



PROGRESS OF WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN 2017

TRANSFORMING ECONOMIES,
REALIZING RIGHTS

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Design: Blossom - Milan

Translation: Prime Production

Editing: Margo Alderton, Tina Johnson

Printing: AGS Custom Graphics, an RR Donnelly Company

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SUMMARY

Preventing setbacks, overcoming obstacles and advancing the economic empowerment of all women

Latin America and the Caribbean stand at a significant juncture for achieving women's economic empowerment. Following a period of prosperity, social progress and democratic deepening, many countries are experiencing economic slowdown or even recession, social polarization, distrust in government and, in some cases, political crises. External factors further contribute to the gravity of this moment, such as falling commodity prices, protectionist tendencies, uncertainty about the sustainability of remittance flows and possible changes to immigration policies.

Against this backdrop, women's economic empowerment must be placed at the centre of the public agenda in order for the region to build economies that are not only more prosperous and resilient but also more equitable. Those responsible for the formulation of public policies face a dual challenge: to protect the gains women have made against the economic downturn; and to overcome the persistent obstacles to their economic empowerment.

The progress women have made in the region during the last two decades is indisputable but so too are the persistent gaps—not only between women and men but also among women themselves. As this report shows, both women's achievements and the constraints on their economic empowerment reflect the deep socioeconomic inequalities that are characteristic of this region and are exacerbated by patriarchal family relations and

violent patterns of behaviour. These inequalities—which are strongly influenced by differences in geographic location and ethnic origin—are obstacles that must be overcome if economic empowerment is to be achieved for *all* women.

Based on the analysis of the progress women have made over a quarter of a century (1990–2015) and the remaining challenges they face today, this report offers six key strategies to overcome remaining obstacles and advance women's economic empowerment in the region:

- Recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work;
- Establish universal and gender-responsive social protection systems;
- Create more and better jobs and transform labour markets for women's rights;
- Promote egalitarian family relationships that recognize the diversity of households and the rights and obligations of their members;
- Create the conditions for women to fully enjoy their sexual and reproductive rights; and
- Contain the adverse effects of economic slowdown on gender equality.

1

Today, women's economic empowerment is more important than ever for the region to build economies that are more prosperous, more resilient and more equitable.

Governments in the region have made a number of national, regional and international commitments in relation to gender equality and women's rights. National constitutions expressly set out equality between women and men as one of the fundamental pillars of society. Similarly, international and regional human rights conventions under the aegis of the United Nations and the Organization of American States—such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará Convention, 1994)—oblige States to move towards achieving gender equality and to not backtrack on achievements made.

Over recent decades, a strong regional agenda for gender equality has been built that recognizes women's rights and gender equality as essential and cross-cutting elements of any state intervention for inclusive, sustainable development.¹

This has occurred thanks to the struggles of organized civil society movements, especially women's rights organizations, the operation of international and regional human rights bodies such as the Commission on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, as well as mobilizations that emerged from the Beijing Conference process and the Regional Conferences on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Recently, the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment was underlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Today, there is a global consensus that gender equality is not only a basic human right but also central to the building of peaceful, prosperous and sustainable societies.² The evidence shows, for example, that the increasing participation of women in the region's labour market has made a significant contribution to the reduction of poverty and inequality.³ Thus, obstacles to women's economic empowerment are not only unjust but also inefficient. In the long term, the progress of societies and economies will depend on the full use of the skills and capabilities of *all*—women and men.

The increasing participation of women in the labour market has made a significant contribution to the reduction of poverty and inequality.

2

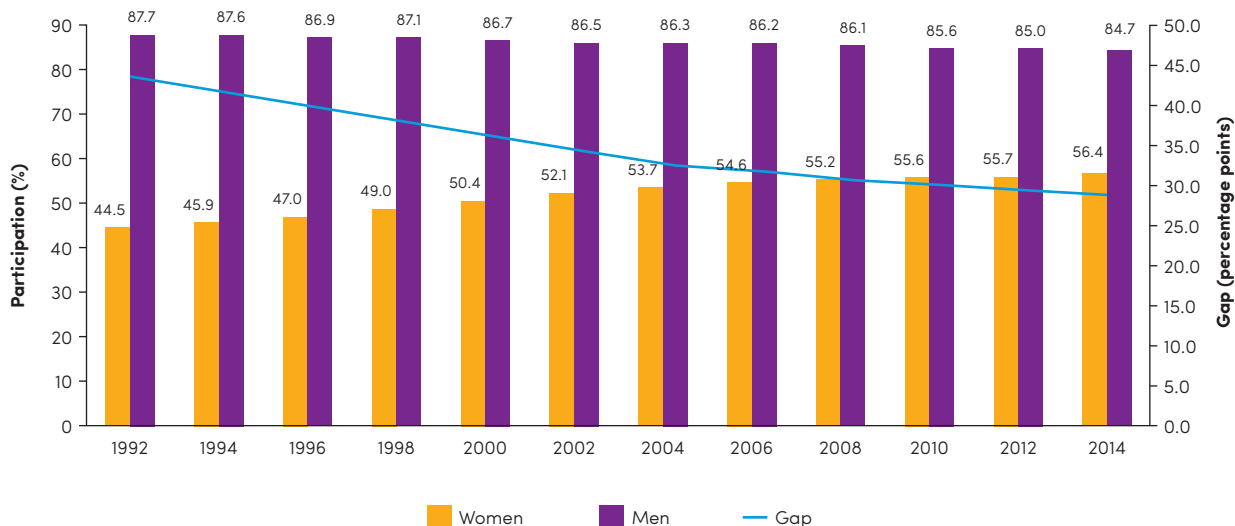
Women in the region have made significant progress for more than two decades.

Since 1990, the region has made significant progress on key gender equality indicators. In most countries, women have equalled or surpassed men in educational attainment, increased their participation in employment and political office, and improved their access to social protection.⁴ During the first decade of the 21st century, in a context of economic growth and rising commodity prices, many

governments increased public spending on health, education, housing and social protection as well as on policies to improve the balance between work and

family life. In general, women benefited from these measures, both directly and indirectly.

Figure 1.
Latin America and the Caribbean: Adult (25 years and over) labour force participation rates, by sex, 1992–2014



Source: ILO (International Labour Organization). 2016a. "Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM)." Accessed December 2016. <http://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/research-and-databases/kilm/lang--en/index.htm>.

N.B. The labour force participation rate is defined as the ratio of the active population to the working age population, expressed as a percentage. Adult labour force participation only includes people aged 25 years and over.

