



# Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean

› GUIDE ON GENDER MAINSTREAMING



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# Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean

## › GUIDE ON GENDER MAINSTREAMING



This document was prepared by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in its capacity as Secretariat of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement).

The authors wish to thank the States Parties to the Escazú Agreement and the following institutions and individuals: the Presiding Officers of the Conference of the Parties to the Escazú Agreement, the Committee to Support Implementation and Compliance, the elected representatives of the public, the Sustainable Development and Human Settlements Division of ECLAC (Carlos de Miguel, David Barrio, Andrea Sanhueza, Gabriela Burdiles and Natalia Labbé), the ECLAC Division for Gender Affairs (Ana Güezmes and Diana Rodríguez), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) (Bibiana Aído and Lorena Lamas), the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (Jan Jarab, Xavier Mena, Paula de Sa, Ignacio Carvajal and Ignacio Roncagliolo) and other agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system. Thanks are also due to Lorena Aguilar, María Victoria Galleguillos and all the other people and institutions that participated in the public consultations and whose input made this publication possible.

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This document was prepared with financial support from the Waverley Street Foundation and the Open Society Foundations.

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United Nations publication  
LC/ESZ.2026/3  
Distribution: L  
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Printed at United Nations, Santiago  
S.2600065[E]

This publication should be cited as: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. (2026). *Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean: guide on gender mainstreaming* (LC/ESZ.2026/3).

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# Executive summary

The *Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean: guide on gender mainstreaming* provides background information and discusses various courses of action and types of measures for integrating the gender perspective into the implementation of the Agreement at the local, national and regional levels. Its objective is to help enable women, in all their diversity, to fully exercise their rights to information, public participation and justice in environmental matters and their rights in working to protect the environment in the region.

It is not a preceptive document, nor does it provide a definitive legal interpretation of the provisions of the Agreement. Rather, it is intended to serve as a readily accessible reference work for government representatives, legislators, policymakers, public officials, academics, the general public and women to use when analysing, applying and implementing the Escazú Agreement with a gender perspective.

Gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the Escazú Agreement is an ethical imperative for advancing towards the goal of sustainable development with equality. The measures proposed here are designed to establish the conditions needed in order for women to fully exercise their rights of access and make an effective contribution to environmental protection in the region.

This guide is based on a recognition of the fact that women in Latin America and the Caribbean are faced with structural inequalities that interfere with their exercise of their access rights in environmental matters. It also incorporates an intersectional focus in recognition of women in all their diversity and the many forms of discrimination they face in the presence of different factors and conditions.

Pursuant to the mandate of the Conference of the Parties to the Escazú Agreement (decision III/4 of 2024), the guide is part of a broader effort to align gender mainstreaming in international environmental agreements. It is also designed to further the implementation of the Secretary-General's United Nations System-Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan (2024).

The first chapter focuses on gender mainstreaming in environmental matters and provides background information on gender mainstreaming in international and regional normative frameworks. It also discusses the structural challenges in the Latin American and Caribbean region that influence its development and perpetuate existing inequalities. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has conceptualized these challenges in its definition of the following three interlocking development traps, which entail a set of structural vicious circles that limit countries' ability to make sustained progress towards higher levels of well-being: (i) a low capacity for growth;

(ii) high inequality, low social mobility and weak social cohesion; and (iii) low institutional capacity and ineffective governance. Gender inequality is interrelated with each one of these traps. While the first trap reduces women's economic autonomy and the second perpetuates women's exclusion from power and decision-making processes, the third gives rise to normative and policy frameworks that fail to guarantee their rights.

The second chapter offers an analysis of the structural challenges of gender inequality defined in the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030: (i) socioeconomic inequality and the persistence of poverty within the framework of an exclusionary form of growth; (ii) discriminatory, violent and patriarchal cultural patterns; (iii) the sexual division of labour and the unfair nature of the social organization of care; and (iv) the concentration of power and hierarchical relations in the public sphere. This analysis extends to how they tie in with the challenges and barriers faced by women when exercising the access rights recognized in the Escazú Agreement and working to protect the environment.

In the third chapter, a number of ways of overcoming these challenges and furthering the process of gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the Escazú Agreement are outlined. These measures are grouped into five areas of strategic action: (i) regulatory instruments and procedures; (ii) accessibility and affordability; (iii) language, communication and recognition; (iv) capacity-building; and (v) networks and partnerships.

One of the guiding principles of these measures is that of the care society, which seeks to uphold all rights of access and standards for the protection of environmental defenders, taking into account the structural inequalities faced by women in all their diversity. By recognizing these inequalities, the care society offers a transformative avenue for working to modify the structures that reproduce gender inequalities in the region while placing priority on the sustainability of life and care for people and the planet.

The fourth and final chapter looks at institutional aspects of the Escazú Agreement, analyses the steps that have been taken to advance gender mainstreaming in its implementation and in its mechanisms and bodies, and discusses other lines of action.

This guide has been drawn up by ECLAC with the assistance of experts in international and environmental law and in gender equality. A participatory methodology was used for its preparation that involved three different consultative stages during which input was received from States Parties, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, women's organizations, academic institutions and the general public. This process ensured that the suggested approaches reflected the real-world experiences and needs of Latin American and Caribbean women in all their diversity.

## Background

The Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement) is the first environmental treaty in the region that develops the three rights of access or procedural rights –information, participation and justice– recognized in Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development in depth.

As established in its article 1, the Agreement’s objective is “to guarantee the full and effective implementation in Latin America and the Caribbean of the rights of access to environmental information, public participation in the environmental decision-making process and access to justice in environmental matters, and the creation and strengthening of capacities and cooperation, contributing to the protection of the right of every person of present and future generations to live in a healthy environment and to sustainable development” (ECLAC, 2022a, p. 14).

The foundational premise of the Escazú Agreement is that the protection of the environment, respect and guarantees for human rights, the reinforcement of democracy and the consolidation of a sustainable development model are only possible if States effectively ensure access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters. As observed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, this treaty seeks “to combat inequality and discrimination and to guarantee the rights of every person to a healthy environment and to sustainable development. In so doing, it devotes particular attention to persons and groups in vulnerable situations and places equality at the core of sustainable development” (ECLAC, 2022a, p. 5).

The Escazú Agreement is the first treaty in the world that seeks to guarantee a safe and enabling environment for individuals, groups and organizations that are promoting and defending human rights in environmental matters. It is particularly important for Latin America and the Caribbean, which, according to various reports of the United Nations system and other international organizations, is one of the world regions where environmental and human rights defenders run the greatest danger.<sup>1</sup> What is more, women, owing to their differing ethnic identities, ages and sexual orientations, among other aspects, are among the most vulnerable population groups in Latin America and the Caribbean, and this is especially true of women environmental and human rights defenders (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women [ECLAC and UN-Women], 2022).

The Escazú Agreement establishes a normative framework for the promotion of equality and non-discrimination that provides for a broad-ranging, inclusive space for public action and for people or groups in vulnerable situations, which are understood to be “persons or groups that face particular difficulties in fully exercising the access rights recognized in the present Agreement, because of circumstances or conditions identified within each Party’s national context and in accordance with its international obligations”.<sup>2</sup> While that provision does not make explicit reference to women, its inclusion provides a basis for addressing inequalities in the exercise of access rights, including gender inequalities, along with the challenges being faced with respect to women’s and girls’ empowerment and autonomy.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the reports of the United Nations system and the inter-American system on the situation of environmental human rights defenders, including United Nations (2016, 2018, 2019, 2023a) and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Article 2 (e) of the Escazú Agreement.

The Escazú Agreement includes a number of provisions that focus on overcoming the barriers faced by vulnerable individuals and groups seeking to exercise their rights. For example, with regard to the right to participate, the State is enjoined to identify and reach out to such persons and groups in order to give them the support they need to participate in the process.

At the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Escazú Agreement (ECLAC, 2024a), the Parties recognized “the importance of continuing to advance gender equality in order to achieve the full and effective implementation of the Escazú Agreement”. In decision III/4 on mainstreaming the gender perspective, the Conference of the Parties requested ECLAC, as the Secretariat of the Escazú Agreement, “to prepare, with the support of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and other agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations, a guide on mainstreaming the gender perspective in the implementation of the Escazú Agreement, and to present it at the next ordinary meeting of the Conference of the Parties” in 2026 (the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Escazú Agreement).

## Objective and users

The objective of this guide on gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean is to provide background information and outline various courses of action and types of measures for integrating the gender perspective into the implementation of the Agreement at the local, national and regional levels. The purpose of doing so is to help enable women, in all their diversity, to fully exercise their rights to information, public participation and justice in environmental matters and their rights in working to protect the environment in the region in recognition of women’s fundamental role in environmental management and development (United Nations, 1993b).

This is not a preceptive document, nor does it provide a definitive legal interpretation of the provisions of the Agreement. Rather, it is intended to serve as a readily accessible reference work for government representatives, legislators, policymakers, public officials, academics, the general public and women to use when analysing, applying and implementing the Escazú Agreement with a gender perspective.

The guide does not prejudge the will or intention of either States Parties or the bodies established pursuant to the Agreement. Nor is it a substitute for the text of the Agreement. In evaluating the scope and implications of each provision, it is therefore important to refer to the actual wording of the Agreement.

This guide is also designed to further the implementation of the Secretary-General’s United Nations System-Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan (2024).

## Methodology

The guide has been prepared by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), as the Secretariat of the Escazú Agreement, with the assistance of experts in international and environmental law and in gender equality. In addition, member organizations of the United Nations system were invited to take part in its formulation. Contributions were provided, in particular, by UN-Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Thanks to the use of a participatory methodology, the preparation of the guide was also enriched by proposals received during the three-stage consultation process. In the first stage, an online

consultation was held on the gaps, challenges and possible measures for mainstreaming a gender perspective in the implementation of the Agreement. The consultation was aimed at States Parties, United Nations agencies and the public.<sup>3</sup> Using these inputs and a literature review on good practices in gender mainstreaming in the environmental sector, a proposal was prepared for an annotated index to the guide that provided recommendations concerning its structure and preliminary content. A second stage of virtual and face-to-face consultations on the proposed index was then held within the framework of the Third Forum on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters. In addition, during the Ninth Regional Forum for Latin America and the Caribbean on Business and Human Rights, held in São Paulo, Brazil, in April 2025, a participatory dialogue on the role of businesses in gender mainstreaming in the Escazú Agreement was organized by ECLAC and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights during which gaps, good practices and recommendations for strengthening the integration of a gender perspective into the implementation of the Agreement were discussed. The draft of the guide was then prepared by drawing on all the contributions received at this stage. The third and final stage of the consultations was focused on gathering comments and other input on the final draft version of the guide.

The Commission is grateful for all the contributions made by the States Parties, public institutions, organizations of the United Nations system, individual women (including academics) and women's organizations, civil society organizations, academia, the private sector and the general public. All these contributions have greatly enriched the content of this document.

## Structure

The first chapter of the guide provides a brief overview of the concept and importance of gender mainstreaming in environmental matters and discusses the challenges of gender inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean, along with the progress that has been made in the region in this area.

The second chapter analyses the structural challenges of gender inequality identified in the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030 (ECLAC, 2017). It also draws upon the input received in the consultations held during the guide's preparation to explore how those challenges are related to the challenges faced by women seeking to exercise the access rights recognized in the Escazú Agreement and women's contributions to environmental protection.

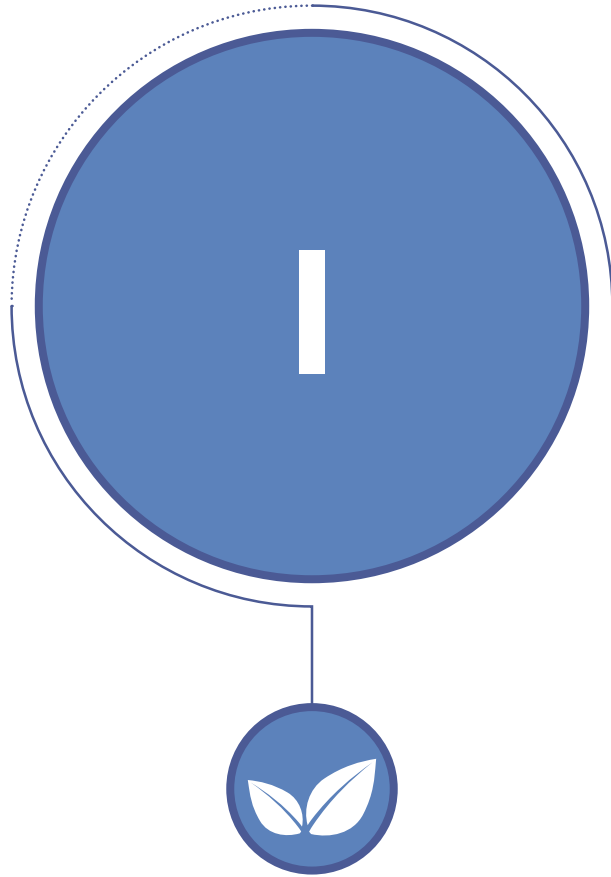
The third chapter offers guidance for the implementation of the Escazú Agreement from a gender perspective and provides suggestions and examples of possible measures for promoting women's empowerment and autonomy and for lowering the barriers they face in exercising their access rights in different arenas.

