

	<i>Argentina</i>	<i>Brazil</i>	<i>Chile</i>	<i>Mexico</i>	<i>Uruguay</i>
Day nursery	0.8	0.3	1.2	0	0
Breaks for breastfeeding	0.1	0.8	0.5	0.1	0.2
Worker's replacement	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0
Average cost to the employer	1	1.2	1.8	0.2	0.2

Source: Abramo, L. and Todaro, R. (eds.) (2002) *Cuestionando un mito: Costos laborales de hombres y mujeres en América Latina*. ILO. Lima

Discrimination operates not only during pregnancy. In Peru's urban areas, mothers with children under 7 years of age receive hourly wages that are 10.7% less than in the case of childless women or women whose children have come of age⁴⁹. The lack of adequate child care services is another unavoidable barrier to labor market entry for low-income women. In the region, child care service provision policies have traditionally focused on the segment immediately preceding school-entry age, i.e. children aged 4 and 5 years, mainly in urban areas, with the result that coverage for children aged 0 to 3 years is still low. In Uruguay, which is one of the most advanced countries in the region with regard to social services, a recent study on child care services finds that public institutions cover a mere 13% of children aged 0 to 3 years, whilst supply for that segment is mostly concentrated in the private sector⁵⁰. The low coverage of child care services is reflected by business leaders' perception (Chart 9) of a continuing dearth in that area.

Chart 9
Child Care Service Coverage (perceived). 2004



Source: The Global Competitiveness Report 2004-2005. World Economic Forum

⁴⁹ Piras and Ripani (2005).

⁵⁰ Batthyány (2004); Acosta, Peticara and Ramos (2007)

5. Representation and Participation in Social Dialogue

In Latin America and the Caribbean, in spite of an improved presence through women's secretariats, commissions or departments within the organization, women continue to have low participation in trade unions or trade union federations due in part to gender demands on their time. Nevertheless, they have achieved the inclusion in trade union agendas of equal pay, reporting and fighting sexual harassment at the workplace, putting an end to pregnancy tests, and other women-specific issues.

Sector segregation is also present in trade unions, with women's participation being higher in trade unions of the service and commerce sectors.

Information compiled by ECLAC (1999) reveals very considerable differences between Caribbean and Latin American countries when it comes to women's presence in trade unions- from zero presence to holding up to 60% of executive positions in national trade unions or general unions. The highest presence can be found in Dominica, where both the Amalgamated Workers Union and the Civil Service Association have women's participation ratios equal to or higher than 50%, followed by Saint Lucia with 40%.

III. AN OVERVIEW OF LABOR MINISTRIES' POLICIES FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND DECENT WORK

In order to do away with the discriminations that maintain gender-based differences and to achieve the decent work goal, a whole range of interventions needs to be implemented in a variety of areas. Specific policies are necessary to ensure respect and protection for women workers' rights, eliminate structural restrictions to women's capacity to expand their employment opportunities and the value of their contribution to total work, and increase their social protection and access to quality employment; also, to improve their capacity to make their voice heard and be represented. This means not only implementing labor market policies and interventions to modify working conditions in both the formal and the informal sectors, and correct gender-based imbalances and discriminatory practices. It also involves strengthening gender mainstreaming into institutions across the spectrum of sectors, their actions and policies, so that women's problems can be addressed by means of a comprehensive, integrated approach.

The present section contains an overview of different policies for gender equality and institutional strengthening for gender equality, which address the issues outlined in the previous section. Its purpose is to provide Labor Ministries in the IACML with a range of options for gender mainstreaming as a way to help cooperation and the improvement of their policies and programs. In its description of the main advances achieved in Latin America and the Caribbean, this section focuses on the most urgent areas, identified to the previously presented assessment. Table 4 that follows presents a summary overview of the issues addressed by the practices presented here.

Table 4
Summary Table of Outstanding Practices, per Area of Impact

Program	Participation	Unemployment	Segregation	Employment Quality	Informality	Shared Responsibilities	Unequal Pay	Social Protection	Maternity	Discrimination	Trade Union Participation	Institutional Strengthening
Labor intermediation centers network (Peru)	x	x			x					x		
Chambanet employment exchange (Mexico)	x	x			x					x		
Individual learning accounts (UK)		x	x	x								
Program for Returnees (Austria)	x	x				x			x			
Working Women in Transition (USA)	x	x							x			
Jive Development (UK)		x	x	x	x							
Training in non-traditional occupations (the Caribbean)		x	x				x					
<i>Programa Joven</i> (Chile, Argentina and Peru)		x	x				x			x		
Career One Stop (USA)	x	x	x	x	x							
<i>Observatorio Laboral</i> (Mexico)	x	x	x	x	x							
Career Services (New Zealand)	x	x	x	x	x		x					
<i>Futuro Laboral</i> (Chile)	x	x	x	x	x		x					
<i>Observatorio Laboral de Educación</i> (Colombia)	x	x	x	x	x		x					
Workplace (Australia)	x	x	x	x	x							
Child Care Initiative (Ireland)	x					x			x			
Strengthening labor courts (El Salvador)				x						x		x
Pay Equity Act (Canadá)							x			x		
Seals of good gender practices (Mexico and Brazil)				x						x		
Pension reform (Chile)								x	x			
<i>Ley de cupo sindical</i> (Argentina)											x	
Tripartite commissions (South Cone countries)											x	x
<i>Observatorio de Asuntos de Género</i> (Colombia)										x		x
Labour Indicators (ECLAC)												x
Seals of good gender practices (Mexico and Brazil)				x			x			x		
Public Management Improvement Program (Chile)												x
<i>Vademécum Laboral</i> (Ecuador)										x		x

1. Build the human capital of women

In spite of women's achievements with regard to education, work remains to be done to maintain this upward trend, increase women's human capital and foster their entry into the labor market. This requires improving women's access to opportunities of education in general and education for work in particular— an endeavor that involves a whole range of actions, from improving access to adult education to promoting technical training for young women, and training programs adapted to the needs and demands of women and potential employers.

One recurrent topic is the problem of how to renew a population's human capital, or, in other words, of how to ensure the acquisition of new competencies throughout working life. This issue has acquired more relevance in today's world, where workers need to acquire new knowledge and skills in order to operate in technology-intensive productive environments characterized by increasing service quality requirements. This involves addressing such key aspects as expanding access to learning opportunities of proven quality and relevance, and applying demand-specific support instruments for different population groups. In addition, aspects like demand placement acquire central importance to ensure that the capacities of women as well as men are harnessed in full. When it comes to designing a model capable of adaptation to individual needs, UK-developed individual learning accounts offer a promising approach.

Box 4

Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs)

Individual Learning Accounts are an integral part of the UK government's overall strategy for lifelong learning aimed at creating a better equipped workforce by encouraging and enabling people to invest in their own future, with greater control and responsibility over their labor and personal development.

The funding mechanism for education and training activities is based on a tripartite investment model sharing the cost between the individual, the State and the employer (if any). Contributions vary according to characteristics of ILA users, and they are not always monetary. In some cases, for instance, the State may grant discounts on tuition fees, learning materials or education-related additional services (quantified in terms of a given value).

Although ILAs were not designed with a specific gender focus, women have made considerable recourse to them. Nevertheless, many women never used their ILAs, citing, most importantly, lack of time and domestic responsibilities. This could change if the State's contribution took the form, for example, of a mechanism for the provision of child care or like service.

Sources: OECD (2001); Scottish Parliament Information Centre (2000); Wiseman, J (2005).

Planning education and training programs adapted to the needs of the labor market requires knowledge of labor demand, one that can be attained, for instance, by surveying businesses across the spectrum of economic sectors. This would make it possible to provide training in accordance with employers' needs. Uninformed training helps neither to improve people's employability nor to shift women's employment towards higher productivity activities and, additionally, reduce labor segmentation.

One of the areas where such planning would be extremely useful is women's reentry into the labor market after long periods of unemployment converted into inactivity, or absence due to maternity, child care or other contingencies. The United States' Working Women in Transition program is an instance of such planning.