Between 2004 and 2014, women in Latin America and the Caribbean continued to increase their participation in the labour market—although to a lesser extent than in the previous decade—and improved their access to income. With respect to both indicators, the gap with men declined. Today, 56 per cent of the region’s women participate in the labour market, compared with 85 per cent of men (Figure 1). In several countries in the Caribbean—such as the Bahamas, Belize and Jamaica—female labour force participation rates already stood at approximately 70 per cent in the early 1990s and, with the exception of Jamaica, have risen even higher since then.

In Latin America, the proportion of women without an income of their own fell from more than 40 per cent in 2002 to less than 30 per cent in 2014, with a

parallel reduction in the gender gap from 26 to 16 percentage points (Figure 2).⁵ Among women of child-bearing age, who frequently reduce paid work in order to cope with childcare responsibilities, the proportion without their own income fell by nearly 14 percentage points.⁶ This reduction was the result of a combination of elements, such as their increased participation in the labour market and greater access to social protection, including conditional cash transfers for mothers or caregivers of young children. There were also significant improvements in access to personal income for women aged 60 years and older, largely due to the expansion of non-contributory pensions (Figure 3). Countries such as Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico and Trinidad and Tobago made significant strides towards universal pension coverage in this way.

Figure 2.
Latin America: Population aged 15 years and over without own income, by sex, 2002-2014

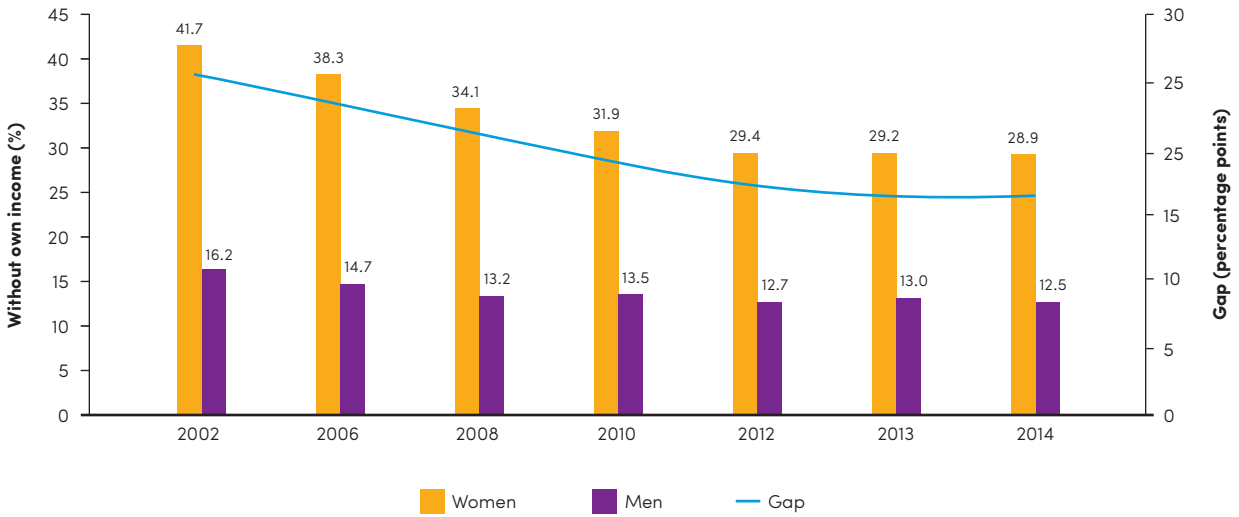
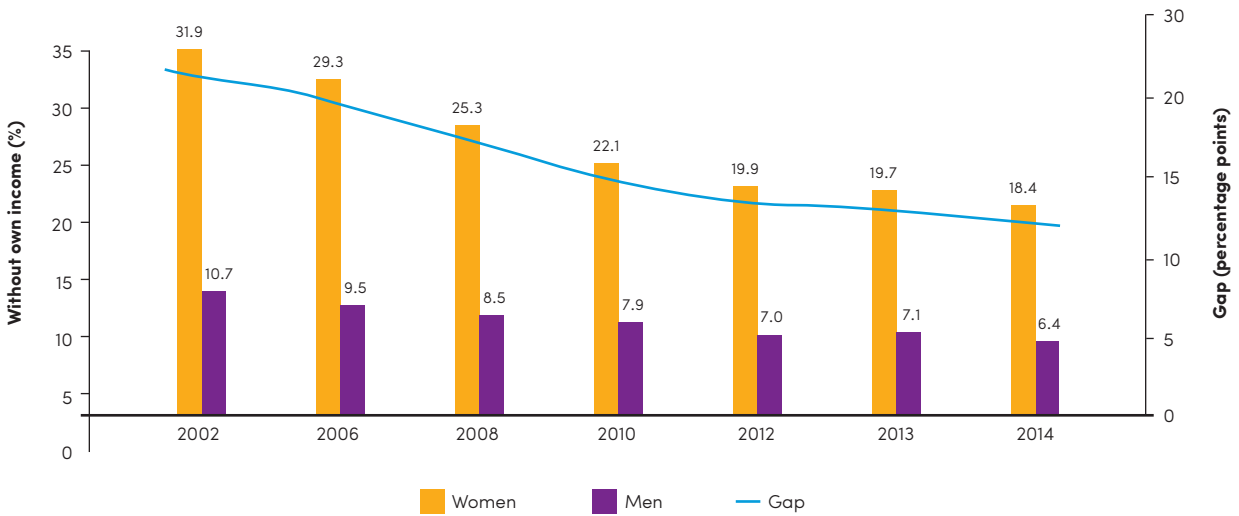


Figure 3.
Latin America: Population aged 60 years and over without own income, by sex, 2002-2014



Source: ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean). 2016b. "CEPALSTAT: Database and Statistical Publications." Accessed December 2016.

N.B. Weighted regional average.

3

Even so, gender gaps persist and poverty has become feminized.