The fourth and final chapter looks at institutional aspects of the Escazú Agreement, analyses the steps that have been taken to advance gender mainstreaming in its implementation and in its mechanisms and bodies, and discusses other lines of action.

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<sup>3</sup> This consultation was held via the Regional Public Mechanism of the Escazú Agreement participatory platform from 3 January to 14 February 2025.





# **Gender mainstreaming in environmental matters**



## A. The gender perspective in international normative frameworks

In 1992, the participants in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Earth Summit, explicitly acknowledged that the full and equal participation of women in environmental matters is vital for the attainment of a sustainable form of development.<sup>4 5</sup>

In chapter 24 of Agenda 21 (United Nations, 1993a), adopted at the Earth Summit, the participating States recognized the importance of women's role in sustainability and the need to empower them so that they could help lead the way towards a more just and equitable future. To that end, they advocated:

- (i) Recognizing that women face discrimination and obstacles to their access to the labour market, land, resources and decision-making power which limit their ability to fully contribute to the effort to attain sustainable development.
- (ii) Ensuring that women have access to economic resources, education and leadership roles so that they can play an active part in decision-making processes and the effort to build a sustainable future.
- (iii) Adopting, strengthening and enforcing laws prohibiting violence against women and taking all necessary administrative, social and educational measures to eliminate such violence in all its forms while recognizing that it undermines their physical autonomy, safety and ability to participate in public and economic affairs.

Another landmark event was the framing of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. In particular, strategic objective K, on women and the environment, urges governments to “integrate women, including indigenous women, their perspectives and knowledge, on an equal basis with men, in decision-making regarding sustainable resource management and the development of policies and programmes for sustainable development, including in particular those designed to address and prevent environmental degradation of the land” and to “develop a strategy for change to eliminate all obstacles to women's full and equal participation in sustainable development and equal access to and control over resources” (UN-Women, 2014, pp. 160-161).

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<sup>4</sup> Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development of 1992 states that: “Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development” (United Nations, 1993b, p. 7).

<sup>5</sup> This chapter draws upon *Guía para la transversalización de la perspectiva de género en programas y proyectos de cooperación internacional para el desarrollo*, United Nations Development Programme et al. (UNDP et al., 2023).

In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the first international treaty focused specifically on women’s human rights. The Convention does not have a specific article on the environment, but its article 14, which deals with the rights of rural women, includes provisions that are directly related to environmental matters, such as access to drinking water, sanitation, natural resources and decent housing conditions. Pursuant to that article, States Parties are under an obligation to take all appropriate measures for eliminating discrimination against women in rural areas and to ensure their participation in rural development processes, their sharing of the benefits of those processes and their ability to play a part in development planning at all levels (United Nations General Assembly, 1979).

In 2016, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women adopted general recommendation No. 34 on the rights of rural women and, in October 2018, general recommendation No. 37 on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in a changing climate.<sup>6</sup> Then, in 2022, the Committee issued its general recommendation No. 39 on the rights of Indigenous women and girls. In 2024, that recommendation was followed by general recommendation No. 40 on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems. These recommendations underline the importance of ensuring the effective participation of women, in all their diversity, and especially women who belong to historically marginalized groups, in decision-making systems and processes, including those dealing with environmental matters.

As may be seen from table I.1, a number of other human rights treaty bodies, in addition to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, have addressed gender equality in various general comments and recommendations within the framework of their mandates.



**Table I.1**

**Selected general comments and recommendations of United Nations human rights treaty bodies that address gender equality**

Committee	General comments and recommendations
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General recommendation No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change</li> <li>- General recommendation No. 40 (2024) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems</li> </ul>
Human Rights Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General comment No. 18 (1989) on non-discrimination</li> <li>- General comment No. 28 (2000) on the equality of rights between men and women</li> </ul>
Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General comment No. 16 (2005) on the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights</li> <li>- General comment No. 20 (2009) on non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights</li> <li>- General comment No. 27 (2025) on economic, social and cultural rights and the environmental dimension of sustainable development</li> </ul>
Committee on the Rights of the Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General comment No. 26 (2023) on children’s rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change</li> <li>- Joint general comment No. 4 of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families/No. 23 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2017) on State obligations regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration in countries of origin, transit, destination and returno</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> Mention should also be made of general recommendation No. 30 (2013) on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations.

Committee	General comments and recommendations
Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General recommendation No. 25 (2000) on gender-related dimensions of racial discrimination</li> <li>- General recommendation No. 32 (2009) on the meaning and scope of special measures in the Convention</li> </ul>
Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General comment No. 6 (2018) on equality and non-discrimination</li> <li>- General comment No. 3 (2016) on women and girls with disabilities</li> </ul>
Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joint general comment No. 4 of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families/No. 23 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2017) on State obligations regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration in countries of origin, transit, destination and return</li> </ul>

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

For its part, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in its general comment No. 27 (2025) on economic, social and cultural rights and the environmental dimension of sustainable development, recalled that environmental crises exacerbate gender inequalities and called upon States to integrate a gender perspective into all sustainable development policies, especially those related to disaster risk reduction, climate change, pollution, the protection of biodiversity and natural resource management.

In a complementary vein, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its general comment No. 26 (2023), recognizes that girls are particularly vulnerable to the effects of environmental degradation as a consequence of structural gender inequalities. This interpretation broadens the protection framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by reaffirming children's right to life, health and development in safe environments, as well as their right to access information and participate in environmental decision-making through inclusive and age-appropriate mechanisms.

The concept of gender mainstreaming as such was adopted in 1997 by the United Nations Economic and Social Council as its strategy for promoting the systematic incorporation of the gender perspective into all policies and programmes of the United Nations system without necessarily linking it to a specific treaty or instrument. This is a tool for making the interests and needs of men and women an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, social and economic spheres (United Nations, 1999; Economic and Social Council, 2025).

Thus, considering the subject through the lens of the gender perspective provides a way of evaluating the effects on women and men of any planned action, including those embodied in laws, policies and programmes, in all spheres and at all levels of government. This approach helps to ensure that the experiences, needs and interests of women and men are integrated into the policymaking process, with the ultimate goal of achieving substantive gender equality (ECLAC, 2022b).

In line with this approach, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that gender equality is not only a goal in itself (Goal 5), but also a cross-cutting issue and a means of working towards achieving all the Sustainable Development Goals.

Despite the long-standing factors of vulnerability to which women have been subject, they have shown themselves to be agents of change in environmental matters by playing a crucial role in protecting ecosystems and building a sustainable development process. From rural and Indigenous communities to decision-making spheres at the international level, women's leadership, expertise and commitment have been the drivers for concrete action to confront the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and responsible natural resource management.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, women's deep involvement in the stewardship of water, land and food has enabled them to develop a rich body of knowledge. This knowledge has contributed to the development of sustainable solutions that benefit both the environment and human communities. In addition, women are at the forefront of social movements, community-based initiatives and public policies that promote access rights in environmental matters.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that women are not a homogeneous group. Different women experience the effects of environmental crises differently depending on a combination of factors and conditions that shape their lives. Women are diverse in terms of age, socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, geographic origin, mobility status and cultural context, among other factors. This diversity entails different levels of exposure, risk and vulnerability to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, which are exacerbated by natural disasters, conflict situations and displacement. Some women—in addition to facing structural inequalities based on gender—may also be affected by socioeconomic inequality, racial discrimination or other forms of exclusion. Consequently, an intersectional perspective is needed in order to address cross-cutting forms of discrimination. (see box I.1).

### Box I.1

#### The concept of intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality emerged out of discussions around the issue of multiple forms of discrimination in the field of international human rights law. Its earliest antecedent is found in paragraph 32 of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in which the signatory governments recognize that some women face multiple barriers due to their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability or other factors.

This constituted a recognition of the need to integrate a gender perspective into policies, strategies and action programmes targeting racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance “in order to address multiple forms of discrimination” (United Nations General Assembly, 2003, p. 2).

Along the same lines, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted that interrelated forms of discrimination may intersect and put women at a particular disadvantage, stating, in its general recommendation No. 28 (2010), that:

“...the discrimination of women based on sex and gender is inextricably linked with other factors that affect women, such as race, ethnicity, religion or belief, health, status, age, class, caste and sexual orientation and gender identity”. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2010, p. 4).

This definition has helped to consolidate the understanding of intersectionality in international human rights law as a central element in the design and implementation of public policies that are sensitive to the multiple forms of discrimination faced by women.

**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, on the basis of General Assembly of the United Nations (2003). *The fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (A/RES/57/195)*; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2010). *General recommendation No. 28 on the core obligations of States parties under article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW/C/GC/28)*.

The explicit recognition of this concept was consolidated at the World Conference to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination (Durban, 2001). This is reflected in the preamble of the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at that Conference, which states that “victims can suffer multiple or aggravated forms of discrimination based on related grounds such as race, sex, religion, economic situation or other conditions (United Nations, 2002, p. 13).

In the environmental field, the concept of intersectionality has gradually been incorporated in studies that explore how factors such as gender, class, age, ethnicity, disability or migration status interact with each other and with environmental crises. For example, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has recognized that these social dimensions influence people’s exposure, sensitivity and capacity to respond to climate risks, allowing for the identification of differentiated vulnerabilities and the adoption of more appropriate and contextualized measures (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2023).

Gender equality and intersectionality approaches have been progressively integrated into the normative frameworks of various legal instruments and multilateral environmental agreements. (see table I.2). Notably, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa include specific commitments aimed at ensuring gender equality in the formulation and implementation of environmental policies. In turn, financial mechanisms such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Green Climate Fund have incorporated these approaches into their financial and investment strategies, thereby strengthening the role of women in sustainable natural resource management and environmental governance.



**Table I.2**

**Selected multilateral environmental agreements that incorporate a gender perspective**

Year	Agreement	Document
1971	Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat	- Resolution XIII.18 on gender and wetlands (2018)
1989	Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal	- Gender Action Plan of the Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions (2013 and various updates)
1992	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change	- Lima work programme on gender (2014) and its gender action plan (2017-2019) - Enhanced Lima work programme on gender and its gender action plan (2019) - Belém Gender Action Plan 2026-2034
1992	Convention on Biological Diversity	- Target 23 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (2022) - Gender Plan of Action (2022)
1994	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa	- Gender Action Plan (2017)

Year	Agreement	Document
1998	Rotterdam Convention	- Gender Action Plan of the Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions (2013 and various updates)
2001	Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants	- Gender Action Plan of the Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions (2013 and various updates)
2013	Minamata Convention on Mercury	- Gender action plan (2023)
2015	Paris Agreement	- Preamble: "Acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity."

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Another noteworthy development was the recognition of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 76/300 (2022a). In this resolution, the General Assembly not only enshrined this as a universal right; it also expressly recognized the importance of gender equality and the adoption of gender-sensitive measures to address climate change and environmental degradation. It also acknowledged the fundamental role played by women and girls as managers, leaders, environmental defenders and agents of change.

Along the same lines, in the 2023 report of the Special Rapporteur on the environment and human rights concerning women and girls and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, he emphasized the need to take a transformative gender-sensitive approach in addressing environmental injustices in recognition of the differentiated and structural impacts faced by women and girls.

It is also important to bear in mind the progressive consolidation of the international legal framework for the protection of human rights defenders, particularly those working on environmental issues. One of the pillars of this framework is the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1998 (resolution 53/144). The General Assembly also adopted a declaration on women human rights defenders in which it calls on States to take the necessary measures to ensure the protection of women human rights defenders and defenders of women's rights of all ages and to integrate a gender perspective into their efforts to create a safe and enabling environment for the defence of human rights.<sup>7</sup>

The office of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders was established in 2000<sup>8</sup> and given a mandate to monitor the situation of human rights defenders, to seek, examine and respond to information on their situation and to recommend strategies to enable States to better protect those defenders. In the performance of this mandate and with the assistance of other mechanisms, the Special Rapporteur has documented the fact that women human rights defenders face differentiated

<sup>7</sup> United Nations General Assembly resolution 68/181.