Box 5
Working Women in Transition

The Working Women in Transition (WWIT) program focuses on women who are making a transition from the domestic sphere to the labor market, or another significant transition in their lives, or who are recovering after facing a contingency of some kind. Its pilot implementation targeted single mothers, recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, incarcerated women about to be released from prison, hurricane survivors, among others.

Women in the program receive face-to-face and online mentoring, career guidance and other employment-related services, as well as occupational training, through National Electronic Tools. They are also given access to child care services, transport support, counseling and clothes appropriate for work. The overall purpose of this is to improve their networks, connect them with a number of resources as a way to enable them to enter the labor market and find a job, improve the quality of their work in whatever job they hold or continue their education.

An important feature of this process is that local providers are various civil society and community institutions most easily accessed by women.

Source: WWIT Program. Available at: www.workingwomenintransition.org

Other avenues for action in this area include reducing gender stereotypes today current even among women as well as their employers; improving women's ability to reconcile skills development with other demands on their time (for instance, by offering child care options); expanding the range of skill development options available to women; include women's affairs offices in the formulation and implementation of vocational training programs; developing mentoring programs among both women with jobs and women seeking jobs.

2. Promote labor placement programs and services

Latin American and Caribbean labor markets tend to be highly discriminatory due, in particular, to their strong dependence on informal networks and personal and/o family contacts, which reduce transparency and limit the circulation of information, as well as opportunities for those who are outside such networks or lack such contacts. In turn, this state of affairs reinforces and perpetuates all kinds of discrimination, gender-based ones included. The creation or strengthening of labor intermediation services that facilitate and improve contacts between women and potential employers is one way to overcome these difficulties, for in many cases, the lack or loss-through lack of use-of such information networks leaves women uninformed about vacancies, job notices, or applying for jobs inconsistent with their qualifications or the requirements of the job offered.

It is necessary for labor placement services to be equipped with a gender perspective and staff trained to attend to women's distinctive needs and possibilities, and focused on finding better jobs for them. It is necessary that they follow a strategy explicitly directed at incorporating women workers into traditionally "male" sectors of the economy and in quality jobs in medium or high productivity sectors. It is necessary that their staff be trained to attend to women's distinctive needs, and—most importantly—to operate in a non-discriminatory manner⁵¹. At this stage, the need should be considered of giving jobseeking women direct counseling on things like preparing résumés, interview techniques. etc.

Some of the mechanisms already in place to make labor intermediation more efficient could be adapted for the benefit of women. Here are a few examples:

⁵¹ Documented cases exist where these services lose effectiveness by focusing on highly vulnerable segments of the population: by failing to aim for labor opportunities beyond a limited range, they end up reproducing the original discrimination mechanisms.

- Competitive support mechanisms for intermediary institutions were recently announced in Chile and implemented in other countries. This format makes public employment agencies compete with their private counterparts or with non-profit organizations by offering a monetary or other reward for each worker placed and still on the job after a given period of time. Should these incentives include specific placement quotas for women—in non-traditional jobs, for instance—placement and employment agencies would have to make an effort that would include encouraging employers to overcome their prejudices against hiring women.
- Young women have higher unemployment rates and a young woman will face greater difficulties when seeking her first job, on which both her career and her earning potential will be base. The supply of instruments and expertise to make the best of that first job opportunity amounts to a niche for labor intermediation offices.
- By interconnecting or creating labor placement networks such as Peru’s CIL (Centros de Intermediación e Información Laboral) network among churches, NGOs, training centers, businesses and other local organizations, it becomes possible to reach women within their own communities through organizations they trust⁵². Another useful mechanism are mobile units that bring services to communities or the vicinity of households, thereby enabling women to respond to the challenge of reconciling work, family responsibilities and child care.
- The use of information technologies through the creation of electronic employment exchanges like **Chambanet** in Mexico ensures greater process transparency, more widespread knowledge about available job opportunities and makes geographical limitations irrelevant by providing information about jobs anywhere in the country, thereby improving women’s chances to find employment.
- The incorporation of self-employment and work-at-home opportunities among labor intermediation services is another step in the right direction. Given the high proportion of female employment in the informal sector, it is necessary to ensure information sharing in that area as well. In addition, appropriate measures could be adopted to increase job security in this type of labor market entry (e.g. through connection to microbusiness creation programs).

3. Reduce labor segregation

Skills development policies specifically aimed at reducing occupational segregation place emphasis on training for occupations where traditionally women have not participated. Systematic evaluations have documented the impact of such programs in terms of higher female employment in non-traditional occupations⁵³. Actions to be undertaken could include providing skills development agencies with information about gender segregation and ways to counteract it.

Box 6
Gender-Based Segregation Reduction Programs

The *JIVE Development Partnership* program in the United Kingdom is creating a network of regional "Desegregation Hubs" to open up career paths for women in male domains of the labor market and to support employers in establishing a more diverse workforce. Desegregation Hubs bring together women’s training centers, employers organizations, mainstream training and educational institutions, careers services and the National Equal Opportunities Commission.

⁵² In spite of the lack of a gender perspective, the Peruvian network has achieved an increase in the number of people enrolled in the service, the number of jobs in its portfolio and the number of placements. (Mazza, 2003).

⁵³ ICRW (2001)

Women-only providers that specialize in training for traditional male occupations manage all of these hubs. Women's Education in Building (WEB) that hosts the London Hub is the largest provider of construction training for women. Each regional hub offers the following services:

- Gender equality courses for managers, lecturers, trainers and support staff of further and higher educational institutions and work based training providers.
- Training in gender-based vocational information designed to orient towards non-segregated occupations.
- Support to companies in the use of a gender audit tool developed by JIVE, to help analyze any recruitment and retention issues that companies may be experiencing. Support and guidance to assist employers in making diversity a reality in everyday working life.
- Encouragement to women and girls who are working and/or training in male-dominated sectors.

In the Region, the **Regional Project for Non-traditional Skills Training for Low-Income Women** is well worth mentioning. It was implemented in **Belize, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago** between 1995 and 2002, and included a public awareness campaign to sensitize women, potential employers and society at large; skills training of low-income women in car repairs, carpentry and joinery, computer repairs, electrical installation, industrial maintenance, plumbing, welding, and more. Job placement was guaranteed at the end of the training process. In the end, employment figures for trainees were 39% in Belize and Jamaica, 46%—the best result—in Trinidad and Tobago.

Among the Project's side effects that had not been taken into account were an increase in domestic violence directly related to the fact that recipients chose to participate against the will and support of their male partners, or to the long periods of absence from home required by this training. Hence the need to raise gender awareness in the family as a whole and to include actions involving both members of the couple, in order to reduce resistance and apprehension.

Sources: EQUAL. European Commission. http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal. Peart, M. (2002)

Among long-term interventions, those aimed at facilitating early labor market entry for the young, especially among the low-income population, help bring down the high unemployment rates prevailing in those social sectors, and create opportunities for less-segregated and more protected entry into the labor market. In Latin America, some youth training programs, including *ProJoven* in Peru, *Joven* in Chile and *Joven* in Argentina have incorporated the gender perspective, e.g. by establishing goals for women's participation, adding benefits to study grants for women with children, or supplying child care services. Documented impacts include a 184% increase in the real wages of women⁵⁴ and 4.6% to 19.5% increase in the demand for education⁵⁵. In spite of involving longer terms and higher costs, the Job Corps program for youth training and job placement in the United States has also produced lessons worth learning.⁵⁶

4. Create Labor Market Information Systems: Labor Observatories

Labor observatories are an excellent mechanism for improving informed decision making about employment, training and education, in that they periodically deliver information on changes in national labor markets, on the various employment programs, in addition to providing vocational and employment information. In so doing, they promote desegregation, the search for occupational and educational options in areas offering better employment and wage opportunities, and open up for women possibilities hitherto unthought-of in some cases.

No two labor observatories are alike either as to contents or gender incorporation. What follows is a brief description of some good examples of the different types currently operation:

The most comprehensive of such resources is **Career One Stop** in the United States (www.careeronestop.org), which brings together in a single web site a group of electronic

⁵⁴ in the case of ProJoven Peru. Source: Saavedra, J. and Chacaltana, J (2000).