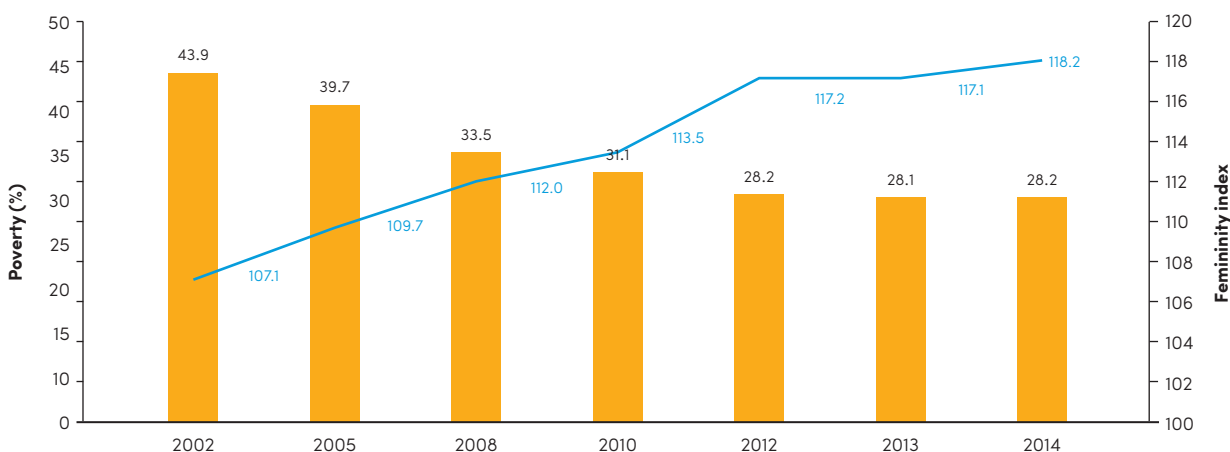
Despite a period of strong economic growth accompanied by major innovations in social and labour market policies, the region continues to lag behind in terms of gender equality. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the labour force participation rate of women is 26 percentage points less than that of men, while female unemployment is 50 per cent higher than male unemployment.⁷ In Latin America, the proportion of women without an income of their own is twice that of men and the gender pay gap persists even in the face of women’s educational gains.⁸ These gaps take on particular importance in the context of the economic downturn currently affecting the region, since, as this report shows, women’s labour force participation is more sensitive to the vagaries of the growth cycle than men’s. Therefore, without decisive action to safeguard women’s achievements, gender gaps could once again widen.

Between 2002 and 2014, poverty in Latin America decreased by nearly 16 percentage points. However, despite this general reduction in poverty, which was partly attributable to increased female labour force participation, poverty became more feminized during the same period. The femininity index of poverty—reflecting the percentage of women aged 20 to 59 living in poor households compared to the proportion of men in the same age range—increased by 11 points (Figure 4).⁹ In 2014, the percentage of poor women was 18 per cent higher than that of men. In other words, poor women benefited less from the poverty reduction than did their male counterparts.¹⁰

Without decisive action to safeguard women’s achievements, gender gaps in the region could once again widen.

Poverty levels remain high in the Caribbean, and in some countries, they seem to have risen as a result of the 2008–2009 economic crisis. In most Caribbean countries the likelihood of falling into poverty is significantly higher in households that are headed by women.¹¹

Figure 4. Latin America: Incidence of poverty and femininity index of poverty in poor households, 2002–2014



Source: ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean). 2016a. “Autonomía de las Mujeres e Igualdad de Género en la Agenda de Desarrollo Sostenible.” Thirteenth Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. 25 to 28 October, Montevideo.

Understanding the obstacles that have limited the progress of women in times of economic growth is crucial for confronting the current scenario of economic slowdown and shrinking fiscal space. This report shows that profound shifts in household structures and family dynamics are an important part of the puzzle. For instance, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of single-parent households headed by women, particularly among lower income groups. Not only are these

households more likely to be poor than others, but the gap between them and other household types has increased. Thus, the report makes an original contribution by showing how family dynamics can enable or constrain the economic empowerment of women in the region.

Understanding the obstacles that have limited the progress of women in times of economic growth is crucial for confronting the economic slowdown.

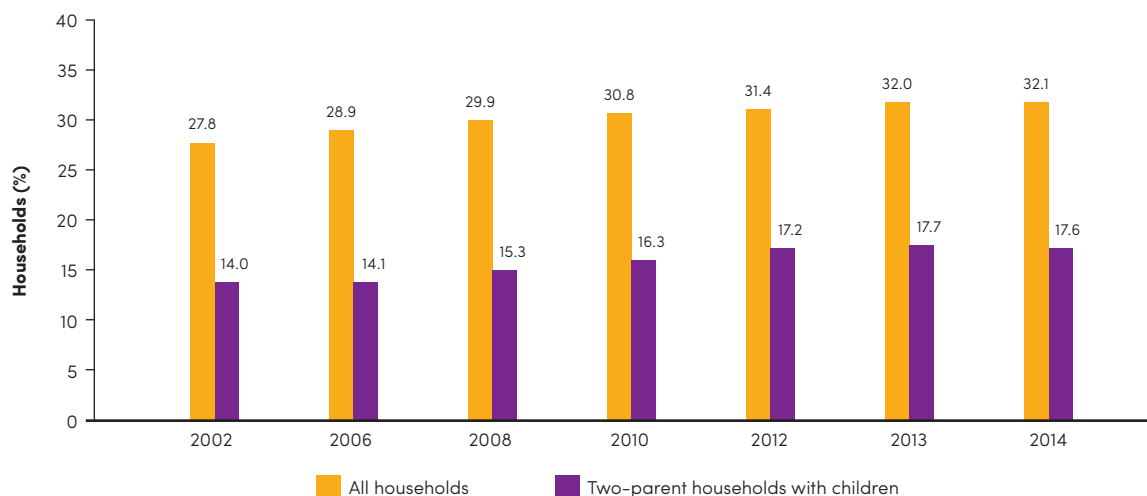
4

The region has experienced a silent, incomplete and uneven revolution in family dynamics.

participation in paid employment have altered gender relations in families.¹² Today, women’s labour force participation is not just a necessity, it is a fact. The model of the “male breadwinner” and the “female housewife” no longer reflects the reality of the region’s families. Today, the odds of a man being the sole income earner in a household are considerably lower than at the start of the millennium, even in two-parent households with children.

Falling fertility rates, rising levels of educational attainment among women and their growing

Figure 5. Latin America: Proportion of households where a woman is the main provider of income, by type of household, 2002-2014.



Source: ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean). 2016b. “CEPALSTAT: Database and Statistical Publications.” Accessed December 2016.

N.B. Weighted regional average

Women have expanded their roles as income earners, and many of them have become the main providers in their households. In 2014, one third of households in Latin America relied on a woman as the primary provider of income. In two-parent households with children, this proportion increased from 14 per cent to 18 per cent between 2002 and 2014 (Figure 5).¹³ Nevertheless, despite women's greater contribution to household income, the domestic sphere continues to be shaped by dynamics that limit their empowerment. Early marriage and domestic violence are among the most pernicious expressions of gender inequality in the family, and the growing instability of conjugal bonds (whether formal or de facto) has created new economic risks for

women, particularly among those with low levels of labour market attachment and little income security.