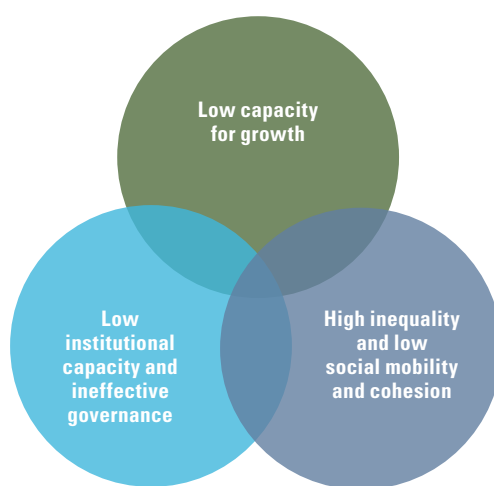
<sup>8</sup> Resolution 2000/61 of the Commission on Human Rights.

and often heightened risks, including gender violence, harassment and exclusion from ownership and decision-making, as well as attacks directed at them and their communities. This makes it all the more necessary to mainstream a gender-sensitive, intersectional approach into all protection frameworks and mechanisms (United Nations, 2019).<sup>9</sup>

## B. Development traps and gender inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin American and Caribbean countries face structural challenges that influence their development and perpetuate inequalities. ECLAC has conceptualized these challenges by distinguishing three interrelated development traps (see diagram I.1).

Diagram I.1  
Latin America and the Caribbean: development traps



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. (2024). *Development Traps in Latin America and the Caribbean: Vital Transformations and How to Manage Them* (LC/SES.40/3-P/-\*).

These three traps entail a set of structural vicious circles that limit countries' ability to make sustained progress towards higher levels of well-being. They interact with and reinforce one another, creating barriers that hinder efforts to overcome poverty, expand upon rights and strengthen the economic and social development process. The first trap is the region's low capacity for growth, which is related to the very limited extent to which its production structures have been diversified, its low productivity rates, low levels of investment in innovation and limited technological development. The second trap –the trap of high inequality, low mobility and weak social cohesion– is characterized by the persistence of highly stratified social structures that perpetuate inequalities in income, access and opportunities. Finally, the trap of low institutional capacity and ineffective governance reflects the weakness of public institutional capacity for designing, implementing and evaluating policies coherently on a sustained basis.

<sup>9</sup> Resolution 49/50 of the Human Rights Council.

These traps are exacerbated by increasingly severe environmental crises, including those of climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and ecosystem degradation, which deepen existing inequalities and jeopardize the sustainability of the region's development models.

Gender inequality is interrelated with each of these traps in the following ways:

- (i) The region's low capacity for growth limits women's economic autonomy.
- (ii) High inequality and low social mobility and cohesion perpetuate women's exclusion from power structures and decision-making processes.
- (iii) Low institutional capacity and ineffective governance result in normative frameworks and policies that fail to guarantee women's rights (ECLAC, 2024b).

As stated in the position paper of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean at its sixteenth session, these dynamics deepen the structural inequalities affecting women in all their diversity by limiting the opportunities that are open to them and constraining their effective exercise of their human rights (ECLAC, 2025b). Against this backdrop, the sweeping changes that need to take place in the region—transitions to boost the production structure's growth capacity, reduce inequalities and enhance the ability to confront environmental crises—demand decisive progress towards gender equality as a condition for sustainability and social justice.

In response to these challenges, the Latin American and Caribbean region has pioneered the creation of institutional and normative frameworks for the promotion of gender equality and women's autonomy. For more than four decades, the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean,<sup>10</sup> a subsidiary body of ECLAC, has provided an intergovernmental forum for monitoring, evaluating and forging commitments in this connection. At the meetings of the Conference, the member States of ECLAC approve agreements that then become constituent parts of the Regional Gender Agenda, a comprehensive road map for upholding women's rights, including their collective and environmental rights.

One of its key instruments is the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda towards 2030 (thirteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2016), which sets out measures corresponding to each of the Strategy's 10 implementation pillars for overcoming the structural challenges of inequality and guaranteeing women's rights, including equal access to justice, and for creating safe environments that facilitate access to information, participation and the protection of human rights. The Santiago Commitment (2020), approved at the fourteenth session of the Regional Conference, promotes the incorporation of the gender, intersectionality and human rights perspectives into policies on sustainable development, climate action, risk management and reconstruction. It also promotes the active participation of women and girls—especially those belonging to Indigenous Peoples, Afrodescendent communities and rural communities—in the design and implementation of environmental policies.

At the sixteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, held from 12 to 15 August 2025 in Mexico City, ECLAC member States approved the Tlatelolco Commitment: A Decade of Action to Achieve Substantive Gender Equality and the Care Society. In this intergovernmental agreement, the signatories recognize that the current social organization of care in Latin America

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<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.cepal.org/en/subsidiary-bodies/regional-conference-women-latin-america-and-caribbean>.

and the Caribbean “is unjust and unequal, and historically, has affected, in particular, Indigenous and Afrodescendent women, adolescents and girls” and acknowledge “their significant contribution to the development of societies and the importance of ensuring their full, equal and meaningful participation in all aspects of society”. To address these challenges, the participating governments agreed to “promote measures to overcome the sexual division of labour and move towards a fair social organization of care, in the framework of a new development model that fosters gender equality in the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development” (ECLAC, 2025c, p. 2).

The Tlatelolco Commitment urges States to “incorporate the gender perspective into environmental, climate change adaptation and mitigation and disaster risk reduction policies, recognizing the fundamental role of women, particularly women environmental defenders” and to “strengthen their capacity for resilience and adaptation in the face of adverse climate change impacts”. It also calls for “the creation of a safe and enabling environment for the promotion and effective protection of the rights of all women human rights defenders, particularly those working on issues related to the environment” and to “foster, strengthen and consolidate gender mainstreaming in national statistical systems” on climate and environmental matters.

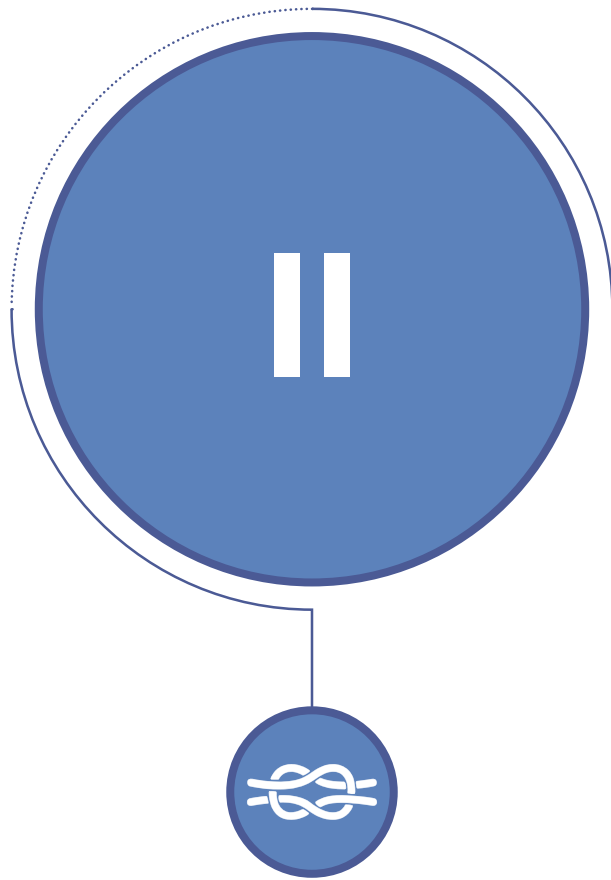
In line with regional initiatives for promoting equality and participation in environmental governance, the Escazú Agreement incorporates equality and non-discrimination as one of its guiding principles (art. 3 [a]) and states that the enjoyment and exercise of access rights must be guaranteed without any form of discrimination whatsoever. It defines persons and groups in vulnerable situations as those who face particular difficulties in fully exercising their access rights (art. 2 [e]), which may include women in all their diversity as a consequence of circumstances or conditions identified within each Party’s national context. The Agreement also establishes specific cross-cutting measures for such persons and groups in all its pillars and stipulates that public participation processes must be adapted to the social, economic, cultural, geographical and gender characteristics of the public (art. 7 [10]).

These agreements, together with the international human rights commitments made by the countries of the region, provide a legal framework for establishing the gender perspective, combined with an intersectional approach, as a central guiding principle for the fulfilment of the obligations assumed under the Escazú Agreement and for the implementation of mechanisms for effectively realizing women’s access rights and removing the barriers that hinder their full exercise.

Decision III/4, on mainstreaming the gender perspective in the implementation of the Escazú Agreement, was adopted at the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties. This decision augments the initiatives mentioned above and is a further step in the application of this guiding principle. It also encourages the Parties to continue promoting the full and effective participation of women in all their diversity, including Indigenous women, and mainstreaming gender equality in the implementation of the Agreement.

This decision also contains a recommendation for the Parties to incorporate the gender perspective into the creation of a safe and enabling environment for the defence of human rights in environmental matters and to prevent discrimination and gender-based violence against women defenders. This is based on the understanding that ensuring women’s safety and promoting their participation in decision-making processes are cornerstones of environmental sustainability and justice.





**Structural challenges  
of inequality faced by  
women in exercising  
their access rights  
and working to protect  
the environment**



Gender inequality is one of the factors underlying the trap of high inequality and low social mobility and cohesion and is also a driver of the discrimination and human rights violations to which certain population groups are subjected.

Tackling gender inequality is both a human rights commitment and an essential condition for advancing towards inclusive and sustainable social development, as reaffirmed in the recently adopted Tlatelolco Commitment (ECLAC, 2025c). Among other factors, steps must be taken to confront the four structural challenges identified in the Regional Gender Agenda, which reflect the underlying factors that perpetuate gender inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean and have a direct impact on women's autonomy. These factors interact systemically and reinforce each other, thereby forming an entrenched web that prevents women from fully exercising their human rights and that stands in the way of the attainment of gender equality and women's autonomy. This underscores the need to move towards a care society by bringing about the essential transformations required to make headway towards a more productive, inclusive and sustainable form of development.

The first of these challenges is socioeconomic inequality and the persistence of poverty within the framework of an exclusionary growth model. Although poverty in the region has declined in aggregate terms, women continue to be overrepresented in low-income households and have greater difficulty entering the labour market.

The second challenge is posed by discriminatory, violent and patriarchal cultural patterns. These patterns are reflected in long-standing practices that perpetuate the subordination of women and that give rise to high levels of gender violence and consistently high femicide rates. Existing inequalities are exacerbated in the case of women facing multiple forms of exclusion and discrimination, such as Indigenous women, women of African descent, women with disabilities, girls and young women, and migrant and rural women, which demonstrates how the structural axes of inequality are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

The third challenge has to do with the sexual division of labour and the unfair social organization of care, which cast women as the main providers of the care work that is essential for sustaining human life. This work is performed against the backdrop of a mounting demand for care driven by demographic, epidemiological and climate-related changes. These factors, combined with the decreasing availability of caregivers and of time to provide such care, is fuelling a crisis of care that is at risk of deepening.

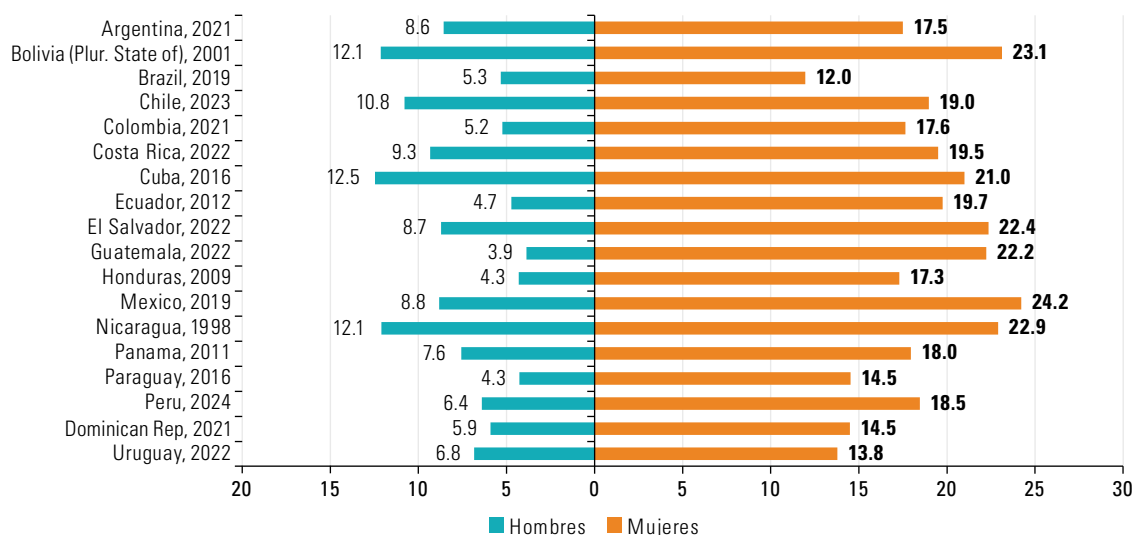
The fourth challenge has to do with the concentration of power and hierarchical relations in the public sphere. Although regulatory inroads have helped to increase political participation and to further the implementation of mechanisms such as gender quotas, gender parity remains an unmet goal in the executive, legislative and judicial branches as well as at the local government level.

