

Action for equality, development and peace in Latin America and the Caribbean

**Draft regional report on the review of the Beijing Declaration
and Platform for Action, 30 years on, in synergy
with the implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda**



UNITED NATIONS



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Introduction

Women's rights are human rights

Beijing Declaration, para. 14 (1995)

Thirty years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, they remain a key milestone and a reference in the international and regional human rights agenda, guiding the development of regulatory frameworks and public policies that seek to advance gender equality. The regional commissions of the United Nations prepare reports on the implementation of these instruments in their respective regions. The present document, prepared by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), is based on 22 reports¹ prepared by countries and territories in Latin America and the Caribbean, which in turn are based on comprehensive national reviews for the thirtieth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing+30).

The reports focus on each country's achievements and challenges in the past five years, since the last such exercise was conducted to review progress 25 years after the Beijing conference (Beijing+25), in 2019. In addition to informing this regional document, the national reports will be included in a global report prepared by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) to be presented at the sixty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2025.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action includes a comprehensive approach and a call for governments and organizations to take concrete measures to eliminate the structural barriers faced by women, thus promoting equality and sustainable development for all. The Beijing Platform for Action outlines 12 critical areas of concern which remain relevant 30 years after they were defined: (i) women and poverty; (ii) education and training of women; (iii) women and health; (iv) violence against women; (v) women and armed conflict; (vi) women and the economy; (vii) women in power and decision-making; (viii) institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; (ix) human rights of women; (x) women and the media; (xi) women and the environment; and (xii) the girl child.

These 12 critical areas of concern have been grouped into six thematic areas which UN-Women has suggested should be considered in the preparation of national reports and which have been included in the guidance note sent to Member States of the United Nations for their reports in 2024. These six thematic areas are: (i) inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work; (ii) poverty eradication, social protection and social services; (iii) freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes; (iv) participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions (v) peaceful and inclusive societies and (vi) environmental conservation, protection and restoration.

¹ This document is based on the national reports received from the following countries and territories: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Saint Lucia, Turks and Caicos Islands and Uruguay. The national reports submitted after the deadline will be incorporated during the report review phase. All national reports are available at [online] <https://www.cepal.org/es/temas/asuntos-genero/beijing30-america-latina-caribe-declaracion-plataforma-accion-beijing-paises-america-latina-caribe>.

Latin America and the Caribbean is the only region in the world with an ambitious, broad and comprehensive Regional Gender Agenda, which incorporates the agreements of ECLAC member States reached in the framework of the meetings held by the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean since 1977. At the fifteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Buenos Aires in 2022, the States adopted the Buenos Aires Commitment, which calls for a transition towards a new development model and a care society that prioritizes the sustainability of life and the planet, recognizes the right to care as a fundamental human right for the well-being of the entire population, as well as the right to receive and provide care, and to exercise self-care.

One of the key agreements reached by the countries of the region is the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030, adopted at the thirteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Montevideo in 2016. This agreement outlines the structural challenges of gender inequality, which account for the unequal power relations in the region from a gender perspective. In addition to providing a conceptual framework for understanding the structural causes of gender inequality, the Montevideo Strategy outlines 10 pillars of implementation which require a redoubling of efforts to ensure progress towards women's autonomy in the region.

This document is therefore based on the synergy between the Regional Gender Agenda and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, emphasizing the thematic areas and critical areas of concern owing to the structural challenges of gender inequality in the region and re-examining the implementation pillars of the Montevideo Strategy.

It is organized into three chapters. Chapter I analyses the global and regional context and highlights the most significant changes in Latin America and the Caribbean in recent years, focusing on the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on women's autonomy. This health crisis is described in all national reports as a challenge that profoundly affected women and forced States to deploy different strategies and responses to address it. Chapter II examines the available statistics and details the progress and challenges identified in the national reports relating to each of the six thematic areas mentioned above. Lastly, chapter III summarizes progress, challenges and recommendations across the thematic areas and that require concerted efforts to advance towards equality and women's physical, economic and decision-making autonomy, and to ensure the rights of all women, development and peace.

CHAPTER I

The global and regional context: cascading crises within the framework of the structural challenges of gender inequality

“A transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is a condition for people-centred sustainable development”²

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, recognized the synergies between economic development, social development and the environmental dimension as fundamental for the achievement of sustainable development and acknowledged women as key actors in each of these dimensions through 12 critical areas of concern. This approach was taken up in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs establish gender equality as cross-cutting for the achievement of all 17 Goals and for sustainable development; in particular, Goal 5 specifically is to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (United Nations, 2015; UN-Women, 2018).

In these 30 years, the governments of Latin America and the Caribbean have taken significant steps towards the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the commitments of the Regional Gender Agenda, in synergy with the 2030 Agenda. In particular, the region has consolidated formal equality with the establishment and amendment of legislation for equality.

However, multiple cascading crises and highly complex multidimensional challenges at the global and regional levels have put progress towards gender equality at risk. Increasing uncertainty and geopolitical instability, with armed conflicts dragging on, are compounding a worsening economic and social situation following international crises in the health and care sectors aggravated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, crises in energy, food and finance within the framework of a growing environmental crisis, the impact of climate change, pollution and the intensification of disasters. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) estimates that only 25% of the targets for which data are available appear to be on track to be met by 2030. A further estimated 48% are moving in the right direction, albeit too slowly, and the remaining 27% are moving backwards (ECLAC, 2023b, p. 9). The region is thus seeing a hiatus or even a setback in progress towards several SDG targets, directly affecting the entire population and women in greatest measure (ECLAC/UN-Women, 2024). According to the latest estimates and the trend in evidence up to 2022, an estimated 20 million women and girls in Latin America and the Caribbean will be living in extreme poverty by 2030. Furthermore, in 2022, the feminization of poverty index showed that poor households numbered 118 women for every 100 men (ECLAC/UN-Women, 2024).

According to ECLAC, the region is traversing a development crisis characterized by three main traps: low growth, high levels of social inequality and low social mobility, and poor institutional and governance capacity to face the current development challenges. In the economic dimension, Latin America and the Caribbean has shown weak economic growth, with an average rate of 0.9% between 2015 and 2024,

² See United Nations (1995, par. 1).

even lower than the 2.0% rate recorded in the “lost decade” of the 1980s (ECLAC, 2024a). ECLAC projections for 2024 show the region still on a low growth trajectory, across all its subregions, with a possible rebound in 2025. The region’s per capita gross domestic product (GDP) has been falling since 2016 and in the first quarter of 2024 was at the same level as 10 years earlier (ECLAC, 2024a). This limited growth is partly explained by low levels of complexity and technological coupling in the region’s productive structures, which lead to low levels of productivity.

Weak institutional and governance capacity also affects gender institutions. Although major progress has been made in this area, setbacks have occurred in recent years that hinder the exercise of women’s rights and affect the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Mechanisms for the advancement of women find gender mainstreaming in public policies being compromised by a lack of financial, human and technical resources (UN-Women, 2024).

The greatest crisis recorded in the region and the world in the last five years looked at in this report was COVID-19, which hit unexpectedly across the world with profound effects on all countries. Although multiple measures were deployed to respond to the crisis, the indirect effects in various areas, such as health and other dimensions of life and development, have yet to be fully understood. In this regard, national reports point out that the COVID-19 pandemic caused havoc in the economies and societies of the countries and had a particularly nefarious impact on women and girls. For example, reports from Caribbean countries cite the devastating consequences that lockdowns and mobility restrictions had on highly feminized sectors of the labour market, such as tourism and services. National reports also mention the repercussions of the pandemic on gender-based violence and the excess burden of unpaid domestic and care work that women were forced to assume as a result of health measures and, consequently, their departure in large numbers from the labour market. It is important to recognize that women were on the frontline of crisis response, as they make up 72.6% of employees in the health sector (ECLAC, 2022b). On the other hand, jobs in sectors such as paid domestic work almost halved, as occurred Costa Rica, Chile, the Dominican Republic and Brazil, where between 25% and 44% of women’s employment was lost (UN-Women/ILO/ECLAC, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic slowed some of the progress that Latin America and the Caribbean had achieved in recent decades. In education, for example, the trend has been positive in recent years, with significant advances in women’s access, progression and completion rates at all levels of the education system. In particular, most countries have achieved near-universal levels in primary education (ECLAC, 2022b) and, although universal access to secondary education is still a major challenge for most of them, on average women completing this level exceed men by 6.1 percentage points (ECLAC, 2022b). However, Latin America and the Caribbean was the world region to experience the longest suspension of in-person classes during the pandemic, with impacts in the short, medium and long terms that will affect a generation of students in terms of socio-emotional well-being and learning opportunities, as well as education trajectories and completion levels (ECLAC, 2022b).

Similarly, the pandemic turned a spotlight on the region’s weak labour markets and on the persistent structural challenges of gender inequality, which are evident in the analysis of women’s participation in the labour market.³ Latin America and the Caribbean has been historically characterized by a highly

³ The structural challenges of inequality set forth in the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030 reflect the unequal power relations in the region from a gender perspective: (i) socioeconomic inequality and the persistence of poverty; (ii) discriminatory, violent and patriarchal cultural patterns and the predominance of a culture of privilege; (iii) the sexual division of labour and the unfair social organization of care; and (iv) the concentration of power and hierarchical relations in the public sphere.

uneven productive structure, with a large proportion of people employed in low-productivity sectors and a high rate of labour informality (ECLAC, 2023a). Data on women's participation in the labour market show an uptrend, albeit a very slow one, between 2001 and 2019. However, this trend was interrupted in 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic, when massive job losses caused an 18-year setback in female labour market participation (ECLAC, 2022b). Although the average rate rose again to 51.9% in 2022, the gender gap in participation rates remains wide. That same year, 1 in 2 women were outside the labour force, compared to 1 in 4 men. These figures have not changed significantly in the last 20 years (ECLAC, 2022a). At the same time, over half of women who are in the labour market (51.9%) lack access to social security coverage, which speaks to serious problems regarding present access to social protection as well as future income. This is largely because responsibility for care work is primarily allocated to women, whether in households, on an unpaid basis, or in informal working conditions.

Latin America and the Caribbean is experiencing a persistent care crisis that far exceeds the number of people and services and infrastructure available to provide care, with growing demand exacerbated by population ageing, epidemiological trends and climate change, as well as the high levels of structural inequality that disproportionately affect women, particularly those who face multiple and interrelated forms of exclusion and discrimination, such as poor, rural, indigenous and Afrodescendent women, women with disabilities or those in situations of human mobility, and those living in territories in conflict (ECLAC, 2019, 2021a, 2021b and 2022a; Benería, 2008; Fraser, 2016).

Most national reports express concern over the unequal burden of unpaid care work that falls upon women, which constitutes a structural challenge of gender inequality in the region. This has been addressed with innovative proposals, both statistical and normative, and in public policies, and has been examined intensively in regional and global discussions in which the region's countries have been especially active.

In this regard, within the framework of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, the governments of the region have acknowledged care to be a growing need, as well as a job, a right and a sector with the potential to galvanize economies, highlighting its key social function for the production and reproduction of life and societal well-being.

Simultaneously, since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, two trends that were already emerging as important have accelerated and present opportunities and new risks for gender equality and women's autonomy: growing digitalization and the environmental crisis. Digitalization and the impact of technological advances in multiple areas of the region's societies and economies have accelerated in the past decade and particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. The lockdown and social distancing measures implemented in many countries during the crisis gave fresh impetus to the digital transformation process and the digital economy of the region (ECLAC, 2022b). In recent years, Latin America and the Caribbean has seen similar development of digital industries to the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), although the region still shows a significant lag with respect to these countries (ECLAC, 2021c).

This rapid expansion of the digital economy has a major impact on employment, as well as the skills needed to participate in economic and social activities. Demand for skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and professional training in these fields, especially in information and communications technologies (ICT), is increasing across the board. This opens up new opportunities to access well-paid, skilled, less repetitive and more flexible jobs that are often suited to teleworking. Many of the jobs, careers and professions of the future will increasingly require digital and STEM-related skills (ECLAC, 2022a).

However, these dynamics have important gendered consequences beyond areas related to economic autonomy. While it is important to recognize that women are underrepresented in STEM areas in the region and have fewer digital skills than men; it is also necessary to address the numerous challenges that tools such as ICT and artificial intelligence (AI) are generating for women, in particular gender-based violence facilitated by these technologies. This phenomenon forms part of the multiple and recurrent manifestations of gender-based violence affecting women and girls, which are not caused by technology use, but have been facilitated and accentuated by it. This cyberviolence covers a wide spectrum of behaviours, from online harassment or cyberbullying to sexual assault, unauthorized disclosure of explicit images and illegal access to personal information, among others. Also of particular concern is the occurrence of this type of violence in the political sphere —which affects female politicians much more than male politicians— in the form of political harassment and risks to human rights defenders, journalists and activists, among others. These forms of violence hinder democracy and the full inclusion of women in digital ecosystems and undermine their autonomy and human rights (ECLAC, 2023c).

In this regard, in the conclusions agreed upon at the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Member States of the United Nations recognized and expressed great concern over challenges in matters of safety, privacy and violence against women and girls facilitated by digital technologies and recommended adopting multisectoral and coordinated approaches to investigate, punish and end impunity (United Nations, 2023).

Over the past 30 years, and especially in the last 5, it has become increasingly evident that the environmental crisis requires urgent changes in the production and consumption model. In the words of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, we are pushing the planetary boundaries to the brink, shattering global temperature records and reaping the resulting whirlwind (United Nations, 2024a). Already in 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action expressed concern over “resource depletion, the degradation of natural systems and the dangers of polluting substances” and noted that “the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries, which is a matter of grave concern, aggravating poverty and imbalances” (United Nations, 1995). Since then, crises relating to biodiversity, pollution, climate change and disasters have worsened and, although progress has been made at the global and regional levels in recognizing and proposing multilateral agreements and actions to address these crises, progress is too slow considering the magnitude of the problem. From a gender perspective, progress is being made in analysing and documenting the differential effects of environmental crises on women and the fact that it is women —particularly poor and rural women, including Indigenous and Afrodescendent women, who depend directly on natural resources for subsistence— who suffer the most from the impact of climate change and environmental degradation (United Nations, 2024b).

In this regard, the situation of the Caribbean countries is of particular concern, as they are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change and face increasingly frequent and intense extreme weather phenomena, such as tropical cyclones, floods and droughts, fresh water losses, desertification, coastal erosion, soil degradation and sea level rise. All these constitute serious threats to the well-being of the population, natural ecosystems and sustainable development more broadly. This state of affairs coexists with high debt levels, which limit response capacity, resilience and progress towards sustainable development. Accordingly, the small island developing States (SIDS) have called upon the international community to take measures to help expand their productive capacity, increase trade and investment and promote healthy and resilient societies, highlighting the need to achieve gender equality and leave no one behind (United Nations, 2024b).

Among other things, the links between the environmental, economic and social crises have worsened existing migratory pressures in the region, another situation that is not gender-neutral. Intraregional migration has increased faster than extraregional migratory movements. Migrants face serious risks and adversities in transit within and outside the region and women are particularly exposed to sexual violence and face difficulties in accessing essential health services, both during their journey and in destination countries (ECLAC, 2024b).

As the Montevideo Strategy acknowledges, the region shows a tendency towards the concentration of political and economic power and is experiencing a resurgence of antidemocratic tendencies and authoritarian practices aimed at limiting women's autonomy and social progress. It is a matter of grave concern that, even as spaces are being opened for civil society to participate in public life, human rights and environmental defenders and social protest in the context of socioenvironmental conflicts are being criminalized, and the related violence is going unpunished. At the same time, the fundamental contribution made by women's, feminist, Afrodescendent, youth, indigenous and LGBTI+ people's movements to the construction and exercise of democracy, cultural change and peaceful coexistence based on equality policies is insufficiently recognized (ECLAC, 2017).

Since the first Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in the Economic and Social Development of Latin America, held in Havana in 1977, the member States of ECLAC have held 15 sessions of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, whose agreements make up the Regional Gender Agenda, which includes the recommendations that the member States have adopted to advance its application. To resolve the structural challenges of gender inequality, the Montevideo Strategy proposes 10 pillars to accelerate progress towards women's autonomy: (i) normative framework, (ii) institutional architecture, (iii) participation, (iv) capacity-building and -strengthening, (v) financing, (vi) communication, (vii) technology, (viii) cooperation, (ix) information systems, and (x) monitoring, evaluation and accountability.

In addition to normative and substantive contributions at the regional level, the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean brings together the contributions of the region as a whole and contributes to global discussions, in particular to the deliberations of the Commission on the Status of Women. Since 2021, regional consultations prior to the session of the Commission have been held within the framework of the meetings of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. In this context, member States adopt the declarations of ministers and high-level authorities of the machineries for the advancement of women, which are then presented to the Commission as a joint contribution to the deliberations at the international level, based on the Regional Gender Agenda.

To conclude, although the global and regional context presents various challenges for progress towards gender equality, the agreements of the Regional Gender Agenda represent instruments that address specific realities of the Latin American and Caribbean region and offer concrete proposals for advancing in the 12 critical areas of concern set forth in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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CHAPTER II

Progress and challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in synergy with the Regional Gender Agenda

A. Achieving inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work with gender equality requires transforming the sexual division of labour, redressing the unfair distribution of care work and increasing the economic empowerment of women

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted 30 years ago, identified critical areas of concern that called (and still call) for urgent action to ensure gender equality, guarantee the rights and autonomy of women and move towards inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work. Of particular importance in this regard are policies that address the structural challenges of gender inequality, in particular the sexual division of labour, and support labour participation and inclusion for women, decent work and a fair social organization of care. Recognizing, reducing, redistributing, rewarding and representing care work from gender, intersectional and human rights perspectives is crucial in fostering co-responsibility between genders and among households, States, markets and communities (United Nations, 2024a).

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Regional Gender Agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development all recognize the importance of decent care work, the acknowledgement and appreciation of unpaid care work and the care economy. In addition, in the Buenos Aires Commitment, adopted by the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean at its fifteenth session, in 2022, ECLAC member States encouraged the measurement of the multiplier effects of boosting the care economy in terms of labour market participation by women in their diversity, and of well-being, redistribution, economic growth and the macroeconomic impact of the care economy, including through the periodic measurement of time use, needs and demand for care in diverse territories, valuation of unpaid work in national accounts, cost estimation and calculation of the investment and return related to care policies and systems (ECLAC, 2023f, para. 34).

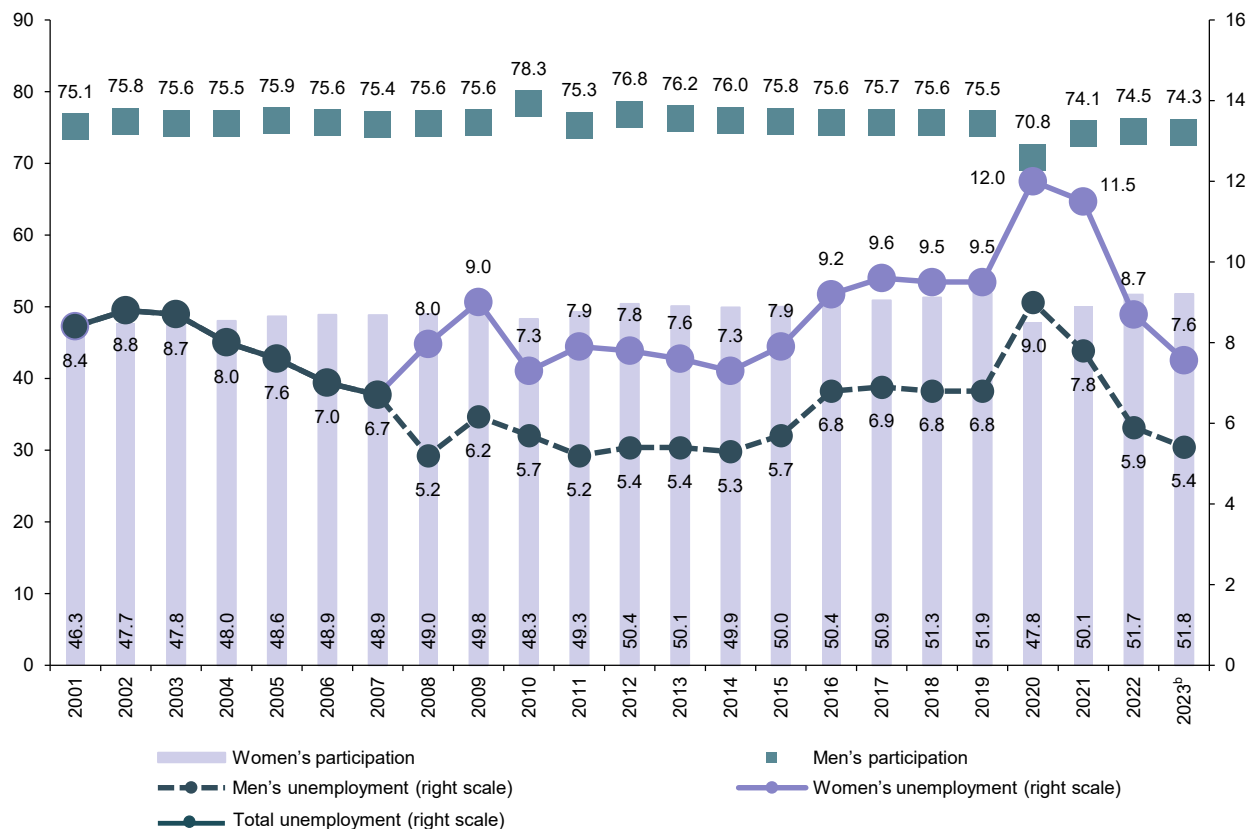
The Buenos Aires Commitment welcomed the call for a transition towards a new development model and, ultimately, a care society that prioritizes the sustainability of life and the planet, recognizes care as a human right that is fundamental to the well-being of the population as a whole, and safeguards the rights of people who require or provide care, as well as the right to exercise self-care. The care society is centred on the sustainability of life and recognizes the synergistic interdependence among people, the environment, and economic and social development (ECLAC, 2022c).

1. The absence of half of Latin American and Caribbean women from the labour market limits women's economic autonomy, hampering the region's development and prospects for shared prosperity

In the past five years, labour participation has continued to exhibit lingering effects from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Between 2000 and 2019, the labour force participation rate among women in Latin America and the Caribbean increased at a moderate-but-sustained pace, ending the period at

51.9%, but this figure remains much lower than the rate for men (75.5%). In 2020, the COVID-19 crisis caused a historic decline in participation rates, reversing 18 years of progress, and three years passed before rates returned to pre-pandemic levels (see figure II.1).

Figure II.1
Latin America and the Caribbean (weighted average for 26 countries):^a labour participation and unemployment rates, by sex, 2001–2023
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of official figures from the countries.

^a Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay.

^b Preliminary figures for 2023 are based on estimates from ECLAC, *Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2024* (LC/PUB.2024/10-P), Santiago, 2024.

The region faces structural development traps of low growth, high levels of inequality and weak institutional capacities, which translate into a lack of productive diversification and vulnerability to external shocks. All of this is set against a global and regional backdrop of increasingly frequent, cascading crises, which have caused a surge in multidimensional inequalities and have disproportionately affected women (Salazar-Xirinachs, 2023). Meanwhile, population ageing, epidemiological changes and the effects of climate change have caused demand for care work to rise (ECLAC, 2022c and 2024a). These crises, together with persistent structural gender inequality, act as barriers to women’s full economic participation.

In 2022, little more than half of women in Latin America and the Caribbean (51.7%) participated in the labour market, compared to 74.5% of men. By the same token, the unemployment rate for women tends to be higher than the rate for men; in 2023, for example, the rates were 7.6% for women and 5.4% for men. Understanding why women have lower participation rates and higher unemployment rates requires an analysis of the sexual division of labour in households. It also requires an analysis of access to social protection, in particular education and health institutions and social services. Women in the region spend nearly triple the amount of time on unpaid domestic and care work that men do, which limits their participation in all domains, in particular the labour market, and exacerbates inequality in all its forms (ECLAC, 2023e). The lack of essential services during the pandemic intensified and shone a light on the care work overload in households, which falls disproportionately on women, and it also demonstrated that care is central to sustaining life in general and women's economic autonomy in particular (ECLAC, 2022a; United Nations, 2020).

While it is true that some public policy measures, such as non-contributory transfers, account for a significant portion of women's income and play an important role in poverty reduction (ECLAC, 2022c and 2024a), paid work is the leading source of income in terms of improving their economic autonomy. In the first income quintile, 4 in 10 women have no income of their own, compared to 3 in 10 men. In the highest income quintile, the disparity is greater: 24.5% of women have no own income compared to 10.8% of men.

In 2022, 23.5% of women had no income of their own, compared to 9.7% of men; at 15.6 percentage points, that gap remains substantial. In other words, 1 in 4 women over the age of 15 has no income of her own, while the rate among men is 1 in 10. Disaggregated by household income quintile, this indicator is even more disparate: the percentage of women with no personal income of any kind is approximately 40% in the first (i.e. lowest income) quintile, 32% in the second quintile and 26% in the third and above (ECLAC, 2024a).

The number of single-parent households headed by women is rising, while household sizes are generally shrinking (ECLAC, 2022c). This poses additional challenges for reconciling labour market participation and unpaid domestic and care work. Single-parent households headed by women have the lowest levels of economic autonomy. Data from Brazil, the most populous country in the region, are illustrative in this regard. According to Brazil's national report on implementation, between 2012 and 2022, the percentage of women who were the main breadwinners increased from 35.7% to 50.9%, while the percentage of men in that position decreased, from 64.3% to 49.1%. In addition, following the COVID-19 pandemic, the share of women's income that went to paying off debt surpassed the share for men, reaching a record 30.5% in January 2024. In other countries, the effect of economic crises on household debt, in particular for women-headed households, had a direct impact on economic autonomy and the conditions necessary for decent work.

Restructuring the labour market with a focus on inclusive development and decent work requires affirmative policies to incentivize the employment of women in historically male-dominated sectors. In this regard, construction was one of the sectors with the highest demand for labour and the swiftest post-pandemic recovery, and in at least four countries (Argentina, Chile, Cuba and the Plurinational State of Bolivia), policies were adopted to incentivize women's participation in the sector. Still, women remain underrepresented in highly productive and technologically advanced sectors, which tend to offer above-average working conditions and salaries. In 2023, the Ministry for the People's Power for Science and Technology of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela launched "*Mujer, la Innovación está en TI*", an online platform aimed at increasing women's participation and leadership in information and communications technology, a sector in which women are underrepresented region-wide.

Gender inequality and the unfair organization of care manifest differently in rural areas and urban areas. In rural areas —home to at least 20% of the regional population— the employment rate is 82.5% for men and 47.5% for women, whereas in urban areas, the rate is 76.2% for men and 54.9% for women (ECLAC, 2024e). In Cuba, the Agricultural System Gender Strategy aims to reduce this gap through measures to increase rural women’s autonomy and empowerment, including by implementing a gender-equal system of management. The Plurinational State of Bolivia, Mexico and Ecuador have established lending programmes specifically for rural women.