⁵⁵ in the case of Argentina Joven. Source: De Moura, C. (1997)

⁵⁶ For additional references, go to www.jobcorps.dol.gov

vocational information resources (Career Info Net), a labor intermediation hub (Job Bank) and several services available at the national, state and local level (Service Locator). Unfortunately its gender perspective incorporation is limited to women entrepreneurs among armed forces veterans for purpose of reentry into the labor market and, as a component of the information center, to a number of resources for women.

In Latin America, Mexico's *Observatorio Laboral* (www.observatoriolaboral.gob.mx) offers a considerable volume of resources, including information on available careers, occupations and services, with a link to intermediation services and employment exchanges. Although all career and occupation information at the national and state levels is presented disaggregated by sex with regard to participating women, wage information is not, with the result of hiding wage gaps and like differences. The site also offers skills self-appraisal and career exploration tools that are very useful in that they provide career guidance free from gender-based preconceptions.

Another Latin American example is Chile's *Futuro Laboral* (www.futurolaboral.cl), which provides labor information on university graduates and holders of diplomas from technical institutes, including entry wages and wages by the fourth year in the labor market, and enrollment numbers by sex or occupational field. For its part, Colombia has *Observatorio Laboral para la Educación* (www.graduadoscolombia.edu.co) which also delivers graduates information by sex. Both portals would be strengthened by the inclusion of resources encouraging women to choose non-traditional careers and showing information about which sectors have higher or lower labor productivity and segregation.

Internationally, New Zealand's Career Services (www.careers.govt.nz) is particularly worthy of mention. It offers a broad spectrum of information on each job, industry, employment trends, skills development and training opportunities, scholarships and support services, etc. Its statistics are sex-disaggregated in every case, and even provide information on temporary safe houses for women who have been victims of domestic violence, women reentering the labor market following maternity, single household heads, accompanied by career reorientation information for such cases.

In Australia, Workplace (www.workplace.gov.au) is a portal that focuses on collecting information about labor market dynamics and offers a link to an employment exchange, and resources for labor market entry. With regard to gender, it delivers a number of tips or data for women seeking jobs: from how to prepare and apply for work, to reasons for job loss by sex, to how to improve one's resume and reenter the labor market, in addition to periodic reports from the equal employment opportunity agency.

Lastly, in a completely different line, gender policy observatories appraise implementation of existing policies and publish their findings. They also provide information for recipients, public opinion and policy designers, thereby fostering accountability and compliance with each policy's gender components.

Box 7

Colombia. *Observatorio de Asuntos de Género* (OAG)

Colombia's *Observatorio de Asuntos de Género* is operated by *Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer - CPEM*. It is a tool for monitoring compliance with current national and international norms regarding woman's equity and gender equity, as well as public policies, plans and programs from the standpoint of their different impacts on men and women, in order to make recommendations aimed at eliminating discriminations and overcoming gender inequities still present in that country.

The OAG compiles, systematizes, processes and analyzes statistical information through 81 indicators grouped around 5 thematic axes, one of which is Employment and Business Development. A law enacted

in 2006 has made the OAG a permanent institution and made it compulsory for national, regional, municipal and local entities to periodically provide the OAG with sex-disaggregated data.

In the Employment and Business Development area, the OAG monitors the following indicators:

- Women's participation: economically active population, working age population and labor participation ratio
- Female employment: employment rate, unemployed population and inactive population
- Female unemployment
- Female underemployment
- Women's activities not recognized as productive (domestic work)

It also monitors equity tools with a focus on outcome, namely:

- Men/women ratio in apprenticeship contracts
- Men/women ratio in the Jóvenes en Acción program
- Men/women ratio in the Jóvenes Rurales program
- Men/women ratio in the Formación Profesional Integral program
- Boys/girls ratio in the Familias en Acción program
- Madres Comunitarias trained in solidarity economics (cooperative studies)

It even monitors the actions of CPEM itself, namely:

- CPEM's program for women heads of micro family businesses
- The national business training for women plan
- *Feria Nacional de la Mujer Empresaria*

Based on an analysis of this information, the OAG proposes topics for research and periodically prepares a *Boletín de Asuntos de Género* (gender affairs bulletin). One such bulletin was devoted to the issue of "Colombian Women in the Workforce". Among other topics, it has carried out an enquiry on the quality of female employment and another on the employment status of women in the private sector.

Source: Information provided by Coordinación OAG. May 2007

5. Increase women's access to social security

When it comes to pension schemes, women have difficulties of their own at every stage of the process. To begin with, women's contributions to, and funding of, their pension funds are affected by their lower contribution density due to lower number of contributing employment episodes, higher participation in flexible or informal work schemes, periods outside the labor market due to child rearing, care work or marriage, etc.. At the time of retiring, or using their funds, women face other difficulties due to the fact that in general they leave the labor market before men and only rarely manage to complete the number of years required to receive an adequate pension, not to mention the fact that, given their longer life expectancy, they receive lower monthly pensions.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, pension reforms carried out to overcome these difficulties are based on a "multipillar" system, where one pillar takes care of the risk of poverty in old age (higher among women), a second pillar establishes the minimum funding requirement for pension coverage, and a third pillar provides incentives for additional voluntary saving for retirement income. In the absence of a gender perspective, these pillars face significant efficiency challenges. For example, one issue that is the subject of much debate in the region is an increase of retirement age for women. Their staying longer in the labor market would imply higher contributions and a larger monthly pension in view of the fact that the period to be funded would be shorter. However, this proposal finds a barrier in labor market inequalities for women aged over 50 years, who find it more difficult to continue to work. Alternative or compensatory measures for gender-based differences have been proposed, as in the case of pension reform in Chile.

Box 8

Gender Equity in Chile's Pension Reform

The pension reform carried out in Chile beginning in 2006 implements several measures aimed at guaranteeing equity between women and men in the pension system. Among other things, the reform grants a bonus equivalent to 12 minimum wage contributions to all women for each liveborn child. Contributions to women's capital accounts are increased by separating invalidity and survival insurance by gender. Since women's longer life expectancy makes it less likely for them to use survival insurance, this separation means that women will have to pay lower premiums than men. Furthermore, in the event of a divorce or annulment of marriage, the accrued balance in each spouse's account will have to be divided, which will particularly benefit women outside the labor market.

Additionally, the reform makes women the main beneficiaries of *Sistema de Pensiones Solidarias*, which has no requirements as to number of contributions, thereby eliminating access barriers. Furthermore, the reform has eliminated the requirement of 240 months of contribution in order to qualify for minimum pensions (*Pensiones Mínimas Garantizadas*) guaranteed by the State, to the benefit of a considerable number of women engaged in contingent or seasonal work.

Source: *Reforma Previsional*, Gobierno de Chile. http://www.gobiernodechile.cl/reforma_previsional/index.html

6. Improve the protection of parenthood and reconcile caregiving roles

Maternity protection has always been considered a hindrance to the hiring of women, because it increases its costs. There are, in fact, cases where legislation is too rigid and discourages hiring a woman of reproductive age. However, the recognition of maternity as a labor right—not deregulation—is the answer. Changes should come through policies encouraging shared child care, and a better distribution of relevant gender roles.

No two maternity protection schemes currently existing are alike. In some cases, long maternity leaves are combined with a number of tax incentives or subsidies to women's reentry into the labor market. In other cases, the structure of prenatal and postnatal leaves is flexible, subject to a few limitations. In Ireland, prenatal leaves may not be shorter than four weeks, but may be as long as ten weeks. In Denmark and Italy, women may choose to use their entire prenatal leaves, or only a few days, and then enjoy longer postnatal leaves at lower wages. In Latin America, most countries give full freedom to adjust maternity leaves to mothers' work and personal needs.

Flexible maternity leaves subject to no statutory requirement as to duration could in fact give women a competitive improvement without eliminating their acquired and necessary right to rest. Interesting proposals in this respect are those that envisage the accumulation of weeks of paternal leave for use as special leaves at some point in the future. This is the case of European countries, where maternity protection, while generous, is also more flexible. Another interesting example comes from Finland and Sweden, where mothers and fathers are given the freedom to share their paternal leaves, thereby creating an incentive to do away with rigid gender role allocation (productive work for man, reproductive work for woman).