These factors exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and pose new challenges for the exercise of the right to a healthy environment and environmental protection. First of all, the unequal impacts of manifold environmental crises, viewed from a gender perspective, are closely linked to socioeconomic inequality and the persistence of poverty. As evidence of women's lack of economic autonomy, data from the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, indicate that 21.3% more women than men were living in poor households as of 2025 (ECLAC, 2025a). Furthermore, as a

consequence of the structural nature of gender inequality, women continue to face barriers in accessing natural resources and goods and services such as training and technologies, and these barriers are even higher for women belonging to certain ethnic, age and other groups (ECLAC, 2017).

The sexual division of labour and the unfair social organization of care limit women's participation in environmental decision-making processes. According to data compiled by the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, women devote more time to unpaid work, with an average of two thirds of their time spent on this activity and one third of their time devoted to paid work, while for men, the trend is reversed, with one third of their time devoted to unpaid work and two thirds to paid work (ECLAC, 2025d) (see figure II.1).

**Figure II.1**  
**Latin America and the Caribbean (18 countries): time devoted to unpaid domestic and care work, population aged 15 years and over, by sex (Sustainable Development Goals indicator 5.4.1), latest year for which information is available**  
*(Percentages)*



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. (2025). *Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex*. [https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/databank/index.html?lang=es&indicator\\_id=3201&area\\_id=&lang=en](https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/databank/index.html?lang=es&indicator_id=3201&area_id=&lang=en).

A closer examination of the role that women play in caring for others in Latin America and the Caribbean is called for, since they often assume responsibility not only for their families, but also for their extended community. They are in charge of caring for men, children, older adults and the land. This caregiving burden is intertwined with other structural factors of inequality, exposing women not only to gender-based violence but also to violence at the hands of their community and its members (ECLAC, 2020b).

The Latin American and Caribbean region's long-standing discriminatory paradigms are also evident in matters relating to the environment and were reflected in responses to the questionnaires and in the in-person and virtual consultations conducted as part of the preparation of this guide. The input received in the course of that process demonstrated that many women who work to preserve the planet's biodiversity possess detailed, valuable knowledge that would enable them to devise sustainable

solutions for the challenges facing the region in this connection.<sup>11</sup> As a consequence of these prevailing discriminatory paradigms, however, decision-makers concerned with environmental matters tend to dismiss or ignore that knowledge, particularly when the persons possessing it are rural, Indigenous or Afrodescendent women or women belonging to other marginalized groups (Aguilar Revelo, 2021a). This also occurs in academic, technical and other fields where knowledge produced by women tends to be delegitimized.

The limited participation of women in the exercise of power and in decision-making processes is reflected in the institutional structures for environmental decision-making, which reproduce dynamics of inequality in the concentration of power and hierarchical relations in the public sphere. Among the main obstacles faced by women seeking to gain access to those processes are the social stigmatization to which many are subjected within their own communities or family settings, particularly when their leadership as environmental defenders calls traditional gender roles into question. This delegitimization translates into their exclusion from public policymaking circles, forcing them to the sidelines in highly male-dominated environments that further exacerbate their marginalization.

One critical point made during the consultations concerning the preparation of this guide was the criminalization of leading women human rights defenders in environmental matters.<sup>12</sup> As will be discussed at greater length at a later point in this guide, this criminalization takes the form of threats, harassment, persecution through social networks, physical violence and intimidation. The situation is made all the worse by the lack of appropriate mechanisms, such as accessible, gender-sensitive reporting channels, for protecting women defenders' human rights.

The consultations also brought out the fact that, from an intersectional standpoint, exclusion from environmental decision-making processes is especially marked in the case of rural, Indigenous and Afrodescendent women, young women, women with disabilities and women who live in informal settlements. These women face additional obstacles, such as the absence of or remoteness of institutional offices, the lack of culturally competent staff and the absence of participation and accountability mechanisms that are suited to their realities and backgrounds.<sup>13</sup>

Given these structural challenges of inequality in situations where the very sustainability of life is under threat, State action taken within the framework of the Escazú Agreement must create the necessary conditions for women, in all their diversity, to fully exercise their access rights in environmental matters and to freely pursue their efforts to protect the environment.

The following sections explore the correlation between the challenges arising from structural inequalities and the difficulties women face in fully exercising each of the access rights that women mentioned during the consultation process.

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<sup>11</sup> The survey showed that, although many women are recognized as being knowledgeable about their communities and about the environment, their knowledge is not valued. For example, a number of respondents spoke of the need to offer special leadership development programmes for Indigenous, Afrodescendent and rural women and government training programmes on gender equality, cultural diversity and environmental rights in order to raise awareness of their expertise and of its value.

<sup>12</sup> Over 70% of the respondents in the virtual consultation said that women defenders of environmental human rights were subject to numerous risks, restrictions and threats, and 66% stated that such women have particular difficulty in securing preventive measures and in having attacks or attempts at intimidation investigated and their perpetrators punished.

<sup>13</sup> The consultations made it clear that the exclusion of women from environmental decision-making processes is especially marked in the case of rural, Indigenous and Afrodescendent women, young women and women with disabilities. Around one third of the respondents referred to these conditions as factors of exclusion and spoke of the need for special leadership programmes, differentiated service protocols and measures to increase digital and territorial accessibility.

## A. Access to environmental information

As a consequence of socioeconomic inequality and the persistence of poverty, especially in rural areas, many people have difficulty in accessing public information, including information on environmental matters. A consideration of the situation more broadly in terms of digital access has led to the use of the concept of “meaningful connectivity”, which refers to the fact that simply having an Internet connection is not enough to enable people to fully benefit from digitalization. Other important elements include the quality and stability of the connection, the affordability of the service, having the digital skills necessary to use the Internet connection effectively and the security conditions under which access is provided (ECLAC, 2025e). When the situation is viewed from this broader perspective, it becomes clear that many women—especially women in rural areas, low-income women and women belonging to Indigenous Peoples or Afrodescendent communities—encounter additional obstacles that limit their ability to use this technology for their personal, social and economic development, even if they do have basic access to the relevant devices and Internet connections.

Access to environmental information can also be hampered if the information is expressed using highly technical terminology, as it often is, especially in the case of environmental information generated by public institutions or private companies, and it is not a common practice to provide summaries or reports aimed at the general public. There are also usually too few channels for socializing or clarifying the information.

Many women—especially those in marginalized communities—reported being unaware of the availability of environmental systems and records or of how to access them. In rural areas, for example, it is often difficult to access environmental information on institutional websites because it is usually presented in complicated formats or in files that are so large that they cannot be easily downloaded, and this becomes even more complex when a person does not have the necessary digital skills or when Internet connections are unstable or non-existent. This situation widens access gaps and creates a structural disconnect between institutions and private individuals, especially those living in rural, Indigenous, peri-urban and migrant communities.

## B. Public participation in environmental decision-making processes

Among the challenges identified during the consultation process, some of the most formidable ones for women’s participation that are associated with the concentration of power and hierarchical relationships in the public sphere are the constraints that women encounter in finding opportunities for sharing or socializing environmental information relevant to their communities, such as town halls, prior consultation processes, workshops, meetings or round tables. In rural communities, for example, some women reported being excluded from community meetings where key decisions about the land—including environmental matters—are made and from traditional bodies and local authorities, such as councils of elders. The consultation brought out the fact that, in many cases, these restrictions are the result of unwritten cultural codes that continue to assign a purely domestic role to women and to restrict their participation in public affairs. This same restriction applies to young men and women, who, according to this same code, owe obedience to adults and are subordinate to them.

The input received during the consultations indicated that women often shoulder the lion’s share of domestic and caregiving tasks, which interferes with their ability to play an active part in complex,

prolonged decision-making processes. One of the problems is that the scheduling of participatory processes does not take into account the times of day when such tasks (such as caring for children and older adults) must be performed. This often makes it difficult for women to have direct access to the information provided during participatory events, requiring them to rely on intermediaries to convey it to them, or effectively preventing them from obtaining it at all, thereby limiting their ability to have any influence over those processes.

The means used to publicize participatory opportunities may also be unsuitable. For example, notices of such events are often posted in public places or published in national newspapers that are not widely distributed in rural areas. In addition, the events organized by public institutions do not always employ a gender-sensitive approach, making it difficult for women attendees to find support or safe settings in which to voice their views. Many of these events take place in capitals or major cities, which makes it difficult and expensive for women living in rural, Indigenous or remote communities to attend. Women respondents also reported that sexist and discriminatory attitudes on the part of public officials, local authorities or family members often discourage them from participating in public affairs. As a result, many of them are intimidated or reluctant to interact with the authorities because of their past experiences of exclusion or discrimination.

## **C. Access to justice in environmental matters**

In a context of socioeconomic inequality and persistent poverty, combined with an exclusionary growth model marked by limited access to goods and services, economically vulnerable women have fewer means of gaining access to justice. Judicial and administrative processes are often lengthy and complex, which poses a particularly high hurdle for those who lack the time and means to follow up on them effectively.

Many women, especially Indigenous women and rural women, reported encountering obstacles in obtaining clear and timely information about their rights and the status of proceedings affecting them. They also indicated that the lack of resources to hire legal representation or obtain proper legal assistance limited their ability to ensure the enforcement of judicial or administrative decisions in their favour. The cost of legal assistance and the costs associated with judicial or administrative proceedings, especially for women without their own income, thus represent a direct barrier to the effective exercise of their rights. Even when legal proceedings are free of charge, the indirect costs (such as transportation, food, lodging and copies of necessary documents) may be prohibitive for women living in poverty.

In addition, appropriate, gender-sensitive protocols for the provision of services to women—for example, advisory assistance to help them understand the highly specialized language used in the various mechanisms for seeking legal recourse—are often lacking. The same kind of situation exists when women are trying to obtain evidence, which in environmental proceedings is often essential for the success of legal action. Thus, women often have greater difficulties in gathering evidence of environmental harm owing to technical, logistical and economic constraints.

Finally, even when court rulings or administrative decisions are in women's favour, they are not always effectively enforced in a timely manner. In many cases, the lack of enforcement and compliance results in wrongdoers going unpunished and discourages women from seeking justice.

## D. Human rights defenders in environmental matters

The inputs received during the consultation process and in the course of this guide's preparation (see box II.1) indicate that the most significant challenges faced by women human rights defenders in environmental matters are as follows:

- (i) Disparagement at the hands of other members of society and of their community for not complying with traditional gender roles: Women human rights defenders in environmental matters are disparaged by their own communities or families when, because of their advocacy work, they do not fit in with traditional gender roles. As a result, many of them do not identify themselves as environmental human rights defenders for fear of criticism, which has direct implications for their ability to seek government protection.<sup>14</sup>
- (ii) A lack of institutional recognition: Some defenders said that the work they do to protect the environment is not acknowledged by the public institutions responsible for environmental protection and that their knowledge and views are therefore not valued or recognized as legitimate contributions to the debate on environmental issues.
- (iii) Stigmatization and criminalization: Women human rights defenders in environmental matters begin to be stigmatized when they become involved in environmental issues in their community by members of the community itself, at their place of work and even by public officials and authorities. This can lead to threats, dismissals, intimidation, attacks and gender-based violence –including physical, psychological or sexual assault– targeting them and their families. This, in turn, can lead to forced displacement, physical or mental health problems and the loss of their livelihoods.
- (iv) A lack of effective protection mechanisms and limited access to technical and legal assistance in gaining access to justice: The lack of such mechanisms discourages women from participating in environmental matters for fear of reprisals. In addition, many of them, especially in marginalized areas, have difficulty accessing these mechanisms and institutions; nor do they have support networks that can provide proper technical or legal assistance in reporting violations or following up on their cases.

### Box II.1

#### Testimony of a woman environmental human rights defender

“Attacks differ depending on whether the defender is a woman or a man. Men are not sent to do the washing or to look after the children. They aren't subjected to sexual harassment or to catcalls. And public institutions do not offer psychosocial support for women. We looked for a lawyer who works with this (gender) approach, but there weren't any. Lawyers need training in this area.”

Third Forum on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, April 2025.

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

<sup>14</sup> This situation is also referred to in the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders (United Nations, 2019).

Table II.1 provides an overview of how gaps in the exercise of access rights tie in with the structural challenges of gender inequality.