Inclusive development also requires affirmative policies to facilitate access to decent work for the segments of the population that are most vulnerable to gender-based discrimination. Such a policy was implemented in Argentina in 2021 with the adoption of the Diana Sacayán-Lohana Berkins Act No. 27636, which stipulated that at least 1% of national public sector jobs be reserved for “transvestite, transsexual and transgender persons”. In Cuba, the National Sex Education Centre is developing the Strategy for the Social Integration of Transgender Persons which, in collaboration with the TransCuba network, advocates measures to ensure retention in the education system and access to decent jobs.

To support women generating their own income through entrepreneurship or business development, most countries have established lending programmes for commercial and productive enterprises and have fostered institutional cooperation on fair trade. In Argentina, the *Emprender Mujeres* and *Producir con Equidad* programmes provide funding for women-led businesses. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the *Mujer BDP* programme and the Women’s Energy Fund support thousands of women in agriculture and other sectors. In Chile, the *Capital Abeja Emprende* and the *Semilla Inicia Mujer* programmes have offered co-financing and support services to women entrepreneurs to advance projects with high growth potential. Costa Rica, Ecuador and Cuba have implemented programmes focused on rural areas and women entrepreneurs from vulnerable communities. Through the *Mujer y Negocios* national programme for women entrepreneurs and the Rural Lending Programme of the Rural Development Institute, Costa Rica has facilitated access to financing and helped hundreds of women to build their business skills. Ecuador has implemented the Human Development Loan and the *Súper Mujer Rural* initiative for women in agricultural production. In Uruguay, the National Institute for Women has designed and undertaken several workstreams to support entrepreneurship and economic autonomy for women. These include *Charlas con Valor* and *Diálogos y Saberes*, public events in which women from various professions and training areas shared their motivational stories, with a focus on increasing women’s economic autonomy and recognizing their various contributions to society and the economy, among other areas.

Mexico and Nicaragua have implemented programmes that provide technical training and business support in addition to financing, especially for Indigenous and Afrodescendent women. In Mexico, the Microcredit for Well-Being and *Tandas para el Bienestar* programmes have been crucial in supporting women who run microenterprises. In addition, the Commission for Dialogue with the Indigenous Peoples of Mexico of the Secretariat of the Interior, in coordination with the Institute for Mexicans Abroad and the National Institute for Indigenous Peoples, implemented the Mexican Indigenous Artisan Mission to support fair trade in various handicraft and textile products made by women from Indigenous Peoples and communities in United States cities. Nicaragua has fostered entrepreneurship through the *Nicaragua Fuerza Bendita* platform, which supports people with disabilities, and has strengthened training programmes for women entrepreneurs. In Panama, women’s inclusion in productive sectors has been pursued through collaborative efforts by the Ministry of Women, the Authority for Micro-, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, the National Secretariat of Policies and Development for Afro-Panamanians and the Ministry of Social Development —through the Programme of Support for the Productive Enterprises of Afro-Panamanian Women— and the *Mujer Cambia tu Vida* programme, focused on training and entrepreneurial projects. In Saint Lucia, the Micro-, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise Loan-Grant

Facility and the creation of the Youth Economy Agency have supported women entrepreneurs and mothers who previously worked in the informal sector. Colombia, Brazil and Paraguay have also shown a significant commitment to supporting entrepreneurship. In Colombia, the *Fondo Mujer Libre y Productiva* and the *Fondo de Fomento para las Mujeres Rurales* were created to provide funds to strengthen women's entrepreneurship and facilitate the internationalization of women-led enterprises. In Brazil, the Micro- and Small Enterprises Guarantee Fund and the National Targeted Production Microcredit Programme have expanded access to microcredit for women, especially in the informal sector. In Paraguay, the *MiPYME Compite* programme and the *InnovandoPY* initiative have provided support to entrepreneurs for innovative projects that incorporate the gender perspective, with a special focus on digitalization and economic resilience.

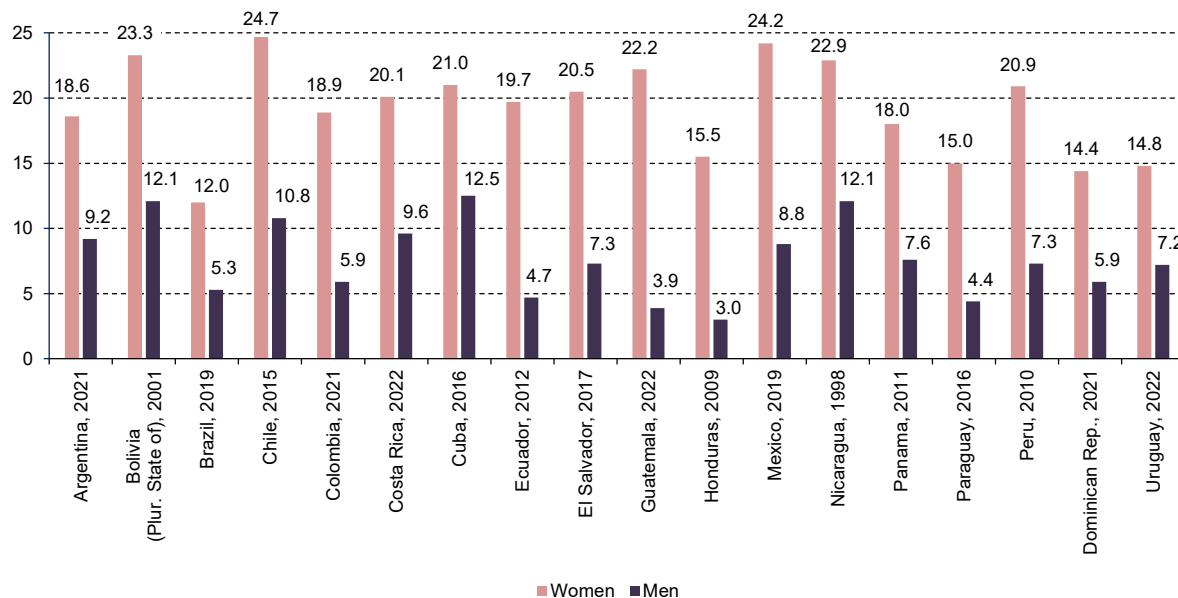
2. The sexual division of labour and the social organization of care remain the greatest barriers to inclusive development with gender equality, shared prosperity and decent work

The care economy, both formal and informal, includes activities carried out by workers in the education sector, the early childhood care and education sectors and the health and social sectors, as well as domestic and unpaid care workers (ILO, 2024). It accounts for 26.7% of women's employment in the region (7.6% in health, 9.2% in education and 9.9% in paid domestic work) (Baron and Scuro, 2023). The sexual division of labour —one of the structural challenges of gender inequality— means that the workforce in both the paid and unpaid care sectors is majority women. In Latin America and the Caribbean, on average, women spend triple the time that men do on unpaid domestic and care work (ECLAC, 2023a). Trends indicate that the disproportionate burden of care on women is the main barrier to their labour market access, even as their participation has increased. Although recent years have seen a small increase in men's participation in unpaid work, gender gaps remain significant in all countries of the region. Seven national reports mention the incorporation of social and gender co-responsibility criteria in policies to address the unequal distribution of care work (Argentina, Chile, Cuba, Costa Rica, Mexico, Colombia and El Salvador).

The region has also made progress in the official measurement of various aspects of the care economy. Currently, 23 countries officially measure time use, 18 provide data on the SDG indicator on unpaid domestic and care work (see figure II.2), 5 have officially calculated a satellite account of unpaid household work (Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala and Peru) and 10 have estimated the economic value of unpaid household work. According to these measurements, unpaid household work represents between 15.9% and 27.6% of countries' gross domestic product (GDP), and women contribute more than 70% of this figure (ECLAC, 2022d).

Time-use statistics have provided relevant data for the formulation of public policies. The social organization of care in households varies according to their purchasing power. When public services are not sufficient to meet the care needs of the population, households with more economic resources often turn to private services, for example hiring domestic staff or in-home care workers or paying private institutions (such as kindergartens and care homes for older persons). In contrast, households with limited income rely on unpaid work in their families or communities, undertaken primarily by women, whose labour market participation is consequently restricted, which perpetuates socioeconomic inequalities (Faur, 2014).

Figure II.2
Latin America and the Caribbean (18 countries): proportion of time spent by persons aged 15 and over on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, latest available year (indicator 5.4.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals)
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), “Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex (Goal indicator 5.4.1)”, Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, 20 September 2023 [online] <https://oig.cepal.org/en/indicators/proportion-time-spent-unpaid-domestic-and-care-work-sex-sdg-indicator-541>.

Note: The data are not comparable between countries owing to methodological differences in the collection instruments, so no regional average is presented.

Fostering decent work and investment in the care economy are key to achieving economic recovery with equality and sustainability. Social protection systems and, in particular, care policies, must therefore be strengthened, expanded and sustainably resourced, with an eye towards universality (United Nations, 2024a), in order to address the care demands of the population. At the same time, they must recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work (Elson, 2017) and represent and reward care (ILO, 2021 and 2024a; United Nations, 2024a).

The continued social and economic underrecognition of paid domestic and care work results in low wages and poor working conditions (ECLAC, 2022c; ILO, 2024a). With its 93% female workforce, this sector accounts for 9.9% of employed women in the region (Baron and Scuro, 2023).

Despite performing essential work that is extremely demanding both physically and emotionally, women in paid domestic work often live below the poverty line. In fact, of all the regions, Latin America and the Caribbean has the highest number of paid domestic workers relative to population size (approximately 14 million people) and accounts for 20% of paid domestic workers worldwide (ILO, 2021). From an intersectional perspective, gender, ethnic and racial, territorial and socioeconomic inequalities are especially visible in domestic work, as it is the most common employment outlet for women —many of them Afrodescendent and Indigenous— who do not have professional qualifications. According to Baron and Scuro (2023), 69% of domestic workers in the region are neither affiliated to nor pay into a social security system. For migrants, who represent around 35% of domestic workers in the region (ILO, 2021), the situation is even more precarious: the lack of access to permanent residency can make it difficult for them to access their rights, leaving them in vulnerable conditions (see box II.1).

Box II.1

Migration corridors for care in Latin America and the Caribbean

In recent years, multiple crises affecting the region have caused a substantial increase in the number of women who migrate in search of employment opportunities (Valenzuela, Scuro and Vaca Trigo, 2020), and the sexual division of labour means that they often find employment in feminized sectors, in particular the care economy. Intra-regional migration (i.e. movement to and from countries within the same region) has grown at higher rates than extra-regional migration, a trend that has been particularly noticeable in the past five years with the near doubling of the intra-regional migrant population. The growth of intra-regional migration is linked to the movements of Venezuelan migrants, most of whom remain in the region — mainly in Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Brazil and Chile (R4V, 2023; ECLAC, 2024a).

This process has resulted in the development of “migration corridors”, or systems that connect two different territories and are used continuously by persons leaving one territory to live in another, on a temporary or a permanent basis. In this context, the formation of migration corridors for care is strongly linked to the emergence of development poles around urban centres (Valenzuela, Scuro and Vaca Trigo, 2020).

A number of corridors for care have sprung up in Latin America and the Caribbean, with Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica and Brazil emerging as top destination countries for migrant women. There are also significant migration corridors that run from Guatemala to Mexico’s southern border, from Haiti to the Dominican Republic and from Central America to Panama and Brazil, which funnel migrant women from different countries into paid domestic work. The countries of the Caribbean, in particular, have seen an increase in the emigration of skilled health personnel, mainly to Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States, which creates a corresponding deficit of such personnel in the countries of origin (ECLAC, 2024d).

The majority of women migrant workers in Latin America and the Caribbean come from neighbouring countries. These women migrate to care for others, often leaving their children or older relatives behind in the care of other women — usually relatives, such as grandmothers or sisters. Jobs in the care economy, especially those accessible to migrants, are often informal, poorly paid and without access to social protection (UN-Women, 2020).

In a regional landscape where economic, social and environmental challenges threaten the territorial organization of economies and societies and propel displacement, the design and implementation of care policies that address the needs of migrant women in countries of origin, transit and destination constitute a key area for action to achieve a fairer organization of care, reduce inequalities and increase women’s autonomy.

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of M. Valenzuela, L. Scuro and I. Vaca Trigo, “Desigualdad, crisis de los cuidados y migración del trabajo doméstico remunerado en América Latina”, *Gender Affairs series*, No. 158 (LC/TS.2020/179), Santiago, ECLAC, 2020; Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), “Refugees and migrants from Venezuela”, 2023 [online] <https://www.r4v.info/en/refugeeandmigrants>; ECLAC, *Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2024*, Santiago, 2024, forthcoming; ECLAC, *Population, Development and Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean: second regional report on the implementation of the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development* (LC/CRPD.5/3), Santiago, 2024; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), “Leaving no-one behind: access to social protection for all migrant women”, *Policy Brief*, No. 14, 2020; ECLAC, *The sociodemographic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean* (LC/CRPD.4/3), Santiago, 2022.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, women in the domestic sector were the workers hardest hit by job losses. The landmark ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) recognized that paid domestic work is indeed work and domestic workers should therefore be protected by labour laws and guaranteed equal treatment with other workers.⁴ However, although many countries have ratified the agreement, and despite the existence of legal frameworks requiring its formalization, domestic work remains highly informal in the region. Only two countries, Uruguay and Chile, have formality levels above 50% (UN-Women/OISS/ILO, 2022; ECLAC, 2022c).

⁴ Thirty-eight countries have ratified the Convention since its adoption in 2011. Latin America and the Caribbean has more ratifications than any other region (18 countries).

As part of the post-pandemic economic recovery, measures were taken to promote the rights of care workers. In Argentina, the *Registradas* programme was implemented in September 2021 with the aim of maintaining and increasing the number of registered women domestic workers to facilitate their access to labour rights. With a view to reducing labour informality, improving women workers' access to and retention of formal jobs and increasing their financial inclusion, the programme covered 50% of the salary of the newly registered workers for their first six months. In Panama, during the pandemic, a form was designed and shared on the Ministry of Commerce and Industries platform to collect data on women domestic workers in order to protect their employment contracts. Those workers were granted special permission to move about freely during the health crisis caused by COVID-19. Beginning in 2021, Colombia organized mobile inspection campaigns to raise awareness about labour guarantees, promote fundamental rights and incentivize full compliance with labour codes. These campaigns addressed the subject of domestic work in all parts of the country. Enrolment drives were held to increase affiliation to social security and health insurance among domestic workers. As of September 2022, the number of domestic workers affiliated to Social Security System components was as follows: health insurance, 90,784; pensions, 84,128; occupational accident insurance, 90,498; and compensation fund, 90,617.

In Mexico, a pilot programme was developed to include domestic workers in the social security system, which ensures that they receive health and social protection entitlements, helping to formalize their employment and improve their working conditions. In Colombia, the national development plan for the period 2022–2026 includes strategic formalization measures, the expansion of social security and protection, and sectoral collective bargaining for women domestic workers. This comprehensive approach reflects the government's clear commitment to improving the working and living conditions of this segment of the population. With the aim of formally recognizing care work, creating job opportunities and improving the wages of people in the care economy, the Ministry of Social Development and Family of Chile, the Commission of the *Chile Valora* National Occupational Skills Certification System, the National Service for Older Persons and the National Training and Employment Service established a programme to evaluate and certify the job skills of care workers.

Healthcare is a central sector of the care economy. Its highly diverse workforce and marked occupational segregation reflect the persistence of gender gaps. In 2020, 7.5% of employed women worked in this sector, which is 72.6% female. The wage gap in relation to men stands at 39.2%, the highest among the paid sectors of the care economy (ECLAC, 2022c). Decent working conditions in the health sector need to be guaranteed, and affirmative action policies and a gender equality approach need to be integrated within healthcare institutions to avoid women, notwithstanding their professional training and experience, remaining in the worst paid positions with the lowest levels of responsibility.

Lastly, 9.7% of employed women in the region work in the education sector. In general terms, this is a highly feminized sector, as women represent 69.2% of the employed population. However, it is also a heterogeneous sector, with marked occupational segmentation; women tend to work mostly in preschool and primary education, which usually require more direct care work than other levels (ECLAC, 2022c). Labour policies have a critical role to play in altering the sexual division of labour, not only through mechanisms to incentivize women's entry into male-dominated sectors, but also through measures to incorporate men into care-related jobs that have historically been female-dominated. These policies are vital in changing patriarchal cultural patterns.

3. Regulatory, programme and public policy innovations in the region aim to transform the sexual division of labour, redress the unfair organization of care and increase women's economic autonomy in pursuit of inclusive development

Latin America and the Caribbean is in the midst of a persistent care crisis, exacerbated by population ageing, changing epidemiological patterns and the effects of climate change. These reveal a growing gap between the demand for care and the availability of people to meet it, and they highlight the inadequate supply of care infrastructure and services, which increases the burden of unpaid care work on women (ECLAC, 2024a). In the framework of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, the governments of the region have recognized care as a growing need, a job, an individual right and a sector with the potential to galvanize economies, and they have highlighted the key social role that care plays in life, the production and reproduction of life and the well-being of societies.

The Buenos Aires Commitment, in particular, charts a path towards a care society, including agreements by governments in new areas to achieve transformative recovery with gender equality and sustainability. In it, governments recognized the right to provide and receive care and to exercise self-care, and they call for the promotion of measures to overcome the sexual division of labour and move towards a fair social organization of care, under a new development model that fosters gender equality in the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Care as an autonomous right is specifically addressed in various legally binding international, regional and universal commitments, and is explicitly recognized in the Inter-American Convention on the Protection of the Human Rights of Older Persons (2015). At the intergovernmental level, the right to care was explicitly recognized in the Brasilia Consensus, adopted by the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean at its eleventh session (2010), and more recently in the Buenos Aires Commitment (2022).

The region has been highly innovative in terms of care regulations, programmes and public policies. The positive impact of these policies is evident not only in their direct contribution to well-being and sustainable development, but also in the direct and indirect creation of quality jobs, in increased tax revenue and social security contributions that are beneficial to the State, and in productive and social improvements for all of society.

Care has also been addressed in regional bodies, notably the Latin American and Caribbean Parliament, through the Framework Law for a Comprehensive Care System and the Framework Law on the Economy (PARLATINO, 2012 and 2013), and Inter-American Commission of Women of the Organization of American States, with the Inter-American Model Law on Care (CIM, 2022a) and its implementation guide (CIM, 2022b). In addition, in a declaration adopted at its fifteenth meeting, the Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality affirmed that States must guarantee access to the right to care (ParlAmericas, 2022).

On the public policy front, following the pioneering case of Uruguay in 2015 (Act No. 19353), significant advances have been made in the design and implementation of care systems in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Panama. In Brazil, the federal government established an interministerial working group, coordinated by the Ministry of Women and the Ministry of Social Development and Assistance, Family Affairs and the Fight against Hunger and comprising 15 federal agencies, to draft the proposed national care policy and national care plan. In Chile in January 2023, the Interministerial Presidential Advisory Council was established to advance the development of the National Support and Care System (Chile Cuida).

With regard to regulations, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru have also developed legislative proposals for the creation of care systems.

In Cuba, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama and Peru, discussions and development processes for national care systems is under way. In Mexico, the National Council for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development decided to consider and deliberate on the importance of building a national care system. Cuba is working on a national system for comprehensive life care, with a focus on population ageing, children and caregivers, as well as co-responsibility in domestic and care work. In addition, the Cuban Network of Care Studies, which systematically contributes to knowledge and public awareness to recognize the social and economic value of care and the need for co-responsibility, worked with other organizations on the awareness campaign #ReconocerYValorarLosCuidados. In El Salvador, the National Policy on Co-responsibility for Care 2022–2030 is a first step towards building a national care system. In Panama, the National Care System was created by Act No. 431 of 25 April 2024 with the aim of increasing well-being and social protection by providing comprehensive support to individuals who require care and their families. One of the pillars of this process is a stronger care structure that addresses early childhood needs and the needs of older persons, persons with disabilities and women in vulnerable situations. In Peru, a sectoral working group was formed under the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations to draft a proposal for the creation of a national care system with a gender- and human rights-based approach. In May 2023, Ecuador adopted the Organic Law on the Human Right to Care, which explicitly recognizes care as a human right and creates the National Integrated Care System.

With regard to care infrastructure, Argentina has implemented the National Early Childhood Plan, under which 2,000 early childhood centres provide care for more than 140,000 children in vulnerable situations. In addition, under the Care Infrastructure Programme, at least 8.5% of the annual budget is committed to infrastructure works for children, young people, older persons and persons with disabilities, as well as health and gender, and the location of such works was determined according to multidimensional indices that prioritize the most vulnerable areas of the country. In Brazil, the expansion of public childcare centres has enabled more women with children to re-enter the labour market. In Peru, the national *Cuna Más* programme aims to improve child development in geographical areas affected by extreme poverty, and in Saint Lucia, the opening of new early childhood development centres has expanded access to affordable care.

Progress has also been made in recognizing other forms of care, such as family and community networks. In Latin America and the Caribbean, a large portion of the population's demand for care is met at home, through family, neighbourhood or community networks, and women are the primary caregivers. The lack of public policies and services and the segmented access to private care services exacerbate socioeconomic inequality and perpetuate poverty among women (ECLAC, 2024a). As a testament to local resilience, some community initiatives, such as soup kitchens, have been able to adapt to the reality and socioeconomic needs of the population. Making these forms of care visible is key to recognizing the value of communities' contributions in the provision of care and to advocating for a more inclusive and equitable model that integrates State and community responsibilities (UN-Women/ECLAC, 2022). Under Colombia's National Development Plan 2022–2026, which established the National Care System, care is recognized as a fundamental pillar of social and economic sustainability, with an emphasis on cultural diversity and respect for community care. In Chile, the Ministry of Social Development and Family is piloting a programme of community care and protection centres to increase the subjective well-being of unpaid caregivers. The pilot programme aims to ensure access to a broad, flexible range of public services, delivered through infrastructure provided by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, that is based on the needs and interests of caregivers and their communities. Services are provided by the centres themselves or by nearby public institutions, depending on availability in the community. The pilot programme also provides relief services for caregivers, allowing the children, adolescents or persons with mild or moderate functional dependence in their care to use facilities and certain services while caregivers participate in other activities. The centres will also offer services for social management and psychological

and emotional well-being. The pilot programme includes efforts to increase social and community participation with a view to strengthening community co-responsibility. In the same vein, a caregivers database was created, from which caregivers obtain a credential that gives preferential access to the offices of various public and private services. In Colombia, the internationally recognized District Care System of Bogotá seeks to address structural obstacles to gender equality and women's autonomy in the region, restructuring the social organization of care and recognizing, reducing and redistributing the time that women spend on caregiving, by coordinating services and programmes through "Care Blocks". At the same time, it addresses the role of patriarchal cultural patterns in the persistence of the sexual division of labour, through strategies to effect cultural change (ECLAC, 2024c) (see box II.2).

Box II.2

Care in the territories: mapping and georeferencing in Latin America and the Caribbean

The economic and social organization of care differs according to territorial characteristics. With support from ECLAC, the District Secretariat for Women of the Office of the Mayor of Bogotá worked with academics and other parts of the United Nations system to develop technical standards and gender indicators from a gender perspective for use in designing and implementing a care system. This process included the development of a georeferenced map that provides a detailed description of these indicators, to serve as a dynamic input for public policy optimization (2020–2022). Argentina, with technical assistance from ECLAC, designed the Federal Care Map, which displays the geographical locations of different organizations, educational institutions and services that provide care or offer training for caregivers. The map identifies the resources available to households in each region of the country to organize care strategies and shows locations where training is available for people who wish work in the care sector (2021–2023). The Care Map of Mexico was developed by the National Institute for Women, with the support of UN-Women and the College of Mexico, to georeference the current supply of care services and estimate potential demand (2023–present). Georeferencing and mapping initiatives are also under way in Brazil, Chile, Colombia and the Dominican Republic.

These initiatives enable the analysis of territorial and gender gaps through gender indicators and facilitate collaboration among the various levels of government and sectors involved in the design and implementation of care policies (ECLAC, 2022c, 2023a and 2024c). Georeferencing and mapping tools make it possible to quantify the supply of services available in a given area and decide where to locate new services. They also act as "living" tools for use in the constant improvement and reduction of service access gaps while informing citizens of the care services and infrastructure in their area.

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://oig.cepal.org/en/maps>; ECLAC, "Design and implementation of the District Care System of Bogotá: a political, social and fiscal covenant", *Gender Equality Bulletin*, No. 2, Santiago, 2024; ECLAC/Ministry of Women, Genders and Diversity of Argentina, "Mapa Federal del Cuidado en la Argentina: construcciones conceptuales y usos", *Project Documents* (LC/T.S.2022/173-LC/BUE/TS.2022/18), Santiago, ECLAC, 2022; ECLAC, *The care society: a horizon for sustainable recovery with gender equality* (LC/CRM.15/3), Santiago, 2022; ECLAC, *Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2023* (LC/PUB.2023/18-P/Rev.1), Santiago, 2023; and National Women's Institute (INMUJERES), Mapa de Cuidados (MACU), "Acerca de" [online] <https://mapadecuidados.inmujeres.gob.mx/acerca-de/>.

Programmes to care for caregivers have been implemented to support those who care for or support persons with disabilities, with specific measures adopted in Cuba, Ecuador and Colombia. In 2023, the Cuban Association of Persons with Cognitive Disabilities was created, offering community rehabilitation to this population so that they can gain autonomy and independence, receive training in the use of new technologies and obtain employment, and providing space for caregivers to support one another. The same year, Ecuador implemented the Joaquín Gallegos Lara Bond, providing US\$ 240 per month to caregivers of persons with severe disabilities. In Saint Lucia, a programme was established to provide in-home support for older persons with disabilities, with the aim of reducing the burden of care on primary caregivers.

Policies that allot time for caregiving, such as parental leave, long-term care leave, emergency leave, breastfeeding leave, reduced working hours, flexible schedules, spaces in the workplace (e.g. lactation rooms, nurseries) and child and family sick leave, are key regulatory tools for social and gender co-responsibility. The Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) provides for a minimum of 14 weeks' paid maternity leave. The Maternity Protection Recommendation, 2000 (No. 191), which is a supplement to the Convention, extends the recommended leave time to 18 weeks and reiterates women's entitlement to return to their former positions or an equivalent position paid at the same rate at the end of their leave. The Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) and its Workers with Family Responsibilities Recommendation, 1981 (No. 165) call for equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women workers with family responsibilities, as well as for workers with family responsibilities and those without, and provide a framework for meeting the needs of men and women workers with family responsibilities. The 12 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean that have ratified the Convention account for 27% of the countries where it is in force (ILO, 2024b).