Table 5
Maternity Benefits in Latin American and European Countries, 2004

	<i>Group</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Weeks of maternity leave</i>	<i>Wage benefits (%)</i>	<i>Who pays</i>
Latin America	Group I: Higher benefits	Chile	18	100 subject to a ceiling	SS
		Venezuela	18	100	SS
		Brazil, Costa Rica	17	100	50% SS and 50% employer
	Group II: Medium benefits	Argentina, Peru, Colombia, Mexico, Uruguay	12	100	SS
		Bolivia	12	100 of minimum wage + 75 of the amount in excess	SS
	Group III: Lower benefits	El Salvador	12	75	SS
		Nicaragua	12	60	SS
		Paraguay	12	50 during 9 weeks	SS
		Honduras	10	100	67% SS, 33% employer
		Bahamas	8	100	40% SS, 60% employer
Europe	Group I: Higher benefits	Sweden	64	80 for 360 days, and a fixed amount after that	SS
		France	16-26	84	SS
		Finland, Italy	22	80	SS
	Group II: Medium benefits	Denmark, Norway	18	100	SS
		United Kingdom	14-18	90 for 6 weeks, and a fixed amount after that	SS
		Spain	16	80-100	SS
	Group III: Lower benefits	Germany, Portugal	14	100	SS. subject in Germany to average wage as ceiling, with employer covering the difference.
		Ireland	14	70 subject to a ceiling, or a fixed amount if wages < than minimum	SS
		Switzerland	8	100	Employer

Source: Acosta, Peticara and Ramos (2007). Note: SS: Social Security

Once the maternity period has passed, it is of fundamental importance to support women (and men) as they reenter the world of work, by providing child care help, knowledge updates, and similar support (Box 9).

Box 9
Labor Market Reentry Programs

Austria's "Program for Returnees" was specifically designed for non-working parents (largely mothers) and provides additional support for parents seeking jobs, independently of whether they also benefit from other programs. In Austria, 40% of mothers are outside the workforce after completing a two-years maternity period. For such people, skills obsolescence and long absence from labor networks make reintegration into the labor market no easy feat. The Program for Returnees began as a way for the public sector to support women through information events, orientation services, child care training and subsidies

In Ireland, financial incentives for unemployment insurance or other beneficiaries to "get back to work" is among the pillars of the entire labor market reentry strategy. Child care schemes are among the fundamental concerns for jobseeking parents. Two innovative programs—**Community Employment Scheme and Northside Partnership**— offer job seeking and child care services tailored to parents' needs. **Irish Gateway for Women**, another interesting program launched in 2002, makes access to information easier for non-working mothers.

Single parents face specific barriers against entry into the workforce, one of which is having less time than couples with children and serious limitations to entry. To this should be added that this group tends to receive a significant portion of its income in the form of state benefits, a state of affairs that may discourage them from entering the workforce. Ireland has specific programs in place for single parents, and Austria allows them to work on a part-time basis until the child is 2 and a half years old.

Source: OECD (2003).

On the other hand, measures for protecting the motherhood of women workers will not avail to reduce discrimination against them if they are not combined with the promotion of other actions in support of family and education, health and other personal care responsibilities with regard to children, the sick and the elderly.

Hence the need to provide services that may enable families—men and women—to cope with their care responsibilities. These services need to be designed in agreement with educational policy makers particularly with regard to pre-primary education, and with health and social protection policy makers with regard to issues related to care for the sick and the elderly. The incorporation of a gender perspective is an essential requirement to ensure that they meet the needs of women workers⁵⁷.

Child care facilities and systems are among the areas where most progress has been made in the region—albeit not enough to meet existing needs—on the premise that integrating maternal policies with express child care policies is of essential importance to ensure mothers' return to work after maternal leave.

Existing public programs in Latin America and the Caribbean have been essentially conceived to attend to the needs of children at risk, with priority given to children aged 3 to 6 years. Very few such programs have also addressed the problems of working mothers or the challenge of increasing female labor participation. This is the area where private and community child care services have stepped in, to fill coverage gaps on one hand and to meet context-specific needs on the other. In the poorest sectors, child care is mostly entrusted to informal and family networks or to non-conventional child care services.

⁵⁷ Clearly the objective of expanding high-quality child care services to improve early childhood education and the objective of increasing women's participation in the work force may well complement each other. However, they may also conflict. Some high-quality early education programs require a great deal of time and attention on the part of the mother, not to mention the fact that the daily schedule required is incompatible with full-time employment.

On the other hand, countries like Ireland, Austria and Japan, driven by the need to tap female labor supply rather than by other considerations, have been stepping up efforts to expand child care coverage.

Box 10
Child Care Initiatives

In Ireland during the nineties, the Pilot Child Care Initiative became the public response to what was known at the time as “the child care crisis” brought about by demand for good quality, affordable child care services. The program was implemented in poorer communities and sought to help low-income families by providing tax incentives and special benefits, including payment of child care costs, in connection with women’s skills development and retraining. In some cases, the program even offered training and support for women to undertake professional child care as a viable business option.

This policy was combined with tax incentives that found much favor with low-income families, and included tax incentives and other like benefits or an allowance for families with children, and additional measures to help pay the cost of caring for each child aged under six years.

The policy also included measures aimed at improving the quality of informal child care (friends, relatives and neighbors), which is very popular in Ireland.

Source: Ireland’s National Training and Employment Authority - <http://www.fas.ie>; and Central Bank of Ireland - <http://www.centralbank.ie>

In line with the above, it is necessary to promote family/work conciliation programs and actions for women and men. Of key importance in this regard are flexible labor arrangements with regard to place and mode of work, flexible working hours, part-time work, homeworking or teleworking, maternal and paternal leaves, and like practices. It is necessary in this regard to know the needs or wishes of individuals in each case. Some mothers may wish to combine part-time work or homeworking with care of her sons and daughters; in other cases, the father may wish to undertake a part of these tasks. In Spain, for instance, parents may reduce their working time by up to one third, and receive wages in proportion, until the child turns 6. Italy allows parents to extend postnatal leave up to 10 months in exchange for wages equivalent to 30% of the usual amount. It is necessary to point out here that these initiatives should be aimed at reconciling parents’ family responsibilities with employment, not at reaffirming traditional gender roles.

7. Apply the non-discrimination principle⁵⁸

The high level of inequality prevailing in Latin America is a reflex of disparities and discriminations based on gender, race, ethnicity and social class. Progress with regard to compliance with the non-discrimination principle for women workers is an absolute necessity because it means overcoming not only discrimination against women as such, but also discrimination based on age or reproductive situation, labor segregation, and more. This is particularly important in the employment sphere, where any form of discrimination will affect not only income but also general equality within society at large in terms of access to goods and services. Although most countries value and recognize the non-discrimination principle, it is necessary to increase its power at the level of action by labor ministries by means of explicit measures aimed at reducing discrimination in whatever sphere it may be present, including wages, by bringing to light the application of the “woman factor” that translates into lower wages for equal work.

⁵⁸ For a more detailed discussion of this point, reference is made to the recommendations included in the ILO report (2007c) ‘Equality at Work: Tackling the Challenges’, and more specifically to the section on “Trends in institutional and policy responses since 2003” (pp. 60-95).

Box 11
Quebec's Pay Equity Act. Canada

This law, enacted in 1997, demands of employers that they achieve and maintain pay equity within their companies so as to rectify differences in wages due to systematic discrimination against people in predominantly female jobs. The Act makes it mandatory for all companies to implement an equal pay plan. According to the company's size, an equal pay committee must be set up jointly with workers, where women must have 50% participation. With or without a committee, all companies must implement the plan's stages, namely: (i) determine predominantly male and female job classes within the company; (ii) evaluate job classes on the basis of the tasks involved; (iii) compare job classes, determine the value of the differences in compensation, and calculate compensation adjustments; (iv) define the terms and conditions of payment of the compensation adjustments thus calculated; (v) post the adjustments and maintain pay equity.