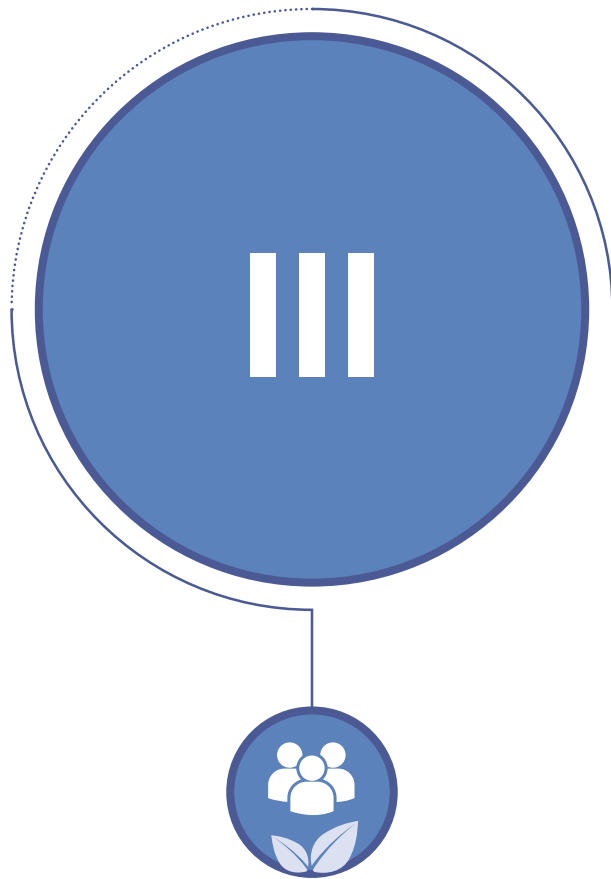


**Table II.1**  
**Relationship between the structural challenges of gender inequality and the difficulties encountered by women in implementing the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement)**

Structural challenges of inequality	Pillars of the Escazú Agreement			
	Access to environmental information	Public participation in environmental decision-making processes	Access to justice in environmental matters	Human rights defenders in environmental matters
Socioeconomic inequality and the persistence of poverty in the framework of exclusionary growth	Gaps in terms of the conditions needed for meaningful connectivity, especially in rural areas.	Difficulty of covering the costs of travel to locations offering opportunities for participation.	A lack of sufficient economic resources to obtain legal assistance and information on women's rights.	Difficulty in gaining access to justice and protection because of a lack of resources and support networks and because of the distance from the relevant institutions or the difficulty in travelling to them.
Discriminatory, violent and patriarchal cultural patterns	Undervaluing of women's environmental knowledge.	Exclusion of women from institutional, technical and community-based decision-making processes.	Discriminatory practices on the part of administrative and judicial institutions.	Differentiated stigmatization and criminalization of women defenders and their families.
Sexual division of labour and unfair social organization of care	Unequal distribution of caregiving tasks that makes it difficult to devote sufficient time to searching for and requesting information.	Caregiving responsibilities limit the amount of time available for attending participatory events at which environmental decisions are made.	Limited amount of time for taking part in lengthy, complex legal proceedings.	Disparagement and criticism by members of their communities and families because of their advocacy work.
Concentration of power and hierarchical relations in the public sphere	Lack of suitable and accessible information channels for women.	Persistence of masculinized hierarchical structures in environmental decision-making circles.	Absence of gender-sensitive service protocols.	Lack of institutional recognition of the work of women defenders.

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.





# **Guidance on gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the Escazú Agreement**



The following section describes measures aimed at addressing and reducing the barriers discussed in this document and at providing States Parties with guidance on implementing each pillar of the Escazú Agreement with a gender perspective.

These measures were identified on the basis of information provided by States Parties, United Nations system funds, agencies and programmes and members of the public who participated in the three consultations. They are classified into five strategic areas of action: (i) regulatory instruments and procedures; (ii) accessibility and affordability; (iii) language; communication and recognition; (iv) capacity-building; and (v) networks and partnerships.

This classification, which is expanded upon in table III.1, may be used to organize measures according to their operational nature and institutional requirements, which in turn enables each State Party to prioritize, coordinate and implement them and to evaluate them in a progressive manner.



**Table III.1**

**Spheres of action and measures for gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement)**

Spheres of action	Measures
1. Regulatory instruments and procedures	Measures to integrate a gender perspective into regulations, plans and policies that enable the exercise of access rights.
2. Accessibility and affordability	Measures to address the barriers (physical, informational, social and economic, among others) that disproportionately affect women.
3. Language, communication and recognition	Measures to ensure that a gender focus is adopted in the preparation of information and the use of language, to disseminate the rights of access and the procedures available, and to disseminate and recognize the role of women in defending the environment.
4. Capacity-building	Measures to strengthen leadership by women in all their diversity and build institutional capacities with a gender focus within public entities that are responsible for implementing processes concerning information and participation, as well as the capacities of judges, judicial operators and protection and care mechanisms for women human rights defenders in environmental matters.
5. Networks and partnerships	Measures to strengthen networks, partnerships and collaboration among local, regional and national government entities, as well as between these and other social actors, to support the full realization of access rights in environmental matters.

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

It is advisable to devise a twin-track approach with two simultaneous efforts: on the one hand, to integrate the gender perspective broadly into all initiatives and policies and, on the other hand, to take specific measures to correct historical discrimination and empower women.

The feasibility and scope of these measures will depend on each country's possibilities and priorities, as well as its institutional, social, economic and cultural context. It is thus essential to acknowledge that these actions must necessarily be implemented in a gradual manner and that their effectiveness will depend on institutional capacity, intersectoral coordination, resource availability and the sustained commitment of the public entities responsible.

In this context, it is essential to identify and seize the opportunities that arise in each country to embed these measures into public policy proposals, programmes, initiatives or projects related both to the implementation of the Escazú Agreement and to gender equality. Examples include the road maps or implementation plans that a number of States Parties to the Escazú Agreement have developed or are currently pursuing.

State Parties, with the participation of civil society and other stakeholders, can use these instruments to identify priority measures to further the implementation of the Agreement and organize them into progressive stages of implementation. Another example is the open government action plans developed by States belonging to the Open Government Partnership. These plans include biennial commitments on transparency, access to public information, participation and accountability.<sup>15</sup>

Measures must also be designed and carried out in a coordinated manner across the different national, regional and local political and administrative levels. The decentralization and localization of policies on access to information, participation and environmental justice with a gender perspective are fundamental to ensuring that State responses are adapted to the specific realities of each place. This requires not only clear national guidelines, but also operational tools to organize the application of measures, including the necessary funding and a monitoring system, as well as local capacity-building, involving subnational governments, grassroots public institutions and community actors, to ensure that measures are implemented in a way that is effective, inclusive and contextualized. Lastly, it is important to identify women and women's organizations and groupings who are already working on the defence of the environment and women's rights in the country, as their experience and leadership are crucial in designing and carrying out effective and relevant measures.

Furthermore, in order to integrate a gender perspective effectively, it is necessary to recognize the diversity of women in each country, including rural women, vulnerable urban women, Indigenous women, women of diverse ethnicities and ages, women with disabilities, migrant or displaced women and non-binary women. Their realities vary considerably, as do the institutional, economic and cultural barriers they face in exercising their rights, and their experiences require differentiated, context-appropriate responses.

Thus, national censuses and other official sources of information disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity and territory are fundamental tools in characterizing this diversity and guiding the formulation of public policies with an intersectional approach.

There follows a set of guidelines and potential measures to ensure that access rights and environmental protection efforts include a gender perspective in the different spheres of action. Table III.2 shows the number of measures for each pillar of the Escazú Agreement and sphere of action. All measures should be implemented with an eye to achieving a care society, as a cross-cutting principle.

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<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.opengovpartnership.org>.

**Table III.2****Suggested measures to ensure a gender perspective in access rights and environmental protection work, by sphere of action and pillar of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement)***(Number of measures)*

Spheres of action	Pillars of the Escazú Agreement			
	Access to environmental information	Public participation in environmental decision-making processes	Access to justice in environmental matters	Human rights defenders in environmental matters
Regulatory instruments and procedures	4	5	4	4
Accessibility and affordability	4	5	6	4
Language, communication and recognition	5	3	4	2
Capacity-building	3	6	3	2
Networks and partnerships	3	2	2	2

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

## A. The care society: a guiding principle

This guiding principle is aimed at ensuring that all access rights and protection standards for environmental defenders are applied, taking into account the structural inequalities that women in all their diversity face, and at advancing towards a new paradigm.

ECLAC has drawn attention to the structural challenges of inequality in the region that were mentioned earlier, despite significant progress in terms of gender equality. These challenges threaten to become more acute in the context of the development crisis. ECLAC and the Regional Gender Agenda propose that this situation be tackled by developing a care society, understood as a new paradigm that prioritizes the sustainability of life and taking care of people and the planet. This constitutes a transformative proposal to change the structures that reproduce gender inequalities in the region (ECLAC, 2025b).

This approach implies:

- (i) Recognizing care as a human right involving the right to give and receive care and to exercise self-care, based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination, solidarity, sustainability, universality, and social and gender co-responsibility.
- (ii) Strengthening the institutions responsible for care policies, endowing them with the technical, operational and political capacities to ensure that policies are implemented effectively, including territorial management tools and social participation mechanisms.

- (iii) Ending the sexual division of labour through universal normative frameworks and good-quality services and benefits, as well as paid and protected parental and care leave covering the entire working population in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy and families in all their diversity.

To move towards a care society, this vision must be built into all policies related to the Escazú Agreement, so that the measures States take will create the necessary conditions for women, in all their diversity, to fully exercise their rights of access to information, public participation and justice in environmental matters, as well as their right to safe and enabling conditions for the defence of the environment.

## B. Access to environmental information

The Escazú Agreement enshrines the right of access to environmental information and establishes specific commitments for the States Parties in two articles. Article 5, “Access to environmental information”, establishes provisions relating to “passive transparency”, i.e. the provision of information to members of the public upon request. Article 6, “Generation and dissemination of environmental information”, establishes provisions relating to “active transparency”, i.e. the proactive production and dissemination of information by the State, through electronic and other means, without waiting for it to be requested.

Exercising this right presents a real challenge for men and women and for the most vulnerable individuals and groups generally. The challenge lies in ensuring access to information on equal terms, taking into account the economic, geographic, technological and other barriers these groups face. Notwithstanding the challenges that are common to both men and women, as noted earlier, women, in all their diversity, face a particular set of difficulties that call for specific measures, such as those mentioned below. Furthermore, environmental information itself, regardless of who requests it, should take gender equality into account, contain data disaggregated by sex or gender and highlight applicable gender-related factors.

### 1. Regulatory instruments and procedures

- (i) Foster efforts to strengthen the regulatory framework and procedures related to access to environmental information, incorporating the principles of equality, non-discrimination and the gender and intersectional approach in a cross-cutting manner.
- (ii) Ensure that the principle of non-discrimination includes non-discrimination on the basis of gender.
- (iii) Ensure that the annual reports prepared by the authorities responsible for implementing regulations on access to information include the affirmative measures adopted to create the conditions for accessibility, so that vulnerable groups, including women in all their diversity, can exercise the right of access to public information on equal terms and without discrimination.
- (iv) Encourage the development of protocols to reduce the barriers that women in their diversity face in the process of accessing public information by means of independent review mechanisms concerning access to public information.

## 2. Accessibility and affordability

- (i) Facilitate access for women, in all their diversity, to environmental information, establishing procedures that cover everything from the formulation of information requests (through different means such as verbally and in Indigenous or local languages, with the help of interpreters when necessary, with personalized assistance and delivery of explanatory materials in clear language) through to the delivery of the information in order to promote access on equal terms.
- (ii) Expand the channels available for accessing information, such as digital platforms, instant messaging, in-person service windows, fixed or mobile information centres, free telephone lines and community media such as local radio stations and social networks, ensuring cultural and territorial relevance.
- (iii) Translate and adapt technical content into understandable, accessible and inclusive formats, for example, through specific age-inclusive measures, such that young people receive information expressed in clear, explanatory language while older persons have access to adapted formats, such as audio descriptions or enlarged text.
- (iv) Provide environmental information<sup>16</sup> at no cost, insofar as its reproduction or delivery is not required. Reproduction and delivery costs shall be applied in accordance with the procedures established by the competent authority. Such costs shall be reasonable and made known in advance, and payment can be waived in the event that the applicant is deemed to be in a vulnerable situation or to have special circumstances warranting such a waiver.

## 3. Language, communication and recognition

- (i) Generate environmental information and data disaggregated by sex or gender, including differentiated environmental impacts on women, where applicable. This disaggregation must be mainstreamed across all active transparency tools in environmental matters, such as environmental information systems, pollutant release and transfer registers, and reports on the state of the environment, among others.
- (ii) Generate statistical data on requests for access to environmental information received by public entities, disaggregated by sex or gender, in order to gain an understanding of men's and women's differentiated needs in accessing information. To this end, gender identification options may be included in request forms and mechanisms may be established to facilitate access to data on recurring topics.
- (iii) Promote the dissemination of environmental information by the competent authorities in the various languages used in the country by women in their diversity and develop alternative formats that are understandable to them and that are transmitted through appropriate communication channels adapted to their cultural, linguistic and territorial characteristics.