Although all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean recognize the right to maternity leave, only 10 countries have policies establishing 14–17 weeks of maternity leave, and just 5 have policies that meet or exceed the recommended 18 weeks (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Chile, Colombia, Cuba and Paraguay) in accordance with Recommendation No. 191. In the remaining 18 countries, the duration of maternity leave is between 12 and 13 weeks (ECLAC/ILO, 2024). However, in recent years, there has been a trend towards the expansion of parental leave to include both mothers and fathers and to promote co-responsibility in childcare. In Argentina, Colombia and Chile, shared parental leave has been implemented or extended so that both parents can actively participate in caring for their children from birth. In Colombia, Act No. 2114 of 2021 introduced flexible and shared parental leave and envisaged the extension of paternity leave to 12 weeks, planned for 2026. Measures were also adopted to protect the rights of workers during pregnancy and in maternity. In Cuba, Decree Law No. 56 of 2021 extended postnatal leave from 12 to 15 months and guaranteed 100% pay during that period for workers with high-risk pregnancies. In addition, it stipulated that grandparents caring for their grandchildren could also access these entitlements. In Brazil, the Federal Constitution guarantees maternity leave for a period of 120 days and paternity leave for a period of 5 days, though complementary legislation has extended the latter to 20 days at some companies. In El Salvador, the 2020 Law for the Creation of the Trust Fund for the Economic Recovery of Salvadoran Companies included measures to protect pregnant women workers, which complemented the country's subsequent ratification of ILO Convention No. 183 in 2022. Lastly, in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Organic Law on Labour and Women and Men Workers mandates that employers offer care services or cover the costs of early education for workers' children.

B. Overcoming socioeconomic inequality and the persistence of poverty: social protection and social services

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action include “women and poverty” as one of its critical areas, recognizing that gender is one of the dimensions of poverty and that gender equality contributes to ending poverty, and noting that the feminization of poverty was a serious emerging problem. In Latin America and the Caribbean, putting an end to poverty and its feminization is an urgent challenge, with numerous implications for realizing the rights of women, adolescents and girls in all their diversity. Both issues are directly related to the sexual division of labour and the unfair social organization of care, gender-based violence, lack of economic opportunities, and lack of access to economic and productive resources, social protection systems and services, universal health and education, comprehensive care systems and labour inclusion.

Achieving gender equality and women’s autonomy means overcoming the structural challenges of inequality (ECLAC, 2017), namely: (i) socioeconomic inequality and the persistence of poverty; (ii) patriarchal, discriminatory and violent cultural patterns; (iii) the sexual division of labour and the unfair social organization of care; and (iv) the concentration of power and hierarchical relations in the public sphere. These four structural challenges limit the economic, physical and decision-making autonomy of women and girls, and they translate into an uneven distribution of poverty and access to income between men and women. The Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean monitors the status of women in the region through relevant data and statistics. Women’s autonomy depends on their freedom to make decisions that affect their lives under conditions of equality. The elements that must be present to achieve autonomy include a life free from violence, the exercise of sexual and reproductive rights, full participation in decision-making in the various spheres of public and political life, and access to income, property and time, in a culture free of patriarchal patterns and discrimination.

Latin America and the Caribbean faces new challenges beyond persistent structural heterogeneity and socioeconomic inequality, such as the digital transformation, demographic and epidemiological changes, rapid transformations in the labour market, the climate crisis and the increased frequency of disasters (ECLAC, 2022a; Robles and Holz, 2024). Since 2014, average economic growth in the region has been extremely low (0.8%) —less than half the average growth achieved during the “lost decade” of the 1980s (ECLAC, 2023a). Recent years have brought a slight decrease in the incidence of poverty and extreme poverty, a reduction in income inequality as measured by the Gini index, an increase in labour participation and employment rates, and a decrease in unemployment, but no reduction in the feminization of poverty. In addition, although inflation is trending down, it is likely to remain above pre-pandemic levels. In 2022, some 70 million people did not have enough income to purchase a basic food basket (ECLAC, 2023a). The population living in extreme poverty has increased by approximately 20 million people relative to 12 years prior. Ten years of lacklustre growth have resulted in cumulative vicious circles, which have led the region into a double trap of low growth and high levels of inequality, with a disproportionate effect on women and girls. (ECLAC, 2023a). Achieving a sustained and sustainable reduction in poverty will therefore require a robust, coordinated strategy for inclusive social development, with a major emphasis on labour inclusion policies and social protection systems and the incorporation of the gender perspective.

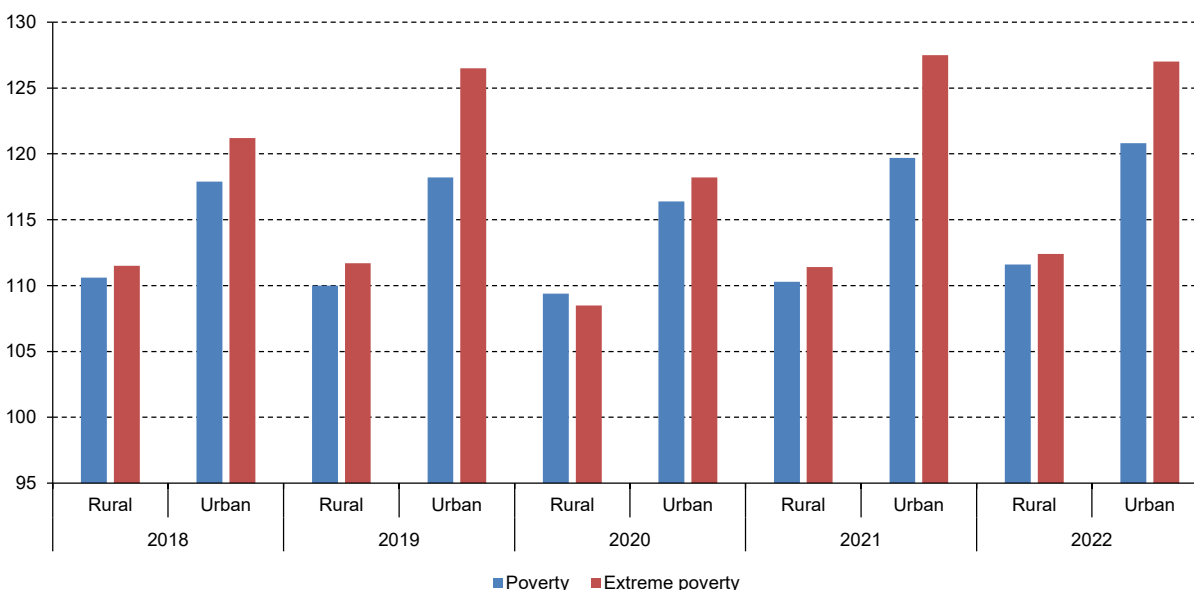
1. Inequality and the feminization of poverty in the region are persistent structural features

Poverty levels are higher for women than for men, and both poverty levels and gender gaps are greater in rural areas than in urban areas. Indeed, 1 in 4 women in Latin America and the Caribbean has no income of her own, while the proportion for men is less than 1 in 10. This means that one quarter of women in the region depend on others for their livelihood. The negative consequences of this situation for women’s economic autonomy and decision-making are amplified when analysed by household socioeconomic quintile. In the lowest income quintile, 38.9% of women have no monetary income of their own, compared to 22.1% of men, but these percentages fall to 13.6% of women and 3.9% of men in the highest-income quintile (ECLAC/UN-Women, 2024a). The femininity index of poverty shows that, in 2022, for every 100 men in poverty, there were 117.7 women in the same situation (ECLAC, 2023a).⁵ This ratio increased between 2018 and 2022 (see figure II.3). In 2022, 42.2% of women living in rural areas were poor,

⁵ The femininity index of poverty represents the disparities in poverty or extreme poverty between men and women. A value above 100 indicates that poverty or extreme poverty affects women more than men, and a value of less than 100 indicates the opposite.

compared to 39.9% of men. Although the gap was smaller in urban areas (1.3 percentage points), the incidence of poverty was still higher among women (26.8%) than among men (25.5%) (ECLAC, 2023a). The incidence of extreme poverty is similarly gendered. In 2021, 20% of rural women and 9.4% of urban women were living in extreme poverty, compared to 19% and 9.1% for men, respectively (ECLAC, 2023a and 2023b).

Figure II.3
Latin America (18 countries):^a femininity index of poverty and extreme poverty
by geographical area, 2018–2022



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), CEPALSTAT, on the basis of the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

Note: Data for Argentina refer to urban areas.

^a Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

At the other extreme, wealth accumulation and income concentration have intensified. Privileged positions in the social hierarchy are usually passed down from one generation to the next and are generally occupied by men, and persistent economic inequality limits intergenerational social mobility, producing a vicious circle. The total wealth of the 105 billionaires in Latin America and the Caribbean amounted to US\$ 453 billion at current prices in 2022, US\$ 4.6 billion more than a year earlier (ECLAC, 2023a).

In the region, there is a growing trend towards incorporating the gender perspective in cash transfer policies, which results in the prioritization of women as primary recipients. In Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, cash transfer programmes have had a significant impact on poverty reduction. Argentina has prioritized women and vulnerable families through the *Alimentar* entitlement and the Universal Child Allowance. Brazil has maintained its focus on supporting women heads of household through the *Bolsa Família* and *Auxílio Brasil* programmes. In Mexico, the *IMSS-Bienestar* and *Tandas para el Bienestar* programmes have enabled women in vulnerable situations to access health services and loans.

In the five years since the last review and appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, most of the countries analysed have implemented or strengthened non-contributory social policies and programmes through cash transfers to reduce poverty among women. According to information from the ECLAC Non-contributory Social Protection Programmes Database in Latin America and the Caribbean, 21 of 32 conditional transfer programmes and other continuous transfers being implemented in 2022 had at least one component in which women were the main recipients of monetary entitlements (e.g. mothers, pregnant women and heads of household). Unlike labour income, which tends to change slowly, cash transfers are a fast and effective way to increase household income.

All social services were tested by the COVID-19 pandemic, which drove demand for social protection to unprecedented levels. Country responses varied but all faced difficulties that, in most cases, laid bare the structural weaknesses of social services. Budgetary constraints made it important to identify which groups needed the most support. National reports on implementation show a regional trend during the pandemic of implementing specific measures to support the most vulnerable groups, such as rural women, Indigenous Peoples and informal workers, with a propensity towards emergency cash transfer programmes designed to provide temporary financial support to households experiencing greater economic difficulties. In addition, a considerable effort was made to expand social protection and health systems.

Countries implemented various strategies to ensure continuity of access to essential services and to adapt to the new realities imposed by the pandemic. In Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, emergency cash transfers and other forms of social assistance were designed to address the specific needs of women, in particular those in vulnerable situations. Argentina, Chile and Brazil reported implementing emergency cash transfer programmes, such as the Emergency Family Income programme in Argentina and Chile and the Emergency Assistance programme in Brazil, which were key instruments to support millions of households during the crisis and prevent the further increase of poverty and extreme poverty rates. In Argentina, Emergency Family Income became one of the main tools to mitigate the economic effects of preventive and compulsory social isolation. This programme provided payments on an exceptional basis to women, including more than 46,000 paid domestic workers. A similar programme was implemented in Chile and progressively expanded during the pandemic, supporting more than 8 million households up to November 2021. This programme also prioritized women recipients with a view to mitigating the pandemic's economic impact on the worst-affected families.

In Brazil, the Emergency Assistance transfer was granted to informal or unemployed workers who were not recipients of *Bolsa Família* conditional cash transfer. It explicitly targeted women in single-parent households, who received a double payment of the subsidy, which helped to temporarily reduce extreme poverty during the pandemic (ECLAC, 2021b). A support programme to maintain employment and income, *Benefício Emergencial de Preservação do Emprego e da Renda*, which complemented the above-mentioned measures by allowing companies to temporarily reduce working hours and wages while the government covered part of the lost wages, was vital to the preservation of millions of jobs. Costa Rica, Cuba, Paraguay and Colombia implemented labour protection measures and provided assistance to specific sectors during the pandemic. In Costa Rica, the minimum contribution was reduced by 25%, helping more than 1.3 million salaried and self-employed workers by ensuring the continuity of their social protection contributions and combating informality at a critical juncture. In Cuba, measures were implemented to protect women workers in particular. Full payment of salaries was guaranteed for the first month following suspension of work, and additional entitlements for mothers and older persons underscored the importance of maintaining gender equity in response to the crisis. In Paraguay, the *Pytyvõ* and *Ñangareko* programmes provided economic support and food assistance to millions of people, with a special focus on rural areas. In addition, the Health Emergency Act (No. 6524) contained a series of social protection and economic stimulus measures, including emergency funds to mitigate the economic

effects of the pandemic. Along the same lines, the Solidarity Income programme in Colombia was created specifically to support the most vulnerable households, giving priority to women heads of household living in poverty. In addition, the Free and Productive Women's Fund gave soft loans to women entrepreneurs, helping to sustain small, women-led businesses during the crisis. In addition, five countries —Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and Nicaragua— implemented or strengthened social assistance programmes that prioritized women and rural communities, ensuring support for the most vulnerable groups during the pandemic. In Ecuador, poverty reduction policies included the Variable Solidarity Bond, aimed mainly at women, and the Family Support Service, aimed at ensuring the full personal development of children and older persons living in poverty. In Guatemala, the Family Bond programme was implemented to protect vulnerable families, including single mothers and families with children at risk of malnutrition, with a special focus on rural communities.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Turks and Caicos Islands and Panama have placed particular emphasis on social protection and pension systems. Costa Rica implemented subsidies and transfers for dependent persons and working mothers, and Cuba remained committed to a robust social protection system that covers more than 350,000 people in vulnerable situations.

2. Social protection coverage is low and insufficient to mitigate the multiple crises facing the region

Social protection systems are essential for progress towards inclusive social development with a focus on ending poverty and extreme poverty and addressing various forms of social inequality. Social protection systems are built on a set of contributory and non-contributory policies to protect income against various contingencies and provide access to social services, universal health and education, and care and labour inclusion. Each of these policies fulfils a specific function in the social protection architecture and employs different instruments and measures (ECLAC, 2021a and 2024a). According to the Regional Gender Agenda and the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development, social protection aims to guarantee universal access to adequate income levels, basic social services and housing, and to labour inclusion policies and decent work (ECLAC, 2020). Since the 2000s, Latin American and Caribbean countries have strengthened the design of social protection systems and expanded the supply of policies and programmes. In view of the high levels of informality in the region, non-contributory social protection policies, such as cash transfers and non-contributory pensions, have become particularly important. These programmes seek to contribute to the eradication of poverty and the reduction of inequality in the region and to guarantee a basic income.

Rapid population ageing and the corresponding growth in demand for care is creating and perpetuating gender gaps in all countries of the region. Moreover, the growing population in the 80-and-over age group faces an increased probability of dependency or disability, which means that they will require assistance and care to exercise their autonomy. Their need for long-term care will also likely increase amid the epidemiological transition and attendant rise in the incidence of chronic disease (ECLAC, 2024a). All of this will deepen the care crisis, and not only that: given that women have a greater life expectancy than men, if the current social organization of care does not change, women will increasingly find themselves in the dual position of giving care while needing it themselves (ECLAC, 2024a). Failure to implement comprehensive care policies with a gender perspective will worsen existing inequalities and jeopardize the sustainability of care. Therefore, cash transfers, old-age and disability pensions and the recognition of care work in social security systems, among other policies, are vital to address growing care needs in pursuit of gender-equal access and quality, as well as greater well-being for all.

Persistent quality and access gaps in social protection continue to exacerbate inequalities. Women outside the labour market lack access to contributory social protection, which affects their present well-being and future income. Young people, Afrodescendants, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities and

migrants, among other groups, are overrepresented in sectors that are less productive and more informal, and they frequently lack social protection and access to social services (ECLAC, 2023a). Meanwhile, women who do participate in the labour market continue to experience horizontal and vertical segregation, as they are concentrated in care-related sectors where wages are lower and social protection tends to be weaker (Baron and Scuro, 2023; ECLAC, 2024a).

The current social organization of care deprives many women of adequate access to social protection. Social protection based on work-related contributions from the formal labour market, without due recognition of unpaid work or informal paid work, tends to reproduce and deepen these inequalities. Over time, this aggravates socioeconomic inequality and perpetuates poverty among women throughout the different stages of the life cycle and across generations. The higher incidence of informality and lower labour participation rate among women translate into larger pension gaps and lower contributory pension coverage (Arza, Robles and Arenas de Mesa, 2024). In 2021, 23.1% of women aged 65 and over did not have access to a pension, compared to 19.2% of men (Vila, Robles and Arenas de Mesa, 2024). In terms of the sufficiency of entitlements received, in 2021, almost one quarter of women aged 65 and over (23.7%) received pensions below the poverty line, compared to one fifth of men in that age group (19.7%).⁶ In this context, non-contributory pension systems are especially important, and their coverage in Latin America and the Caribbean grew considerably between 2000 and 2022, from 3.4% to 31% of people aged 65 and over. In 2022, non-contributory systems represented public expenditure equivalent to 0.42% of GDP (Arenas de Mesa and Robles, 2024).

Evidence shows that, owing to gaps and structural barriers in the labour market, non-contributory policies account for a higher share of women's income than men's. As a result of the region's high levels of informality and low or intermittent participation of women in the labour market, many women reach retirement age without having made sufficient contributions to qualify for contributory pension system entitlements. In the Latin American countries for which information is available, non-contributory pension system coverage for people over 65 years of age tends to be higher among women. In 2021, the percentage of women in that age group receiving non-contributory pensions was 11.6% in Brazil, 22.6% in Chile, 19.6% in Costa Rica, 26.8% in Ecuador, 13.5% in Guatemala, 94.8% in Mexico, 59.8% in Paraguay, 20.9% in Peru and 5.5% in Uruguay. The figures for men were 10.2% in Brazil, 9.8% in Chile, 10.9% in Costa Rica, 24.3% in Ecuador, 13.7% in Guatemala, 91.9% in Mexico, 60.9% in Paraguay, 19.5% in Peru and 6.4% in Uruguay (Arenas de Mesa and Robles, 2024). When institutional linkages and coordination are efficient, non-contributory policies reinforce contributory systems as key tools for combating the feminization of poverty.

There is a fundamental need to work towards recognizing care work within contributory social protection systems. This entails the development of accounting mechanisms to quantify the value of unpaid work within social security and pension systems so that periods devoted to caregiving do not leave gaps in contribution histories but instead support access to social protection entitlements (Arza, Robles and Arenas de Mesa, 2024; Arza, 2017). Recognition strategies may also include the provision of caregiving credits (ILO, 2024). Although non-contributory pension systems have helped to lay the foundation for strengthening the valuation of unpaid work by reducing gaps in access to pension systems, especially for women, there is room for more meaningful progress in this area (ECLAC, 2024a). In the discussion of pension reforms currently under way, gender mainstreaming is urgently needed to address inequalities,

⁶ According to information from the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG) of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) for the following countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Paraguay, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

safeguard women's economic autonomy and recognize the unpaid care work that is performed primarily by women, with cross-cutting effects on their income levels in all phases of the life cycle, including old age. Ensuring that care work is recognized and that it counts towards the required years of contributions to access a pension is a vital policy that many countries are adopting, including Colombia and Argentina. In Colombia, ruling No. C-197 of 2023 introduced child entitlements and envisaged the gradual reduction of the number of weeks of contributions required to access a pension. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has guaranteed 100% pension coverage for all persons of retirement age, and in the Turks and Caicos Islands, legislative reforms have expanded pension eligibility.

With respect to health systems, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean face problems related to coverage and unequal access, which result from the underfinancing and fragmentation of these systems. Problems also exist in the organization of services and in the capacity to address the social determinants of health (ECLAC, 2022a). These weaknesses occur in a context where, according to the social inequality matrix, the region's women, adolescent girls and girls face greater health and social vulnerabilities.

In some cases, cash transfer policies seek synergies with healthcare protection. For example, in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the Juana Azurduy grant (part of the Multisectoral Zero Malnutrition Programme) seeks to reduce maternal and infant mortality and chronic malnutrition in children under 2 years of age. Since 2020, the programme has been periodically strengthened to ensure access to health and the comprehensive development of recipients. In Argentina, the Comprehensive Healthcare Allowance is an extra income for recipients of the Universal Child Allowance for each child under 3 years of age. Those who comply with the established vaccination plan and health check-ups are eligible to receive this entitlement.

3. Latin America and the Caribbean is making progress in adopting a rights-based approach in public policies, but obstacles persist linked to universal access to healthcare and the guarantee of sexual and reproductive rights, especially for young women and adolescent girls

The region has in the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development one of the world's most advanced instruments for ensuring sexual and reproductive rights within a sustainable development framework, which also has ties to the Regional Gender Agenda. In 2024, ECLAC conducted a detailed analysis of the progress and challenges in its implementation, presented in the report *Population, Development and Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean: second regional report on the implementation of the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development*.⁷ This document, however, refers mainly to policies related to certain sexual and reproductive rights, such as access to contraception, prevention of teenage pregnancy, sexuality education and voluntary termination of pregnancy.

Since 2020, several countries in the region have implemented and strengthened policies and programmes to guarantee access to sexual and reproductive health services and modern contraceptives, promoting gender equality and the protection of rights. There is a trend towards the consolidation of legal frameworks and the implementation of concrete actions with a view to ensuring sexual and reproductive rights, in line with the agreements adopted by ECLAC member States at each meeting of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean held over the past 47 years (ECLAC, 2021b).

According to the Latin American and the Caribbean Contraception Policy Atlas, launched by the Latin American and Caribbean Parliament in September 2023, 17 of the 33 countries have legislation that enshrines the right to choose the number, timing and spacing of children, and only 7 have measures to

⁷ See ECLAC (2024d).

regulate conscientious objection. The Caribbean subregion presents limitations with respect to national strategies related to contraception, sexuality education frameworks and contraceptive supply management (PARLATINO, 2023).

The countries of the region have taken steps to reduce adolescent pregnancy, which has been and continues to be a significant problem with deep repercussions on the safeguarding of the rights of women and adolescent girls. Estimates and projections of the adolescent fertility rate in the region indicate a turning point in the second decade of the twenty-first century, with a sharp drop from 73.1 children per 1,000 women aged 15–19 in 2010 to 50.5 in 2024 (ECLAC, 2024d). Despite these encouraging figures, coupled with the reduction in adolescent motherhood evidenced in household surveys in several countries in the region, the adolescent reproduction rate remains high and unequally distributed, with at least 10% of women having a child during adolescence, a figure that jumps to 35% or higher in the poorest quintile in some countries. This higher prevalence is also observed among Indigenous, Afrodescendent and rural adolescents. Moreover, although household survey estimates indicate that motherhood in the 10–14 age group is on the decline, in some countries up to 0.5% of girls aged 10–14 are mothers (ECLAC, 2024d).

Regarding adolescent use of modern contraceptives, adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean are the group with the most unwanted births and the highest level of unmet demand for contraceptives worldwide (UNFPA, 2022). Lower adolescent fertility could be linked to access to a wider range of contraceptive methods, especially reversible long-term methods, and to expanded access to voluntary termination of pregnancy in some countries of the region (Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Mexico) (ECLAC, 2024d).

In this context, countries have developed specific programmes for adolescents that provide comprehensive health services, including access to modern contraceptives within a framework of free and informed choice. In Argentina, the National Plan to Prevent Unintended Adolescent Pregnancies guarantees the rights of adolescents to free access to contraception, comprehensive sex education and counselling in schools, sexual and reproductive health counselling and community outreach activities to prevent unintended pregnancy in adolescence. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the comprehensive adolescent care strategy—which provides health products and services that are accessible, acceptable, appropriate and adapted to the needs of adolescents, particularly in terms of sexual and reproductive rights—contributed to decreasing the adolescent pregnancy rate between 2018 and 2023 by almost 4 percentage points. In Costa Rica, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the Salud Mesoamérica initiative was established for the prevention of adolescent pregnancy, which developed a model for the comprehensive care of adolescent pregnancy. This clinical protocol provides a framework for comprehensive care, including risk assessment, group sexual and reproductive health education, counselling and access to long-term contraceptive methods. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama and Peru have also established specialized programmes to prevent adolescent pregnancy.

Argentina, Belize, Mexico, Panama and the Plurinational State of Bolivia have adopted measures in the area of sexuality education. Argentina adopted operational resolutions 340/2018 and 419/2022, which define concrete actions for the strengthening of comprehensive sexuality education in the country, as well as the “Comprehensive sexuality education without barriers” project, targeting historically excluded populations such as those with vision impairment. The Plurinational State of Bolivia, through a 2018 order, incorporated comprehensive sexuality education into the general standards for the management of education. In Belize, information on sexual health is provided to adolescents in secondary schools. In Brazil, after a three-year gap, the Adolescent Health Manual was reinstated, which provides information on sexual health and self-care for adolescents in addition to containing general health-related information (ECLAC, 2024d). Also worth mentioning are the third edition of the Comprehensive Emotional and Sexuality Study Programme implemented in Costa Rica, as well as the Comprehensive Emotional and Sexuality Education Policy of 2022 and the 2020 National Youth Institute programme, “Let’s Talk About

Everything”, introduced in Chile. Cuba has a comprehensive sexuality education programme with a focus on gender and sexual and reproductive rights (Resolution No. 16/2021); in Mexico, online courses on comprehensive sexuality education were developed for educational communities; and, in Panama, guides on sexuality and emotional health are distributed at public schools (UNFPA/FLACSO, 2022).

Notwithstanding all the actions described above, implementation challenges persist owing to several factors: (i) comprehensive sexuality education is guaranteed only in generic terms subject to political interpretation, rather than through dedicated and operational instruments that are legally binding; (ii) the content of comprehensive sexuality education is mandatory in fewer than half of countries; (iii) the focus and content of comprehensive sexuality education remain primarily academic and biological in nature and fail to adequately address sexual and gender diversity and the prevention of violence against the LGBTQI+ population; (iv) most countries lack an official system for monitoring the implementation and impact of comprehensive sexuality education; (v) very little comprehensive sexuality education has been conducted outside the classroom, and there is scant coordination between the education, health and other sectors; (vi) some influential, high-profile and hostile groups question the value of comprehensive sexuality education; and (vii) the pandemic caused a considerable delay in terms of exposure to comprehensive sexuality education due to the suspension of in-person classes (ECLAC, 2024d, p. 66).

Maternal mortality is another important —and preventable— public health problem linked to gender inequalities in the region. In the last 10 years, the maternal mortality ratio has declined in all regions except Latin America and the Caribbean. In 2020, the region’s maternal mortality ratio was 88 per 100,000 live births, reversing the declining trend of the previous 20 years owing to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the maternal mortality ratios in nine countries (Belize, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Suriname) were higher than the regional average. Childbirth and postpartum complications are among the top three causes of death among adolescent girls aged 15–19. There is great disparity and inequity in terms of maternal mortality and adolescent pregnancy in the region. In some cases, low income and education level, age and ethnicity (Afrodescendants and Indigenous Peoples), often combined with geographical area of residence (rural versus urban), result in rates up to four times higher.

With regard to voluntary termination of pregnancy, significant progress has been made in Argentina with the enactment of the Access to Voluntary Termination of Pregnancy Act (No. 27610). In Chile, progress has focused on the implementation of Act No. 21030, which decriminalizes the voluntary termination of pregnancy on three grounds (rape, danger to the mother’s life and non-viability of the fetus), and the approval of an enforcement manual in 2023 to ensure compliance with this law. In Colombia, progress was made with ruling C-055–22, which decriminalizes abortion until 24 weeks of gestation, and Resolution No. 051 of 2023, which establishes comprehensive regulations to ensure safe access to voluntary termination of pregnancies. In Mexico, the First Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice decriminalized abortion at federal level through a September 2023 ruling that declared the law prohibiting abortion as unconstitutional as it was a violation of women’s human rights. Following this ruling, abortion became legal at the national level. In Ecuador, progress was made 2022 in decriminalizing abortion in cases of rape.