Oversight of application of the Act, and reception of complaints and reports, is entrusted to the Equal Pay Commission, which also provides support in applying the law, generates awareness raising and communication campaigns and implementation manuals.

Source: Equal Pay Committee of Québec. <http://www.ces.gouv.qc.ca/index.asp>

Overlapping discriminations against women is a problem that needs addressing, especially where they create a cluster of vulnerabilities that force women to face lower quality employment, underemployment, exploitation or simply unemployment. To avoid this, it is necessary to develop strategies of integration and work with specific groups, so as to address their special needs and circumstances. A few examples are presented in the following box.

Box 12
Programs for Vulnerable Populations

Female Program in favor of Indigenous and Afroecuadorian Women Workers (*Programa Femenino a favor de Mujeres Trabajadoras Indígenas y Afroecuatorianas* – PROINDAFRO). PROINDAFRO, launched in Ecuador in 2007, is the first official initiative to address women's employment generation problem with indigenous and afroecuadorian segments of the population as its primary target. It operates a group exchange of products and services to promote business initiatives undertaken by organized groups led by indigenous and afroecuadorian women. To that end, it fosters women's organization and training to enable them to form labor supply groups able to engage in productive activities for fairs, regional markets, and even, should the occasion arise, export. On the demand side, PROINDAFRO works to raise awareness among companies, municipal authorities, handicraft markets and fairs in order to promote demand for the services offered by its *Bolsa Grupal de Productos and Servicios*.

In Nicaragua, the *Solidez* foundation has carried out a pilot project to help approximately 200 women with disabilities in the Managua region enter the labor market, by providing technical training in different trades for labor competitiveness and in microbusiness management. The project also included a prior study about labor market demand for women with disabilities, in order to find what types of technical work are demanded by the market and which of those types can be performed in a satisfactory and competent manner by women with slight-to-moderate mobility or communication disabilities. Based on its findings, women received training, at the end of which they were helped to enter the labor market by means of sensitization actions carried out directly with companies, or of educational actions directed at citizens in general with the aim of raising awareness levels about statutory obligations and duties with regard to persons with disabilities.

Sources: Consulta al Ministerio del Trabajo Ecuador. Unidad para la equidad de género, juventud y minorías étnicas; Interamerican Development Bank. Project Portal. Project NI-T1024: *Proyecto Piloto para la Inserción Laboral de Mujeres Discapacitadas*

a. Approve and enforce labor legislation

The enforcement of existing country legislation is an essential requirement for women to be able to compete more fairly in labor markets. In addition to creating new rules to establish

stronger equal opportunity and anti-discrimination standards, e.g. provisions for the criminalization of sexual harassment and the protection of migrant women workers, existing legislation should be revised and amended in line with current labor market needs, so that it does not become an obstacle to the employment of women. In that regard, care should be taken to identify those statutory provisions that may hinder the hiring of women, and revise them in the light of gender equality and the sharing of responsibilities between men and women, especially in the case of provisions regarding child care, maternity protection, care of dependents, etc. Examples of such changes can be found in laws and decrees approved in a number of countries beginning in the nineties in Argentina and Brazil.

Table 6
Labor Legislation for the Specific Protection of Women. Argentina and Brazil 1990-2005

Country	Legislation	Date
Argentina	<i>Decreto</i> n. 2385/93 incorporating conduct constituting sexual harassment in the Civil Service Basic Regulations	1993
	<i>Decreto</i> n. 673/93 creating a register of housewives associations.	1993
	<i>Ley</i> n. 24828 adopting measures that enable housewives to qualify for social security coverage.	1997
	<i>Decreto</i> n. 254 approving a Plan to ensure equal opportunities between men and women in the world of work.	1998
	<i>Ley</i> n. 25674 <i>de Asociaciones Sindicales</i> (trade unions law), providing for women's participation in collective bargaining	2002
	<i>Decreto</i> n. 514/2003 on women's participation in collective bargaining units that negotiate working standards.	2003
Brazil	<i>Ley</i> n. 9029 of 13 April 1995 prohibiting pregnancy and sterilization requirements and other discriminatory practices for purposes of hiring or maintaining in employment, and adopting other provisions.	1995
	<i>Ley</i> n. 9799 of 26 May 1999 introducing provisions on women's labor market access in the consolidated text of labor laws, and adopting other provisions.	1999
	<i>Ley</i> n. 10244 of 27 June 2001, revoking article 376 of the Labor Code-CLT, to allow women to work overtime.	2001
	A decree establishing a tripartite commission within the Ministry of Labor, with the remit to promote public policies for equal opportunities and treatment and to combat all forms of gender- or race-based discrimination in employment and in occupation.	2004

Source: ILO. Natlex. Available at: www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex_browse.home?p_lang=en

The ratification of international agreements and conventions is a key driver of this process, in that national legislation must then be revised to ensure compliance with these instruments, and most particularly when they are binding. It is right to point out here that Latin America and the Caribbean have broadly ratified ILO Conventions n. 100 and 111. However, only 9 countries have ratified Convention n.156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities, which is an important instrument for the improvement of work-life balance of workers as a whole⁵⁹.

Legislation enforcement is no less important, for the mere existence of a law does not ensure its consistent application. Hence the need to strengthen labor inspection systems, and even labor courts as was done in 2005 in El Salvador, with regard to the observation of discriminatory practices against women. Also useful is the dissemination of information on existing legislation. In this respect, the *Vademécum de legislación laboral con perspectiva de género* (handbook on labor legislation with a gender perspective) prepared in Ecuador, is worth mentioning as a very useful tool for inspectors, legislators, judges, employers and workers alike.

⁵⁹ ILOLEX. International Labor Standards. ILO

Box 13
Women's Labor Rights Handbook. Ecuador

This handbook has been produced by systematizing several different legal instruments in force in Ecuador—including the Constitution, statutes, agreements subscribed, conventions ratified, etc.—with the aim in view to spread awareness of labor rights guaranteed for women by Ecuadorian law, and to promote accountability under said laws, its ultimate purpose being to ensure effective respect of and compliance with women's labor rights. It is meant to sensitize and train labor inspectors and employers with regard to the need to foster gender equity in women workers' access, advancement and skills development; and to encourage the inclusion of elements ensuring effective legal protection of women workers' rights in judge training programs.

The handbook discusses hiring and work systems and arrangements; the rights, obligations, and prohibitions of women workers; the modes of termination of employment; association rights, including trade unionization; specific regulations with regard to working women's rights; and international labor legislation applicable in Ecuador.

Source: Consulta al Ministerio de Trabajo y Empleo de Ecuador, UNIFEM (2006) *Vademécum Laboral con Perspectiva de Género*. UNIFEM, Ministerio del Trabajo, Centro de Investigación Multidisciplinaria. Ecuador

8. Promote women's participation in social dialogue

Devising effective incentives to increase women's participation in trade unions or workers' associations is becoming more challenging, especially given the increasingly flexible employment schemes, their high participation in informal work, and the current increasing recourse to subcontracting and the division of functions among increasingly smaller companies that do not allow trade unionization. The above notwithstanding, there has been some progress in the creation of new trade unions and organizations, as in the case of Uruguay's **Sindicato de Trabajadoras Domésticas** (2005), of attempts to create unions of workers serving different employers in the same physical place—e.g. malls—and of migrant workers' unions.

Box 14
Ley de cupo sindical. Argentina

In 2002 a law was enacted in Argentina that established participation quotas for women delegates in collective bargaining units that negotiate working standards. Quotas are based on the number of women workers present in the given industry or activity. To give teeth to this provision, the law provides that agreements reached in the absence of said participation quotas shall not apply to women workers, except to the extent that the working standards thus negotiated are more favorable to them.

The law also provides that women shall have no less than 30% representation in elective and representative offices of trade unions, provided women are no less than 30% of all workers. Where this is not the case, their representation shall be proportional to their participation.

Source: *Ley de cupo sindical*. Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social de Argentina.
http://www.trabajo.gov.ar/ctio/files/legisla/ley25674_02.pdf

Born of an ILO initiative, tripartite commissions have been created in the South Cone, El Salvador and Surinam to promote equal employment opportunities and strengthen working women's rights. Although their success has been far from uniform due to difficulties in terms of political will, institutional strength, material and technical resources, and other problems, these bodies have proved themselves to be privileged fora for enhancing the visibility of gender and employment issues, not to mention that they strengthen social dialogue by putting together all relevant actors to discuss labor issues.