<sup>16</sup> Article 2 of the Escazú Agreement defines "environmental information" as "any information that is written, visual, audio, and electronic, or recorded in any other format, regarding the environment and its elements and natural resources, including information related to environmental risks, and any possible adverse impacts affecting or likely to affect the environment and health, as well as to environmental protection and management" (ECLAC, 2022a, pp. 14-15).

- (iv) Consider developing specialized guides to ensure that environmental information is conveyed in a manner that includes a gender equality focus.
- (v) Incorporate inclusive language criteria into communication on environmental matters, ensuring the use of gender-marked language when the situation being communicated so requires and using gender-neutral alternatives when appropriate. This includes the use of gender-inclusive language, typographic strategies to avoid bias, collective nouns and formulations that avoid perpetuating stereotypes in order to ensure that environmental information is accessible, clear and non-discriminatory for everyone.<sup>17</sup>

#### **4. Capacity-building**

- (i) Train and sensitize authorities and officials about access to information as a key tool for gender equality.
- (ii) Put in place ongoing training programmes on gender equality, cultural diversity and environmental rights, taking a rights-based and intersectional approach.
- (iii) Adopt mechanisms to evaluate the impact of training in order to support continuous learning by public employees.

#### **5. Networks and partnerships**

- (i) Support and strengthen the establishment of women-led local media outlets and information networks.
- (ii) Promote the recognition of existing networks and support for them, and foster ways of coordinating with them, with a view to supporting cooperation and mutual learning.
- (iii) Set up partnerships with civil society organizations, the private sector, public entities and local media to ensure the effective delivery of information to rural, isolated or marginalized areas.

## **C. Public participation in environmental decision-making processes**

The Escazú Agreement distinguishes between different environmental decision-making processes for the purposes of public participation. On the one hand, there are projects, activities and other processes concerning the granting of environmental permits that have or may have a significant impact on the environment. These processes usually undergo environmental impact assessments at the national or subnational level. On the other hand, there are decision-making processes concerning matters of public interest, such as strategies, policies, programmes, standards and regulations on environmental issues.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, both men and women, and vulnerable individuals and groups in general, face various barriers when it comes to exercising their right to participate in decision-making

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<sup>17</sup> See annex A1 for guidance on this point.

processes on environmental matters that concern or affect them. Consequently, article 7 of the Escazú Agreement mandates the implementation of measures to ensure open and inclusive participation in these types of decisions.

In particular, measures aimed at promoting open and inclusive participation in these decision-making processes must take into account the diverse sociocultural barriers that interfere with women's access to spaces for participation and decision-making. The aim should be to increase women's participation and broaden the scope of convening actions.

## 1. Regulatory instruments and procedures

- (i) Ensure that regulatory frameworks and procedures for participation in decision-making processes incorporate a gender perspective and recognize women's diversity and specificities.
- (ii) Promote the active inclusion of women in all their diversity, encouraging the establishment of appropriate consultation forums on environmental matters or better use of existing ones. Part of this is considering specific conditions that make it possible for women to genuinely participate, such as selecting suitable times of day, providing childcare services during activities and using facilitators with gender expertise. With regard to Indigenous women and local communities, each State Party must guarantee observance of its national legislation and international obligations concerning the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.
- (iii) Create mechanisms for participation that ensure the active inclusion of women in all their diversity. Create the conditions to adapt these mechanisms to the public in terms of their social, economic, cultural and geographic characteristics, as well as age, disability status and gender, using appropriate means and formats to involve them actively, promptly and effectively and thereby eliminate barriers to participation.
- (iv) Foster comprehensive protection protocols that are co-created and validated by women to ensure that they are safe and protected in participatory spaces. Protocols may vary depending on the characteristics of the women concerned and their diverse backgrounds and must consider the community's real risks and protection practices.
- (v) Incorporate gender equality indicators into the design of public participation processes and ensure that they are implemented.

## 2. Accessibility and affordability

- (i) Adapt infrastructure, technological resources and territorial conditions to ensure that processes of participation in environmental matters are accessible to all, building in a gender focus and recognizing the barriers faced by women in all their diversity, as well as other groups in vulnerable situations.
- (ii) Establish public Internet access points in communities marked by digital divides and offer digital training programmes focused on public participation processes, affording special attention to women.

- (iii) Consider cultural, linguistic and gender identity, as well as age, security risks and work and caregiving responsibilities, when designing activities, selecting venues and setting schedules for any activity that involves women. Childcare services and logistical support may also be offered to facilitate their attendance.
- (iv) Ensure that spaces where participatory processes take place are accessible to women with disabilities, including those with visual and hearing impairments.
- (v) Facilitate the participation of women, particularly those residing in rural or isolated areas, by providing support for travel when consultation events are organized outside their communities.

### **3. Language, communication and recognition**

- (i) Develop gender-sensitive digital literacy strategies to strengthen women's participation in online environmental decision-making spaces.
- (ii) Promote the use of accessible digital tools for public participation in environmental matters, such as mobile applications, social media, low-data-consumption videoconferencing and platforms available in Indigenous languages.
- (iii) Promote the installation of connectivity networks in rural and Indigenous communities and facilitate access to technological devices that enable the effective use of platforms by women and other vulnerable groups.

### **4. Capacity-building**

- (i) Design and implement specific, culturally relevant methodologies and programmes, especially in Indigenous and rural contexts, to strengthen the leadership capacity of women in all their diversity.
- (ii) Create mechanisms for promoting and supporting women's access to leadership positions and their participation in environmental policymaking bodies and in the bodies tasked with implementing those policies.
- (iii) Promote training for women, in all their diversity (including Indigenous women, women of African descent, rural women and women living in poverty in urban areas), through personalized counselling sessions, tutorials and mentorships that will facilitate their effective participation in environmental matters.
- (iv) Design and implement specific programmes aimed at young people and youth organizations to strengthen youth leadership in all its diversity, with an eye to cultural relevance, especially in Indigenous and rural contexts. Such programmes may include traditional and oral forms of communication, such as community theatre, and may be led by young women who are local leaders.
- (v) Build capacities related to the gender, intersectionality and intercultural approach within public entities and, in particular, in persons involved in participation and leadership training. Specific budgets and resources must be allocated for training and participation processes to this end.
- (vi) Sensitize communities to foster recognition and appreciation of women's leadership and participation, as well as to the importance of creating enabling environments for their participation.

## 5. Networks and partnerships

- (i) Establish partnerships with the private sector, educational institutions, civil society organizations, international agencies, universities and other local stakeholders to ensure access to technology and connectivity for online consultations.
- (ii) Provide government platforms where experiences, methodologies, results and lessons learned can be shared to improve gender mainstreaming in participatory processes.

## D. Access to justice in environmental matters

The right of access to justice is essential to guarantee the effectiveness of other access rights (to information and public participation), as well as to challenge and seek recourse against any other decision, action or omission that affects or may adversely affect the environment or violate laws and regulations related to it.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, both men and women and, more generally, all people and groups in vulnerable situations face common barriers when it comes to accessing justice in environmental matters. Article 8, paragraph 4 (a), of the Escazú Agreement establishes that “to facilitate access to justice in environmental matters for the public, each Party shall establish measures to minimize or eliminate barriers to the exercise of this right”. Paragraph 5 further provides that each Party shall address “the needs of persons or groups in vulnerable situations by establishing support mechanisms”, as appropriate.

The measures proposed below therefore aim to promote access to environmental justice with a gender perspective, eliminating barriers and facilitating women’s access to judicial or administrative bodies in environmental matters through effective, timely, public, transparent, impartial procedures that are not prohibitively expensive.

### 1. Regulatory instruments and procedures

- (i) Incorporate the gender equality approach across all regulatory and institutional frameworks related to access to environmental justice in order to ensure equitable access conditions for women and other vulnerable groups.
- (ii) Support the preparation of diagnostic studies regarding barriers to access to justice which include a specific analysis of the structural patterns and obstacles that prevent or hinder effective access by women, in all their diversity, to justice in environmental matters.
- (iii) Adopt institutional protocols to provide differentiated services to women in judicial and administrative proceedings, taking into account their diversity (for example, Indigenous women, Afrodescendent women, rural women, women with disabilities). Protocols should directly address structural gender inequalities and consider the particular situation and the risks faced by women human rights defenders in environmental matters by, for example, providing specific investigation protocols for these cases.
- (iv) Design differentiated protocols covering not only the start of the process, but also the process leading up to the filing of a formal request, complaint or legal action, as well as follow-up throughout all stages of the procedure, in recognition of the asymmetries women face in these spheres. Protocols should also include specific measures to guarantee safe and confidential spaces for women’s participation.

## 2. Accessibility and affordability

- (i) Adopt measures to ensure that women in vulnerable situations, especially in rural and Indigenous areas, can access legal processes in environmental matters without incurring prohibitive costs, and simplify and reduce administrative requirements that hinder access to justice and related procedures with a view to eliminating barriers altogether. This includes, for example, disseminating information on the right of access to justice and the procedures for exercising it; waiving fees or providing funds to cover legal representation, technical expertise and other expenses related to the defence of environmental rights; giving priority to women affected by particularly serious environmental conflicts requiring urgent intervention; using interpretation or translation services in languages other than official languages when necessary; and setting up support mechanisms, including free legal and technical assistance, as appropriate.
- (ii) Strengthen support for women during judicial or administrative proceedings. This may include legal and psychosocial support to build trust and provide a safe space in contexts where the formal justice system is inaccessible.
- (iii) Maintain safe, confidential reporting channels that are adapted to different cultural and territorial contexts and make sure that they are available in multiple languages and in different locations.
- (iv) Link reporting channels to training on rights and procedures and foster the provision of training spaces that are accessible for women in all their diversity.
- (v) Implement flexible mechanisms, including mobile legal services that can reach remote areas, to facilitate access to justice in rural or marginalized contexts.
- (vi) Publish and disseminate information on the right of access to justice and the procedures for exercising it, ensuring accessibility and transparency, including the use of interpretation or translation into languages other than the official languages when necessary.

## 3. Language, communication and recognition

- (i) Ensure that information on judicial and administrative proceedings is published in accessible, clear and culturally appropriate formats using inclusive language free of stereotypes.
- (ii) Publish information on the judicial and administrative proceedings available and on the status of processes and decisions to ensure that women, in all their diversity, can track their cases through various accessible mechanisms and means.
- (iii) Promote the provision of protocols, specialized units and campaigns to integrate a gender perspective into decisions made by administrative and judicial bodies by, for example, establishing safe and confidential reporting and follow-up channels and including a gender analysis in the rationale for judicial decisions.
- (iv) Promote the use of inclusive language in all oral, written and graphic communications relating to judicial and administrative processes, seeking to avoid biases and stereotypes.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See annex A1 for guidance on this topic.

## 4. Capacity-building

- (i) Set up specific training and outreach programmes for public officials, members of the judicial system and the general public, especially women, on the differentiated protocols that have been established. These programmes should foster not only the use of those protocols, but also an understanding of legal language by women users in all their diversity.
- (ii) Maintain ongoing training initiatives for judges, judicial officers and officials on gender equality and how it relates to access to justice and environmental protection. Training should be made available at all territorial levels and focus on decision-making bodies that have the most contact with women, ensuring recognition for community and intercultural contexts and the specific realities of women.
- (iii) Train judges and officials in the justice sector to be able to perform their duties with a gender perspective so that they will be able to: (i) determine whether there are gender-based power imbalances that indicate the presence of uneven advantages between the parties to a dispute; (ii) assess evidence without engaging in gender stereotypes or biases in order to identify situations of disadvantage based on sex or gender; (iii) evaluate, where gender-based disadvantages are found to exist, the differentiated impact of any proposed solution in order to find one that accords with the context of gender inequality; (iv) apply human rights standards to everyone involved, especially children; and (v) avoid language based on stereotypes or biases.

## 5. Networks and partnerships

- (i) Foster the formation of networks and partnerships to promote the right of access to justice in environmental matters with a gender perspective, including the sharing of best practices among women's organizations.
- (ii) Support international partnerships aimed at sharing experiences, methodologies and lessons learned to strengthen mechanisms for access to environmental justice, especially those that include gender perspectives.

# E. Human rights defenders in environmental matters

The Latin American and Caribbean region is one of the most dangerous regions in the world for human rights defenders working on environmental issues.<sup>19</sup> Women defenders are particularly vulnerable, as they are doubly exposed to gender-based violence and threats to their own safety, as well as the safety of their families and communities, in the process of exercising their access rights (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2018).

According to the standards established by the normative framework of the United Nations, in particular the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the observations issued by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, gender-based violence encompasses a wide range of manifestations that go beyond physical violence. Today, some forms of violence are also exercised via social media and other digital platforms.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, the reports of the United Nations system and the Inter-American system on the situation of human rights defenders in environmental matters, including United Nations (2016, 2018, 2019, 2023a) and Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (2015).