In Costa Rica, a clinical care protocol for therapeutic termination of pregnancy was developed in 2020, based on Article 121 of the Penal Code. This protocol has since been implemented and is complemented by training programmes in contraception and sexual protection, which strengthen the supply of contraceptive methods and sexual health education.

Along the same lines, Mexico implemented the Technical Guidelines for Safe Abortion Care (2022), which establish criteria for safe access to abortion in health facilities throughout the country.

4. The region's countries have made headway in anti-poverty policies and expanding education access to reduce socioeconomic inequality amid low economic growth

One of the region's major achievements in a context of low economic growth is the increased access to education by girls, young women and women. On average, 67.4% of women aged 20–24 have completed secondary education, compared to 60.9% of men in the same age range (ECLAC, 2022a). In fact, women's rates of completion of secondary and higher education are higher than men's. Similarly, the percentage of women exceeds men at all levels of higher education, as seen in the gross enrolment rate gender parity index, which shows that 12 countries in the region have exceeded the parity threshold in women's favour, ranging from 1.05 in Mexico to 1.45 in Cuba (ECLAC, 2022a). In 2021, the primary education completion rate for women in the region was 95.0% and was over 67.0% in the case of secondary education, surpassing the equivalent rates for men of 91.0% and 60.0%, respectively. In 2022, the higher education gross enrolment rates were 65.7% for women and 47.5% for men (ECLAC/UN-Women, 2024a).

These advances in inclusion present a paradox: women have outperformed men in terms of average years of schooling, gross primary school completion and higher education enrolment rates (Goal 4 indicators); however, this does not translate into better outcomes for women in terms of economic participation, exit from unemployment and equal pay for work of equal value in the labour market (Goal 8). Segregation persists in education, as women are underrepresented in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), and in the labour market, with women working mainly in services, particularly in the care sectors, while also being disproportionately affected by informality and a lack of social protection coverage (see box II.3). In this context, women are more likely to be living in poverty (Goal 1) and less likely to invest time and energy in activities related to their self-care and personal development, or to participate in public decision-making mechanisms (Goal 5) (ECLAC/UN-Women, 2024a).

Box II.3

Science, technology, engineering and mathematics education in the Caribbean

The Caribbean has made significant progress in improving access to education, with an increase in the enrolment of both sexes in primary education and of women and girls at all levels of education. However, despite advances in the education of women and girls, especially at the tertiary level, unemployment remains disproportionately high among young women, compared to young men.

In Saint Lucia, programmes such as ConnectEd have facilitated the creation of digital content, benefiting 70% of women given their strong presence in the education sector. Other programmes include the Scratch Coding Competition and Computer Coding and Robotics, which foster technological skills among girls and young women. In the Turks and Caicos Islands, educational offerings in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) have been expanded, with degree programmes in Information Technology and Management Information Systems aimed at increasing female participation. International Girls in ICT Day is an event held annually to encourage girls and young women to consider careers in information and communications technologies (ICTs), which are traditionally male-dominated. The national digitalization strategy of the Bahamas includes the promotion of digital skills among women and girls and seeks to promote gender-sensitive STEM education through initiatives such as Digital Skills Training, a public-private partnership to foster digital skills, the FEM STEM Bahamas programme, the Providing Access to Continuing Education initiative, and the Families of All Murder Victims initiative targeting women who are victims of violence.

Source: A. Abdulkadri and others, "Addressing gender disparities in education and employment: a necessary step for achieving sustainable development in the Caribbean", *Studies and Perspectives series-ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean*, No. 109 (LC/TS.2022/114-LC/CAR/TS.2022/3), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2022, and country reports.

Another substantive achievement is gender mainstreaming in educational curricula in several countries, starting with basic education. In Ecuador, for example, curricula have been updated to include content that promotes equality-based relationships and eliminates gender stereotypes. In Nicaragua, the subject of women's rights and dignity has been integrated at all levels of education to promote a culture of respect for women's rights from an early age. In Mexico, gender equality has been made a central component of the new primary education curriculum, following the reform of article 3 of the Constitution.

Another important trend in education is the focus on women's financial and economic education, especially for women in vulnerable contexts. In Panama and Colombia, policies and programmes have been implemented focusing on financial education as a key element to empower women and improve their economic autonomy. In Panama, the National Financial Education Strategy has made it mandatory to address this subject in schools, marking a significant advance in financial skills development from an early age. Colombia has developed the National Economic and Financial Education Strategy, which focuses on rural women and provides them with tools to improve economic management and facilitate their participation in the labour market.

The reports analysed show that the countries of the region have been progressively strengthening education and training policies with a gender perspective, a sign of the commitment to reducing gender gaps in education and vocational training. Countries have intensified efforts to integrate a gender perspective into national innovation, science and technology plans. There is a clear trend towards the promotion of education in STEM from an early age, as well as the digital inclusion of women and other vulnerable groups in various technological fields. In Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica and the Plurinational State of Bolivia, specific programmes have been implemented to improve women's participation in these areas. In Argentina, the Gender in Technology Centre was established to reduce the gender gap in the technology sector through training and mentoring activities. In addition, the Juana Manso Federal Plan was adopted, which not only seeks to close the digital divide through technology distribution and teacher training, but also emphasizes the inclusion of women in these fields. The Plurinational State of Bolivia has also launched the *RobóTICas* programme for girls and adolescents, the "Digital Marketing for Women Entrepreneurs" project and initiatives such as *Las Warmi TIC* and *Chicas Waskiris*, aimed at empowering girls and adolescents in the use of ICTs. In Chile, a STEM kit and digital connectivity workshops were developed, which have promoted learning in STEM fields and digital skills. In addition, the National Policy on Gender Equality in Science, Technology, Knowledge and Innovation and the *Plan+ Mujeres en Telecomunicaciones* have sought to increase the participation of women in sectors historically dominated by men. In Costa Rica, the National STEAM Education Strategy has promoted the inclusion of women in these disciplines starting from primary education. In Colombia, STEM education for girls and young women has been strengthened through the STEM Girls Programme.

Panama has also been a pioneer in adopting national policies that promote gender equality in science and technology. The country has implemented the National Policy on Gender Equality in Science, Technology and Innovation, which extends to 2040, ensuring women's inclusion in these key sectors. In addition to STEM education initiatives, there is a trend towards the digital inclusion of women in rural areas and in vulnerable situations. Programmes such as *InnovandoPY* in Paraguay and the National Digital Inclusion Policy for Indigenous Women in Brazil have been instrumental in ensuring that women have access to technology and can fully participate in the digital economy. International cooperation and the strengthening of institutional and inter-organizational networks have also been instrumental in the region.

C. To end gender-based violence against women and girls requires, discriminatory and violent patriarchal cultural patterns must be changed through comprehensive and sustainable strategies

Discriminatory and violent patriarchal cultural patterns against women and girls constitute one of the four structural challenges of gender inequality. Their deep historical and structural roots make them one of the most difficult obstacles to dismantle and eliminate.

Thirty years ago, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action identified violence against women and girls as a serious violation of human rights and an obstacle to their full development and equality, and urged countries to take concrete measures to eradicate it. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), together with its general recommendations, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará) (1994) and the Regional Gender Agenda have been instrumental in establishing legal frameworks that address the various manifestations of gender-based violence and comprehensive public policies (see box II.4).

Box II.4

Regulatory instruments for the eradication of gender-based violence against women

Over the past 30 years, the following instruments have been fundamental for establishing legal frameworks to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls and to develop comprehensive public policies at the national level: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), together with its optional protocol and general recommendations; the Convention of Belém do Pará (1994); the jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights; the Beijing Platform for Action and the Regional Gender Agenda.

Latin America and the Caribbean has the distinction of having adopted in 1994 the Convention of Belém do Pará, the first human rights treaty to establish the right of women to live a life free of violence in both the public and private spheres and to define violence against women as a violation of human rights. In 2004, the General Assembly of the Organization of American States established the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention to follow up on the provisions of the treaty, contribute to the consolidation of the defined objectives and institute a system of technical cooperation among the States Parties. The Ninth Conference of States Parties to the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention, held in June 2024, culminated with the commitment to accelerate the implementation of measures and the strengthening of mechanisms to eradicate gender-based violence.

The obligation of States to act immediately to address cases of violence against women and girls is based on the principle of due diligence to prevent, punish and eradicate manifestations of violence against women. This principle arises from the specific obligations of the American Convention on Human Rights and the specific obligations to investigate and punish stipulated by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Added to this are the recommendations to conduct investigations into discrimination made by the Committee of Experts of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (general recommendation No. 19 (1992) and general recommendation No. 35 (2017)) and article 4 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women of the United Nations General Assembly (1993), which calls on States to prevent, investigate and punish all acts of violence, whether perpetrated by the State or by private individuals. The Convention of Belém do Pará outlines States' immediate obligations in cases of violence against women, including procedures, judicial mechanisms and legislation aimed at preventing impunity. All these treaties are complemented by the jurisprudence on gender-based violence against women developed by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, based on investigations of violations of women's human rights and acts of violence and impunity in Mexico, drawing on the cases "González and others (Campo Algodonero) vs. Mexico" (2009), "Fernández Ortega and others vs. Mexico" (2010), and "Bedoya Lima and other vs. Colombia", among others.

In general, the observations and recommendations issued by the human rights treaty bodies constitute a road map for the fulfilment of human rights and due diligence by States in terms of investigation, punishment, reparation and compliance with public policies, institutional frameworks, budget allocation and the development of information systems in the countries of the region.

Source: Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI), “Latin American and Caribbean States agree to accelerate efforts, strengthen mechanisms, and increase budgets to eradicate violence against women”, 24 June 2024 [online] <https://belemdoacara.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Press-Release-IX-CEP.pdf> and inputs provided by the Technical Secretariat of MESECVI.

Defining and addressing the different forms of violence against women and girls is a priority. Progress at the international and regional levels (see box II.4) and in the commitments made by countries to adopt comprehensive and multisectoral policies, laws and action plans to prevent, address, punish and eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination often contrasts with the gap between legally enshrined rights and their effective exercise; as a result, violence against women and girls continues to be a pandemic in the shadows, as underscored by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres. Also of concern is the emergence of governments and movements that deny the existence of gender-based violence (Roggeband and Krizsán, 2020). In this context, human rights standards and the agreements and commitments made in the framework of the Regional Gender Agenda take on special relevance.

Gender-based violence against women and girls is systemic and persistent in the region. It affects all areas of women’s and girls’ lives, both in the public and private spheres and, increasingly, in digital environments. Furthermore, its impact is intersectional, because it specifically and disproportionately affects women who belong to certain groups, such as Indigenous, Afrodescendent, rural, migrant or poor women. Violence cuts across the territories and the diverse socioeconomic realities of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Although its most extreme expression is femicide or feminicide, gender-based violence takes multiple forms that require urgent attention and rapid and effective responses.⁸

1. The region has made great strides on the regulatory front and in increasing the visibility of gender-based violence against women and girls

Thirty years ago, the Beijing Platform for Action expressed the need for countries to enact or reinforce penal, civil, labour and administrative sanctions in domestic legislation or to punish and redress the wrongs done to women and girls in any form of violence, whether in the home, workplace, community or society.

The region has also made proactive efforts: since 1994, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará), the first treaty to condemn such violence, has made it a duty of States to adopt policies aimed to prevent, punish and eradicate discrimination and violence against women in the public and private spheres.

At the regional level, the Follow-up Mechanism for the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI), in collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), has developed instruments to align domestic legal systems with international standards on women’s human rights in the face of violence. Examples include the Inter-American Model Law on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of the Gender-Related Killing of Women and Girls (Femicide/Feminicide) and the Inter-American Model Law on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication

⁸ In Latin America and the Caribbean, gender-related killings of women or girls are referred to using the terms “femicide”, “feminicide” or “gender-based aggravated homicide”.

of Violence against Women in Political Life (MESECVI, 2024). The Latin American Model Protocol for the Investigation of Gender-related Killings of Women (OHCHR/UN-Women, 2014) is another example of the instruments created to promote effective investigation and compliance with due diligence, in line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention of Belém do Pará.

The enactment of comprehensive laws on violence against women beyond the family setting, which began in 2007 (ECLAC, 2015) has been steadily progressing in Latin America. Currently, 14 countries in the region have such legislation (see diagram II.1).⁹ These laws offer a broad and comprehensive perspective to address the various forms of violence, incorporating not only definitions but also policies for prevention, protection, assistance and institutional coordination mechanisms. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the 2013 Comprehensive Law to guarantee women a life free from violence included an article requiring departmental autonomous governments to allocate 15% of their budget to preventing and combatting violence against women. Chile is the latest country to pass a comprehensive law (2024) defining the concept of gender-based violence and its different expressions, such as physical, psychological, sexual, economic and gynecological-obstetric violence. Notably, this law establishes the duties of State bodies in the prevention, investigation, protection, punishment and reparation of violence against women and the standards of due diligence that they must respect.

Diagram II.1
Latin America and the Caribbean: legislative advances related to violence against women and girls



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Although Caribbean countries have not yet enacted comprehensive laws against gender-based violence against women, important reforms have been made to second-generation laws against domestic violence. The concept of sexual violence has been expanded, particularly within marriage (MESECVI, 2024) and in cases of early pregnancy as a result of sexual violence. In Saint Lucia, a new law against domestic

⁹ The countries of Latin America with comprehensive laws on violence against women are: Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

violence was enacted (2022), while in the Turks and Caicos Islands, a protocol for responding to domestic violence was adopted.

The recognition of public space as an area where violence also occurs has led to the implementation of laws against harassment in public spaces in Argentina, Chile and Costa Rica, among other countries.

On the labour front, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, the Bahamas, Barbados, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Uruguay have ratified the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), the first international treaty to recognize the right of all persons to a work environment free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence.

With respect to technology-facilitated violence, in Ecuador the Comprehensive Organic Criminal Code was amended in 2021 to criminalize online harassment and unauthorized dissemination of sexual or intimate images and to establish specific penalties for such acts. This regulatory framework also addresses sexual crimes perpetrated against minors through digital platforms, including the online sexual harassment of minors (grooming). A similar approach has been followed in Costa Rica to sanction online harassment and protect victims. In Mexico, the Olimpia Law has been pioneering in recognizing digital violence as a form of gender-based violence and punishing the non-consensual dissemination of intimate content. Recently, Argentina also enacted a law to the same effect and with the same name: Olimpia Act (No. 26485). Moreover, in 2023, Mexico passed the Ingrid Act, which establishes penalties for public servants who disclose images of victims of violence, with a view to protecting victims' dignity and integrity. This law also included an amendment to the Penal Code to broaden the penalties for corruption and harassment of minors through electronic media. Other countries, such as Guatemala, passed decrees against school bullying, while in Nicaragua the Special Act on Cybercrime was adopted, which establishes specific penalties for crimes committed in the digital environment.

The prohibition of child marriage is another area where regulatory progress has been made in the region. Child marriage is currently prohibited without exception in 14 countries and territories: Antigua and Barbuda, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico and Trinidad and Tobago (ECLAC, 2023b).

Nineteen countries in Latin American and the Caribbean have passed laws to criminalize and penalize femicide, feminicide or the gender-based killing of women (see diagram II.1). Among them is Cuba, which is the latest country to adopt this type of legislation. The criminalization of femicide establishes a legal framework that allows justice systems to identify, prosecute and punish these crimes more effectively and encourages the creation of prevention and education programmes that address the structural causes of such violence.

In addition, some countries have implemented legal frameworks to protect indirect victims of femicide, such as children under the age of 18 and other dependents of the direct victims. In the last five years, Brazil, Chile and Peru joined the group of countries with existing public policies for the reparation of indirect victims of femicide (these measures usually consist of legal, psychological and social assistance adapted to the particular needs of each case). These countries are Argentina, Costa Rica, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

In at least 11 Latin American countries, comprehensive laws for the elimination of gender-based violence against women and girls include the obligation to develop a national programme, policy or plan to prevent, address, punish and eliminate violence against women. These countries include Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

However, some countries of the region have developed national action plans independently of the existence of comprehensive legislation. For example, despite their lack of comprehensive laws on the matter, Brazil, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago have implemented national plans or action strategies that play a central role in coordinating policies against gender-based violence. The Directorate of Gender Affairs of Antigua and Barbuda has drafted a national plan of action against gender-based violence 2023–2027, which is still pending government approval.

As proposed in the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030, one of the approaches guiding public policies and objectives related to the autonomy and rights of women and girls is the recognition of intersectionality and interculturality, which takes into account that women and girls face different social, economic, cultural and identity realities. Panama has established Comprehensive Support Centres in Indigenous regions such as the Guna Yala region, which provide interdisciplinary services in the local language and carry out studies to guide the design of programmes and policies to address violence against older women. In Guatemala, initiatives have been carried out in rural areas, including the creation of support pathways for victims of sexual violence. Mexico stands out for its Indigenous and Afro-Mexican Women’s Centres, which provide specialized assistance in gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive rights to Indigenous and Afrodescendent women. In Antigua and Barbuda, programmes have been implemented for sex workers and transgender women, ensuring access to health services and holistic support. El Salvador, through the Ministry of Culture, has supported Indigenous and Afrodescendent Women’s Circles to promote their rights, facilitate access to technological tools and ensure the prevention and elimination of discrimination through specialized health workshops for older persons. In Argentina, the *Acompañar* programme is a key initiative to promote the economic autonomy of women and LGBTI+ persons. In Chile, the Fourth National Plan for Equality between Women and Men 2018–2030 contains specific measures to prevent and combat violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Fundamental progress has been made in the region in improving the measurement and recording of gender-based violence. Ten countries have implemented standards requiring the recording, analysis and dissemination of data on the various forms of gender-based violence, including femicide (see diagram II.1).

Systems for recording and analysing information are of central importance in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies to eliminate gender-based violence against women. As a result, in recent years, capacities have been strengthened in the management of registry systems, leading to improved policy monitoring and creating the conditions necessary to avoid the revictimization that many women experience when seeking support from different State institutions. Several countries have developed registry systems that bring together the information produced by the various agencies involved in providing support to women who suffer gender-based violence. In Antigua and Barbuda, an inter-agency measurement and coordination system for information management was created, which standardizes the entry and evaluation forms of the Royal Police Force, the Family and Social Services Division, the health sector, the Directorate of Gender Affairs and civil society. The Ministry for Women of Brazil created an integrated system that brings together more than 2,500 services provided by the national care network for women in situations of violence. Argentina launched the Integrated System of Cases of Gender-based Violence and Peru has the *SíseVe* platform, while Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Panama, Paraguay and the Plurinational State of Bolivia are developing linkages and strengthening the capacities needed to implement integrated or unified administrative record systems of cases of gender-based violence.

The availability of rigorous administrative records can save lives by helping to build early warning systems that —when linked with the records of recurrent support, police reports and records of femicides, feminicides or gender-related killings of women— make it possible to generate mechanisms for risk

prevention or early warning of feminicidal violence. These tools, in turn, can be used to coordinate resources in an intersectoral and decentralized manner. Some promising examples of the creation and management of these information systems include the National Data and Information Bank on Cases of Violence against Women of Mexico; Argentina’s National Register of Femicides of the Argentine Justice, the Register of Transfemicides, Travesticides and Femicides, the register of related femicides (Specialized Prosecutor’s Unit on Violence against Women of the Public Prosecution Service); the National Judicial Database of Brazil (centralized storage system of procedural data and metadata for the entire judiciary); the Intersectoral Femicide Circuit of Chile; the Special Commission for Statistics on Security of Ecuador, formed by the Judicial Council, the National Institute of Statistics and Census, the National Secretariat of Planning and Development, the Attorney General’s Office and the Ministry of Justice, Human Rights and Worship; and the publicly available information on domestic violence and gender-based violence of the Ministry of the Interior of Uruguay.

At the same time, statistical exercises have been carried out in many of the region’s countries to measure the prevalence of gender-based violence, either through a module of a broader survey or a specialized survey (see table II.1).

Table II.1
Latin America and the Caribbean: countries that have conducted specific surveys measuring the prevalence of violence against women and girls, 2010–2023

2010–2014	Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay, Uruguay
2015–2019	Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Jamaica, Mexico, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Uruguay
2020–2023	Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay

Source: L. García, “Encuestas de medición de la prevalencia de la violencia contra las mujeres en los países de América Latina 2010-2022”, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), unpublished.

The adoption of laws on violence against women has fostered the establishment observatories managed by various entities at the national level, as in the case of Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Paraguay and the Plurinational State of Bolivia. These observatories have become important tools for accessing information on the prevalence of gender-based violence against women, as well as on various indicators related to the characterization and monitoring of such violations of women’s and girls’ human rights.

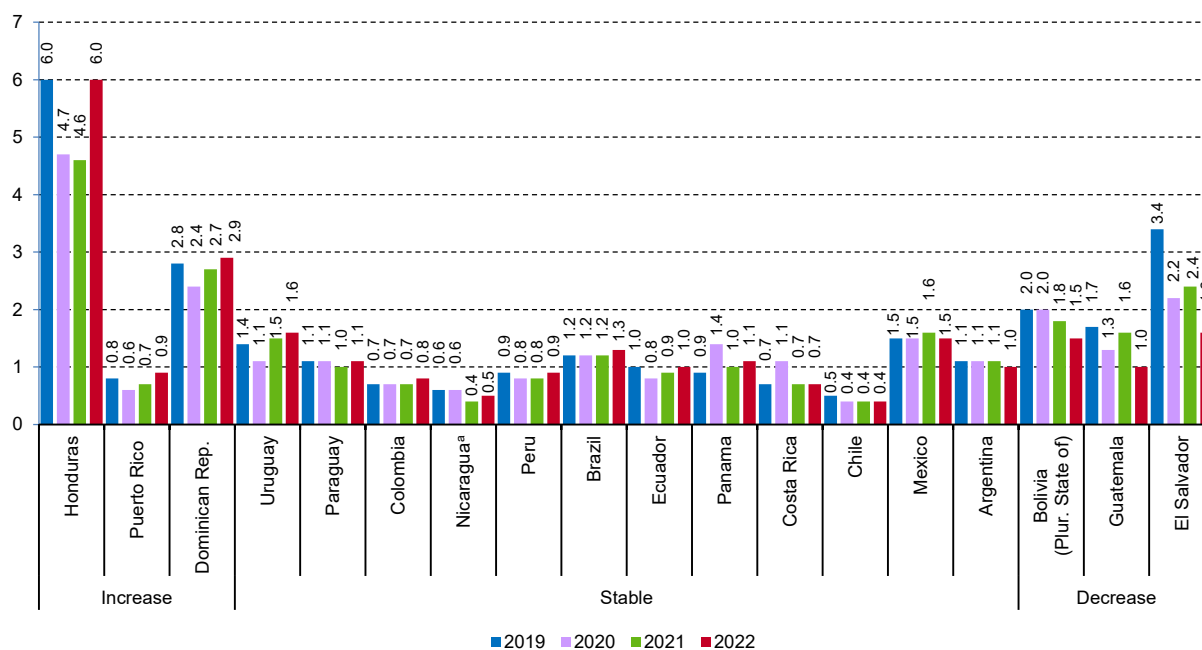
Awareness-raising and actions to address gender-based violence against women have been largely driven by feminist and women’s organizations, which had a strong presence in Beijing. In this context, all countries have referred in their reports to cooperation programmes with feminist and civil society organizations. In some cases, the organizations provide assistance to victims of violence, while in others they provide training. They also provide policy advice, bringing together the needs of the territories and activism in different areas. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, civil society organizations have helped to train community developers in violence prevention since 2016. In Brazil, the Ministry for Women carried out the “Brazil without Misogyny” campaign, with broad and continuous coordination between civil society and the State and the aim to build a shared platform to address hatred towards women. Chile’s National Plan for the Right to Lives Free of Gender Violence for Women, Girls and Diversities 2022–2030 foresees the collaboration of 181 social organizations to strengthen prevention measures as well as the development of awareness-raising campaigns, ensuring an intersectional and intersectoral approach. In Mexico, the use of inclusive language was promoted in the social communication practices of Federal Public Administration agencies.

2. The various forms of gender-based violence against women and girls persist despite significant policy advances

Despite legislative advances, growing visibility and public awareness, and improved institutional response by States, violence against women and girls remains a persistent and widespread problem in Latin America and the Caribbean. National surveys show that between 63% and 76% of women have experienced gender-based violence and, according to World Health Organization estimates for 2018 (WHO, 2021), one in four women in the region have experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner at least once in their lifetime. In 2022, at least 4,050 women were victims of femicide in 26 countries in the region, equivalent to the violent death of a woman every two hours, according to the latest official data compiled by the ECLAC Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean.

An analysis of the femicide rates reported by 18 Latin American countries and territories for the period 2019–2022 (see figure II.4) shows that the figures for this indicator have remained constant or undergone only slight variations in 12 countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay) but have increased in other countries and territories (Dominican Republic, Honduras and Puerto Rico). The largest increase is in Honduras, where the 2022 rate is 30% higher than the previous year. However, in the Dominican Republic and Honduras there was a significant drop in cases between 2019 and 2020, making the increase in the two years that followed notable. Femicide rates have decreased in only three countries: Guatemala, El Salvador and the Plurinational State of Bolivia. In Guatemala and El Salvador, the rate reflects a decrease in cases between 2019 and 2020, and an increase in the period 2020–2021, before falling again in the period 2021–2022.

Figure II.4
Latin America (18 countries and territories): femicide or femicide rates, 2019–2022
(Rates per 100,000 women)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean.

^a Nicaragua only reports cases of women's deaths at the hands of their intimate partner or former partner.

The region has an outstanding debt in terms of gender-based violence against women and girls, given the high prevalence of early and forced child marriages and unions, a harmful practice that must be eliminated, as stated in target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals. This practice mainly affects girls and functions in a context of gender inequality. Social norms that perpetuate traditional gender roles confine many girls, particularly those in vulnerable contexts, to marriages with adult men. In fact, 1 in 5 young women aged 20–24 married before 18, compared to 1 in 30 young men (see map II.1) (Murray Gaston, Misunas, and Cappa, 2019).

Map II.1
Latin America and the Caribbean (19 countries): proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a stable union before age 18, latest available year
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean and United Nations, Global SDG Indicators Database.

Note: The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

3. A comprehensive approach to gender-based violence against women and girls in a comprehensive manner and investing in its prevention as a due diligence obligation of States remain important public policy challenges in the region

The greatest challenges to ensuring a life free of violence for women and girls continue to be the effective implementation of prevention policies and the transformation of patriarchal cultural patterns that perpetuate gender-based violence. An example of this is the persistently low proportion of victims and survivors of gender-based violence who go to assistance centres and report the corresponding crime. Similarly, the most serious cases of violence against women and girls highlight persistent difficulties in accessing justice quickly, with an intersectional and gender perspective and respect for diversity. In Uruguay, according to the Statistics and Strategic Analysis Division of the Ministry of the Interior, 37% of the victims of femicide registered in 2022 had previously filed complaints (ECLAC, 2023c).

Protocols or guidelines for addressing cases of violence are a developing field. Designed as framework management tools, they can be used to carry out specialized or sectoral actions and involve various stakeholders to improve the application of domestic and sectoral laws and public policies. In addition,

most of them include action guides for the launching of criminal investigations, for reparation after punishment and for victim support.