Box 15
Tripartite Commissions on Equal Opportunities

These commissions were created with ILO's support between 1995 and 1999 in the South Cone countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay), as bodies subject to some formal constraints, in charge of designing consensual labor market public policies with a gender perspective. Their members are delegates from ministries of labor, national mechanisms for women's development, employers organizations and trade unions.

In Uruguay the Commission was officially established by decree in 1999, and has been operating for ten years with the following objectives:

- Help improve labor market balance by means of strategies aimed at generating equal employment.
- As a part of the Administration, join forces with social actors to foster a proactive policy in support of equal opportunities and treatment in employment.
- Play a role in implementing actions for the incorporation of a gender vision into the Ministry of Labor and Social Security's three substantive programs.
- Promote and support equal opportunity initiatives adopted by the social actors involved.
- Generate coordination fora to strengthen existing equality initiatives promoted by governmental and non-governmental sectors.
- Provide technical advisory services to support the drafting of new legislation for submission to parliament on equality issues.
- Implement strategies aimed at raising equal opportunities awareness, and spreading information about current labor legislation.

The Commission's achievements include equality promotion seminars, courses on collective bargaining with a gender perspective, the proposal of a bill on domestic work, the establishment of procedures for attending to reports of sexual and moral harassment, and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of such reports, the creation of bodies and agencies providing gender perspective training, and more. The Commission has also fostered the creation of tripartite commissions at the regional (local) level.

An evaluation of the Commission's performance in 2002 found that it has helped foster the right to equality between women and men, incorporate indicators with a gender focus into country statistics, establish national equality plans in Argentina and Paraguay, and install equality promotion units as tripartite and territorially decentralized bodies in Brazil.

Sources: Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social de Uruguay www.mtss.gub.uy; Galilea, S. and Marín, L. (2002); CINTERFOR. http://www.ilo.org/public/spanish/region/ampro/cinterfor/temas/gender/oit_igu/com/index.htm

9. Provide institutional strengthening for labor ministries

Institutional strengthening is necessary to ensure the effective design and implementation of policies aimed at strengthening gender equality and narrowing gaps between women and men in the world of work, as well as at mainstreaming such concerns into all actions undertaken by labor ministries. In turn, this entails a whole range of actions, from strengthening their regular functions, training personnel—in gender perspective mainstreaming in the case in point—improving their capacity for analysis, and strengthening their linkage with other institutions relevant to the gender issue so as to increase the effectiveness of their actions; to providing them with the best information available for decision making purposes.

In order to improve decision making, public policy design, follow-up and appraisal of plans and programs, and more, it is necessary to produce labor statistics with a gender perspective. For that, it is not enough to generate data disaggregated by sex. It is necessary to develop or use gender sensitive indicators, to create new measurement tools, to define what type of information is relevant for purposes of making gender equality-oriented decisions, and to train decision makers and labor ministry personnel in the use of that information.

A first step in the generation of more and better information consists of disaggregating existing statistics not only by sex, but also by whatever factors may be relevant for purposes of detecting the superposition of gender-related vulnerabilities and exclusions, e.g. by sex and age in the case of unemployment, underemployment or income differences. As a rule, all information produced by the various actors—National Institutes of Statistics, Labor Ministries, Women’s Affairs Offices—should implement this approach. Among other things, they should revise their survey forms to make sure that data are being collected without a gender bias, and that surveys cover formal and informal activities alike.

It is also essential to build and expand information collection systems. In addition to periodic employment surveys, time use surveys have provided important insights into the various demands on women and men’s time, with particular regard to unpaid work at home. Agricultural censuses provide an excellent opportunity to investigate characteristics of land use, tenure, and modes of exploitation as a way to perform a gender analysis of rural women’s employment status. Modules or questions can be added to sectoral and even household survey forms on whatever topics may be felt relevant. In view of the above, work on gender indicator determination should proceed as a consensus-based, collaborative process among different organizations. ECLAC’s project entitled “Use of Gender Indicators in Public Policy Making” is a step in the right direction. Its results may provide useful guidance for countries in these processes.

Box 16

ECLAC. Use of Gender Indicators in Public Policy Making

This project was started in the year 2000 by ECLAC, UNIFEM, FNUAP and the Government of Italy. It seeks to strengthen the capacity of countries in the region to use gender indicators in public policy design by providing reliable indicators of gender relations as a way to ensure that effective policies are put in place to reduce discrimination and increase equity.

For instance in 2002, a number of structural and cyclical variables was proposed for investigation at the first interagency meeting on this project. The list included hidden unemployment, potential labor supply, wage discrimination in areas of employment where both sexes have equal participation, and use of time. Also proposed for investigation and future data collection were the impact of labor flexibility measures on wages, the quality of work and female labor supply, social protection, the underlying causes of the wage gap, child labor and the value of women’s time. Mention was made of using econometric tools to disaggregate synthetic gaps, including the wage gap, to establish the relative weights of other disparities and discriminations as contributive factors.

The project is yet to hold a technical or experts’ meeting on the topic of women and work, although it has held one on use of time.

Source: ECLAC, Women and Development Unit. <http://www.eclac.cl/mujer/proyectos/indicadores/Default.htm>

One essential point to be considered is that this information should be broadly available for use by researchers, policymakers, NGOs and civil society at large. In many cases, lack of use of sex-disaggregated information may be cause for production to stop.

The design of women-oriented policies, plans and programs, and the definition of appropriate laws, relevant indicators and statistics, require the capacities of personnel with expert knowledge in the area of gender issues and relations, and women’s empowerment. These capacities can be built by every Labor Ministry including a gender-dedicated unit or office. In fact, several Ministries in the region already have such units in place. Their form varies. Some are offices exclusively dedicated to women or gender affairs, as in the case of *Departamento de Promoción de la Mujer Trabajadora* in Guatemala. Others are units focused on various “vulnerable groups” like the *Unidad Especial de Género y Prevención de Actos Laborales*

Discriminatorios in El Salvador, or the *Unidad para la Equidad de Género, Juventud y Minorías Étnicas* in Ecuador. Still others are mechanisms whose remit goes beyond the Ministry's domain, like tripartite commissions in Argentina, Uruguay or Paraguay or the *Comisión Ministerial para la Igualdad de Oportunidades* in Chile.

The mere creation of these essential offices, units or mechanisms does not suffice to attain the institutional strengthening of Labor Ministries on gender issues. It is also important to endow them with recognition, clearly defined functions and technical and financial resources sufficient to enable them to operate on a continuous basis. In many countries, these requirements are met by women's affairs offices, secretariats or ministries, with which partnership agreements can be established in order to work in a coordinated manner at strengthening gender incorporation into labor programs, at institutional strengthening with a focus on gender and at interlinking those institutional structures with specific targeted programs.

Ensuring that gender issues permeate all areas of institutional duties and do not stay concentrated in specific programs targeted on women is a very complex task. Among the mechanisms developed in the region for this purpose, Chile's Public Management Improvement Program (PMG) is particularly worth mentioning. It links the budgetary appropriations of public institutions to specific gender goals.

Box 17

Gender-Integrated Public Management Improvement Program (PMG - *Programa de Mejoramiento de la Gestión Pública*). Chile

By incorporating gender criteria into the PMG, the performance of public administration has been linked to progress in the area of gender equality and the supply of services with a gender perspective. The integration of gender into the PMG is an important achievement in that the PMG is applied to all public sector services, and is ensured high coverage and sustainability over time by an agreement signed between the Ministry of Finance and SERNAM (the National Service for Women) in 2001.

The program is comprised of four phases: identifying gender aspects relevant to the area of work (phase 1), designing gender action plans (phase 2), implementing those plans to better meet the needs of women and men (phase 3), evaluating the plan's implementation (phase 4).