The United Nations legal framework recognizes the existence of physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence, which may be perpetrated in both the public and private spheres by State and non-State actors. These forms of violence can take the shape of direct acts, threats, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty and may affect women and girls differently based on multiple factors of discrimination, such as their age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, immigration status, disability status or territorial affiliation.

In the context of the defence of human rights in environmental matters, these forms of violence can be worsened when women defenders are subjected to stigmatization, criminalization, forced displacement or sexual violence as a means of intimidation, making the need for comprehensive and intersectional protection all the more important. This situation is further compounded by the underreporting of these situations in formal records, especially in remote and rural areas.

This reality underscores the importance of measures specifically designed for women. Among other aspects, these should address mental and emotional health as a fundamental pillar of the protection of women human rights defenders. The collective caregiving role that many women assume in their communities also warrants recognition, as does the fact that the effects of violence against them also affect their communities.

Furthermore, as the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders has pointed out, difficulties in accessing justice and impunity for human rights violations increase the risks faced by women human rights defenders (United Nations, 2019). The aim is thus to identify measures that can create safe and enabling environments for women's work in environmental protection and to adopt appropriate, effective and timely measures to prevent, investigate and punish attacks, threats or intimidation faced by women human rights defenders in environmental matters, in all their diversity.

## 1. Regulatory instruments and procedures

- (i) Make progress in establishing and strengthening mechanisms, programmes, protocols and inter-institutional coordination aimed at fully protecting human rights defenders working on environmental issues, taking into account the different types of violence, risks and distinct threats faced by women. Support the adoption of physical, psychological and digital protection measures that guarantee the protection of their data and prevent online surveillance and harassment. Special attention should be afforded to women defenders in rural contexts, those belonging to Indigenous or Afrodescendent communities and those in areas subject to high levels of socio-environmental conflict. These protection mechanisms should also have autonomy and functional independence to ensure that they can operate without interference, as well as a sustainable budget of their own in order to ensure their long-term operational capacity. Finally, they must have clearly defined functions, which should include preventive, immediate response, comprehensive support and case monitoring functions.
- (ii) Consider direct participation by women human rights defenders, civil society organizations, and other non-State actors in the design, governance and evaluation of protection mechanisms.
- (iii) Set up effective legal support and assistance mechanisms to report, investigate and prosecute acts of intimidation, criminalization and violence against women human rights defenders in environmental matters.
- (iv) Establish accountability, evaluation and monitoring mechanisms with the participation of human rights defenders, civil society organizations and other actors to monitor and strengthen the State response to situations of risk. These mechanisms could include an early warning system in the event of threats or persistent patterns of violence.

## 2. Accessibility and affordability

- (i) Establish support and protection measures adapted to the different contexts of women human rights defenders, including measures for the protection of their families and for providing access to safe shelters.
- (ii) Consider community-based psychosocial support measures, such as support networks and specialized mental health services, to address the trauma suffered by some in connection with their work as women human rights defenders and other impacts.
- (iii) Implement measures to ensure the privacy of human rights defenders, such as for example, prior and informed consent procedures to clearly establish the use of any information that is collected.
- (iv) Promote the allocation of resources and funds to initiatives led by women human rights defenders in environmental matters to foster their autonomy and empowerment.

## 3. Language, communication and recognition

- (i) Adopt measures to recognize and raise awareness of the role of women human rights defenders through awareness campaigns co-designed with them.
- (ii) Create specific awards or forms of recognition for women human rights defenders working on environmental issues, and document and disseminate their stories to highlight their role in protecting territories and natural resources. Potential negative impacts should be assessed to make sure that increased public visibility will not increase safety risks for women defenders or their territories.

## 4. Capacity-building

- (i) Implement clear protocols for action, accessible reporting mechanisms and collective care strategies, and recognize the status of women human rights defenders as such.
- (ii) Set up training programmes for public officials, public defenders, prosecutors, justice operators and security forces on the protection and support of women human rights defenders in environmental matters, integrating a gender focus and including resources and specialized personnel for implementing and evaluating them.

## 5. Networks and partnerships

- (i) Foster and strengthen national and regional networks of women environmental defenders, as well as collaboration, partnerships and exchanges among international organizations and responsible State mechanisms at all levels, to improve their capacity to respond to threats and attacks, support the reporting and visibility of cases of violence and establish comprehensive support programmes.
- (ii) Create and strengthen work with national and local networks of prosecutors, public defenders and other justice system operators, and promote the exchange of best practices among justice system operators from different countries and among women human rights defenders.

## F. Cooperation and capacity-building

Article 11 of the Escazú Agreement establishes that States Parties shall cooperate to strengthen their national capacities with the aim of implementing the Agreement in an effective manner, giving particular attention to least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States from Latin America and the Caribbean. This entails promoting activities, mechanisms and partnerships among the States Parties and other actors to achieve the effective implementation of the Agreement. Similarly, decision III/4, adopted at the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Escazú Agreement, welcomes all measures that strengthen capacities and cooperation among the States Parties with the aim of incorporating a gender perspective in matters related to the Agreement.

In this context, a noteworthy example of cooperation in the region concerns machineries for the advancement of women (UN-Women, 2024). These machineries, which are made up of the various bodies established by the State and are distributed at the national, regional and local levels, are responsible for directing and coordinating gender equality policies.<sup>20</sup> However, only 44% of the countries in the region have a Ministry of Women's Affairs, while the rest have other, lower-level institutional structures responsible for this area. Accordingly, the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, through the Regional Gender Agenda, has engaged in various efforts and regional cooperation initiatives to strengthen the institutional framework and raise the status of machineries for the advancement of women within the government hierarchies in the region.

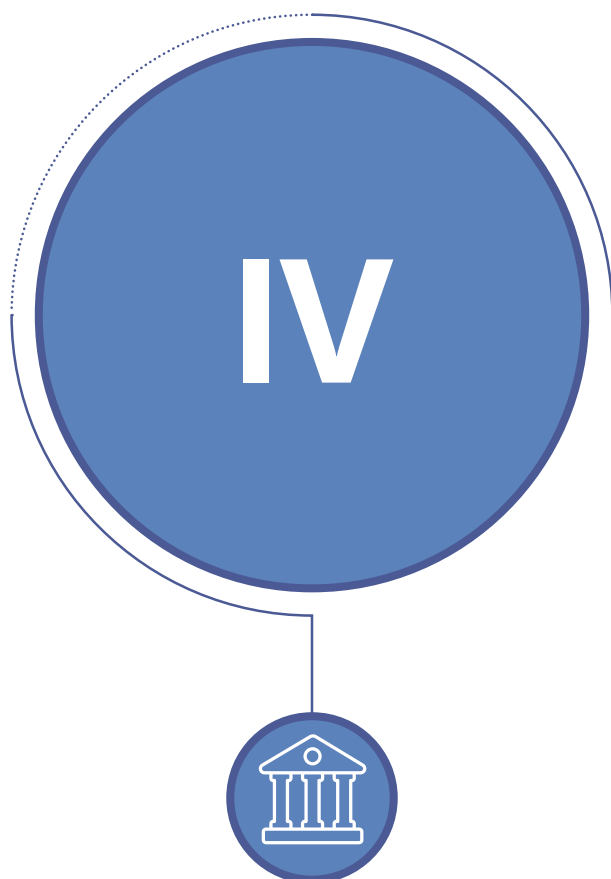
In this regard, States Parties may explore forms of mutual collaboration, as well as synergies and partnerships with gender machineries and initiatives at the regional level and with international initiatives, to adopt a gender perspective in their implementation of the Escazú Agreement. Examples of cooperation measures and activities include the following:

- (i) Design and implement activities to strengthen States Parties' capacities in relation to the gender perspective for the implementation of the Escazú Agreement, in collaboration with machineries for the advancement of women, national institutions and relevant regional organizations.
- (ii) Establish coordination and support mechanisms with ministries or secretariats for women's affairs and gender equality to develop public management tools on environmental issues with a gender focus, such as national climate change plans.
- (iii) Pursue activities to build the capacity of States Parties and other relevant stakeholders to mainstream the gender perspective in the production and use of statistical data that form the basis for the formulation of national policies, plans, strategies and actions within the framework of the Escazú Agreement.
- (iv) In coordination with machineries for the advancement of women, work with the organizations that produce and use environmental information to promote gender mainstreaming in national environmental information systems.
- (v) Promote dialogue between the parties to the Agreement and the focal points for other international or regional conventions in order to identify possible synergies and areas of collaboration on gender mainstreaming in the implementation of access rights.

<sup>20</sup> For example, in 2021, the ECLAC Division for Gender Affairs published the document "Gender equality in the midst of climate change: What can the region's machineries for the advancement of women do?", which identifies leadership and concrete actions that machineries for the advancement of women can exercise and implement (Aguilar Revelo, 2021b).

- (vi) Design State training programmes that engage the private sector in integrating the gender perspective in environmental management, giving priority to productive sectors with the greatest impact.
- (vii) Establish public-private partnerships to finance and sustain capacity-building programmes.
- (viii) Recognize the importance of partnerships, organizations or groupings that contribute to training or awareness-raising efforts focusing on people and groups in vulnerable situations that emphasize women's access rights.





**The gender perspective  
in the institutional  
architecture of the  
Escazú Agreement**

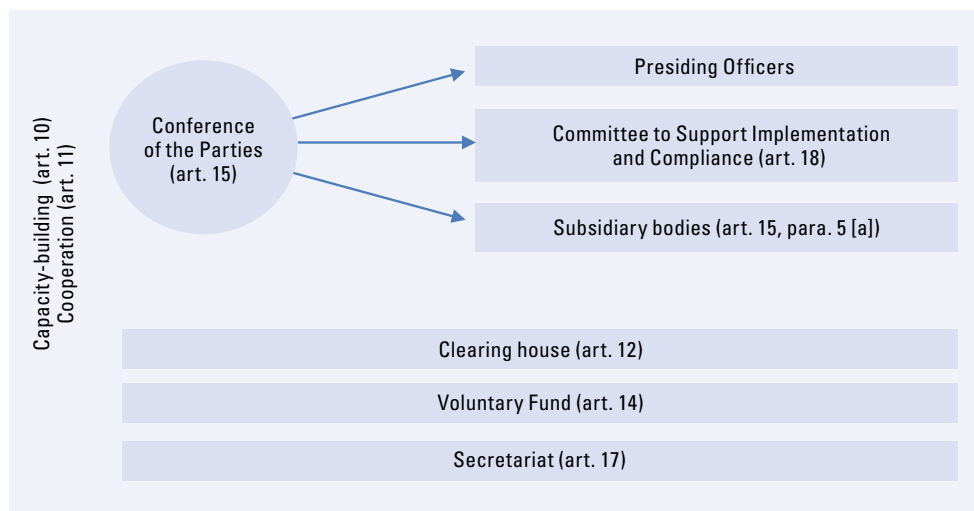


Articles 13 through 18 of the Escazú Agreement establish its institutional architecture, which encompasses numerous elements that have an essential bearing on the treaty’s existence, management, governance and full implementation.

Diagram IV.1 outlines the main structures and mechanisms that make up the institutional framework for the operation of the Escazú Agreement in the region.

Diagram IV.1

**Institutional architecture and mechanisms of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement)**



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

The measures discussed below have been adopted within that framework to further the process of gender mainstreaming in the application of the Escazú Agreement and the operation of its bodies and mechanisms.

## A. Conference of the Parties and Presiding Officers

Article 15 of the Escazú Agreement establishes the Conference of the Parties as its principal decision-making body at the highest level. The Conference is composed of all States Parties and meets at regular intervals. Its mandate is to examine and promote the implementation and effectiveness of the Agreement.

Rule VI of the Conference’s rules of procedure states that “each Party participating in a meeting shall be represented by a delegation consisting of a head of delegation and such other accredited representatives, alternate representatives and advisers as it may require” (ECLAC, 2022c, p. 7).

In accordance with the rules of procedure, at the Conference’s first ordinary meeting, the Parties elected a Chair and four Vice-Chairs from among the Parties present to serve as the Presiding Officers. The positions of Chair and Vice-Chair are subject to rotation. Rule VII establishes that, when electing the Presiding Officers, the Parties are to bear in mind the “need to ensure adequate geographical representation of the Parties and gender balance among representatives” (ECLAC, 2022c, p. 8).<sup>21</sup>

The following measures could be taken in order to ensure a gender balance among the representatives at the meetings of the Conference of the Parties and among the Presiding Officers:

- (i) Establish a practice of alternation or rotation between male and female representatives attending the meetings of the Conference of the Parties and between male and female representatives serving as the Presiding Officers of the Conference.
- (ii) Seek to ensure that the delegations representing States Parties at the meetings of the Conference of the Parties are composed of both women and men in an equitable manner and promote the participation of women as heads of delegation.
- (iii) Promote a parity-based approach in the designation of national focal points for the Agreement in cases where a State Party designates more than one person.
- (iv) Promote balanced participation and representation of women in activities held during meetings of the Conference of the Parties and apply moderation strategies during discussions that will ensure a more equitable distribution of speaking time between women and men.
- (v) Include data and observations on women’s participation in meetings of the Conference of the Parties in the official reports on those meetings.
- (vi) Incorporate gender mainstreaming into the thematic and substantive discussions of the Conference of the Parties.