With regard to prevention measures, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action recommended that governments organize, support and finance community education and training campaigns to raise awareness on violence against women as a violation of their human rights and disseminate information on the assistance available to women and families who are victims of violence. In this regard, various dissemination and training campaigns were reported in at least 10 countries. In Argentina, the Micaela Act establishes mandatory training on gender and gender-based violence for all public servants. In Cuba, the Faculty of Communication of the University of Havana has an elective course on Gender and Communication and more than 800 journalists and communicators have graduated from courses on Gender and Communication and Gender Violence at the José Martí International Institute of Journalism of the Union of Journalists of Cuba. In general, the campaigns seek to raise awareness of different forms of violence, including digital violence. In Ecuador, several awareness campaigns on digital and gender-based violence targeting women and girls were carried out between 2019 and 2023. Since 2016, the Violence-free Dating campaign has been carried out annually in Uruguay with the aim of contributing to cultural change through the promotion of non-violent relationship patterns in dating and questioning gender stereotypes.

With reference to institutional capacity-building, specialized divisions and units have been created in the area of investigation and judicial response. In Antigua and Barbuda, the Family Division of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court, which specializes in domestic violence and child protection matters, including child physical and sexual abuse, was created in 2022. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, between 2022 and 2023, 19 courts specialized in violence against women were established. In 2021, the establishment, configuration and operation of Family Commissariats were enacted by law in Colombia, with the aim of preventing, protecting, restoring, repairing and ensuring the rights of those who are at risk or have been victims of gender-based violence in the family context. Specialized prosecutors' offices and investigation protocols have also been created in Guatemala.

In addition, the number of local shelters or centres for the comprehensive support of victims of violence has increased in several countries. In Costa Rica, 460 safe spaces have been established in businesses, means of transport and temporary housing. In each space, a protocol for addressing violence is applied, personnel are trained to recognize and manage sexual harassment in the street and case reports are provided to the National Institute for Women. The Domestic Violence, Violence against Women and Gender-Based Violence Treatment Centre, a specialized 24-hour service available all year round, was also established by law. These spaces provide a safe environment for at-risk women. In Ecuador, Violet Centre shelters offer comprehensive protection services, including psychological, legal and social assistance. In Antigua and Barbuda, Sunshine Home for Girls is a safe haven for girls and adolescents in abusive or vulnerable situations.¹⁰ In the Dominican Republic, the Ministry of Women's Affairs reported on the strengthening of 55 Local Networks for a Life Free of Violence at the municipal and provincial levels. These spaces for inter-agency and sectoral coordination feature the participation of local community leaders and representatives, who develop joint actions to prevent violence while also reinforcing the referral of victims of violence to social protection systems.

Policies in Argentina, Costa Rica, Chile, the Dominican Republic and Mexico highlight the need to promote women's economic autonomy in order to tackle dependency as a cause for remaining in violent relationships. An example of progress along these lines is the recognition of patrimonial violence in Chile, which includes the obligation to guarantee alimony payments.

¹⁰ See [online] <https://millreeffund.org/sunshine-home-for-girls/>.

Notwithstanding the measures outlined above and the multiple activities described in national reports, prevention must be understood as a State obligation and, according to the definition of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (1988, para. 175), “this duty to prevent includes all those means of a legal, political, administrative and cultural nature that promote the protection of human rights and ensure that any violations are considered and treated as illegal acts, which, as such, may lead to the punishment of those responsible and the obligation to indemnify the victims for damages”. Thus, as stated in the Regional Gender Agenda, gender-based violence against women must be addressed as a commitment of all areas and levels of government. To this end, it is essential to strengthen the inter-agency coordination mechanisms outlined in national reports, in order to develop a comprehensive public response that addresses the multifaceted nature of the causes and structural determinants of gender-based violence against women, adolescent girls and girls in all their diversity. At the same time, doing so will require the availability of sufficient human and budgetary resources commensurate with the scale of this situation in the countries of the region.

In the reports prepared in successive Multilateral Evaluation Rounds, the MESECVI has pointed to the limited availability of information to determine how much States allocate to measures aimed at preventing, punishing, redressing and eradicating the various manifestations of violence against women and girls (UN-Women/MESECVI, 2022).

In recent years, issues such as the increase in organized crime pose challenges to the design and implementation of public policies to address the risks and characteristics of gender-based violence against women, in addition to the structural factors of poverty and inequality (Spotlight Initiative, 2021). Likewise, the disappearance of women and girls and human trafficking require policies and tools to act effectively in the face of such rights violations.

D. The concentration of power and hierarchical relations in the public and private spheres must be addressed to achieve women’s full and meaningful participation, accountability and gender-responsive institution-building

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action states that achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making is necessary to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning (United Nations, 1996). Similarly, guaranteeing the full participation of women in public positions and political representation and achieving parity democracy are fundamental objectives of the Regional Gender Agenda, as expressed in the Quito Consensus (2007), the Santo Domingo Consensus (2013) and the Santiago Commitment (2020), which highlight parity in political representation as a precondition for democracy, a goal for eradicating the structural exclusion of women in society, as well as a key element for strengthening women’s autonomy.

In order to achieve gender equality by 2030, progress in interrelated processes is essential: the deepening and fine-tuning of democracies and the democratization of political, socioeconomic and cultural regimes. Both are conditional upon achieving parity in the distribution of power. Parity democracy —as a quantitative and qualitative criterion— is thus central to the process of generating the conditions for women’s full exercise of human rights and citizenship (ECLAC, 2017, p. 19).

1. Although Latin America and the Caribbean is moving towards parity, barriers remain to women’s full participation in representative bodies

The presence of women in political decision-making positions has been key to advancing gender equality and democratic culture in Latin America and the Caribbean, influencing public policies for gender equality to achieve substantive equality and incorporating the proposals and demands of the women’s and

feminist movement which —thanks to alliances with women within political parties— have evolved into proposals for laws and public policies (ECLAC, 2023e). Despite the importance of these advances, there is still a long way to go to achieve parity and equal participation in the different branches of government.

Target 5.5 of Sustainable Development Goal 5 proposes to “ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life”. More specifically, indicators 5.5.1a and 5.5.1b provide specific measures to assess progress toward gender equality in political leadership. Indicator 5.5.1a measures the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and indicator 5.5.1b assesses the proportion of seats held by women in local governments. Regarding the monitoring of Goal 5 linked to gender equality, only target 5.c, which addresses strengthening applicable policies and laws to promote gender equality at all levels, has been achieved or is likely to be achieved by 2030 (ECLAC/UN-Women, 2024a).

In addition, there is a broad regulatory and political framework at the international and regional levels that seeks to ensure the full participation of women on equal terms in the various spheres of public and political life (Inter-American Task Force on Women’s Leadership, 2022). This includes the Regulatory Framework to Consolidate Parity Democracy sanctioned in 2015 by the Latin American and Caribbean Parliament, which establishes that the respect and defence of political rights are obligations of States, under the principle of equality and non-discrimination (UN-Women/PARLATINO, 2016).

One noteworthy regulatory advance towards women’s increased political participation in several countries of the region is the adoption or strengthening of related legislation following the approval of the first quota law in Argentina in 1991: in 2022, nine countries had parity measures (including constitutional reforms, electoral reforms or laws aimed at fostering parity) and nine countries had quota laws for representative elections (ECLAC/UN-Women, 2024b). In 2020–2024, several countries implemented significant reforms to foster gender equality in various spheres linked to women’s participation in decision-making spaces (United Nations, 2024b).

Concerning parity measures, Mexico’s 2019 constitutional reform known as “Parity Everywhere” is notable in that it enshrined in the Constitution a parity mandate across all levels of government, including the legislative and judicial branches, at the federal, state and municipal levels. In addition, in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, a methodology has been developed to verify and monitor compliance with parity, ensuring that all political organizations present gender-balanced lists of candidates in the general (2020) and subnational (2021) elections. In Nicaragua, in 2022, Electoral Act No. 331 was amended to establish gender alternation on electoral lists with a 50% quota for women. In Ecuador, a progressive parity policy has been established in the Democracy Code (2020), with a target of 50% of multi-person candidacies headed by women by 2025. Also noteworthy is Costa Rica’s “Pathway from Quotas to Gender Parity” in national and municipal elections, carried out by the Ombudsman’s Office as a means of institutional advocacy to guarantee women’s participation in social and political life.

In order to make progress towards equal participation in decision-making spaces and comply with national quota and parity standards, some countries have recognized the need to adopt a gender perspective in regulating the allocation of public resources (direct and indirect) to political parties and organizations and electoral campaigns. Beyond the obligation of parity or the establishment of quotas, some countries have understood the necessity of allocating funding to improve women’s participation in different spheres and have adopted related measures. In terms of access to resources and financing, which are critical to

improving women's political participation, only 10 countries¹¹ in the region have some type of gender-sensitive measure in the financing of political parties, mainly in funds earmarked for training and the promotion of gender equality. Of these, only four countries provide specific resources for women's electoral campaigns¹² (UN-Women, 2024c).

In Chile, Act No. 20840 of 2015 provides special funding to political parties for each elected female candidate, which must be used exclusively to promote women's participation in representative positions. The law also establishes an additional reimbursement of election expenses for female senators and deputies, which, since 2021, include expenses linked to care work. In Brazil, Constitutional Amendment No. 117 of 2022 amends article 17 of the Constitution and requires political parties to allocate at least 5% of their resources to promote and disseminate women's political participation. It also establishes that at least 30% of the Special Campaign Financing Fund resources must be allocated to women candidates, in addition to requiring that 30% of free advertising time on radio and television be dedicated to women candidates.

In addition, at least 15 countries, including 3 in the Caribbean subregion, have adopted policies for women's political training and education in support of women's leadership in all their diversity. Notable examples include programmes for leadership training, political rights training, electoral civic education and community leadership. In Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Uruguay, programmes were created specifically for Indigenous, rural or Afrodescendent women. Also worthy of mention are programmes for young leaders.

Initial progress has been made in the region to ensure the political participation of Indigenous, rural, Afrodescendent and campesino women in different political spaces. In Brazil, women represent 56% of the 75 regular and alternate members of the National Council of Traditional Peoples and Communities. This council stresses that an effective socio-environmental policy requires the legitimate and qualified participation of women, respecting their forms of organization, in line with the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169). In Costa Rica, Act No. 10188, which strengthens the deputy mayor and deputy intendant offices, and Act No. 9860, which reforms the Municipal Code, were passed to combat gender-based political violence and eliminate legal loopholes. These laws seek to optimize the allocation of functions and resources for deputy mayor's offices, which are frequently occupied by women. In Mexico, during the 2020–2021 electoral process, the National Electoral Institute implemented affirmative actions that led to the election of 22 Indigenous women and 4 Afro-Mexican women as federal deputies, thereby strengthening the representation of these communities in Congress. In Peru, Act No. 30982 of 2019 amended the General Law of Campesino Communities to require that at least 30% of community board members be women, as an affirmative action measure to improve gender representation in these organizations.

An example of legislative progress towards fostering women's participation through regulatory measures in the media is the Equity in Gender Representation in Communication Services Act (No. 27635) in Argentina. This law, enacted in 2021, seeks a true equality of rights, opportunities and treatment of people in the media. In Cuba, gender parity was achieved in the science and technological innovation sector in 2020, with women representing 53.9% of persons employed in the sector.

¹¹ Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama and Peru.

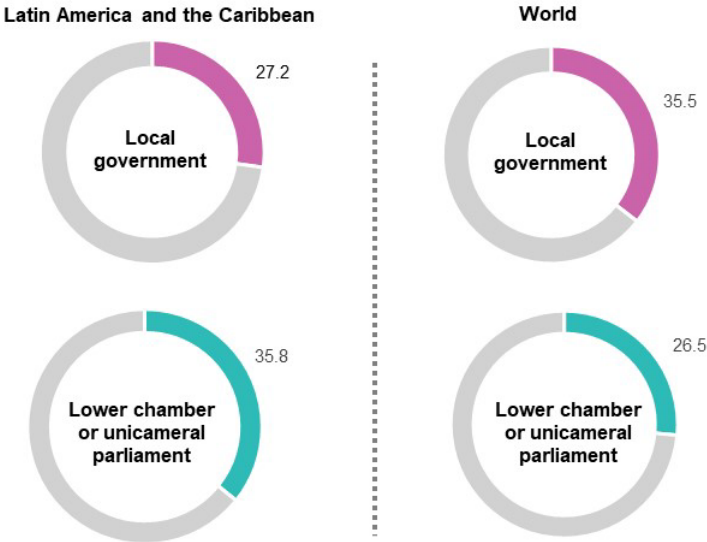
¹² Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Mexico. In addition, Brazil, Mexico, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia have provisions on electoral slots for women candidates in the media.

While the aforementioned legislative advances have been essential, the results in terms of participation, mentioned below, demonstrate the need to increase efforts and the pace of progress towards their implementation and the achievement of substantive results (ECLAC/UN-Women, 2024b).

In recent years, the proportion of women legislators in unicameral parliaments or lower chambers of national parliaments has gradually increased in Latin America and the Caribbean. While the majority of seats continue to be held by men at the global level, the region continues to lead the way towards parity in national parliaments, reaching an average of 35.8% female representation in 2023. However, taking into account countries' varied results in recent elections, it is estimated that reaching parity in national parliaments will take more than 40 years (ECLAC, 2023e).

Regarding women's participation in local governments, at the beginning of 2023, women held 27.2% of the elected positions in local deliberative bodies in the region, compared to 35.5% at the global level (UN-Women, 2024c). This places Latin America and the Caribbean fifth among other regions (ECLAC/UN-Women, 2024b) (see diagram II.2).

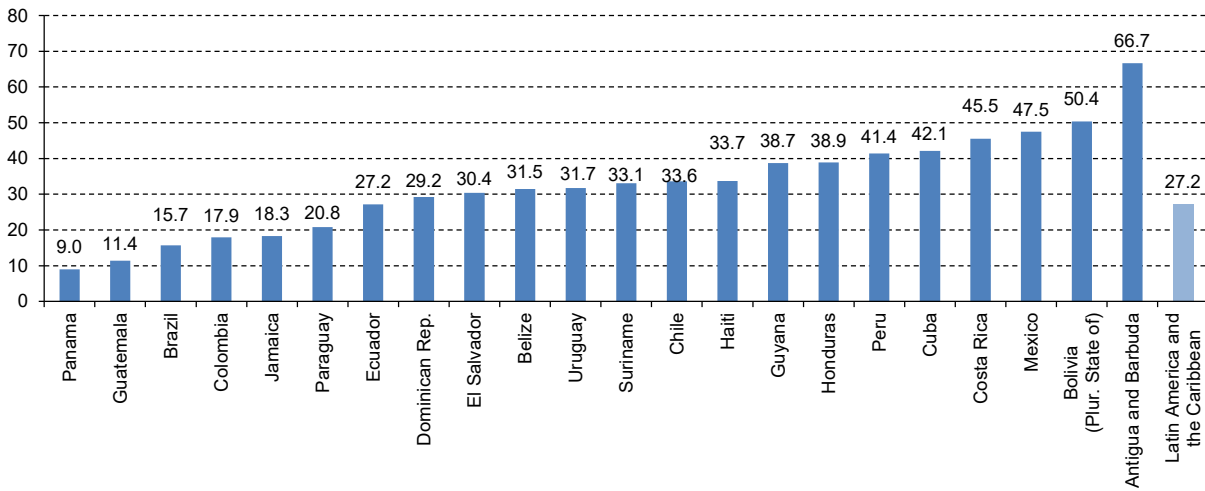
Diagram II.2
Latin America and the Caribbean and the world: women's participation in local government deliberative bodies and in national parliaments, 2023
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean/United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (ECLAC/UN-Women), “Women in local government in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2023”, *Notes for Equality*, No. 33, Santiago, 2024, on the basis of data from UN-Women and Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

Women's participation in local governments continues to vary widely among countries. While in some countries parity in deliberative bodies has been or will soon be achieved, women's representation in mayoral positions has advanced at a slower pace (ECLAC/UN-Women, 2024b) (see figure II.5).

Figure II.5
Latin America and the Caribbean (22 countries): proportion of seats held by women in local governments, latest available data according to local elections (SDG indicator 5.5.1b)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean.

In Paraguay, a milestone was achieved in the 2021 municipal elections with a record 31 women elected as mayors, representing 12% of mayoral positions. In addition, a record number of women were elected as councillors, reaching 22.6%, thanks to the system of closed and unblocked lists with preferential options, which favoured the inclusion of women in political positions. Since 2020, Jamaica has achieved the highest percentage of women in parliamentary leadership in its history, with 29% female representation (18 of 63 members) in the House of Representatives, surpassing the global average of 25.5%. In addition, in August 2020, the Government of Jamaica published a list of appointments to 312 public sector councils, commissions and committees in which women have had significant participation. In December 2022, the House of Representatives approved a motion for the creation of a Bicameral Caucus of Women Parliamentarians, composed of members from both chambers and all parties. This group was established as a select committee that holds joint sessions with a similar Senate committee. In February 2023, a historic all-female session of Parliament was held as part of International Women’s Day. This session involved young women aged 18–25 who were nominated by female and male parliamentarians for a debate on a (fictitious) motion seeking to implement a national action plan for gender equality and women’s economic empowerment, focusing on the education, care and digital transformation sectors. In Colombia, 16 Special Transitory Peace Electoral Districts were created in 2021 for the House of Representatives for the period 2022–2026, in an effort to include the victims of the conflict in the legislative arena. In Nicaragua, progress was made in gender equity with the formation of two Regional Councils in 2022, with equal participation of 50% women and 50% men.

Regarding women’s representation in the executive branch, their degree of presence in ministerial positions in presidential cabinets is a direct expression of the president’s political will, of negotiations within the political parties in power and of the priority that the government agenda gives to gender parity and equality. Cuba was the first country in the region to appoint a woman as minister or secretary of State in 1948. Since then, women’s participation in ministerial cabinets has gradually increased. However, this increase has been modest over the last three terms of government: according to data reported from the latest available presidential term, the proportion of women ministers in Latin America and the Caribbean reached an average of 28.7% (ECLAC, 2023e). Moreover, this representation remains limited to certain areas (UN-Women, 2024b).

In Colombia, Act No. 2424 of 2024 on parity in decision-making positions establishes that 50% of decision-making positions in the public sector of the executive branch (including mayors' offices, governors' offices and the national government) must be held by women. In Cuba, women hold 51.5% of leadership positions, including 8 ministerial and 30 vice-ministerial posts, representing 48.5% of decision-making positions. In 2023, the first woman governor was appointed in the Turks and Caicos Islands, reflecting the presence of women at the highest level of decision-making in the islands. However, no specific policies or measures to drive such changes were reported.

It is also important to establish mechanisms for monitoring progress towards gender parity. In Mexico, Panama and the Plurinational State of Bolivia, policies were established to monitor women's participation in national politics. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the State Service for Devolved Administrative Divisions is responsible for systematizing data on women's political participation, including statistics related to the implementation of Act No. 348. In Mexico, the Women's Political Participation Observatory, established by the National Institute for Women (INMUJERES), the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary and the National Electoral Institute, worked alongside 32 local observatories in 2022 on local implementation of the political parity index. The purpose of the index is to analyse the implementation of the parity principle and to foster participation free from violence and discrimination. In Panama, with the transfer of the methodology for the political parity index of the Atenea initiative¹³ to the electoral body, an updated analysis was conducted in eight areas, with 40 standardized indicators. The overall parity index score improved, averaging 52.0 in 2021, compared with 37 in 2015 (Martínez and others, 2021).

2. Preventing gender-based political violence against women in the public and political spheres is a challenge that makes it difficult to accelerate their full participation therein

The persistence of the structural challenges of gender inequality, in particular discriminatory, violent and patriarchal cultural patterns and the predominance of a culture of privilege in countries' political systems, continues to hinder progress towards parity democracy. Despite the consolidation of regulatory frameworks aimed at strengthening women's participation in politics, numerous institutional, social and cultural factors continue to limit their access to power, to a role in decision-making, to justice and to mechanisms for enforcing their rights. Activists and experts from Latin America and the Caribbean addressed this situation in the regional consultation on general recommendation No. 40 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, held in April 2024 (UN-Women, 2024a). Preventing and eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and establishing regulations, campaigns and effective sanctions to respond to such in the political and public spheres is part of the commitment of the Regional Gender Agenda.

Latin America and the Caribbean has a regulatory framework for women's rights and the promotion of gender equality (see box II.4). Currently, gender-based political violence against women is recognized in the regulatory frameworks of at least 14 countries,¹⁴ and various instruments have been established to monitor it and enable responses from public institutions (especially electoral bodies) and civil society, including women's and feminist movements and organizations, the academic sector, human rights institutions and women's political networks (UN-Women, 2021a).

¹³ The political parity index was developed in 2014 in the context of the Atenea initiative, enabling measurement of the real exercise of women's political rights in a specific context at the national and subnational levels and also regional comparison. More information on Atenea is available at [online] <https://ateneaesparidad.com/indice-de-paridad-politica/>.

¹⁴ Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

Among the measures adopted by countries is the progressive approach taken by Costa Rica, which passed the Preventing, Addressing, Punishing and Eradicating Violence against Women in Politics Act (2022). In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the competencies of electoral courts in cases of harassment and political violence against Bolivian women were strengthened under the Electoral Offences and Penalties Regulation (2020). In Guatemala, the Gender Equity Policy of the Supreme Electoral Court was updated in 2023 to incorporate a gender-sensitive approach in the design of its policies, plans, programmes and projects. In 2020, political violence was recognized as a specific form of gender-based violence in Argentina, when the definition of public and political violence against women was incorporated into Act No. 26485 concerning comprehensive protection to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women in the environments in which they engage in interpersonal relationships. Through the offices of Argentina,¹⁵ the member countries of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) adopted Recommendation No. 06/23, with 10 recommendations on action to address gender-based political violence. In 2020, various regulations were amended in Mexico to recognize gender-based political violence against women, and implementation was strengthened through the issuance of different jurisdictional criteria by the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary. In El Salvador, political violence against women was incorporated into the Special Comprehensive Act for a Life Free of Violence For Women in 2021, and the Supreme Electoral Court developed a specific protocol in 2023. The Road map to coordinate and harmonize inter-institutional services for women facing political violence was also implemented in the country to coordinate the different public responses aimed at protecting women victims of this type of violence. In Peru, Act No. 31155 concerning the prevention and punishment of harassment of women in politics was passed in 2021.

Preventing political violence is particularly important to ensure the full participation of women in all their diversity. Achieving this will also mean fostering inter-institutional collaboration in the provision of services and responses (Albaine, 2021). In Ecuador, reforms to the Democratic Code were adopted in 2020 to criminalize gender-based political violence, recognizing it as a serious electoral offence. These reforms include the establishment of severe penalties, including fines, the suspension of political rights and removal from office, to discourage and punish political violence in the context of elections. In Panama, political violence was addressed through Act No. 184 of 2020. In 2023, the Inter-institutional Response Protocol for the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women in Politics was developed to guide the competent agencies in effectively handling such cases. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, political violence was recognized in the Organic Act on Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence. Lastly, in the Dominican Republic, Act No. 20-23 amending the Organic Electoral Regime Act, was passed criminalizing and punishing gender-based political violence against women for the first time.

3. Regulations must be established and implemented to advance towards parity democracy and encourage bold action to strengthen the political participation and representation of women in their diversity

Regulations and actions to promote women's participation in decision-making spaces, especially parity promotion initiatives with robust implementation frameworks (ECLAC/UN-Women, 2024b), have fostered progress in women's political participation in the region, particularly in national parliaments.¹⁶ Governments have instituted parity promotion initiatives, quotas, financing, training, local regulations and measures to recognize and eradicate political violence against women. However, parity is still a long way

¹⁵ See MERCOSUR (2023).

¹⁶ See ECLAC/UN-Women (2024b) for an analysis showing that across the region, women's representation is much higher in countries with well-designed parity quotas than in those without, by 13 percentage points on average (45% compared to 32% on average per country). Effectively designed parity quotas set participation targets for women at 50%, include ranking or placement rules, and establish strict penalties —such as the rejection of lists that fail to comply with quota requirements— which increase women's participation in local government and accelerate progress towards parity.

off. The gap between regulation and implementation and in the achievement of gender parity in decision-making shows the need to strengthen gender-related institutional frameworks in several areas—including electoral bodies and political parties—and also implementation, particularly at the local and subnational levels, with measures to penalize non-compliance. Gender mainstreaming must also be enhanced across all spheres and in specific decisions and resolutions, which requires human rights and gender equality training and skill-building.

More broadly, commitments must translate into action, and existing national, regional and international obligations for gender equality in political and public life must be fully met, strengthening the autonomy of women in their diversity in decision-making processes. It is also essential to continue incorporating parity into electoral codes through the adoption of laws establishing gender parity targets and to ensure compliance through classification rules and the rejection of candidate lists that fail to meet legal requirements. Gender-based political violence must also be prevented and punished, eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and addressing it through awareness-raising campaigns, regulations and effective sanctions in cases occurring in the political and public spheres.

Generating accessible, globally comparable and intersectional data—disaggregated by sex, age and other characteristics—is critical to facilitate analysis with a view to reporting on and monitoring women’s participation in political and public life. The standards for collaboration between national statistical offices and election management bodies must be raised in order to improve reporting, including on SDG indicator 5.5.1b. Greater investment is needed in lifelong political skill-building for women, and their autonomy in key decision-making processes must be strengthened through awareness-raising, training and specific support for those who face multiple forms of discrimination. Political campaign financing rules must also be established to ensure equal access for men and women to financial resources, boosting the political participation of women in all their diversity—including Indigenous, Afrodescendent, young, rural, and migrant women as well as women with disabilities and sexually diverse women—through community outreach, mentorship, capacity-building and offering legislative and policymaking opportunities. Lastly, there is a need to foster an enabling environment for gender parity in political participation, which means addressing poverty, the sexual division of labour, the burden of unpaid domestic work, patriarchal models, and unequal access to rights, education and technology.

The message of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the International Day of Democracy in 2024 is noteworthy: artificial intelligence must serve humanity equitably and safely, as a tool for good governance, education on democratic processes and full and active public participation, while mitigating risks (United Nations, 2024c). Addressing technological transformation is therefore pivotal for continued progress towards parity democracy free from gender-based political violence facilitated by technology, in the context of efforts to complement and revitalize the existing agenda 30 years on from the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

E. Advancing towards peaceful and inclusive societies requires implementation of the women and peace and security agenda and effective protection of women human rights defenders

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action emphasizes the importance of achieving peaceful and inclusive societies, recognizing that establishing and maintaining peace and security is an essential prerequisite for economic and social progress. To achieve lasting peace, women must fully participate in decision-making, conflict prevention and resolution, and all other peacebuilding initiatives. There is also a need to reduce military spending, limit the availability of weapons, promote non-violent conflict resolution and protect women living in situations of armed and other conflicts (United Nations, 1996).

Latin America and the Caribbean has changed since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action. In the 1990s, many of the region's countries were in transition as democracy following years of military dictatorships, authoritarianism and prolonged violence. Over the ensuing decades, the region became known for its stance on the peaceful settlement of international disputes and the use of multilateralism to build political consensus. Nonetheless, it continues to face challenges in the promotion of just, peaceful and inclusive societies, as set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda.