In addition, women in the region still spend more than three times as much time as men on unpaid care and domestic work.¹⁴ Women's disproportionate responsibility for this kind of work limits their opportunities—whether in education, work, political participation or rest and leisure—and presents an obstacle both to their economic empowerment and the enjoyment of their rights on equal terms with men. Greater progress requires a fairer distribution of unpaid care and domestic duties between women and men, as well as the promotion of responsible fatherhood, whether or not there is a conjugal bond.

5

These changes have been unevenly experienced by women from different socioeconomic, geographic, ethnic and racial groups.

Socioeconomic, geographic, ethnic and racial inequalities intersect with and exacerbate gender inequality. In socioeconomic terms, the gradients are clear and manifest themselves both in labour market indicators and family dynamics. For example, women in lower-income households or with lower levels of formal education face systemic disadvantages in terms of labour force participation, quality of employment and access to personal income. As a consequence, this group has benefited less from the recent cycle of growth than women in higher and middle-income households or women with higher educational levels.¹⁵ The labour force participation rates of lower-income women began to stagnate in the late 1990s. This trend, which is more pronounced among women with children under the age of five years, reflects the persistent difficulties faced by these women to reconcile motherhood and paid work.¹⁶ Currently,

the gender gap in labour force participation between highly educated women and men in Latin America is 11 percentage points, compared to 34 percentage points among those with no more than primary education.¹⁷ With regard to geographical location, gender gaps in labour force participation in Latin America are larger in rural areas (nearly 37 percentage points) than urban areas (23 percentage points).¹⁸

Labour force participation rates of lower-income women began to stagnate in the late 1990s, especially among those with young children.

There are also clear inequalities on the basis of gender, race and ethnicity. The labour market incomes of the working population are a case in point. White (not indigenous or Afro-descendant) men with eight or more years of formal education are at the top of the ladder, with incomes six times greater than the poverty line, while white women with similar levels of education have incomes of nearly five times the poverty line. For Afro-descendant women this ratio drops to less than four times the poverty line. Highly educated indigenous men have incomes of three times the poverty line, while indigenous women with the same educational level have incomes of only two times the poverty line.¹⁹ The incomes of the least educated indigenous women barely reach the poverty line.

Divergent trends between women with higher or lower educational levels can also be observed at the family level. Among women with less formal education, for example, the age at which they enter partnerships or motherhood has remained stable or even declined over the past decades.²⁰ Conversely, university educated women have delayed the onset of partnership formation (marital or de facto) and childbirth.²¹ In both groups, consensual unions have increased in importance compared to formal marriage, but these unions take very different forms. Less educated women are more likely to find themselves in “traditional” unions that occur early (usually before the age of 19) and are associated with early childbearing and significant age differences

between the spouses, with men often being significantly older than women.²² Women with higher educational levels are more likely to be in “modern” unions formed at a later age, with fewer children born at a later stage and with less pronounced age differences between the partners.²³

Recognizing that progress has been unequal and that there are interlinkages between different types of inequalities—including those based on gender, socioeconomic situation, ethnic origin and location (rural or urban)—is fundamental to the development of effective policies that advance the economic empowerment of *all* women.

6

Different scenarios of economic empowerment have emerged as a consequence.

The different scenarios experienced by women in the region have determined the extent to which they were able to benefit from the growth cycle of the first decade of the 2000s.²⁴ Likewise, they shape women’s capacity to cope with the economic downturn affecting the region since 2010.

At one extreme, there is the scenario of women on the **sticky floors**. These women face the greatest obstacles to economic empowerment. They have primary education at most and live in households with low incomes. Their labour force participation rates are low, much lower than those of men. When women from this group do enter the labour market, they are often trapped in insecure work such as paid domestic service, with few rights and little job security.

Low levels of education as well as the lack of formal employment and social protection restrict the economic empowerment opportunities of women in this group: more than 40 per cent have no access to personal income. Furthermore, women in this group have to cope with a heavy burden of unpaid care and domestic work, exacerbated by persistently high rates of early motherhood, which they frequently face without the presence or support of male partners and, on occasion, their families. Thus, their capacity to take advantage of opportunities during periods of economic growth is low, while their vulnerability during economic downturn is high. This exposes them to poverty and social exclusion as well as limiting their voice and agency in domestic relations. Without an enabling policy framework, this group of women will continue to be left behind, and their economic empowerment will be unattainable.

At the other extreme, there are the women with higher education and high household incomes who were able to take advantage of the recent economic expansion but who continue to struggle against **glass ceilings** that limit their economic empowerment.

Labour force participation among women in this group is high and comparable with that of men. It is also relatively stable in the face of economic cycles. The proportion of women with no access to personal income is lower than among those on the sticky floors (and those on the broken ladders, discussed below), but it is still much higher than among men in the same socioeconomic group.²⁵ The burden of unpaid work for this group is lower than it is for women in the other two scenarios, reflecting their greater capacity to buy care and domestic services in the market. As a result, in contrast to the other two groups, having small children represents less of an obstacle to employment for these women.²⁶ However, although women in the glass ceilings scenario are on a more positive pathway than women in the other two scenarios, they are still a long way from achieving equality with their male counterparts. They work in contexts of recurrent labour market discrimination and occupational segregation, reflected in persistent gender pay gaps, and face a greater burden of unpaid care and domestic work than men. Without an enabling policy framework, the progress of women in this group will continue to be blocked, and their economic empowerment will remain incomplete.

Between the two extremes is the scenario of the **broken ladders**. It comprises women with secondary education from middle-income households. Women in this group are able to access the labour market, but they lack the support

system that would help them make leaps towards empowerment or prevent them from slipping down towards the sticky floors. The labour force participation of this group is the most volatile among the three scenarios: when market signals are positive, these women turn strongly to the labour market, but when the economic cycle becomes less favourable, the growth in their labour force participation and employment slows down. These women share some of the gains of women in the glass ceilings scenario while simultaneously facing some of the obstacles associated with the sticky floors scenario. Like women in the glass ceilings scenarios, they have increased their labour market participation, even when they have small children: they present advanced labour force participation rates and an intermediate gap with men in the same group. Like women on the sticky floors, however, they struggle with the organization of care responsibilities. Rates of single parenthood are relatively high and the burden of unpaid care and domestic work is only slightly lower than that of women on the sticky floors. Nearly one third have no income of their own. In other words, these women lack stable support systems—sustained by family ties, state services or their own labour force participation—that would cushion the impact of major shocks, personal or economic. As a result, and in spite of their efforts, their progress is extremely fragile. Without an enabling policy framework, the gains of women in this group will remain vulnerable and erratic.

7

Preventing setbacks, overcoming obstacles and advancing the economic empowerment of all women: six strategies for the current context.