Gender actions implemented within the Ministry of Labor thanks to the PMG included:

- Awareness raising campaigns led by the Directorate for Labor about women's situation in the labor market and their rights at the workplace
- Media campaigns to promote awareness of the rights of women engaged in temporary work and domestic work
- Production of sex-disaggregated information and gender statistics by sector and region.

Beginning in 2006, it will become mandatory for institutions to apply this gender focus when defining their strategies. The PMG specifically provides that the gender focus assessment envisaged for the first stage shall be based on an analysis of the given institution's mission, strategic objectives, supply of strategic products and services, as well as information systems for users and beneficiaries. Stages 2, 3 and 4 will include the development, implementation, evaluation and replication for new products of a work plan aimed at integrating the gender perspective into strategic products.

Source: Guerrero, E. (2006).

The capacity to implement gender equality within the various organizations is critical to the generation of good practices that can be reproduced by others. In the public sector, some countries in the region—including, recently, Chile—have either good labor practice codes for the public sector or mechanisms against sex-based discrimination built into civil service recruitment systems.

In the private business sphere, the introduction of gender equality is more difficult, for it depends to a high degree on the political will of individual institutions. That said, awards or seals of recognition appear to be useful tools for improving unequal or discriminatory practices. Such is the case in Brazil and Mexico.

Box 18
Gender Equality Certifications and Seals. Brazil and Mexico

Brazil's *Pro Equidade* program is based on the concept that gender inequalities need to be addressed there, where they materialize. To that end, a number of companies are invited to participate in the program, and those that accepted enter a process that will lead them, through several stages, to the award of a recognition or seal of equity.

During the first stage, each company is asked to produce information on: (i) its workforce in terms of age, gender, race, schooling, etc.; (ii) its mechanisms for personnel selection and recruitment; (iii) whatever skills development and training methods it has in place, if any; (iv) its advancement mechanisms and career plans; (v) its occupational safety and health programs; (vi) its benefits policies (vii) its mechanisms for fighting discriminatory practices; (viii) its institutional publicity policy, both internal and external. In each area, it is asked to report on the specific existence of affirmative actions, special attention to women, family/work conciliation practices, sanctions against discrimination, harassment, etc.

During the second stage, the company profile thus drawn up is used as basis for drawing up an equity program and developing an action plan for implementing that program. The stage also includes monitoring and evaluation of that implementation by the Pro Equidade Program Committee, which observes changes in company practices and compliance with the action plan.

If the Committee's evaluation is favorable, the company is awarded the Pro Equidade Seal, in recognition of its commitment to promote exemplary gender equality practices at the workplace.

In Mexico's case, the **gender equity certification** process had a similar objective, i.e. improve gender equity at the workplace. The program in question was implemented between 2001 and 2004, and resulted in the award of a gender equity certification to 20 companies in the public and private sectors, as well as to a number of NGOs.

The certification process was comprised of the following stages: (i) Definition: Principles and criteria were established for the award of the "gender equity seal". (ii) Consultation and validation: the seal was designed and approved through a consultation process with key firms and actors in the economic, academic, cultural and political fields, (iii) Selection of certifiers: An independent, specialized firm was selected for the implementation of the certification process.

Lastly, the certification process took place in accordance with a demand-driven model. Each organization that voluntarily accepted the invitation to participate had to submit itself to an assessment, receive ad hoc training, go through a pre-certification exercise involving whatever adjustments and improvements were found appropriate; to finally obtain certification.

A first evaluation of the project found that:

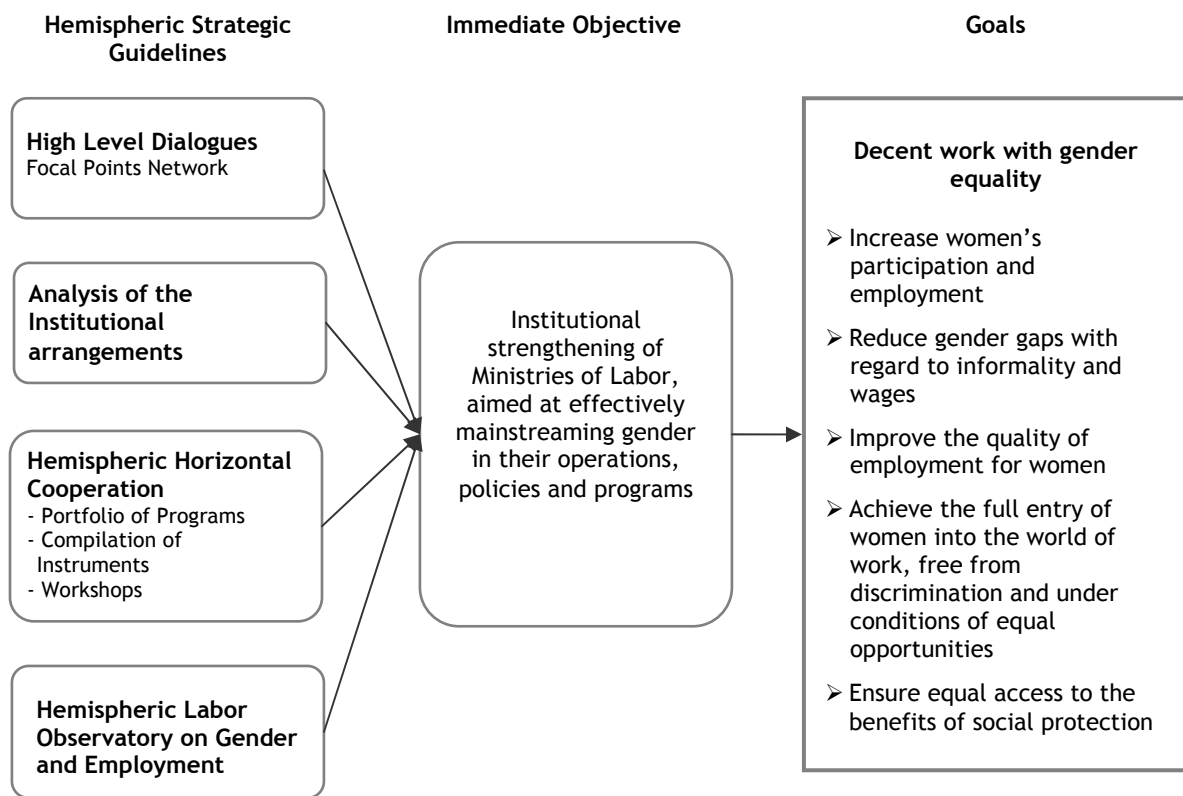
- There was real interest among large companies, which were willing to participate in the project and get involved in the process
- International firms adapted their affirmative action policies to conditions prevailing in Mexico
- The fact that participation was voluntary and separate from labor rights was an advantage.
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Source: World Bank (2006); Secretaría Especial de Políticas para las Mujeres, ILO y UNIFEM (2006).

IV. STRATEGIC GUIDELINES TO STRENGTHEN LABOR MINISTRIES IN THE AREA OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND THE PROMOTION OF EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

Based on the gender equality priorities in decent work and the alternative lines of action identified in the Report, the following strategic guidelines for action are proposed, with the aim of building the capacities of Ministries of Labor for mainstreaming a gender perspective in their institutional action and contributing to the reduction of the gap between women and men in the world of work. In that regard, the guidelines in question are aimed at meeting the objectives of the 2006-2015 Hemispheric Agenda for the Generation of Decent Work and the mandates of the Summits of the Americas and the Inter-American Conferences of Ministers of Labor.

A Synopsis of Proposed Hemispheric Strategic Guidelines



The above strategic guidelines are based on the IACML's scope of action, on the comparative advantages of its technical secretariat as an OAS body able to coordinate its actions with those of other bodies within the Inter-American system such as the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), and seek to tap the potential of RIAL, its cooperation mechanism, as a means for sharing experience, practices and knowledge relevant to the promotion of decent work with gender equality.

It is important to point out that, although these guidelines are primarily directed at the region's Labor Ministries grouped in the IACML, their implementation will involve workers' and employers' organizations through the participation of the two advisory bodies of the IACML: namely, the Trade Union Technical Advisory Council (COSATE) and the Business Technical Advisory Committee on Labor Matters (CEATAL).