Global challenges are echoed within the region, threatening the stability of the multilateral system and to financing for development. Mounting geopolitical tensions have rendered it more urgent to redouble efforts to mainstream the gender perspective in disarmament and arms control policies, an aim that is complicated by the acceleration of military build-up. In 2023, military spending grew for the ninth consecutive year, reaching an all-time high of US\$ 2.44 trillion, 6.8% higher than spending in 2022 (United Nations, 2024d).

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that peace and development are interdependent: "There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development." Accordingly, the aim of Goal 16 is to promote peaceful and inclusive societies. In that context, gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but the bedrock of a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.

Under the Regional Gender Agenda, measures have been adopted to ensure the full and effective participation of women at all levels and in all stages of peace processes and mediation efforts, conflict prevention and resolution, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and recovery (ECLAC, 2020), and in the protection of women and their access to justice, as established in Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security and other resolutions relating to the women and peace and security agenda, as well as in general recommendation No. 30 (2013) on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2013).¹⁷ Similarly, the Regional Gender Agenda includes measures for the promotion of multilateral cooperation to implement the provisions of international humanitarian law and to maintain international peace and security (ECLAC, 2023f).

An environment that fosters global peace and the protection of human rights, democracy and peaceful conflict resolution—in keeping with the principles of refraining from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State and of respect for sovereign equality, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations—is paramount for the realization of the Regional Gender Agenda and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

1. Women are affected by conflict differentially and their participation in building and sustaining peace is low

The obstacles to building and sustaining peace in Latin America and the Caribbean go beyond the conflict and post-conflict situations traditionally addressed in the women and peace and security agenda. The region has experienced high levels of violence and social and political conflict related to structural

¹⁷ The Regional Gender Agenda has a strong connection with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security adopted in 2000, which refers to the effects of armed conflict on women and girls and the important role of women in conflict prevention and resolution and in peacebuilding. The Security Council adopted nine further resolutions on women and peace and security that address sexual violence in the context of armed conflict, resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019) and 2493 (2019).

problems linked with exclusion, discrimination and inequality, which increase social fragmentation. The impact of these underlying factors on women is differential and disproportionate depending on their age, ethnicity or race and other factors.

Implementation of the commitments under the Regional Gender Agenda associated with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and the related resolutions, and more generally with the women and peace and security agenda, offers an opportunity to address the structural challenges of gender inequality in the region and to move towards a fairer and more peaceful society.

In compliance with Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security and the complementary instruments and international regulatory framework, some governments have prepared national action plans to translate commitments into meaningful action. As of June 2024, 110 countries had developed such plans (United Nations, 2024d), recognizing not only the differentiated impact of conflict on women and their critical role in sustaining peace but also the need to address emerging obstacles for peace and security using a gender-sensitive approach. In Latin America and the Caribbean, 10 countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay) have adopted national action plans that are in force or have been updated, while Colombia is in the process of doing so. A feminist foreign policy stance has also been adopted in Mexico, Chile and Colombia, providing for concrete initiatives related to women and peacebuilding.

In Argentina, two action plans on women, peace and security have been developed, with the most recent having been adopted in 2022. Similarly, two national action plans have been developed in Brazil, the latest in 2023, and Brazil has actively participated in the international discussions on resolution 1325. Chile is designing its third national action plan, which prioritizes intersectionality and territorial security and recognizes the multiple forms of discrimination that affect women. Colombia is finalizing its first action plan, which was developed through a participatory process with broad civil society participation, including by women representatives of all departments and population groups. Similarly, the Final Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) (2016) included more than 100 specific gender-related measures, which are reflected in its Framework Implementation Plan. In Costa Rica, an inter-institutional action plan was developed to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), fostering the active participation of women in peace and security policies. In Mexico, the National Peace and Security Strategy 2018–2024 was implemented, which includes women in national security, and the first national action plan to follow up on that resolution was presented in 2021. Progress was made in the implementation of Guatemala's national action plan through the institutionalization of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. In Uruguay, the first national action plan for women, peace and security was developed for the period 2021–2024.

One of the key objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) is to foster women's active and meaningful participation in peacebuilding as well as their effective contribution to achieving and consolidating lasting, sustainable peace. In that regard, some of the region's governments have made progress in supporting women in strengthening their negotiation and mediation skills in peace processes. Argentina implemented the Federal Network of Women Mediators with a Gender Perspective, and during that country's term as Chair of MERCOSUR in 2023, the Regional Network of Women Mediators of the Southern Cone, established in 2021, was strengthened. Its members include Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. The Ibero-American Network of Women Mediators was also established in 2023, sponsored by Mexico and the Ibero-American General Secretariat, with Andorra, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Spain and Uruguay as members. Lastly, Uruguay co-chaired with Canada

the Women and Peace and Security Focal Points Network (2020–2021), bringing a Latin American and Caribbean perspective to its work plan. In each of these countries, various strategies and actions, tailored to their national and regional circumstances, have been adopted to promote women’s participation in peacebuilding and in the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and the women and peace and security agenda as a whole.

Resolution 1325 (2000) and the broader women and peace and security agenda recognize women as key stakeholders in conflict prevention and resolution and in peacebuilding. Evidence from a variety of contexts and cultures shows that women’s meaningful participation in conflict prevention, early recovery from crises or emergencies, in dialogue, mediation and negotiation, and in the planning and implementation of security, peacekeeping and peacebuilding policies strengthens social cohesion. When women have a place at the negotiating table in conflict situations, peace agreements tend to be more effective and long-lasting. Women’s participation increases the likelihood that a peace agreement will last at least two years by 20%, and the likelihood it will last 15 years by 35% (UN-Women, 2015). Despite the evidence, data show that there has been little progress over the past decade. In 2023, just 9.6% of peace negotiators, 13.7% of mediators and 26.6% of signatories of peace and ceasefire agreements were women, on average (United Nations, 2024d). In Colombia, the government appointed the first female chief negotiator in peace talks with the National Liberation Army (ELN) and formed a gender-balanced team (United Nations, 2023) (see box II.5), while Brazil, as a guarantor country, appointed a woman as the main representative. Women’s participation in peacebuilding is not only a matter of representation but also a matter of including the women’s rights agenda and presents an opportunity to further the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 5 on gender equality and Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.

Box II.5

Women at the centre of peacebuilding in Colombia

The Final Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army (FARC-EP), signed in 2016, is a global benchmark for good practices in women’s participation and the inclusion of the gender perspective in peace negotiations.

In a groundbreaking initiative, a Gender Subcommittee was established during the peace talks, which were held in Havana. Participants included women delegates from both the government and FARC-EP, as well as representatives of civil society organizations comprising women, victims and LGBTI persons, who contributed to the outcome, a final peace agreement with more than 100 specific provisions on gender and the promotion of women’s rights.

The role of civil society, and in particular of women’s and feminist organizations, was paramount for achieving progress in the inclusion of the gender agenda in the agreement and its follow-up, through the Special Women’s Unit, which supports the work of the Commission for the Follow-up, Promotion and Verification of the Implementation of the Final Agreement. Various platforms for women’s organizations, such as the National Women’s Summit for Peace and the Gender in Peace Group, monitor the agreement on an ongoing basis and prepare periodic progress reports and recommendations.

The government’s institutional architecture has evolved to enable effective implementation of the agreement’s gender-related provisions, including through the recent establishment of the Ministry of Equality and Equity (2023), to which the Vice-ministry for Women and four other vice-ministries are attached, and which has replaced the Presidential Advisory Council for Women’s Equity. The High-level Government Forum on Gender, established in 2018, aims to coordinate and monitor implementation of the gender perspective by the entities involved.

International cooperation bodies and the United Nations have played a pivotal role in that process, providing support, both through technical assistance and financing, as well as oversight and verification. In that context, notable initiatives include the United Nations multi-partner trust fund for sustaining peace in Colombia, the *Mesa de Género de la Cooperación Internacional en Colombia*, and the establishment of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia.

Despite the government's efforts, implementation of the agreement's gender-related provisions continues to lag, in particular at the territorial level, exacerbated by the risks and persistent violence faced by women peacebuilders and human rights leaders and defenders.

The Government of Colombia is currently developing its first action plan for women, peace and security. Women in all their diversity have actively participated in the process through a consultation mechanism involving more than 1,500 women from across the country. Women's organizations, however, have been implementing the women and peace and security agenda for decades, even before the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). The action plan offers a pathway to accelerate the implementation of the gender perspective in the peace agreement, fostering women's full participation and the incorporation of a gender-sensitive approach into the government's Total Peace Policy and the associated peace negotiations.

The action plan dovetails with Colombia's recently launched feminist foreign policy, given that one of its pillars, the peace pillar, is now not only a domestic commitment but also a foreign policy commitment.

Source: United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (UNVMC), "Reports of the Secretary General" [online] <https://colombia.unmissions.org/en/reports-secretary-general-o>.

Recognition of the differentiated impact on women of the crimes committed during different conflicts makes it possible to design mechanisms for truth, justice and reparations. Countries' efforts to reclaim historical memory, recognize sexual violence against women and provide reparations to victims are notable in that regard. *Memoria histórica de las investigaciones: periodo dictaduras 1964-1982*, a publication presented in 2021 by the Plurinational State of Bolivia, documents how sexual violence was systematically used in dictatorships as a form of torture to keep society in order and punish dissidents (Comisión de la Verdad, 2021). This report highlights the brutality with which women were treated as a tool of political repression. In March 2023, the Plurinational Policy for Comprehensive Reparation for Victims of Serious Human Rights Violations during Periods of Unconstitutional Government was established with a view to providing reparations to victims of violence in times of dictatorship and other recent events, such as those that occurred in Sacaba and Senkata in 2019 and 2020. Implementation of the Policy is under way. Moreover, legal action in Guatemala involving sexual violence against Achí women (2022) and the Sepur Zarco case (2016) are notable examples of justice for Indigenous women and women from other communities who suffered sexual violence during the conflict. These are bellwether cases in the fight to obtain reparation and recognition for victims of sexual violence in that country. Meanwhile, a significant step forward was taken in Colombia in combating gender-based violence in the context of its armed conflict. In 2023, macro-case 11 was launched at the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, focusing on investigating gender-based violence, including sexual and reproductive violence, as well as crimes motivated by prejudice. This case reflects an effort to recognize and address the scope of the gender-based violence perpetrated during the conflict in Colombia. Progress has also been made in Guatemala in recognizing and prosecuting human rights violations against women during the country's internal armed conflict.

Several countries have included in their reports information on initiatives to increase women's presence in the areas of defence and security and to provide gender training for staff on active duty. In Argentina, the Ministry of Defence has established a directorate responsible for incorporating the gender perspective and gender equality in the context of the Armed Forces. Other mechanisms have also been created, including the Council for Gender Policy of the Ministry of Defence and gender departments in the army, navy and air force, which handle reports of gender-related human rights violations and mainstream the

gender perspective in all military units. Important steps have also been taken in Brazil to support women's participation in peace missions through the Brazilian Cooperation Agency, which organizes the International Course for Peace Operations for Women. In Chile, a sectoral agenda for gender equality and inclusion (2022–2026) is being developed by the Ministry of National Defence, which aims to ensure that women are fully integrated into national defence. The agenda includes measures to prevent and address workplace and sexual harassment and abuse and to strengthen personnel management systems. In Ecuador, the Institutional Gender Policy of the National Police was implemented, which aims to eradicate discrimination and gender-based violence and to promote equal opportunity within the institution. The Armed Forces Personnel and Discipline Organic Act was also adopted, which ensures the use of a gender-sensitive and non-discriminatory approach in the military structure and promotion based on merit and gender equity criteria. In 2021, Mexico received funding from the Elsie Initiative Fund for Uniformed Women in Peace Operations, which it allocated to analysing opportunities for women in peace operations in the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Naval Affairs and the Ministry of Security and Citizen Protection. In Peru, the implementation of the uniformed gender parity strategy 2018–2028 has increased women's participation in United Nations peace missions. Implementation of the "From Acceptance to Inclusion" Action Plan is also under way, which promotes gender equality in opportunities in the Armed Forces, ensuring a more inclusive environment for women's professional development. In Uruguay, a pilot project has been proposed to reduce the tour of duty in peace missions from 12 to 6 months, with a view to increasing the participation of women who are in the military. This initiative, which was endorsed by the United Nations Department of Peace Operations, positions Uruguay at the forefront of encouraging female participation in international peace missions.

2. Women in peacebuilding and the defence of human rights

The women, peace and security agenda and the Regional Gender Agenda both recognize women as key stakeholders in conflict prevention and resolution and in all other peacebuilding initiatives. Deep knowledge of the social, economic and political situation of their communities means that the work and activism of women involved in peacebuilding and defending human rights contributes to strengthening democracy and building fairer and more inclusive societies. Despite the importance of their work, they often face threats, stigmatization, discrimination, violence and persecution, meaning that effective and comprehensive prevention and protection measures are needed, with a gender-sensitive approach. The efforts of women environmental defenders to defend human rights and protect the environment mean they are among the groups facing the worst of such repercussions in the region.

In the Buenos Aires Commitment, adopted in 2022, the countries of the region undertook to "[e]ncourage and strengthen the effective protection of the rights of all women human rights defenders, particularly those working on issues related to the environment, land, territory and natural resources, and adopt measures to integrate the gender, intersectoral and intercultural perspectives into the creation of a safe and enabling environment for the defence of human rights to prevent all forms of discrimination and violence against these defenders and to combat impunity by taking steps to ensure that human rights violations committed against them are investigated and that they have access to justice".

The Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement), which entered into force on 22 April 2021, is a milestone for the region, as the first regional environmental agreement in Latin America and the Caribbean with specific provisions on human rights defenders in environmental matters. At the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties (2024), countries adopted the decision on mainstreaming the gender perspective, which notes the urgent need to integrate and strengthen the gender perspective, ensure the full and effective participation of women in all their diversity, including Indigenous women, and prevent discrimination and gender-based violence against women defenders. Countries also adopted

the Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, a step forward for the region in protecting and fostering the participation of women human rights defenders in environmental matters and in peacebuilding (see section F).

The work of women as peacebuilders and human rights defenders has been just as essential and pivotal as the resolve of governments and the support of the international community in the significant strides made in the region towards building safe, peaceful and harmonious societies and in driving the adoption of parity policies in several countries (UN-Women, 2021b).

Numerous initiatives have been implemented in the region to support and strengthen the work of women peacebuilders and human rights defenders. In Saint Lucia, Raise Your Voice Saint Lucia works with communities affected by gang violence. In Mexico, *Estrategia Redes de Mujeres Constructoras de Paz (Redes MUCPAZ)*, a strategy to support a network of women peacebuilders, is encouraging women to organize in local spaces to generate peacebuilding processes in vulnerable communities and towns through local citizen planning and participation, in coordination with local public safety authorities. The Executive Victim Services Committee works with civil society organizations to provide comprehensive support for women human rights defenders and journalists who are the victims of crimes and human rights violations, ensuring they receive legal representation and care with a human rights and gender-sensitive approach. In Colombia, Instancia Especial de Mujeres was established, a mechanism to enable women from various civil society organizations to participate in monitoring and verifying the mainstreaming of a gender-sensitive approach into the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, agreed between the Colombian State and FARC-EP. This mechanism fosters women's participation in monitoring the implementation of the Agreement from a gender perspective. In Guatemala, women's organizations have influenced the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda from an intersectional perspective through a variety of institutional mechanisms, such as the Ombudsman for Indigenous Women and the Inter-institutional Panel for Women, Peace and Security. In El Salvador, the *Mujeres guardianas de la paz* project strengthens women's participation in civil society organizations and in women's and community leadership networks, empowering them in matters of transitional justice and peace processes. In Costa Rica, the Ministry of Justice and Peace established Civic Centres for Peace to establish and maintain peace and peaceful societies, placing particular emphasis on the development of girls, adolescent girls and women in selected cantons and their areas of direct influence.¹⁸

Another important issue for building lasting peace in the region is the need to step up international cooperation, as proposed in the Beijing Platform for Action, to address the challenges faced by women in a context of human mobility on an unprecedented scale. The Platform underscores the need to develop effective strategies to protect and promote the rights of migrant and displaced women.

In Brazil, Costa Rica and Ecuador, important policies have been implemented with a gender perspective to address the need to protect refugees and migrants. In Brazil, the National Refugee Committee, which is coordinated by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, considers gender to be a factor of persecution that may warrant the granting of refugee status. In 2023, the National Refugee Committee adopted a

¹⁸ The Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders is a civil society initiative established in 2010 to coordinate numerous feminist organizations and networks of women defenders from a variety of social movements in Mesoamerica. Now including almost 3,000 women defenders and 300 organizations in Mesoamerica, it helps Mesoamerican women defenders to continue their work, supporting their security, well-being, leadership and autonomy through feminist comprehensive protection strategies. In addition to the national networks for women defenders established in Mesoamerica, similar networks have also been established in Brazil and Colombia. See [online] <https://im-defensoras.org/2022/12/im-defensoras>.

measure to grant refugee status to women and girls from countries with high rates of female genital mutilation, demonstrating a commitment to protecting these groups. In Costa Rica, with the support of UNFPA, an inter-institutional instrument is being developed to assess and address risk in situations of violence against migrant women in transit. Measures have been implemented in the country to enhance judicial and extrajudicial accountability, with a focus on preventing sexual and gender-based violence in contexts of fragility and humanitarian crisis, including migration. These initiatives seek to ensure the protection of vulnerable women and girls, addressing the challenges that arise for Costa Rica as a recipient country of migrants and refugees in the Central American subregion. Under Ecuadorian law, gender-related persecution has been considered an additional reason to recognize refugee status since 2021, even though there is no explicit mention of it in the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951. Priority has been given in the country's regulations to applicants citing gender-related reasons and victims are permitted to select the sex of the interviewer to prevent revictimization. Public servants also receive continuous training in Ecuador and mobile brigades are established to improve access and the interview process, in line with international standards on sanctuary.

The New Agenda for Peace —presented by António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, in 2023— highlights the need to take an inclusive approach to transforming gendered power dynamics, ensuring that women meaningfully participate in decision-making and expanding upon the provisions of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 2242 (2015) (the latter reaffirms the commitments of the former). Women's participation is considered critical for achieving sustainable peace and addressing the root causes of conflicts. Their perspectives must be included in areas such as sustainable development and climate action (see section F). The Agenda seeks to modernize peace operations and adapt them to the characteristics of present-day conflicts and establish clear mandates that include a gender perspective. This approach aims not only to make peace missions more effective but also to strengthen their long-term legitimacy and sustainability. The Agenda also urges countries to commit to the eradication of all forms of gender-based violence and enact robust and comprehensive legislation, including on gender-based hate speech, and to provide sustained, predictable and flexible financing for gender equality. This includes allocating 15% of official development assistance to gender equality and providing a minimum of 1% in direct assistance to women's organizations, especially grass-roots groups mobilizing for peace.

Against a global backdrop of persistent barriers to the advancement of women's rights and the consolidation of peace, the fulfilment of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and of instruments and international policy frameworks such as Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) presents an opportunity to consolidate fairer and more peaceful societies. The regional perspective on those instruments and policy frameworks, which is reflected in the Regional Gender Agenda, enhances women's role and their transformative potential for addressing the challenges facing the region, including in conflict prevention and resolution, security, and sustainable natural resource management.

F. Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation requires sustained efforts to mainstream gender and strengthen intersectoral coordination

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action —adopted three years after the historic United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, known as the Earth Summit— echoes several of the proposals put forward at that Conference,¹⁹ noting that “[w]omen have

¹⁹ One was a recognition that integrating and balancing the economic, social and environmental dimensions required new perceptions of and approaches to production and consumption models and to ways of living, working and making decisions, concepts that were revolutionary at the time (United Nations, n.d.).

an essential role to play in the development of sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns and approaches to natural resource management”. The Beijing Platform for Action calls for the adoption of strategic measures to address “gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment”, drawing a parallel between poverty and environmental degradation and pointing to unsustainable production and consumption models, in particular in industrialized countries, as the main cause of that degradation. It notes that women’s role in the environmental dimension is critical, stating that “[...]sustainable development will be an elusive goal unless women’s contribution to environmental management is recognized and supported” (United Nations, 1996).

At the regional level, the Regional Gender Agenda, and in particular the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030, the Santiago Commitment and the Buenos Aires Commitment, include commitments to foster the recognition of collective and environmental rights, mainstream the gender perspective in environmental policy, actively support the participation of women’s and feminist organizations and movements in climate change and disaster risk management responses, and promote and strengthen the effective protection of the rights of all women defenders, among other commitments. The Escazú Agreement is also important in that regard, as the world’s first treaty to include provisions relating to human rights defenders in environmental matters (ECLAC, 2022e) (see box II.6).

Box II.6

Latin America and the Caribbean at the forefront of environmental leadership: the Escazú Agreement and mainstreaming the gender perspective

The Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (the Escazú Agreement) entered into force on 22 April 2021. As of 2024, there are 17 States Parties: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Belize, Chile, Colombia, Dominica, Ecuador, Grenada, Guyana, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Uruguay (ECLAC, n.d.).

The objective of the Agreement 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, n.d.).

The Escazú Agreement, the first binding treaty in Latin America and the Caribbean to apply Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, aims to ensure a safe environment for human rights defenders in environmental matters (ECLAC, 2022; Aguilar Revelo, 2021), a pressing need in a region marked by incessant violence and threats against defenders and considered the most dangerous in the world for environmental defence (Global Witness, 2023). The Agreement also establishes States’ obligation to protect defenders, investigate and punish attacks against them and to guarantee the right of access to information, environmental justice and the rights of local communities in particular for groups in vulnerable situations.

At the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Escazú Agreement, held in April 2024, countries adopted decision III/4 on mainstreaming the gender perspective, which notes the urgent need to integrate and strengthen the gender perspective, ensure the full and effective participation of women in all their diversity, including Indigenous women, and prevent discrimination and gender-based violence against women defenders. This is a significant milestone for sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Countries also adopted the Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean at that meeting, which aims to highlight a set of priority areas and implement strategic measures, including so that each Party will guarantee a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders in environmental matters, enabling them to act free from threat, restriction and insecurity. States are also obligated to take measures to recognize, protect and promote all their rights, and to prevent, investigate and punish attacks, threats or intimidation that they may suffer.

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), "Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean", Observatory on Principle 10 in Latin America and the Caribbean, n.d. [online] <https://observatoriop10.cepal.org/en/treaty/regional-agreement-access-information-public-participation-and-justice-environmental-matters>; ECLAC, *Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean* (LC/PUB.2018/8/Rev.1), Santiago, 2022; L. Aguilar Revelo, "Gender equality in the midst of climate change: what can the region's machineries for the advancement of women do?", *Gender Affairs series*, No. 159 (LC/TS.2021/79), Santiago, ECLAC, 2021; Global Witness, *Standing Firm: The Land and Environmental Defenders on the Frontlines of the Climate Crisis*, 2023.

An analysis of national reports from Latin America and the Caribbean shows a growing interest in addressing the differentiated effects of climate change from a gender perspective. This is driven by increasing evidence that the effects of climate change are unevenly distributed and that they disproportionately affect the most vulnerable populations, in the form of food insecurity, rising food prices, loss of income and livelihoods, health outcomes and displacement. Among the hardest hit are those who depend on agricultural and coastal activities, Indigenous populations, children and older persons, those living in poverty, and populations and ecosystems in island States, such as those in the Caribbean (Roy and others, 2018). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) notes that climate change vulnerability is the result of intersecting social processes, including discrimination on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, age and (dis)ability (IPCC, 2014). The Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change explicitly states that human rights, gender equality and the rights of Indigenous Peoples should be considered when taking action to address climate change (United Nations, 2016). The Lima work programme on gender, adopted in 2014 at the twentieth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention, and its gender action plans indicate meaningful progress in the inclusion of the gender perspective.

1. Regional progress in the development of specific gender and climate change plans and in mainstreaming the gender perspective in regulatory frameworks and environmental public policy

Progress in mainstreaming the gender perspective in climate change instruments and responses is important, since of the three conventions agreed at the Earth Summit (the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa), the Framework Convention is the only one that was established with no mandate or mention of women's rights and gender equality. It was only in 2008 (16 years later) that changes began to take place in that regard.

(a) Gender and climate change plans

A growing number of the region's countries have developed action plans, strategies or road maps focusing specifically on gender and climate change, including Costa Rica, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay (UNDP, 2024).

Ecuador has had a Gender and Climate Change Action Plan since 2024, with 38 actions linked with the actions and measures of the 2020–2025 Implementation Plan for the First Nationally Determined Contribution and the policies of the National Agenda for Gender Equality. Through the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources and the Presidential Secretariat for Women, Guatemala also adopted its Gender and Climate Change Action Plan in 2024. The National Action Plan for Gender Equality in Climate Action of Costa Rica seeks to incorporate the gender perspective in climate change responses, with a particular focus on women on coastal and rural areas. In addition, at the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties of the Framework Convention, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, in 2022, the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development of Colombia officially launched the Road Map for the Gender and Climate Change Action Plan of Colombia. As noted in its national report, the Gender and Climate Change Action Plan will include activities and specific indicators to support the systematic incorporation of the gender perspective in climate change management policies and actions. In 2022, at the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties, Mexico presented its first National Gender and Climate Change Action Plan, which is currently being updated, and in 2020, the Ministry of the Environment of Panama began developing the National Gender and Climate Change Plan of Panama. In Paraguay, the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development, working with the Ministry of Women, prepared and implemented the National Gender Plan of Paraguay for Climate Change to 2030. Other instruments adopted include the Gender and Climate Change Action Plan in the Dominican Republic and the 2020–2024 Action Plan for Gender and Climate Change in Uruguay. In the Caribbean, Jamaica developed the Gender and Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan to guide the government in the implementation of its commitment to climate action with a gender perspective.

(b) Mainstreaming the gender perspective in climate change laws, instruments, plans, strategies and programmes

Most countries are working to mainstream the gender perspective into laws and public policies, in particular those that address climate change. In some cases, laws, policies and strategies include specific pillars or guidelines on mainstreaming gender.

Pillar 4 of the Plurinational Climate Change Policy of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, published in 2023, includes a directive entitled “Gender and intergenerational climate justice”, aimed at mainstreaming the gender perspective. This includes specific lines of action, from capacity-building to recovering and promoting ancestral knowledge that views women and girls as key stakeholders. The Framework Law on Climate Change (No. 21455) of Chile sets forth the need to incorporate the gender perspective into policies, plans, programmes, regulations and instruments established under the Law and provides for cooperation between sectoral authorities, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and Gender Equity, and the Ministry of Social Development and Family in incorporating the gender perspective and giving special attention to vulnerable groups. It also refers to the Long-term Climate Strategy to meet climate change challenges, which includes a specific goal to close certain gender gaps in various climate change management instruments.

Colombia raised its gender ambitions with the update of its nationally determined contributions, and progress is being made under the management of the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development, through its Climate Change and Risk Management Directorate, on mainstreaming the gender perspective in climate change management through the Colombian Adaptive and Resilient Strategy for Low-Carbon Development. In that context, a Gender and Climate Change Toolbox has been developed for incorporating the gender perspective into climate change management projects, programmes, plans and policies.