Based on this assessment, the report proposes six strategies to prevent setbacks in the gains that were made during the most recent period of economic growth, overcome the obstacles that have remained unresolved and advance the economic empowerment of all women. The challenge is to take the uncertainty that currently affects the region as an opportunity for the formulation and implementation of a transformative agenda that will allow countries to move more decidedly towards gender equality. The six strategies seek to advance equality, minimize

the devastating effects that the region's women have experienced as a result of previous crises and pave the way for a speedy recovery. They also seek to implement active measures that make better use of existing opportunities to counter economic downturn and lay the foundation for a future of renewed growth with greater gender equality.

The six economic empowerment strategies need to be adapted to each national context, taking into account the three scenarios outlined above. Hence, they need to be subjected to public debate and amended as appropriate based on an open dialogue with the active participation of civil society organizations that defend the rights of the most disadvantaged women or seek to build alliances between women from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Strengthening the agency, voice and participation of women in the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies is an essential condition for the success of any strategy intended to promote their economic empowerment.

Steps to economic empowerment: Unequal scenarios



GLASS CEILINGS

Female labour force participation

72%

High levels of economic empowerment and labour market insertion; lower burden of unpaid care and domestic work; persistent discrimination, occupational segregation and gender pay gaps in the labour market

BROKEN LADDERS

Female labour force participation

58%

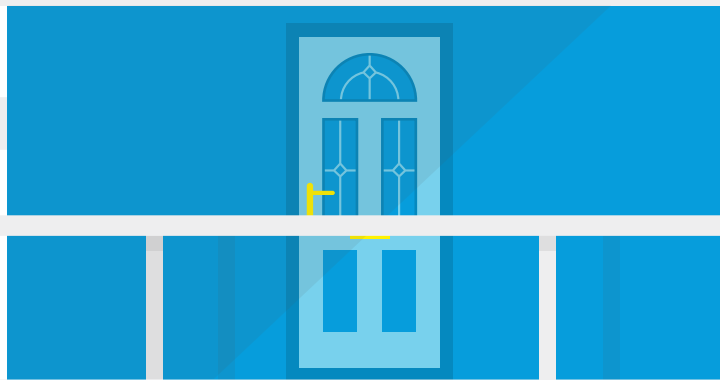
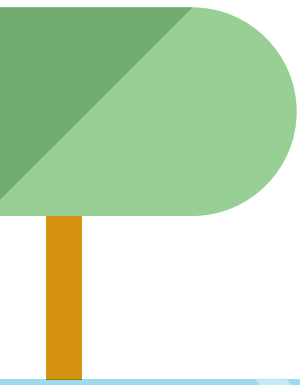
Intermediate levels of economic empowerment but with unstable gains and vulnerability to change; volatile labour force participation; increasing difficulty in striking a balance between employment and unpaid care and domestic work






STICKY FLOORS

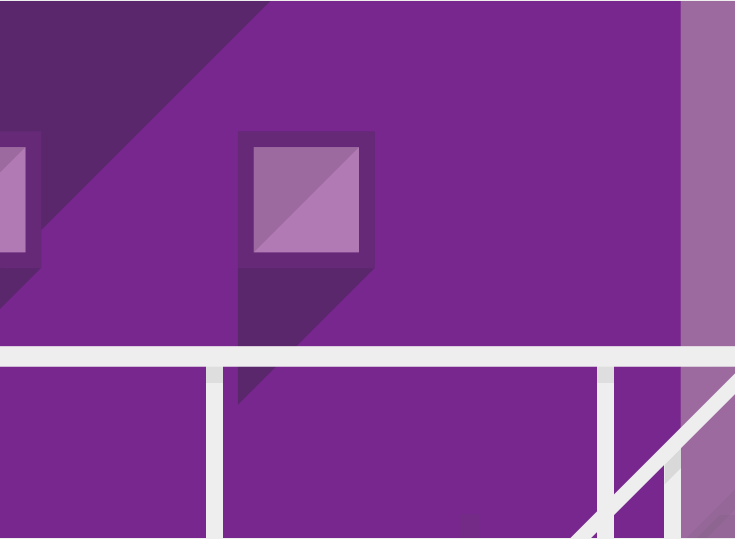
Female labour force participation






40%

Low levels of economic empowerment; structural obstacles to access employment or insertion in insecure jobs; high and early fertility; low level of education and high burden of unpaid care and domestic work








-  **19%**
of women have no income of their own
-  **16%**
of women dedicate themselves exclusively to unpaid care and domestic work
-  **33 hours**
is the time women spend on unpaid work per week
-  **8%**
of women between 25 and 29 years are single mothers
-  **6%**
of women are mothers by the age of 19 years



-  **31%**
of women have no income of their own
-  **29%**
of women dedicate themselves exclusively to unpaid care and domestic work
-  **41 hours**
is the time women spend on unpaid work per week
-  **15%**
of women between 25 and 29 years are single mothers
-  **30%**
of women are mothers by the age of 19 years



-  **43%**
of women have no income of their own
-  **41%**
of women dedicate themselves exclusively to unpaid care and domestic work
-  **46 hours**
is the time women spend on unpaid work per week
-  **17%**
of women between 25 and 29 years are single mothers
-  **59%**
of women are mothers by the age of 19 years

Strategy 1

Recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work

The burden of unpaid care and domestic work is a structural impediment to the economic empowerment of all women, even though its effect may vary according to the scenario they find themselves in. Whether it hinders upward job mobility (glass ceilings), hampers stable access to formal, well-paid work (broken ladders) or makes it difficult to access any type of employment (sticky floors), recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work between the family, the state and the market—as well as between women and men—is essential to advancing women’s economic empowerment. While many countries in the region have made the economic contribution of unpaid care more visible through, for example, national time-use surveys and satellite accounts, it is essential that this progress be built upon—through incorporating time-use data into policy design and reform, for instance. To advance the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work, the report recommends the following measures:

- **Use participatory processes to formulate comprehensive national care strategies.** Access to high quality care services is essential for reducing the time constraints that women face and for promoting the autonomy, rights and capabilities of those who need care and support. To fulfil these functions, services have to be accessible, of appropriate quality and respectful of the rights and dignity of both caregivers and care receivers. For example, Uruguay’s National Care System includes an explicit commitment to gender equality and
- **Improve care systems for very young children.** Increasing the availability of affordable childcare services that are of high quality and meet the needs of working parents can result in significant economic and social benefits. They promote the education and capabilities of children, create care-related jobs at different skill levels and reduce the opportunity costs of women’s labour force participation. Achieving this “triple dividend”²⁸ requires properly trained childcare staff capable of creating a stimulating learning environment. This, in turn, involves proper wages and working conditions, including training opportunities. Ecuador has made significant efforts in this regard (see Box 1).
- **Combat the systemic undervaluation of paid care work** through the certification, formalization and social recognition of care workers, in coordination with relevant professional associations and employers (see also Strategy 3).
- **Reform maternity, paternity and parental leaves.** Coverage in this regard is still insufficient in the region for both women and men, leaving important gaps that vary according to socioeconomic status. Reforms should include specific measures to ensure a fairer distribution of responsibilities between women and men (see Strategy 4).
- **Invest in basic social infrastructure** such as drinking water, sanitation and electricity. These are especially important for reducing the burden of unpaid care and domestic work on women in rural areas and sticky floors scenarios²⁹ and can liberate their time for productive activities, education and leisure.

the human rights of those who provide and receive care, both paid and unpaid.²⁷

BOX 1

Ecuador: Improving quality and working conditions in community-based childcare services

In Ecuador, 3,800 childcare centres (*Centros Infantiles del Buen Vivir*) provide care for more than 138,000 children of working mothers. Services are coordinated centrally but are mainly provided through agreements with local governments and civil society organizations.³⁰ Until 2013, caregivers were known as “community mothers” and were volunteers who only received a small stipend. As part of a broader strategy to improve service quality, the Government has recruited a growing number of early childhood specialists to coordinate service provision in each centre. In parallel, training opportunities for workers (now called “child education promoters”) means that they can obtain a technical degree after three years of part-time study. Since 2013, these workers have also received the minimum wage and full employment benefits. Despite these achievements, additional efforts are needed to extend coverage. In the context of weak economic growth, the pace of expansion slowed down between 2013 and 2015. At the current rate, it is unlikely that the government target of delivering approximately 400 additional centres by 2017 will be met.³¹ There is also a need to further strengthen interventions to improve the quality of services and the training of the professionals who are responsible for the children.³²

Strategy 2

Establish universal and gender-responsive social protection systems

In recent years, countries in the region have achieved an unprecedented expansion of social protection coverage. To confront the current economic downturn, governments have to continue their efforts to build social protection systems that move towards universal and equitable coverage as well as higher benefit levels. It is also essential to improve the gender responsiveness of social protection systems, ensuring that policies and programmes are designed, implemented and evaluated taking into account the multiple forms of discrimination against women as well as their specific needs throughout the life course. Social protection is recognized as a human right in various international instruments.³³ It is also a key

component of economic and social development with positive effects on productivity, employability and social inclusion.³⁴ This turns the extension of coverage into one of the most urgent priorities to achieve sustained economic growth with social cohesion and decent work for women and men.³⁵

Against this backdrop, the report recommends the following measures:

- **Expand the coverage of cash transfers for families with children.** These transfers have played an important role in increasing women’s access to personal income over the past decade, and further progress needs to build on the gains that have been made in this area (see Box 2). The main challenge is to move towards systems that provide universal benefits and adequate amounts in a complex fiscal and political environment (see Strategy 6). There is also a need to reconsider the use of conditionalities with a view to eliminating them where their gender effects are questionable

and promoting the co-responsibility of men in caring for children. Furthermore, links with complementary services—such as literacy courses, vocational training, agricultural inputs, childcare, legal aid and assistance for survivors of domestic violence—are critical for cash transfers to promote women’s empowerment more substantively.

- **Extend the coverage of cash transfers for older persons.** Several countries in the region have taken significant steps to correct the socioeconomic disadvantage faced by older women who have dedicated their lives to unpaid care and domestic work or experienced discontinuous employment histories.³⁶ Guaranteeing women’s economic empowerment in old age requires, among other things, a further extension of non-contributory pensions that provide adequate

benefit levels; a reduction of gender gaps in contributory systems through the adaptation of eligibility criteria and benefit formulas in ways that take account of women’s life course patterns and employment trajectories; and the reform of individual capital account systems in order to guarantee access for people with shorter and less stable contributory histories.

- **Enhance coverage among informal workers through contributory, non-contributory and mixed social protection schemes** (see also Strategy 3). Recent experience in Uruguay shows that extending social protection to domestic and rural workers has not only had positive effects on the quality of employment but also boosted the formalization and unionization of the economically active population.³⁷

BOX 2

Brazil: The *Bolsa Familia* programme and women’s economic empowerment³⁸

Since 2003, the *Bolsa Familia* programme has helped Brazil exceed its poverty and child mortality reduction targets and has had a positive impact on the lives of a significant part of the population, particularly women. The programme is part of the anti-poverty strategy *Brasil sem Miséria*, a combination of initiatives that help families overcome extreme poverty, exercise their basic rights and gain access to work and entrepreneurship opportunities. The *Bolsa Familia* programme has helped improve living conditions for the poorest in Brazil and reduced inequality. It has also contributed to the economic empowerment of Brazilian women and to their autonomy in the family and community. Data from 2014 show that of the households benefiting from the programme, 88 per cent were headed by women and 68 per cent by Afro-descendant women. Of all the beneficiary families, 73 per cent are of African descent. Women are the priority recipients of the electronic cards used by families to draw the benefits. This was a strategic decision in the implementation of the programme that recognized women’s capacity for dialogue and the fact that the use of resources is negotiated in the family context. The programme also opened up new horizons for training, access to credit and housing, and interaction with public and private officials—domains that were previously dominated by men. The interventions have introduced new capacities and social practices related to women’s economic empowerment and the gender division of labour.

Strategy 3

Create more and better jobs and transform labour markets for women's rights

More than half of women's incomes are derived from salaries and wages and nearly one quarter are from the returns to business activities, assets and own-account work.³⁹ Improving the extent and quality of women's labour force participation is therefore key to promoting their economic empowerment. Nevertheless, across countries in the region, women continue to face adverse conditions when it comes to entering and remaining in the labour market. Their unemployment rates are nearly always higher than those of men, especially among young people. When women find employment, they do so in the context of highly segregated labour markets—with an over-representation in systematically undervalued occupations such as domestic service and paid caregiving—and persistent gender wage gaps. In a region where formal employment is scarce, women are disproportionately represented in informal and insecure jobs. In addition, they often experience discrimination in recruitment as well as violence and sexual harassment in the workplace. To address these shortcomings, the following measures are recommended:

- **Establish a floor of labour rights for the entire working population.** This floor refers to six fundamental individual labour rights:⁴⁰ the right to a minimum wage; the right to unemployment insurance; the right to adequate working conditions in terms of safety, holidays, working hours and health; the right to severance pay; paid maternity, paternity and sick leave; and insurance for accidents at work. More than 18 million women in Latin America and the Caribbean are employed in paid domestic work, with 78 per cent of them working informally. Strengthening, equalizing and implementing the rights of this group of workers therefore presents an enormous opportunity for the governments of the region. It is recommended that countries that have yet
- **Establish, implement and equalize minimum wages.** Adequate minimum wages can contribute not only to combating poorly paid work and rising poverty but also to reducing gender pay gaps. Backed by appropriate wage indexation mechanisms, they also enable low-wage workers to share the benefits of productivity gains in periods of economic expansion and ensure that they are protected from disproportionate losses during contractionary periods. Since women are disproportionately represented in low-wage jobs, they usually benefit more from minimum wages than men.
- **Take effective measures against employment discrimination,** from legislative measures to outlaw discrimination in recruitment, promotion and professional development to the ban and prosecution of sexual harassment and other forms of violence in the workplace.
- **Strengthen labour inspections and direct their efforts towards precarious employment in highly feminized sectors** such as domestic service, export-oriented manufacturing (*maquilas zonas or francas*), and seasonal agricultural work (see Box 3). In addition, it is necessary to establish effective complaint systems and corresponding sanctions for discriminatory practices at work. Furthermore, incentives should be provided for employers to implement gender-responsive quality protocols and standards in recruitment and promotion practices as well as employment conditions.
- **Increase employment opportunities for women and promote their advancement in male-dominated fields** through targeted job-creation schemes, training opportunities and employment counselling as well as the use of quotas. States can establish quotas for women in highly male-dominated occupations in the public sector (e.g., in the police and armed forces, public works and political positions, such as trusted advisers) and create incentives to increase the representation of women in the private sector.

BOX 3

El Salvador: Mainstreaming gender in labour inspection⁴¹

In El Salvador, the labour inspection department houses a special unit for gender and the prevention of workplace discrimination. This unit consists of 16 specially trained officers. Although they have the same general competencies as all other inspectors, the main focus of their work is gender equality, anti-union practices and HIV/AIDS. Approximately every three months, they carry out planned inspections in *maquila* production facilities. This unit plays an advisory role for other inspectors so that they explicitly pay attention to gender and discrimination issues, in addition to surveying general operations. Nevertheless, there is still ample room for improvement for the unit to be truly effective and better integrated into the inspection system. This is a promising example that countries could adopt in the short and medium terms.

Strategy 4

Promote egalitarian family relationships that recognize the diversity of households and the rights and obligations of their members

The opportunities and risks associated with the demographic, social and economic changes of recent decades have been unevenly distributed. Patriarchal and violent family relations persist regardless of socioeconomic status, but women's capacity to confront them varies significantly. In this context, the main challenge for laws and policies is to recognize the heterogeneity of family structures and the power relations they contain in order to promote more egalitarian arrangements. Ensuring equal rights and responsibilities for women within and beyond the family context is fundamental for promoting their economic empowerment. There is a broad range of measures that countries can take in this regard. Examples include a review of the laws that govern the formation and dissolution of partnerships, the introduction of paternity and

parental leave, awareness-raising campaigns that disseminate appropriate models of masculinity, and the effective implementation of child support payments. Some specific recommendations include:

- **Reform maternity, paternity and parental leaves.** In addition to extending the coverage of existing provisions (see Strategy 1), there is a need to create stronger incentives for men to become more actively involved in raising and caring for children from the early stages. Chile and Uruguay are the only countries that, in addition to paternity leave, have introduced shared parental leave.⁴² To make progress in men's effective use of this leave, future reforms should consider the introduction of use-it-or-lose-it quotas (i.e., a proportion of parental leave would be reserved for the father and would be lost if it is not used by him).⁴³
- **Develop robust mechanisms to guarantee the exercise of responsible fatherhood, including regular child support payments.** In light of rising rates of single motherhood, it is essential that fathers and former husbands meet their financial obligations (see Box 4).

- **Implement integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women at the hands of their partners and husbands**, combining the services

of health, psychological care, access to justice, and education for prevention along with interventions that promote economic empowerment.

BOX 4

Mechanisms for enforcing regular child support payments

Several governments in the region have made efforts to create mechanisms to ensure child support payments are timely and to reduce the level of discretion in the amounts that single mothers receive. Examples include the automatic deduction of child support payments from wages; centralized information systems that enable governments to detect automatically when the father changes jobs (as seen in **Uruguay**); sanctions for employers who conceal the real level of wages they pay to the father; and the registration of child support debtors in ways that will restrict their ability to engage in financial transactions. **Chile's** *Cuenta Vista de Ahorro de Pensión Alimenticia*, a child support and maintenance savings account established in 2016, enables courts to monitor the account so that the parties do not have to be in direct contact. Considering the high percentage of men with no income of their own in the lowest socioeconomic strata, it is also important to create income-generating opportunities for them. In **Ecuador**, for example, there is an ongoing debate about an employability strategy for child support debtors who have no stable income.⁴⁴ It would also be worthwhile to study the experience of some European countries where child support payments are made in advance by the state and subsequently collected from the father, a mechanism that is considered highly effective in maintaining an adequate standard of living and reducing the risk of poverty among single-mother households.⁴⁵

Strategy 5

Create the conditions for women to fully enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights: motherhood as a choice

The right “to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and means to do so”⁴⁶ remains an unfulfilled promise for many women in the region. The high proportion of

unintended pregnancies, the persistence of teenage motherhood, the unmet demand for family planning and the legal restrictions on the right to abortion are some of the pending issues that reflect and affect the risks and opportunities of women in the three different economic empowerment scenarios.

While women in the glass ceilings category may be postponing motherhood more than desired⁴⁷ in order to advance in their careers, many women in the sticky floors scenario enter motherhood early and not always intentionally. In both cases, women’s educational, career and family aspirations are undermined by the persistence of patriarchal

models and relationships: women in glass ceilings scenarios could be restricting child-bearing due to a labour market environment that continues to operate based on assumptions of an 'ideal' worker with no family responsibilities—a model that strongly penalizes motherhood. Conversely, for women in sticky floors scenarios, the difficulty in accessing contraceptive methods and negotiating power relations over their use ends up undermining their education and employment prospects. Strengthening policies to keep girls in school so that they complete secondary education (at the very least) not only pays off in terms of human capital but also reduces teenage motherhood and unplanned pregnancies.