## **B. Committee to Support Implementation and Compliance**

Rule VIII of the rules of procedures of the Conference of the Parties, on the establishment of subsidiary bodies, states that, with regard to the structure and composition of such bodies, States Parties are to “give special consideration to the need to ensure adequate geographical representation and gender balance in participation”.

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<sup>21</sup> By decision I/2 concerning the election of the first Presiding Officers, adopted at the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Escazú Agreement in April 2022, Uruguay was chosen as the Chair and Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Mexico and Saint Lucia as Vice-Chairs. In addition, the Conference requested the designation of one of the elected representatives of the public to be a member of the Presiding Officers with a voice but not a vote. Subsequently, by decision III/6, adopted at the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Escazú Agreement, the Parties re-elected the sitting Presiding Officers. Those officers are to remain in office until the closure of the following ordinary meeting of the Conference of the Parties, to be held in April 2026. The Conference once again requested the designation of one of the elected representatives of the public to be a member of the Presiding Officers with a voice but not a vote.

This rule has been applied in the Committee to Support Implementation and Compliance. The Committee's rules relating to its structure and functions state that consideration is to be given to ensuring an "equitable geographical distribution of membership, gender parity and legal knowledge and experience" (ECLAC, 2022e, p. 4). At the time of writing, a majority of the representatives serving on the Committee were women.

The gender perspective has also been incorporated into the approach that the Committee takes to its work. For example, with respect to its rapid response mechanism for dealing with communications submitted by members of the public, the Committee's working modalities state: "In assessing the measures to be taken, the Committee shall take into account the particular conditions of the affected persons and their family, ensuring that the measures cause no harm, and adopt an intersectional, intercultural and gender-based approach" (CEPAL, 2024c, p. 16).

## C. Clearing house

Article 12 of the Escazú Agreement establishes that a clearing house on access rights is to be operated by the Secretariat. That article also states that the clearing house is to be a "virtual and universally accessible" mechanism, indicating that it is to be open to the general public and available online. While the article does not describe the content of that mechanism in full, it does state that the clearing house may compile "legislative, administrative and policy measures, codes of conduct and good practices". Other unspecified types of material may also be included.

Pursuant to article 12 of the Agreement, ECLAC has established the Observatory on Principle 10 in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>22</sup> The Observatory serves as a clearing house for treaties, policies and jurisprudence dealing with access rights in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. It also compiles information on related issues, such as climate change, biodiversity and environmental defenders (ECLAC, 2026). The Observatory website provides publicly available information and information volunteered by the countries of the region.

The website has a special section on gender, and the term "gender" is the heading for one of the categories in its list of topics.

In decision III/4 of the Conference, the Parties requested the Secretariat to continue recording progress in gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the Agreement in the Observatory on Principle 10 in Latin America and the Caribbean. To assist it in doing so, States Parties may provide data and collaborate actively to ensure that the information in the Observatory more fully reflects progress in the development of laws, regulations and public policies aimed at mainstreaming a gender perspective in the exercise of access rights and in environmental protection.

## D. Public participation and the regional public mechanism

Rule XIV of the rules of procedure of the Conference of the Parties establishes that the public is to "participate meaningfully in the Conference" and its subsidiary bodies. The Escazú Agreement employs a broad, inclusive definition of the term "public" (art. 2 [d]) when it states that the term means "one or more natural or legal persons and the associations, organizations or groups established by those persons, that are nationals or that are subject to the national jurisdiction of the State Party" (ECLAC, 2022a, p. 15).

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<sup>22</sup> See [online] <https://observatoriop10.cepal.org/en>.

This allows for participation, as part of the general public, of women, women’s organizations, territorial collectives, local communities, Indigenous Peoples, young people and academic institutions, among other possible participants. Meaningful public participation in the institutional structure of the Agreement entails ensuring that women and women’s organizations or groups are recognized as key participants in its implementation, as well as promoting mechanisms for substantive participation in which their contributions and forms of organization are valued.

Paragraph 3 of rule XIV states that the Secretariat is to “maintain a regional public mechanism whereby interested persons can register by filling in a short form available on the Secretariat’s website”. This mechanism regularly disseminates official information on the work of the Presiding Officers, the Conference of the Parties, the Committee to Support Implementation and Compliance and the Secretariat of the Escazú Agreement. It also serves as a platform for public consultations and the election of representatives of the public.

This mechanism can also promote greater participation by women. Their access to it can be facilitated by means of a broad dissemination of information about the regional public mechanism at the regional, national and local levels so that more women can register with it.

## **E. Elected public representatives**

In accordance with the rules of procedure of the Conference of the Parties (rule XIV, para. 3), representatives of the public are elected through the regional public mechanism with a view to encouraging and facilitating public participation and channelling the contributions of members of the public, including the submission of proposals on behalf of the public.

The rules (ECLAC, 2022d) governing the second election of public representatives, in 2022, included a formula for ensuring balanced representation. Article 11 of those rules states that, in each subregion, “no more than one person elected as representative may be from the same country (national or resident) or of the same sex”. At the time of writing, in accordance with this rule, three of the six elected representatives of the public were women.

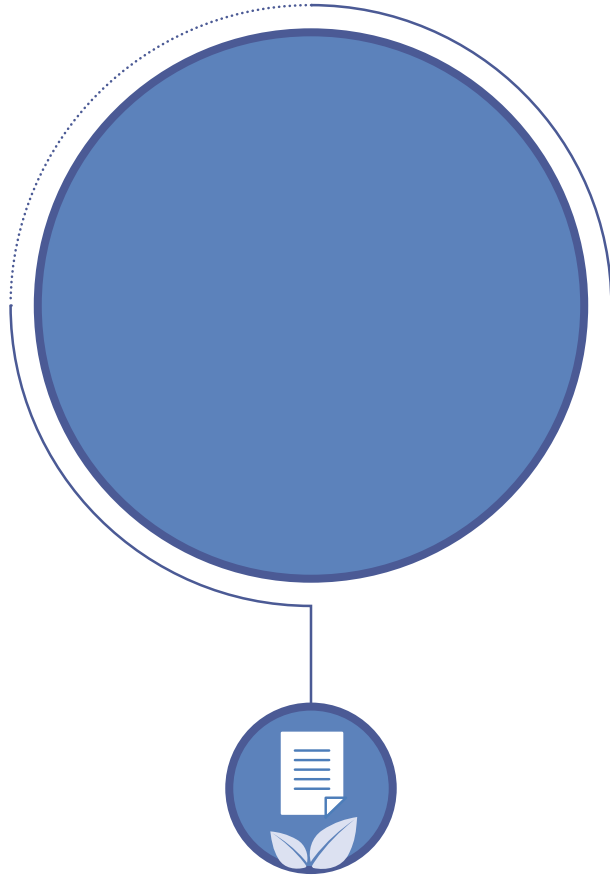
## **F. Road maps and national implementation plans**

Road maps have been prepared in order to assist States Parties and guide the implementation of the Escazú Agreement at the national level. These road maps have been developed using a dynamic, structured eight-step strategy that enables States Parties, in collaboration with social and private actors, to lay the foundations for the implementation of the Escazú Agreement in their respective countries.

By decision III/1 of the Conference of the Parties, all States Parties are invited “to develop, with the support of the Secretariat, plans and road maps for the national implementation of the Escazú Agreement no later than 2026 or two years after the entry into force of the Agreement in the State Party” (ECLAC, 2024a, p. 4).

In paragraph 2 of decision III/4, States Parties are urged to continue to promote “the full and effective participation of women in all their diversity, including indigenous women, and the incorporation of a gender-equality perspective into the implementation of the Agreement, particularly in their national implementation plans and road maps” (ECLAC, 2024a, p. 17).

To this end, some countries have devised governance systems for the implementation of the Escazú Agreement that consist of committees or commissions made up of public entities and members of civil society, academia and the private sector. The activities of these bodies could include, for example, the development of gender balance rules or other equity mechanisms to promote meaningful participation by women.



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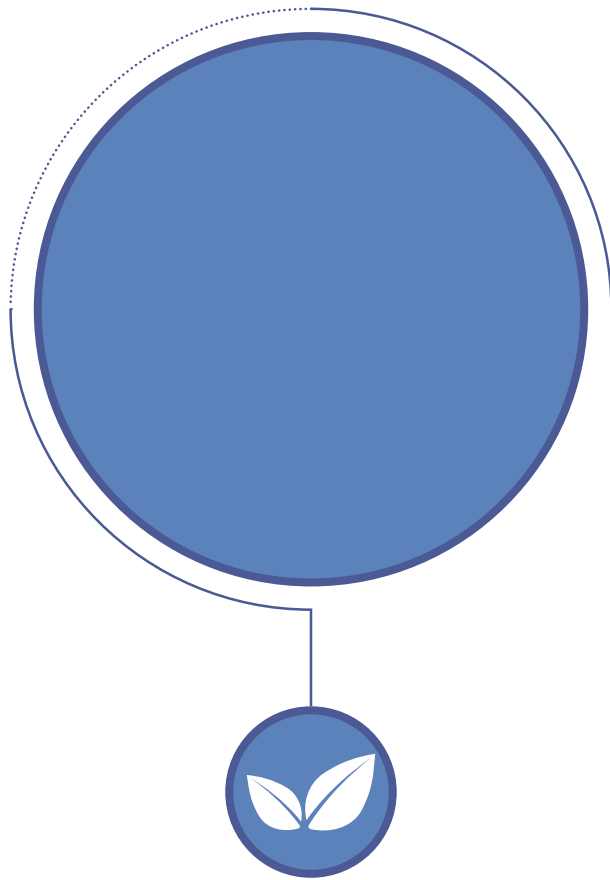


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# Annex A1



Table A1.1 lists a series of useful strategies. A judicious choice of which of these strategies to use will invariably depend on the communication situation in each case.



**Table A1.1**  
**Use of inclusive language**

Specifying gender when the communication situation requires it		
How to do so	Examples	
Use both feminine and masculine pronouns to specify that the gender-neutral term includes both genders.	Each teacher then clarified his or her opinion on the issue.	
Employ typographical marks such as the slash [/] or brackets [()]. <b>This is used mainly in forms.</b>	His/her address should be indicated below.	
Use “men and women” when the context requires specifying both groups.	Both men and women survey respondents gave a negative rating to question No. 5.	
Not specifying gender when it is not relevant		
How to do so	Less inclusive	More inclusive
Use gender-neutral words.	Mankind.	Humankind, humanity, the human race.
	Manpower shortages.	Staffing shortages.
	Man-made	Artificial, anthropogenic
Use plural pronouns or adjectives. In informal writing, such as emails, plural pronouns may be used to ensure gender inclusiveness. <b>This usage is not recommended in formal writing.</b>	Before submitting the document, send it to the focal point for his review.	Before submitting the document, send it to the focal point for their review.
Use a plural antecedent in contexts where it will not alter the intended meaning.	A substitute judge must certify that <b>he</b> has familiarized <b>himself</b> with the record of the proceedings.	Substitute judges must certify that <b>they</b> have familiarized <b>themselves</b> with the record of the proceedings.
Use the pronoun “one”.	A staff member in Antarctica earns less than <b>he</b> would in New York.	A staff member in Antarctica earns less than <b>one</b> in New York.
Use the relative pronoun “who”.	If a complainant is not satisfied with the board’s decision, <b>he</b> can ask for a rehearing.	A complainant <b>who</b> is not satisfied with the board’s decision can ask for a rehearing.

Not specifying gender when it is not relevant		
How to do so	Less inclusive	More inclusive
Omit the gendered word.	A person must reside continuously in the Territory for 20 years before <b>he</b> may apply for permanent residence.	A person must reside continuously in the Territory for 20 years before applying for permanent residence.
Use the passive voice.	The author of a communication must have direct and reliable evidence of the situation <b>he</b> is describing.	The author of a communication must have direct and reliable evidence of the situation being described.

**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, on the basis of United Nations. (n.d.). *Guidelines for gender-inclusive language in English*. <https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml>.



The *Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean: guide on gender mainstreaming* provides background information and discusses various courses of action and types of measures for integrating the gender perspective into the implementation of the Agreement at the local, national and regional levels. Its objective is to help enable women, in all their diversity, to fully exercise their rights to information, public participation and justice in environmental matters and their rights in working to protect the environment in the region.

This guide has been prepared by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) at the request of the Conference of the Parties to the Escazú Agreement and with the assistance of experts in international and environmental law and in gender equality. A participatory methodology was used for its preparation that involved three different consultative stages during which input was received from States Parties, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, women's organizations, academic institutions and the general public.

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