In El Salvador, gender was mainstreamed in the development of the 12 sectoral plans to be established under its nationally determined contributions, a process jointly led by the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources and the Salvadoran Institute for the Development of Women, with support from the United Nations System. The 2022–2026 National Climate Change Plan incorporates the principle of equity for the benefit of the entire population and adopts a human rights-based approach in undertaking initiatives to meet the needs of various population groups, including women. A series of mechanisms and instruments was also adopted in Guatemala, through the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources, including its 2022–2026 Institutional Gender Equity Policy, which aims to reduce gaps in access, control and use of natural resources and the impact of climate change on women.

Work has been stepped up in Mexico on mainstreaming the gender perspective into climate policy instruments, through initiatives that include the incorporation of a gender, human rights and intersectional perspective in the Special Climate Change Programme, updating the National Climate Change Strategy and nationally determined contributions, and preparing for the Seventh National Communication on Climate Change and First Biennial Transparency Report. In 2022, the National Climate Change Policy of Nicaragua, which includes gender equity among its principles, was updated. In Paraguay, the 2022–2030 National Climate Change Adaptation Plan includes gender vulnerability as a cross-cutting theme. Saint Lucia participated in the EnGenDER project, in which mechanisms were created to mainstream the gender perspective in priority sectors of the National Adaptation Plan. Mainstreaming gender is a cross-cutting strategic area in the 2015–2030 National Climate Change Adaptation Plan of the Dominican Republic.

Progress has also been made in the consideration of gender in nationally determined contributions. According to a UNDP study (UNDP, 2024), just 14 countries (48%) were including gender considerations in their nationally determined contributions in 2015. By 2023, 29 countries (100%) were incorporating gender in nationally determined contributions submitted to the Framework Convention.²⁰ In this new generation of nationally determined contributions, not only is gender equality a cross-cutting issue or climate change principle, gender considerations are also addressed more comprehensively. Many of the new nationally determined contributions are more ambitious on gender issues: 23 countries (80%) mention gender equality as a critical part of adaptation and mitigation in different sectors. With regard to targets with a gender perspective, 55% of countries include such adaptation targets and 14% of countries include such mitigation targets.

2. The structural challenges of gender inequality are embodied in the environmental dimension, highlighting the need for an intersectional approach

Analysis of national reports also illustrates the need for an intersectional approach in addressing the structural challenges of gender equality in the environmental dimension. One example is gender-based violence in the context of disasters, the repercussions of which are a particular concern in the Caribbean owing to its extreme vulnerability to disaster (see box II.7). Some countries, such as Antigua and Barbuda, Ecuador and El Salvador, have taken specific action in that regard. A specific approach to tackling gender-based violence against rural women was also developed in Brazil, through the Permanent National Forum for Combating Violence against Rural and Forest Women.

²⁰ Data are based on the UNDP analysis of the incorporation of gender considerations in the updated nationally determined contributions of: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Suriname and Uruguay.

Box II.7

Policies and programmes for climate change and disaster impact responses in the Caribbean from a gender perspective

With more than 7,000 islands and 40,000 km of coastline, the Caribbean is extremely vulnerable to hurricanes, tropical storms, earthquakes, droughts and flooding (Bleeker and others, 2021). Climate change is exacerbating extreme weather events in small island developing States in the Caribbean, fuelling economic and social tensions. Although climate change is global in reach, its effects on rural, coastal and marginalized populations are differentiated. Gender inequality is a key factor in how climate change impacts are experienced. By threatening livelihoods and displacing families, it exacerbates inequalities, especially for women, children and vulnerable groups (Bleeker and others, 2021; Aguilar Revelo, 2021).

The severity of disaster impact is more closely linked with human interventions than with disasters themselves. Anthropogenic ecosystem degradation and unplanned urban growth can increase disaster risk, while social inequality and poverty can increase the severity of its effects. Although earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions are natural events, they become disasters when they affect vulnerable populations. Others, such as floods, droughts and landslides, originate in climate events, but can be worsened by climate change (UNDRR/UN-Women, 2022).

In the aftermath of disasters, Caribbean women and girls experience heightened mortality rates and risk of gender-based violence as well as additional barriers in meeting their recovery and livelihood needs (Bleeker and others, 2021). The risk of becoming victims of sexual violence and abuse increases for girls and adolescent girls in particular, as the functioning of many protective factors, such as schools, caregivers and authorities, is interrupted following disasters (UNDRR/UN-Women, 2022). The burden of care also increases during disasters, especially for women, as that burden typically falls on them. In Dominica, following Hurricane Maria in 2017, most care work in shelters and elsewhere was performed by women over 65, who were reported to have spent at least 18 hours per week on unpaid care (Government of Dominica, 2017, cited in ECLAC, 2022).

In that regard, some initiatives are presented in the national reports of Caribbean countries. In Antigua and Barbuda, for example, the National Office of Disaster Services has worked closely with the Directorate of Gender Affairs over the past five years to conduct training and raise awareness of gender-sensitive early warning systems, gender vulnerabilities during disasters, flood management, and gender-based violence in disaster and emergency contexts. In the Bahamas, the government has implemented gender-sensitive initiatives, in response to Hurricane Irma, for example, setting up shelters, organizing training and including women in resilience-building activities. In Jamaica, the 2017–2027 National Strategic Action Plan to Eliminate Gender-Based Violence continues to be implemented when disaster strikes, including by supporting victims and conducting awareness-raising campaigns. In the Turks and Caicos Islands, a disaster risk management framework was adopted that aligns with the comprehensive disaster management framework being implemented as part of the regional disaster risk management conceptual framework. Nonetheless, laws and regulatory frameworks need to be better aligned with international instruments (for example, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development) in order to improve the provisions for addressing gender issues.

Source: L. Aguilar Revelo, "Gender equality in the midst of climate change: What can the region's machineries for the advancement of women do?", *Gender Affairs series*, No. 159 (LC/TS.2021/79), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2021; A. Bleeker and others, "Advancing gender equality in environmental migration and disaster displacement in the Caribbean", *Studies and Perspectives series-ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean*, No. 98 (LC/TS.2020/188-LC/CAR/TS.2020/8), Santiago, ECLAC, 2021; ECLAC, *The care society: A horizon for sustainable recovery with gender equality* (LC/CRM.15/3), Santiago, 2022; Government of Dominica, *Post Disaster Needs Assessment Hurricane Maria September 18, 2017: A Report by the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica*, Roseau, 2017; United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction/United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNDRR/UN-Women), *Towards Gender Equality and Women's Leadership for Resilience to Disaster Risks in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2022 [online] <https://lac.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/02/hacia-la-igualdad-de-genero-y-el-liderazgo-de-las-mujeres-para-la-resiliencia-ante-el-riesgo-de-desastres-en-america-latina>.

Another concern raised in the reports of some countries is the risk posed by climate change and environmental degradation to agrifood systems and women's livelihoods, in particular those of rural women. In that regard, specific capacity-building programmes were established for women in the Plurinational State of Bolivia in areas such as watershed management and climate change, among others, with land tenure cited as a priority issue, in particular for Indigenous women. In Mexico, INMUJERES has implemented initiatives to broaden the scope of the Comprehensive Strategy for Rural and Indigenous Women's Access to Land, Territory and Recognition of their Agrarian Rights with a view to narrowing gaps in access to land and ownership of agrarian rights, focusing on rural, Indigenous and Afro-Mexican women. In Paraguay, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock has implemented the Gender and Intercultural Equality Policy of the Public Agricultural Sector, aimed at rural, campesino and Indigenous women. Tackling food security and sovereignty in the context of climate change is one of its areas of focus. In Uruguay, the National Plan for Gender in Agricultural Policy was developed using a study that analysed progress and presented gender-sensitive recommendations on rural women's access to resources and the fulfilment of their rights, which presented specific issues faced by rural women (Cardeillac and others, 2019).

With a view to reducing the gaps in women's participation in environmental processes and decision-making, several countries established policy directives and other initiatives to include more women in those processes, as well as affirmative action, in some cases. One example is the Regulations of the Framework Law on Climate Change (No. 30754) in Peru, which provides that ministries and public entities with competence in matters of climate change must ensure the participation of stakeholders such as Indigenous Peoples, with a particular focus on Indigenous women. In Brazil, women's participation was enhanced in the Letters of Agreement for the regions of Araripe (Ceará) and Alagoas of the REDESER project, which aims to address the increase in the causes of soil degradation and biodiversity loss. In Cuba, a considerable proportion of the managerial roles in environmental stewardship and preservation are occupied by women, and the situation is similar in risk management for mitigating vulnerabilities and preventing disasters, where many women oversee risk reduction management centres and early warning stations in their territories or fulfil other important roles in their communities. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, pillar 7 on women, the environment and animal protection was incorporated into the *Gran Misión Venezuela Mujer* programme in 2024 to promote women's participation in decision-making on the environment and animal welfare.

In Mexico, specific affirmative action initiatives were included in programmes such as the Conservation for Sustainable Development Programme and the Drinking Water, Drainage and Treatment Programme, which allocate a portion of project resources for women's participation—for example for projects that appoint at least one woman to a leadership role—or provide additional support if gender balance is achieved in community assemblies or if more women than men are given decision-making roles.

3. The complex interplay between environmental problems and economic and social factors highlights the need to strengthen the gender architecture of inter-institutional mechanisms

Although in general, environmental policy is mainly within the purview of ministries of the environment, participation and close collaboration with national machineries for the advancement of women and other sectoral ministries or offices is essential to mainstream the gender perspective into environmental policies, programmes and actions and to ensure synergy with instruments such as the gender equality policies or plans under those machineries. In that regard, inter-institutional coordination mechanisms have been established or are operating in several countries, often involving national machineries for the advancement of women.

In Antigua and Barbuda, the Directorate of Gender Affairs works with the National Office of Disaster Services on an ongoing basis to include the gender perspective in disaster response programmes. Similarly, the Technical Panel for Protection and Gender in the Plurinational State of Bolivia aims to coordinate between public and private institutions, international organizations, domestic and international non-governmental organizations, and civil society organizations to protect the fundamental rights of persons in vulnerable situations during emergencies or disasters.

In Argentina, a Gender Working Group was established under the National Climate Change Cabinet, which also incorporated the national machinery for the advancement of women to ensure the adoption of a gender perspective in the design, implementation and evaluation of gender-sensitive climate policies. In Chile, the Framework Law on Climate Change (No. 21455) mandates that sectoral authorities cooperate with the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Gender Equity and the Ministry of Social Development and Family to incorporate the gender perspective and place a particular focus on vulnerable groups. A Gender and Climate Change Panel was also established as a subcommittee under the Interministerial Technical Team for Climate Change, which has worked on mainstreaming the gender perspective to devise public policy recommendations.

A sectoral gender panel was established in El Salvador, comprised of the gender and environmental units of 11 institutions that have gender commitments in the context of nationally determined contributions.

In Mexico, the Inter-institutional Gender and Climate Change Group was established, with the involvement of INMUJERES, the National Institute of Ecology and Climate Change and civil society organizations, to generate inputs to strengthen public policies on climate change mitigation and adaptation with a gender perspective.

Under the Ministry of the Environment of Uruguay, the National Directorate of Climate Change presides over the National Climate Change Response System and coordinates with the National Gender Council by including INMUJERES in the joint coordination of the Gender and Climate Change Working Group.

National machineries for the advancement of women have also made progress in including environmental issues, in particular climate change, in the gender equality plans or policies that they coordinate. In Ecuador, the 2021–2025 National Agenda for Gender Equality contains public policy recommendations and actions to close gaps in the areas of environment and climate change. In the Dominican Republic, in a first, the third National Gender Equity and Equality Plan (2020–2030) includes a line of action on the environment, management of disaster risk reduction and climate change. According to an analysis of the gender equality plans available at the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, 19 of the 36 documents recorded between 1997 and 2020 mention “climate change”, a rate of 52.77% (Aguilar Revelo, 2021).

Despite these important advances, challenges remain in the region. One is the lack of specific climate funding to promote gender equality, which would enable countries to maintain the continuity of initiatives and implement policy instruments such as action plans or gender and climate change strategies designed at the national level (UNDP, 2024).

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CHAPTER III

Progress and challenges in ensuring the rights of women and girls and achieving equality, development and peace in Latin America and the Caribbean

Thirty years ago, the governments participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women made a commitment “to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity”. The Beijing+30 review coincides with the fortieth anniversary of the First World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City in 1975. This anniversary calls for reflection on the region’s progress and remaining challenges in a multipolar world that is changing increasingly rapidly. Understanding the transformative potential in Latin America and the Caribbean of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, as well as its implementation, means examining this instrument as it relates to four factors.

First, the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) was held within the framework of a cycle of United Nations conferences that shaped the global development agenda. In 1990, these conferences, in addition to calling on States parties to advance in fulfilling the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), focused on the challenges and opportunities of women’s full participation in various dimensions of development. For instance, at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), it was recognized that women’s full participation was essential to achieve sustainable development (principle 20 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and chapter 24 of Agenda 21). One year later, within the framework of the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), it was acknowledged that women’s rights were also human rights and the eradication of all forms of discrimination against women was urged (para. 18 and sect. II.B, 3 of the Vienna Programme of Action). In 1994, the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo) marked a paradigm shift in population issues, from a focus on demographics to an approach centred on human rights and women’s ability to make decisions on their sexual and reproductive health (chapter IV of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development). Also in 1994, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará) was adopted; it was the first regional agreement to refer specifically to violence against women in the framework of human rights. In 1995, the World Summit for Social Development highlighted women’s lack of access to employment, land and social protection, along with the need to ensure their economic, social and cultural rights (commitment 5 of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development). The outcomes of these conferences contributed significantly to the formulation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Second, the agreements expressed in the Regional Gender Agenda, which were adopted within the framework of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, also raised the ambition of the Beijing commitments. In 1994, in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women, the governments of Latin America and the Caribbean adopted the Regional Programme of Action for Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995–2001, at the sixth session of the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in the Economic and Social Development of Latin America, held in Mar del Plata, Argentina. That Programme of Action included eight strategic areas agreed on by governments to achieve gender equality and women’s full exercise of citizenship. It included transformative measures, for instance, to address the impact of the debt crisis and implementation of structural adjustment programmes on women’s lives. It also underscored women’s contribution to ongoing democratization in many countries of the region.

Third, against the backdrop of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, several countries of the region were undergoing transitions and redemocratization following the end of dictatorships, along with peace processes, and most made significant political and institutional changes to strengthen the State (ECLAC, 2015).

Fourth, women's and feminist movements, along with their networks, consolidated in the region, broadened their alliances and called on States to drive the agenda for the rights of women in all their diversity. Women's and feminist organizations and networks in the region mobilized and participated in the preparation and follow-up of United Nations conferences in the national, regional and international spheres, advocating for States' commitment to gender equality, women's rights and the adoption of transformative public policies.

Since then, the region has undergone a lengthy process of consolidating the Regional Gender Agenda and formulating and executing recommendations for implementation. In 2015, the member States of the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which represents a big push for progress towards a new development paradigm centred on people, the planet, prosperity and peace, emphasizing means of implementation. In that regard, the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030 (2016) proposes 10 pillars to accelerate the achievement of regional and global commitments relating to women's human rights and autonomy, and closing gaps in implementation.

In the past 30 years, the governments of Latin American and Caribbean countries have adopted meaningful measures to realize the aspirations of the Beijing Platform for Action and the commitments of the Regional Gender Agenda, in synergy with the 2030 Agenda, and within the framework of fulfilment of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention of Belém do Pará. This has been key for driving constitutional, legislative, political and cultural transformations that have altered discriminatory institutional structures. In particular, the region has consolidated formal equality through regulatory amendments and the establishment of legislation to that end. Considerable progress has been made in the adoption of comprehensive laws to address violence against women in all their diversity, to foster women's full participation in the public sphere and to mainstream gender in the State.

Concretely, however, substantive equality has yet to be achieved in the region. Progress has been slow and uneven across countries and the different dimensions of women's autonomy and diversity. As women occupy new spaces, new forms of resistance, discrimination and violence have emerged, such as casualization of the labour market, political violence and forms of violence that are facilitated or amplified by the use of technology.

The structural challenges of gender inequality highlighted in the Montevideo Strategy remain a big obstacle to the exercise of women's and girls' rights and limit the reach of public policies. There are also new economic, social and environmental challenges to contend with. In the Buenos Aires Commitment (2022), the member States of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) recognized the multiple and interrelated international crises in the energy, food and financial sectors, along with the growing challenges posed by climate change, biodiversity loss, desertification and high public debt levels. This complex scenario is compounded by increasingly rapid technological changes, the care crisis and pressure on social protection systems amid weak economic growth and limited fiscal and monetary policy space.

These cascading crises threaten the progress made in the reduction of poverty and inequality; gender equality; ensuring the rights of women, adolescent girls and girls in all their diversity; the exercise of their autonomy and the sustainable development of the countries of the region.

The combination of factors such as persistent inequality and poverty, discriminatory cultural patterns, the concentration of power and the unfair organization of care gives rise to gender gaps in various social and economic indicators. Women are overrepresented in poor households and lack their own income or face violence in all its forms and a scarcity of opportunities. The predominant development model in the region explains why Latin America and the Caribbean is the most unequal region in the world.

Bearing this in mind, 30 years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, there is an urgent need to recognize progress and good practices, address the challenges of a changing world and redouble efforts to accelerate fulfilment of commitments to achieve equality, sustainable development and peace for women and girls in Latin America and the Caribbean. Given the current pace of progress, it is unlikely that structural challenges will be overcome and that substantive equality will be achieved by 2030.

A. Progress and challenges in taking action to address the critical areas of concern outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Latin America and the Caribbean

The following section outlines the progress and challenges in the region relating to the 12 critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action, which are grouped into six main areas and are synergetic with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Regional Gender Agenda. The analysis is based on information provided by the governments of Latin America and Caribbean countries in comprehensive national reviews, and on official statistics from the past five years.

1. Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

In the region, women's labour participation grew slowly but steadily until the onset of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which led to an unprecedented decline. Only in 2023 did the figure return to pre-pandemic levels. However, gaps in terms of unemployment remain and the proportion of women unable to enter the labour market is higher than that of men. One in two women remains outside the labour market, compared to one in four men. Trends indicate that the biggest barrier to labour market entry for women is care work. Although men's participation in unpaid work has risen slightly in recent years, gender gaps remain wide in all the countries of the region, with women spending thrice as much time on unpaid domestic and care work as men (ECLAC, 2024b).

Moreover, consensus has recently grown on the need to adopt policies that encourage women to participate in highly masculinized and knowledge-intensive sectors, which typically provide jobs with stronger protection and higher wages and in greater demand. Programmes focused on increasing women's participation in sectors such as fishing, construction and other areas linked to innovation and the development of new technologies are notable. There are also programmes targeting the labour inclusion of women living in rural areas, young women, Indigenous women, women of African descent and women who are members of the LGBTI+ population, whose labour participation is below the average.

In all countries, women remain overrepresented in sectors relating to the care economy (health, education and paid domestic work). Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the regions in the world with the largest number of paid female domestic workers. Despite the progress made, informality among this group remains high.

There have been new developments in the region with regard to regulations, programmes and public policies to transform the sexual division of labour, aiming to recognize and ensure the right to care and to foster women's economic autonomy to advance towards inclusive development. With a view to addressing the unequal distribution of care work, seven countries²¹ mention in their reports that they have incorporated into their policies the criterion of social co-responsibility —shared by the State, the market, the community and households— and gender co-responsibility. Following Uruguay's pioneering measures in 2015, there has been significant progress in the formulation and implementation of policies fostering the establishment of comprehensive care systems in the past five years. The region has also made some headway in the production of gender statistics, especially time-use measurements, which are fundamental to the design and execution of such policies. Similarly, in recent years, efforts to shed light on and consider community-based care and respect for diversity in the provision of care have been highlighted.

The sexual division of labour and the unfair social organization of care remain the greatest barrier to inclusive development based on gender equality, shared prosperity and decent work. At present, half of women in Latin America and the Caribbean are outside the labour market (ECLAC, 2024b), which constrains their economic autonomy and the region's sustainable development.

2. Poverty eradication, social protection and social services

The overrepresentation of women among people living in poverty is characteristic of Latin America and the Caribbean. The number of women living in poor households is greater than that of men. At the same time, higher levels of poverty and wider gender gaps are seen in rural areas. In the region, 1 in 4 women does not have her own income, compared to fewer than 1 in 10 men (ECLAC, 2024b).

Since the 2000s, Latin American and Caribbean countries have strengthened the design of social protection systems and expanded the offering of policies and programmes. In view of the high levels of informality in the labour market, non-contributory social protection policies —such as cash transfers and non-contributory pensions— have become particularly important. In the past five years, most of the countries analysed have implemented or strengthened non-contributory social policies and programmes through cash transfers to reduce poverty. Most of these programmes include at least one component that ensures that women are the main recipients of monetary entitlements.

With regard to ensuring sexual and reproductive rights, the region stands out owing to its significant progress in the voluntary termination of pregnancy. In the past five years, several countries have passed laws that protect the right to choose and ensure access to voluntary termination of pregnancy. Other countries have decriminalized the practice in certain cases. Some countries of the region now have a legal and regulatory framework to support comprehensive sexuality education.²²

The region still owes a debt to girls, adolescent girls and young women, with the second-highest rate adolescent fertility rate in the world, and with girls and young women under the age of 20 accounting for about 15% of pregnancies, most of them with lower levels of education and income. Tackling this issue means strengthening sexual and reproductive health programmes, providing access to comprehensive health services that ensure the right to health for girls, adolescent girls and women. These measures are part of efforts to advance towards universal health systems.

²¹ See section A.3 of chapter II for a detailed description of the progress made on these policies and a description by country.

²² See section B.3 of chapter II for a detailed description of the progress made on these policies and a description by country.

In addition, amid weak economic growth, one of the region's major achievements was increasing access to education for girls, young women and women. On average, 67.4% of women aged 20–24 have completed secondary education, compared to 60.9% of men in the same age range (ECLAC, 2022a). Another significant factor is that several countries are integrating the gender perspective into curricula from the basic education level onward. There is a clear trend towards the promotion of education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics from an early age, as well as the digital inclusion of women and other vulnerable groups in various technological areas.

3. Eradication of violence, stigma and gender stereotypes

The prevention and elimination of gender-based violence is one of governments' main concerns. Most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have passed laws to ensure that women may live a life free of violence and discrimination. The adoption of comprehensive laws to prevent, penalize and eradicate violence against women, including different forms of violence, in 14 Latin American countries; the criminalization of femicide or feminicide in 19 countries and the formulation of comprehensive plans to address it in most countries reflect a broad and robust regulatory framework. Progress has also been made in Caribbean countries, where significant reforms have targeted laws against domestic violence.

In the past five years, policies to detect, prevent and penalize violence in the workplace, political violence and especially technology-facilitated violence, have been adopted.

All countries have taken measures to prevent gender-based violence through public awareness campaigns, and seven countries have implemented initiatives to foster egalitarian and non-violent masculinity. These measures seek to dismantle society's deep-rooted patriarchal cultural patterns.

At least five countries have tried to foster the economic autonomy of women in situations of violence. In particular, these initiatives were implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many women were forced to stay at home, without income and with few possibilities to seek help. During that period, several countries carried out campaigns to promote safe corridors, businesses and other spaces in which women could report situations of violence, given mobility restrictions. Services provided to victims of violence included a network of centres offering guidance and psychological or legal support to women, as well as shelters for women at serious risk of violence.

Child marriage and early unions remain a problem in the region, which affects one in five girls and adolescent girls, and is a serious violation of their rights. In recent years, various countries have enacted laws that prohibit this practice, in keeping with international standards. At present, 13 countries have taken such measures.

However, despite the progress made in terms of regulations and policy implementation, gender-based violence against women and girls remains a severe and persistent problem. According to national surveys to determine the prevalence of this issue, between 63% and 76% of women have experienced some form of gender-based violence in some sphere. Moreover, according to estimates for 2018 by the World Health Organization, one in four women in the region has experienced physical or sexual intimate partner violence at least once in their lifetime. In 2022, official data included in the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean of ECLAC indicated that at least 4,050 women were victims of femicide in 26 countries of the region, meaning that one woman was murdered every two hours for that reason.

Against this backdrop, persistent patriarchal cultural patterns that perpetuate gender-based violence against women and girls remain one of the most complex structural challenges of inequality to resolve. States also continue to face challenges relating to the due diligence required to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls.

4. Women’s participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

Latin America and the Caribbean has made considerable progress in terms of women’s participation in various representative bodies. However, there are still barriers to their full and effective participation, and to the achievement of parity democracy.

In the region, women ministers account for 28.7%, on average, of national cabinets in the executive branch.²³ Nonetheless, their representation remains concentrated in areas relating to social portfolios (such as social development, health and education) (UN-Women, 2024). Progress is uneven at the various levels of government. Women occupy 35.8% of seats in the national legislative branch. Regarding women’s participation in local governments, at the beginning of 2023, women held 27.2% of the elected positions in local deliberative bodies in the region, compared to 35.5% at the global level (UN-Women, 2024; ECLAC, 2024b). This means that Latin America and the Caribbean is in fifth place among all regions.

By 2022, nine countries had adopted parity measures, including constitutional reforms, electoral reforms or laws aimed at fostering parity, and nine countries had quota laws for representative elections. Concerning parity measures, Mexico’s 2019 constitutional reform known as “Parity Everywhere” is notable in that it enshrined in the Constitution a parity mandate at all levels of government, as well as for the legislative and judicial branches, at the federal, State and municipal levels. Chile has passed a law that provides political parties with financing specifically for each female candidate elected, which must be used only to foster women’s participation in representative bodies. Several countries also have mechanisms to follow up progress in parity.

In the region, the first steps have been taken to ensure the political participation of Indigenous women, women of African descent, campesina women and women living in rural areas in various bodies tasked with political coordination and training. However, one of the main obstacles to gender parity in decision-making spaces is the need to strengthen the gender-responsive institutional framework in various areas, for example in electoral bodies and political parties.

5. Peaceful and inclusive societies

In recent decades, Latin America and the Caribbean has stood out on the global scene both for its capacity to peacefully settle international disputes and for promoting multilateralism as a means of building political consensus. Nonetheless, obstacles remain in the region for the achievement of just, peaceful and inclusive societies, as stated in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda. One of the most notable advances in the region over the last five years has been the implementation of action plans on women, peace and security in several countries.

Women’s full participation in decision-making, conflict prevention and resolution and in all peacebuilding initiatives is essential for building peaceful and inclusive societies. Reducing military expenditure, limiting the availability of armaments and promoting non-violent conflict resolution mechanisms is also key, as is ensuring the rights of women in situations of armed or other conflict. As proposed in the 2030 Agenda, the interdependence between peace and development must be reaffirmed.

The Final Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army (FARC-EP), signed in 2016, is a global reference for good practices in women’s participation and the

²³ See “Executive power: percentage of women in ministerial cabinet positions” [online] <https://oig.cepal.org/en/indicators/executive-power-percentage-women-ministerial-cabinet-positions>.

inclusion of the gender perspective in peace negotiations. It includes more than 100 specific provisions related to gender and advancing women's rights. The Government of Colombia is currently preparing its first action plan on women, peace and security, which was developed through a participatory process with broad civil society participation, including by women representatives of all departments and population groups. In Latin America and the Caribbean, 10 countries have adopted national action plans on women, peace and security, which are already in force or have been updated. These plans recognize not only the differential impact of conflict on women and their vital role in sustaining peace but also the need to address emerging peace and security challenges from a gender perspective.