Creating the conditions for all women to effectively enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights and overcoming the particular barriers faced by those in the sticky floors scenario requires a broad range of measures, including the following:

- **Improve and equalize access to modern contraception.** This should be implemented country and region-wide but with a focus on rural areas in particular. New (reversible and long-term) contraceptive methods should be made accessible, and their availability in primary health centres should be increased. Emergency contraception is especially important for women in sticky floors situations, since they do not always have access to effective methods and are more exposed to forced sexual relations.⁴⁸
- **Prevent teenage pregnancy** by means of free, timely and informed access to voluntary, confidential and high-quality family planning.⁴⁹
- **Make comprehensive and gender-responsive sex education universally available,** enabling teenagers to negotiate equitable sexual relationships and effective contraceptive use with their partners.
- **Remove barriers that prevent pregnant teenagers or teenage mothers from continuing their education** by prohibiting discrimination against them in schools and adopting specific programmes aimed at overcoming economic and social constraints (see Box 5).
- **Recognize and deal with the health impact of unsafe abortion as a major public health concern.** Where abortion is legal, services should be safe and accessible to all women without discrimination. Where abortion is restricted, a review of laws that contain punitive measures against women who have undergone or are presumed to have undergone abortions should be considered. In all cases, women should have access to quality services for the management of complications arising from abortion.⁵⁰

BOX 5

Enabling pregnant teenagers and young mothers to stay in school

Most of the countries in the region protect the right to education of pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers through laws prohibiting their exclusion or discrimination.⁵¹ Yet the formal right does not always guarantee that these girls remain in school. Some countries have adopted specific programmes to address financial and social barriers. In **Argentina**, the *ProgresAR* programme offers childcare services and a monthly cash transfer to one million youths between 18 and 24 years of age who lack access to paid employment, work informally or receive below poverty-line wages. The goal is for them to complete their primary and secondary education and be able to attend university.⁵² In **Mexico**, the *Becas de Apoyo a la Educación Básica de Madres Jóvenes y Jóvenes Embarazadas*, a scholarship programme, awards grants to girls and young women whose vulnerability is exacerbated by pregnancy and early motherhood so that they can access, remain in and complete basic education. The programme has a strong presence in indigenous communities. In **Chile**, the *Programa de Apoyo a la Retención Escolar* is aimed at pregnant girls as well as teenage mothers and fathers who are at risk of dropping out of education. In addition, teenage mothers have free access to public day-care centres located in or near their school through the PEC (*Para que Estudie Contigo*) programme. Since 2013, **Jamaica** has had a national policy that guarantees the reintegration of school-age mothers, into the formal educational system.⁵³ Prior to its creation, the Women's Centre of Jamaica had long provided similar support services to teenage mothers, with positive effects on their reintegration into the school system and on the prevention of repeat pregnancies during adolescence.⁵⁴

Strategy 6

Contain the adverse effects of economic slowdown on gender equality

Over the past 25 years, Latin America and the Caribbean have witnessed significant economic and social progress. Nevertheless, the combination of strong growth and social policy innovations has not been enough to overcome the multiple and profound inequalities that characterize the region. The challenge today is to close gender gaps and reduce socioeconomic inequality in the context of an economic slowdown that has already affected the labour market to such an extent that the 2016 unemployment rate was the highest in the last decade.⁵⁵ This increase has disproportionately

affected women and is a particular threat to those in the broken ladders scenario. Today more than ever, policymakers need to consider the lessons of the past. A new cycle of structural adjustment would not only have devastating social costs, in particular for gender equality, but would also delay the region's economic recovery. To prevent this, the following measures are needed:

- **Avoid hyper-restrictive monetary policies.** While the scope for strong monetary expansion is limited, it is possible to use foreign exchange reserves, responsible borrowing and a non-contractionary interest rate policy to avoid a pro-cyclical effect. These measures protect both economic activity and employment. The space for these measures exists: although public debt has increased and central bank reserves have fallen slightly, both present manageable figures at the present time.

Most countries in the region do not face an exaggerated risk of inflation.

- **Maintain current exchange rates or allow for their depreciation** to support competitiveness in the context of lower international demand and lower commodity prices. The inflationary effect of falling exchange rates has been modest and can be managed.
- **Protect social spending with positive effects on gender equality and women's economic empowerment.** The recent growth cycle has allowed for a significant expansion of cash transfers—mainly benefits for families with children and the elderly. It has also allowed for progress, albeit timid, in the coverage of early childhood education and care services. Both are important investments that enable women to access personal income—from social transfers or wages—and should hence be protected in the face of economic downturn.
- **Incorporate a gender perspective into programmes aimed at managing, reducing and preventing the indebtedness of countries in the Caribbean.** High levels of debt force countries to adopt structural adjustment programmes, often under the supervision of the International Monetary Fund. Countries are obliged to renegotiate their debt or indebt themselves further in order to confront the effects of recurrent natural disasters.

These programmes should protect investments targeted at women and promote gender-responsive cash transfer programmes.⁵⁶

- **Increase tax revenues through a new fiscal pact.** It is necessary to combat tax avoidance and evasion, improve the efficiency and progressiveness of tax collection and avoid the negative effects of indirect taxes on basic products and services on women, especially those in the sticky floors category, who tend to spend most of their incomes on these items. In the Caribbean, where debt and vulnerability to external events are high, it is particularly urgent for countries to create countercyclical fiscal cushions to better absorb economic and environmental shocks.
- **Advance towards gender-responsive and redistributive public spending** to stimulate aggregate demand, protect employment, guarantee women's short-term economic security and create the conditions for their economic empowerment in the medium and long term. Gender-responsive budgeting aims to guide the formulation of fiscal and budgetary policies to enhance gender equality outcomes (see Box 6). This means that it is necessary not only to increase fiscal resources but also to reorient the ways in which they are spent.

BOX 6

Mexico: The road towards gender-responsive public spending⁵⁷

In Mexico, the work of civil society organizations dedicated to overseeing the allocation of public resources—for example, to address maternal mortality—led in 2008 to an alliance between the National Institute for Women, the Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit and the Gender Equality Committee of the Chamber of Deputies. Together, they established an annex to the federal expenditure budget that earmarked resources for equality between women and men, specifying the sector, programme and amount. In 2011, a reform to the Planning Act helped boost the incorporation of a gender perspective into the design, execution and evaluation of the budget cycle. The reform incorporates equality of rights between women and men and a gender perspective as guiding principles of planning. It also establishes the obligation to report on the conduct, result and differentiated effects of economic, social and environmental policies and to introduce specific indicators to evaluate the effects of public programmes on women and men. In 2012, through a reform of the Budget and Fiscal Responsibility Act, an annex for equality between women and men was formally established as a cross-cutting component of the federal budget. Furthermore, the Act determined that the amount of resources allocated to achieving equality and the advancement of women could not be reduced.

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