What follows is a presentation of the four strategic guidelines proposed, which are submitted to the XV IACML for consideration. Their purpose is to orient future actions by the Conference in favor of the integration of the gender perspective in the operations, policies and programs of Ministries of Labor, as a way to promote decent work with gender equality.

1. High Level Dialogues on Gender and Employment

High Level Dialogues on Gender and Employment will provide the opportunity for Ministries of Labor grouped in the IACML to meet with the highest authorities of women's mechanisms, grouped in the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), in order to reinforce the political commitment in favor of gender equality in the world of work, to develop intersectoral actions putting in practice that commitment, and to facilitate fluid, ongoing communication among the said institutions.

This proposal is in line with one of the actions proposed by SEPIA (PIA's follow-up): namely, strengthen coordination with national mechanisms for the advancement of women in order to integrate the gender perspective in labor policies. Moreover, it meets a concern often voiced by several governments in the Hemisphere for the lack of communication and coordination among their various bodies and agencies. Currently the sharing of experience, good practices, etc. between Ministries of Labor and women's offices, secretariats or ministries (as the case may be) goes no further than a number of joint actions or initiatives without any ongoing interchange of advice, recommendations and know-how.

The OAS framework provides two pillars that would guarantee the effective development of the High Level Dialogues proposed here. On one hand, both the IACML and the CIM are part and parcel of the OAS, and are recognized as the principal fora for sectoral dialogue at the hemispheric level on labor and gender issues. On the other hand, their technical secretariats, (the OAS Department of Social Development and Employment and the CIM Secretariat) are component structures of the General Secretariat of the OAS, and close coordination between them in planning, developing and following up on High Level Dialogues will be natural.

An active part in planning High Level Dialogues will be played by the OAS and the ILO. In addition to defining their scope (whether subregional or hemispheric) and the specific issues to be addressed, in consultation with the IACML and the CIM, the OAS and the ILO will analyze whether other governmental sectors should be included in individual Dialogues on the basis of their relevance to the issues addressed, with the aim of creating partnerships for concerted actions.

Possible issues to be addressed at High Level Dialogues include:

- female unemployment reduction
- income gap reduction
- maternity protection
- labor flexibility without loss of quality
- ways to support productive/reproductive work balance.

a. Establishing a Focal Points Network

Within the framework of High Level Dialogues, we recommend that a Focal Points Network be maintained among representatives of women's mechanisms and Ministries of Labor alike. Such a network would foster information sharing while also helping the preparation of policy and analysis dialogues, and the performance and monitoring of actions decided upon at the dialogues.

We recommend that focal points be in every case people actually dedicated to gender and employment issues on a daily basis. We also recommend that national authorities ensure that appointment as focal point will include a definition of tasks or terms of reference, so that the appointee can devote the time required to perform their function.

2. Analyzing the gender-related institutional arrangements of Ministries of Labor

Several Ministries of Labor in the region have created offices, units or commissions on gender issues within their organizational structures. In some cases these bodies and agencies are of recent creation, whilst in other cases they have been reformulated, strengthened or eliminated. Although their mere existence does not guarantee that the Ministries have the capacity to incorporate a gender perspective into their policies and programs, their correct operation can make a substantial contribution in that direction.

Given the existing diversity as to approach and experience, we recommend an evaluation of the offices, units or commissions dealing with gender issues within Ministries of Labor. This exercise should include a documented inventory of the various types of entities in existence, their characteristic features in terms of staff, resources, influence, main achievements and difficulties, in order to document achievements, lessons learned and recommendations. The output of this exercise would make it possible to support the creation, strengthening and/or reorganization of such entities for these to be able to make effective contributions to the further incorporation of a gender perspective into the actions, programs and policies of the Ministries of Labor.

This hemispheric evaluation could begin by the ministries themselves providing self-evaluations in accordance with a homogenous methodology, to be later complemented by a comparative evaluation at the hemispheric level. This exercise would produce a general overview of existing bodies and agencies, their achievements and failures, and would provide the basis for horizontal cooperation activities.

3. Hemispheric horizontal cooperation

The IACML has broadly recognized horizontal cooperation as a key mechanism for the institutional strengthening of Labor Ministries, and the creation of the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL) is a manifestation of this recognition. The RIAL will facilitate cooperation on decent work and gender equality-related issues, and our proposal is to use its instruments (Portfolio, Workshops, etc) and include specific topics related to gender equality, the fight against discrimination, and institutional development for gender mainstreaming.

It should be pointed out that cooperation through the RIAL will be instrumental to the development of concrete institutional strengthening actions in line with progress by High Level Dialogues, thereby creating a positive synergic effect between cooperation and political dialogue.

a. Preparing the Portfolio of Programs

RIAL's Portfolio of Programs is a data bank that systematizes the supply of programs and projects by Ministries of Labor in the Americas. To that extent, it is a tool that facilitates horizontal cooperation and provides the IACML with an updated overview of programs undergoing implementation.

The Portfolio will include programs and projects developed by the Ministries of Labor to promote gender equality and improve women's situation in the world of work. Programs in the Portfolio will include actions in the following areas:

- Building women's human capital
- Employment programs and services with a gender perspective
- Reducing labor segregation
- Information systems on labor markets with a gender perspective
- Women's access to social security
- Protecting parenthood and reconciling caregiving roles
- Applying the principle of no gender-based discrimination
- Promoting women's participation in social dialogue
- Employment generation strategies with a gender perspective.

b. Compiling support instruments

RIAL's virtual platform will be used to compile and produce instruments in support of gender equality mainstreaming, as well as to disseminate already existing instruments. In many cases, communication campaigns have taken place inside countries to promote the rights of women workers and to raise employers' awareness of the lower costs of hiring women, as well as other initiatives of a similar nature, which can be replicated or reproduced. There are also toolkits or like materials to facilitate gender analysis and the incorporation of the gender perspective into the various phases of project development or institutional work as a whole (e.g. attending to beneficiaries' needs). All this information will be made available through RIAL's webpage as complementary to the Portfolio of Programs.

c. Exchange activities and workshops

Workshops and seminars will be developed within the RIAL framework for institutional strengthening in gender issues. These initiatives will be based on programs from the Portfolio, on the support instruments compiled and on the findings of the gender analysis of Labor Ministries' institutional arrangements.

These sharing and training workshops will be directed at officers of the Ministries in various operational areas, and will help implement at every level mandates regarding gender equality at the workplace and a better application of the equity, equal opportunities and non-discrimination principles.

Priority areas for such sharing and training should include the following:

- Build capacities among labor inspectors and generate instruments for ensuring compliance with women workers' rights
- Improve knowledge and capacities among labor inspectorates and labor courts for interpreting the ILO Core Conventions against gender-based discrimination
- Build capacities and knowledge among labor inspectors in the area of protection of women workers' rights with regard to working conditions (working day duration, labor contracts, sick leave, maternity leave, wages, fringe benefits, and more)
- Strengthen employment services to guarantee equal opportunities for women workers with regard to labor intermediation, occupational orientation and job seeking consulting services
- Promote the exchange of experience on the production of statistics based on gender variables
- Promote greater coverage of and access by, women to social security.

4. Hemispheric Labor Observatory on Gender and Employment

In line with the concept of the European Working Conditions Observatory (EWCO), an hemispheric labor observatory with a special focus on gender and employment issues that provided information on gender gaps and family/work balance on a regular basis would be a valuable instrument.

The Observatory could start by compiling information already available through existing observatories in several countries. It could then begin to work at homogenizing and harmonizing indicators so as to be able to generate comparable information suitable for political decision making, agreement monitoring, and, most importantly, for public use. Among indicators, the main focus would be on gap indicators useful for identifying gender equality trends and changes in the world of work.

The Observatory should create partnerships and linkages with already existing realities, including the IDB's Labor Compass, MERCOSUR's Observatorio del Mercado de Trabajo, and CAN's Observatorio Laboral Andino. This would make it possible to optimize the availability of information at the national, regional, subregional and economic bloc levels.

The Observatory could be attached to the RIAL website. It could be built gradually, through collaborative actions or by networking correspondents from all sectors involved in labor issues.

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