Efforts to recover historical memory, recognize the existence of sexual violence against women in conflict situations and offer reparation to the victims constitute another step forward in that regard. In Guatemala, the sentences handed down in 2022 in the case involving sexual violence against Maya Achi women and in 2016 in the Sepur Zarco case are examples of justice for Indigenous women and women from other communities who suffered sexual violence during the country's internal armed conflict. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the Plurinational Policy for Comprehensive Reparation for Victims of Serious Human Rights Violations during Periods of Unconstitutional Government was adopted in March 2023 to redress the injury suffered by victims in times of dictatorship and during other recent episodes of violence, such as the clashes in Sacaba and Senkata in 2019 and 2020. In 2023, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace of Colombia initiated macrocase 11, investigating gender-based violence, which includes sexual and reproductive violence and other crimes committed during the country's armed conflict that were motivated by prejudice grounded in sexual orientation or diverse gender identities.

With their deep knowledge of the social, economic and political situation of their communities, women peacebuilders and human rights defenders strengthen democracy and build fairer and more inclusive societies through their work and activism. Despite the importance of their work, they are often the victims of threats, stigmatization, discrimination, violence and persecution, meaning that effective and comprehensive prevention and protection measures must be adopted, taking a gender-sensitive approach. In the context of human rights advocacy and environmental protection, women environmental defenders are among the groups most severely affected by these repercussions in the region. A milestone was achieved in that regard with the adoption of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, known as the Escazú Agreement, which entered into force on 22 April 2021. The Escazú Agreement is the first regional environmental agreement in Latin America and the Caribbean and contains specific provisions on human rights defenders in environmental matters.

A further challenge rests in the need to enhance cooperation to address the issues arising from unprecedented human mobility. Policy coordination is needed among countries of origin, transit and destination to safeguard women's rights in this area.

6. Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation

In recent years, the Latin American and Caribbean region has made significant strides in the incorporation of the gender perspective into climate change policies. Recognizing the differentiated impacts of climate change on men and women, several countries have developed specific plans that jointly address gender issues and climate change effects. Efforts have been made to mainstream the gender perspective into laws, regulatory instruments and public policies on the environment, reflecting an increasing will to integrate that vision in climate and environmental planning. The region has also shown leadership in that area through the Escazú Agreement.

Nonetheless, significant challenges remain. The structural challenges of gender inequality are embodied in the environmental sphere, underscoring the need for an intersectional approach that addresses the multidimensional nature of discrimination. Climate change and environmental degradation also pose a particular risk for agrifood systems and women's livelihoods, especially in rural areas, where their role is critical, albeit often undervalued.

B. Progress and challenges in the implementation of policies for the fulfilment of the Beijing Platform for Action

This section presents shared progress and challenges related to the enabling conditions and implementation pillars for the policies aimed at achieving substantive equality in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. In particular, countries' national reports note advances and obstacles associated with institutional architecture, information systems, financing for gender equality policies and civil society participation. In line with the Montevideo Strategy, focusing attention on these implementation pillars is essential to enable analysis of the medium- and long-term sustainability of gender policies.

1. The region has established machineries for the advancement of women and States' gender architecture is stronger; however, insufficient funding for equality policies remains a key challenge

In keeping with the commitments made in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Regional Gender Agenda, the region's governments have established machineries for the advancement of women, with varying levels of institutional development and hierarchization, to direct and coordinate gender equality policies and ensure that gender equality is mainstreamed throughout State structures.

In recent years, progress has been made in strengthening machineries for the advancement of women, especially with regard to hierarchization within the State structure. According to the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, in 2019, half of the machineries for the advancement of women in Latin American countries were classified as high-level (they had been accorded the institutional rank of a ministry, or their head had the rank of minister, with full participation in the cabinet); today, that figure is 70%. The situation was different in Caribbean countries, where low-level machineries were predominant (83.3%). Only Haiti and Trinidad and Tobago had high-level machineries for the advancement of women, a state of affairs that remains unchanged.

Several countries have established gender equality mechanisms in sectoral ministries, including ministries of the economy, environment, infrastructure and foreign affairs, consolidating the institutional fabric required to mainstream the gender perspective within the State. Progress has also been made in the establishment of intersectoral coordination mechanisms focused on gender and women's rights policies at the national and subnational levels.

In their national reports, several countries mention the difficulties faced by machineries for the advancement of women in implementing their mandates, programmes and initiatives. This is partly the result of the limited resources allocated to these mechanisms and to equality policies. The allocation of sufficient financial, technical and human resources is thus critical to strengthen these national machineries so that they may effectively fulfil their mandates.

There is also a need to ensure women's rights and their autonomy, in particular in the current context, marked by a resurgence of conservative positions that risks setbacks (ECLAC, 2024d). According to the national reports of some countries, the steady rise in discourse opposing gender institutional frameworks and equality policies is now one of the most pressing challenges.

2. Work must continue on transforming data into information, information into knowledge and knowledge into political decisions in furtherance of gender equality

Considerable progress has been made in the region in breaking the statistical silence through the production of official information with a gender perspective. Time-use measurement and valuation of unpaid work in the system of national accounts, tools that enable a comprehensive quantification of the economic contribution of women's work, are among the main outcomes of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.²⁴ To date, 23 countries have officially measured time use at least once, 18 have provided data on the Sustainable Development Goal indicator on the proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, and 5 have established satellite accounts for the care economy (ECLAC, 2023c). The region also has the *Methodological guide on time-use measurements in Latin America and the Caribbean* (ECLAC, 2022b), the outcome of a commitment assumed at the tenth meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC.

In addition, labour market indicators are generally disaggregated by sex in the countries of the region. Most countries also have records disaggregated by sex for positions elected by popular vote and, in some cases, in public administration and the judicial branch (ECLAC, 2024b).

Progress has also been made in improving measurement and record-keeping on gender-based violence. Ten countries have implemented regulations requiring the recording, analysis and disclosure of data on the various forms of gender-based violence, including femicide or femicide. Some countries²⁵ have also developed registry systems that bring together the information produced by the various agencies involved in providing care to women who suffer gender-based violence.

At the regional level, the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean is a critical repository of data for monitoring the strategic indicators for the fulfilment of the Regional Gender Agenda, the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda. This information has been instrumental in the preparation of reports that project short-, medium-, and long-term trends to enable assessment of the progress and remaining challenges for women's autonomy.

Over the last biennium, coordination between the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean and the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC led to the preparation of the *Guidelines for mainstreaming the gender perspective in statistical production* (Working group on the preparation of a guide for mainstreaming the gender perspective in statistical production of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2024), a regional standard to strengthen gender information systems in the region's countries.

Although important achievements have been made, challenges remain in terms of disaggregation of data to shed light on the multiple and interrelated forms of discrimination against women, adolescent girls and girls in their diversity. There are also challenges in areas such as the generation of environmental statistics

²⁴ See paragraph (iii), section (f) of strategic objective H.3. "Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation", p.87 [online] <https://www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/off/a--20.en>.

²⁵ See section C.1 of chapter II for details on the progress made with regard to these policies and a description by country.

with a gender perspective and climate change indicators. There is also a need to continue promoting gender mainstreaming in national statistical systems, strengthening partnerships between data producers and users, and ensuring that measurements are taken periodically and information is disseminated.

3. Financing for gender equality is an increasingly pressing challenge in a context of limited fiscal space and multiple crises

In recent years, some governments have built on their progress in the allocation of funding to achieve equality and to promote and shed light on the issue by using the tools of gender-responsive budgeting. These initiatives, launched following the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the agreements of the Regional Gender Agenda, represent a major step forward in the implementation of policies and programmes aimed at women with a view to reducing gender inequalities. In recent years, some countries have conducted exercises to calculate the cost of care systems and policies and their possible impact on tax revenue and employment. Initiatives have also been launched that emphasize the importance of complementing domestic resources with international and North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation resources.

Although this progress is notable, it is not yet sufficient to fulfil the commitments of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Regional Gender Agenda aimed at incorporating the gender perspective into macroeconomic policies and closing the funding gap.

Limited fiscal space reflects growing pressure caused by interest payments on public debt. On the revenue side, the region also has a regressive tax structure, heavily biased towards indirect taxes (ECLAC, 2024a). In addition to the differences from one country to another, the region is characterized by low levels of tax collection, high levels of tax evasion and avoidance, and regressive tax structures that disproportionately burden women, given that they are overrepresented in the lowest income quintiles.

Latin America and the Caribbean continues to face difficulties in mobilizing sufficient resources and making tax systems more progressive for the fulfilment of national, regional and global commitments on gender equality and women's autonomy.

It is also critical to strengthen regional cooperation to combat tax evasion and avoidance and illicit financial flows, and improve tax collection from the wealthiest and highest-income groups in order to have greater resources for gender equality policies, including care policies and systems (ECLAC, 2024d, para. 30). In terms of international cooperation on the subject, the region's countries have played an important role in advancing the negotiations for a framework United Nations convention on international cooperation in tax matters, which is expected to help to reach agreement on new global tax rules. It is hoped that in the future, this framework convention will maximize the mobilization of funding for sustainable development, gender equality and environmental sustainability.

4. Civil society participation, in particular by women's and feminist organizations, accelerates the fulfilment of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Regional Gender Agenda

Civil society, especially women's and feminist organizations and women's human rights defence groups in Latin America and the Caribbean, have played a prominent role both in defending women's rights within the framework of United Nations conferences and in the formulation of the Regional Gender Agenda.

The Montevideo Strategy recognizes citizen participation, in particular by women's and feminist organizations and movements, as a key pillar for the implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda and for policy oversight and strengthening democracies in the region.

In the Buenos Aires Commitment, the fundamental role of non-governmental organizations is reaffirmed, in particular that of women's and feminist organizations and movements, Indigenous, Afrodescendent and rural women, women with disabilities, women living with HIV, migrant and young women, LGBTI+ persons, and women defenders of human and environmental rights. The Commitment also calls for the promotion of exchanges and partnerships between these organizations and with the State to ensure progress towards achievement of the goals set forth in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Regional Gender Agenda, fostering the conditions for their participation, addressing cultural or linguistic barriers and identifying and pursuing sources of financing (ECLAC, 2023a, par. 37).

In this context, several countries provide information on the implementation of cooperation programmes or initiatives with civil society organizations, particularly women's and feminist organizations. For example, with regard to policies aimed at women who suffer violence, women's organizations are involved in prevention and support for victims. They also provide training on how to address such situations and help to design awareness campaigns using a gender and intersectional approach. Participation and consultation mechanisms have also been implemented in designing gender policies, allowing for the needs and interests of women in different territories to be taken into account as well as those of activists working in a range of areas.

At the regional level, the Regional Fund in support of Women's and Feminist Organizations and Movements was established. It is an innovative initiative developed within the framework of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean through coordinated work by governments, women's and feminist organizations and movements from the region, and United Nations system entities. Its purpose is to fund the region's women's and feminist organizations, providing resources for projects focusing on gender equality, women's economic, physical and decision-making autonomy, and ensuring their human rights. So far, two calls for applications have been issued for small grants. Its governance structure ensures that a range of stakeholders participate. It has a board of directors and a secretariat composed of representatives of governments, women's and feminist organizations, ECLAC, and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the fund administrator.

Even though Latin America and the Caribbean has been recognized for these advances, major challenges persist for achieving the meaningful participation of such organizations throughout the public policy cycle. Tackling these challenges will require the establishment of a safe and enabling environment, by strengthening organization processes, building capacities, facilitating access to information and justice, and establishing participation mechanisms. Effectively protecting the rights of women defenders of human rights, particularly those working on issues related to the environment, land, territory and natural resources, remains an outstanding debt. As the climate and environmental crisis advances, the role of women environmental defenders in the region is not only essential for the people of Latin America and the Caribbean; it is critical for peace and the sustainability of life and the planet.

C. Recommendations: action to achieve substantive equality, development and peace

Latin America and the Caribbean stands out for the progress achieved on a variety of objectives related to the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Regional Gender Agenda. Governments have recognized all the rights of women, adolescent girls and girls. They have adopted pro-equality regulatory frameworks, eliminated discriminatory laws, and strengthened States' gender institutional architecture and gender information systems. However, no country in the region has achieved substantive equality. In a context marked by complexity and uncertainty, significant gaps remain between the scale of gender inequalities and the capacities, resources, and information available to States to address them.

Given the structural nature of inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean, achieving gender equality and ensuring women's rights will mean overcoming the development crisis the region is facing. This crisis is characterized by three mutually reinforcing traps: low capacity for growth, high inequality and low social mobility, and weak institutional capacities (ECLAC, 2024a).

Against a backdrop of emerging challenges and an unstable political and economic landscape that jeopardizes the gains achieved in recent decades, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remains a visionary agenda for achieving gender equality and ensuring women's rights. Implementing it is critical to avoid setbacks.

To progress more rapidly towards gender equality by 2030, urgent and transformative action is needed to accelerate the effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Regional Gender Agenda, strengthening gender equality institutions and architecture to achieve gender equality and mainstream gender within the different levels and branches of the State. These measures must include an increase in the financial, technical and human resources allocated, the adoption of gender budgeting, and monitoring and accountability mechanisms, with citizen participation.

The Regional Gender Agenda has been expanding since 1977, when the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in the Economic and Social Development of Latin America was held in Havana. This Conference served as a forum for regional intergovernmental coordination following the World Conference of the International Women's Year (Mexico City, 1975). Two instruments that have been pivotal in this process are the Montevideo Strategy, as a tool for overcoming implementation gaps, and the Buenos Aires Commitment to advance towards a care society. The latter reiterates that, in addition to ensuring gender mainstreaming in the social, economic and environmental dimensions of development, there is a need for proactive measures to achieve substantive equality that foster comprehensive care systems, decent work and the full, meaningful and equal participation of women in leadership positions in strategic sectors of the economy.

1. Recommendations to accelerate the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Latin America and the Caribbean, in synergy with the Regional Gender Agenda

(a) Overcoming the sexual division of labour and the unjust social organization of care is needed to foster inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

- Foster the design and implementation of comprehensive care policies and systems with a gender, human rights and intersectionality approach, contributing to gender and social co-responsibility for care.
- Implement affirmative action to promote the full participation of women, particularly those subject to multiple forms of discrimination, in knowledge- and innovation-intensive sectors, under decent working conditions.
- Encourage the professionalization, certification and formalization of those employed in the care economy, promoting agile regularization programmes for workers who were previously in the informal sector and focusing in particular on the care sector and paid domestic work. At the same time, community-based and rural work must be recognized through public programmes offering initial and continuous training, which in turn should be linked with skills certification and social security systems, in order to guarantee professional development and attract a qualified labour force.

(b) Ensuring women’s right to social protection and social services is key to eradicating poverty and reducing socioeconomic inequality

- Foster processes aimed at linking, coordinating and regulating contributory and non-contributory policies, and take steps to guarantee universal access to social services, using a gender perspective and intersectional approach to avoid segmentation in social protection access and quality and to eradicate poverty. Achieving this requires guaranteeing universal access to social protection and social security from a gender perspective that promotes women’s economic autonomy throughout their life course.
- Create enabling conditions for the empowerment of women, adolescent girls and girls in all their diversity through capacity-building, technology, humanitarian assistance, the provision of and investment in affordable, quality infrastructure and essential services. This requires promoting, for example, universal access to comprehensive health services and the full exercise of sexual and reproductive rights, as well as women’s access to education; safe drinking water; healthy, nutritious and sufficient food; sanitation; renewable, clean and affordable energy; public transportation; housing; social protection and decent work.

(c) Ending violence, stigmatization and gender stereotypes is urgent in order to advance towards gender equality

- Promote the adoption and full implementation of laws and policies to prevent, address, punish and eliminate all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination against women, adolescent girls and girls in all their diversity, in different areas, including harmful practices such as child marriage and early unions.
- Strengthen public institutions to respond comprehensively to the complex causes and manifestations of gender-based violence against women, consolidating intersectoral coordination, information recording systems for appropriate decision-making and access to justice to ensure violence prevention.

(d) Fostering the full and effective participation of women in all areas and moving towards parity democracy are central to overcoming the concentration of power

- Promote the adoption of laws related to parity and quotas and ensure their effective enforcement.
- Through an intersectional approach, ensure the protection of the human rights of women participating in political and public life, and condemn acts of political violence against women, including those that occur when women access decision-making spaces and those that take place in the field of information and communications technologies and in social networks.
- Foster an enabling environment for women to participate fully and equally in decision-making roles, as well as in organizations and political parties, through access to funding and investment in awareness-raising and training programmes. The need for tailored support to women who are subject to multiple forms of discrimination that hinder their integration into public and political life must be recognized.

(e) Women’s participation in peace processes and the protection of women human rights defenders are essential for advancing towards peaceful and inclusive societies

- Accelerate efforts to effectively advance the agenda for women and peace and security in the region, in alignment with United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 and other related provisions, through innovative initiatives, such as the development and implementation of national action plans on women, peace and security that respond to the region’s current peace and security challenges, including operationalization, financing and monitoring mechanisms.

- Adopt concrete measures to eliminate and prevent all types of barrier, forms of discrimination, threats and violations of human rights experienced by women and girls, and ensure peacekeeping, peacebuilding and recovery from armed conflict, post-conflict situations and humanitarian emergencies, guaranteeing the creation of safe environments for the participation of women human rights defenders and peacebuilders.
 - Ensure that the response to human mobility in the region integrates protection and violence prevention mechanisms that help to prevent different forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, exploitation and trafficking in persons; facilitates comprehensive access to services; and promotes the participation of organizations of women, young people, LGBTI+ persons, migrants, refugees and displaced persons, as well as transit and host communities.
- (f) Promoting comprehensive sustainable development policies and recognizing the role of women environmental defenders are fundamental to advancing environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation**
- Intensify coordination between the national machineries for the advancement of women and the entities responsible for economic and productive policies, as well as policies related to the environment, climate change and disaster risk reduction and management, in order to promote gender-sensitive sustainable development and just transition policies.
 - Highlight the contribution of women and girls, especially rural and Indigenous women, encourage women’s leadership in environmental decision-making processes, and build the resilience and adaptive capacities of women, adolescent girls and girls to respond to the adverse impacts of climate change and disasters, environmental degradation and environmental pollution in cities and rural areas, especially in small island developing States.
 - Promote the free, prior and informed consent of communities and make progress in implementing the Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as decision III/4 on mainstreaming the gender perspective, adopted in April 2024 at the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean.

2. Enabling conditions and drivers for the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in synergy with the Regional Gender Agenda

Thirty years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, new challenges have emerged related to governance and institutional capacities to implement effective public policies and drive social participation. Other challenges relate to the statistics and information available, and the political economy of the reforms and transformations needed to ensure women’s rights and avoid setbacks. In addition, sufficient and sustainable financing is required to effectively implement the regulatory progress achieved. These represent enabling conditions and drivers to fully and effectively implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in synergy with the Regional Gender Agenda.

(a) Gender institutions, governance and institutional capacities

The *Pact for the Future* expresses a commitment to “respect, protect and fulfil all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development, promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal justice for all and develop good governance at all levels and transparent, inclusive, effective and accountable institutions at all levels” (United Nations, 2024, action 7, p. 7/64). Historically, women have been excluded from institutional frameworks. In the region, this has most affected women subject to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequality.

According to several national reports, in the last five years, progress has been made in the region's gender architecture to ensure the rights of women in all their diversity; however, certain setbacks have also jeopardized institutional consolidation in some countries.

In the Buenos Aires Commitment, the governments of Latin America and the Caribbean reaffirmed their “commitment to take all necessary and progressive measures to accelerate the effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Regional Gender Agenda, strengthening gender equality institutions and architecture through the prioritization at the highest level of machineries for the advancement of women and the mainstreaming of gender at the different levels and branches of the State, by increasing the allocation of financial, technical and human resources, gender budgeting, and monitoring and accountability, with civic participation” (Buenos Aires Commitment, para. 3).

This implies implementing various sustained actions over time and having political support at the highest level. It is also fundamental to strengthen the role of machineries for the advancement of women as governing bodies for policies related to gender equality, women's rights and autonomy, and to promote gender mainstreaming within the different levels and branches of government, with special emphasis on budgeting, in order to ensure that public policies have sufficient resources to achieve gender equality and close gaps.

In order for the machineries for the advancement of women to fully comply with their mandate and specific functions, their action must be supported by a national strategy that defines the main needs in terms of gender equality, prioritizes the closure of gaps and takes into account women and girls subject to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequality. Lastly, it is essential to foster close collaboration with civil society organizations, particularly women's and feminist organizations, to ensure that policies are in line with their needs, proposals and demands, as has been consistently reiterated by ministers and high-level authorities of the machineries for the advancement of women (ECLAC, 2024d, para. 26).

(b) Information systems

Accurate information on how policies affect women's lives is fundamental. Information production and accountability systems are critical for linking government policies with the corresponding achievements and progress made in terms of gender equality and ensuring women's human rights, as well as for detecting signs of potential setbacks.

In order to establish and strengthen national statistical systems with a gender perspective, it is essential to improve the coverage, quality and periodicity of sociodemographic and economic statistics and, in particular, to generate the information needed to develop key indicators for monitoring progress in gender equality, in accordance with the provisions of the *Guidelines for mainstreaming the gender perspective in statistical production* (Working group on the preparation of a guide for mainstreaming the gender perspective in statistical production of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2024). To this end, there is a need for surveys, censuses and administrative records with common classifications that ensure the comparability of data, and for gender mainstreaming in all phases of the statistical production process and in all thematic areas. Challenges remain in this regard, such as the lack of updated measurements on the prevalence of violence and the need to develop gender-sensitive assessments on the available statistical information on the environment and climate change. It is also crucial to ensure the disaggregation and dissemination of information by sex, age, ethnicity and race, socioeconomic status, area of residence or other characteristics that will make it possible to conduct analyses and design measures with an intersectional perspective. Such actions will result in more accurate diagnoses that reflect the diversity of situations of women and men in the region, which in turn will help to better understand inequalities and each group's specific needs.

(c) Financing

Current global asymmetries in trade, technology and access to development finance highlight the need for new multilateral cooperation agreements. Today's macroeconomic situation further limits the policy space available to developing countries.

More urgent and ambitious action is needed to ensure that the international financial architecture becomes more efficient, more equitable, fit for the world of today and responsive to the challenges faced by developing countries in closing the Sustainable Development Goal financing gap (United Nations, 2024, para. 75). Within the framework of the Regional Gender Agenda, Latin America and the Caribbean also urges the global economic governance institutions that design and implement international norms on finance, trade and debt to ensure that these norms are consistent with women's human rights (ECLAC, 2024d, para. 29).

In the *Pact for the Future*, Member States made a commitment to scale up support from all sources for investment in increasing productive capacities, inclusive and sustainable industrialization, infrastructure and structural economic transformation and diversification (United Nations, 2024, Action 4, p. 5/64). The Sustainable Development Goal financing gap in Latin America and the Caribbean must be resolved, with a view to overcoming the structural challenges of gender inequality, especially in terms of improving women's participation in the most competitive and better-paying sectors.

In addition, States and society as a whole need to ensure the adoption of measures to correct the gender biases in three of the sectors connected with a just transition, which are undergoing the greatest transformation processes and have the greatest access to international financing: the energy sector, the sector for climate change response, adaptation and mitigation, and the digital transition sector.

In the context of negotiations for a United Nations framework convention on international tax cooperation, and 30 years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, the countries of the region will be able to push for fiscal compacts that can increase revenues progressively and expenditures strategically to contribute to gender equality and sustainability. Likewise, gender-responsive budgeting should continue to be promoted to facilitate the monitoring of resources aimed at narrowing inequality gaps. Given the need to secure financial resources and improve tax revenue, it is urgent to strengthen regional cooperation to combat tax evasion and avoidance and illicit financial flows.

(d) Civil society participation

Women's and feminist organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean have been instrumental in promoting women's rights and gender equality. To ensure their full and effective participation, it is essential to create and maintain a safe and enabling environment that encourages participation in public life and, in particular, the defence of the human rights of women and women human rights defenders, through support for organizational processes, capacity-building and access to information and justice. This environment must include effective citizen participation mechanisms, especially the free, prior and informed consent of rural, ethnic and Indigenous communities, to ensure that their voices are heard and considered in public policymaking processes.

In addition, strengthening citizen participation mechanisms is critical to ensure that they are representative, permanent and institutionalized and that they reflect the diversity of civil society. Such efforts will enable women's and feminist organizations to actively contribute to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies on gender equality, human rights and sustainable development, especially in relation to risk management and response to adverse climate events. At the same time, there is a need to boost women's leadership in these organizations, promoting participation in the public sphere of women's and feminist organizations and movements, Indigenous women,

Afrodescendent women, rural women, women with disabilities, women living with HIV, migrant women, young women and LGBTI+ persons, as well as women defenders of human and environmental rights, and respecting their forms of organization and representation.

D. Concluding remarks

Latin America and the Caribbean stands out for its progress in achieving the various objectives set out in the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. Governments have recognized all the rights of women, adolescent girls and girls; adopted regulatory frameworks for equality; progressively eliminated discriminatory laws and strengthened States' gender institutional architecture and gender information systems.

Despite these advances, no country in the region has achieved substantive equality. In a context marked by complexity and uncertainty, gaps remain between the scale of gender inequalities and the capacities, resources, and information available to States to overcome them. In addition to States' continued support for gender mainstreaming processes, affirmative action must be undertaken in the six thematic areas analysed in this report in order to move from formal equality to real equality. To support these efforts, the region has the Regional Gender Agenda, a road map whose guidelines converge with those of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

At the fifteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, organized by ECLAC with UN-Women, governments discussed the proposal to advance towards a care society. This proposal was transformed into a regional agreement through the Buenos Aires Commitment; it aims for a future in which the sustainability of life and of the planet are prioritized and promotes the redistribution of work, time and resources. The care society will help to overcome the development crisis synergistically with the achievement of substantive equality.

In the Buenos Aires Commitment, governments not only call for gender mainstreaming in policies, but also for affirmative action measures to accelerate the pace of achieving equality. The document calls for countries "to advance recovery plans with proactive measures to achieve substantive equality that foster comprehensive care systems, decent work and the full, significant and equal participation of women in positions of leadership in strategic sectors of the economy for a transformative recovery with gender equality aimed at the sustainability of life and for the transition to a care society" (ECLAC, 2023a, para. 6). As stated in the Beijing Platform for Action and, subsequently, in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, synergistic action is required in the three dimensions of development: economic, social and environmental.

The sixteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean will be held in Mexico in 2025. It will mark 50 years since the World Conference of the International Women's Year (Mexico City, 1975) and 30 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), as well as 5 years before the deadline set for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. ECLAC member States will examine the issue of "political, economic, social, cultural and environmental transformations as a means of advancing the care society and gender equality" (ECLAC, 2024c, para. 8). In a complex international context, marked by accelerated demographic changes, the climate crisis and a historic increase in military spending, the sixteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, with its proposal to advance the care society and gender equality, will bring from the territorial level to the national level, and from the region to the world, a renewed multilateralism and decisive action to achieve substantive equality, peace and development.

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