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ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW65)

Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Consultation

Towards parity and inclusive participation in Latin America and the Caribbean

Regional overview and
contributions to CSW65

**TOWARDS PARITY AND INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION IN LATIN AMERICA
AND THE CARIBBEAN
REGIONAL OVERVIEW AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO CSW65**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
I. International legal commitments and gender agendas on political rights: opening paths, moving towards a vision of parity	7
I.1 International and regional normative instruments: substantive equality without violence against women in politics	7
I.2 Political agreements: towards parity democracy with an intersectional perspective	8
II. Trends in women’s participation in public life in Latin America and the Caribbean: strengths and weaknesses prior to the COVID-19 crisis	12
II.1 The legal path as an accelerator of women’s access to public decision-making spaces	12
II.1.1 From quotas to political-electoral parity measures and other affirmative actions	12
II.1.2 Women as electors and elected and designated candidates	14
a. Electoral Participation	14
b. Women at the national level: Executive, Legislative, Judiciary and Electoral Branches	15
c. Women at the local level: mayorships and council seats	18
II.2 Intersectionality, an urgent but unfinished business: indigenous, Afro-descendant, rural, young, migrant and sexually diverse women and women with disabilities	19
II.3 Institutional and cultural barriers that hinder egalitarian political participation	24
II.3.1 Institutions indifferent to gender inequalities: political parties	24
II.3.2 Culture and gender stereotypes that limit women’s political participation	25
II.3.3 Strengthening leaderships and campaign financing	27
III. The threats to women’s full participation in the public space	30
III.1 Violence against women in politics (VAWP)	30
III.2 Ultraconservative discourses against the rights of women and their empowerment in the public sphere	33

IV. Feminist, women’s and diversity movements: driving progress and exploring options to overcome setbacks	35
V. The unforeseen pandemic: How the COVID-19 crisis is disrupting the structural conditions for women’s effective political participation	37
V.1 The risk of deterioration of the democratic context for the exercise of women’s political rights	37
V.2. The impact on other rights that interact with political rights	39
V.2.1 Private life and shared responsibilities	39
V.2.2 Economic rights	40
V.2.3 The right to a life free of gender-based violence	41
V.3 The consequences and challenges of COVID-19 for women’s political rights: a regional overview of a multidimensional crisis	42
VI. Conclusions and recommendations for the consolidation of parity democracy as a new social contract for the region	46
Bibliography	52

INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared as part of the preparations for the 65th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65) that will be held in March 2021 and will focus on the full and effective participation of women in decision-making and public life, as well as the elimination of violence for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. It is a reference document for intergovernmental discussions within the context of Latin America and the Caribbean's Regional Consultation prior to CSW65.

The document was prepared amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which has created a multidimensional crisis scenario that is widening pre-existing gaps that already affected women in relation to care tasks and their economic autonomy (a situation exacerbated by declining incomes and the further impoverishment of many women), and has also increased gender-based violence. All this in a political context of democracies already affected by public mistrust and dissatisfaction with their results that has produced a more volatile scenario for the exercise of politics in a region hit hard by COVID-19 and with several of its countries facing significant challenges in managing the health crisis. These democracies will also face increasing tensions due to little or very low economic growth, less development opportunities, increasing government debts, food, water and migration crises, and the deterioration of sectors that are key for economic growth, combined with a previous unresolved environmental crisis, to mention a few issues. All these factors will increase inequalities within and between countries, since different social, economic and political realities coexist in Latin America and the Caribbean.

These circumstances have clearly shown the need for a comprehensive strengthening of democracies in the region, with parity democracy as one of its visions. The magnitude of this crisis opens the

door to rethink unequal and unjust structures that for decades have remained unchanged, but their depth and multidimensionality in itself is also a warning about the possibility of a highly unstable future in which the presence and participation of women in the public sphere may be reduced due to the urgency of addressing other care, health or economic problems, to cite a couple of examples. Furthermore, the regional gender agenda built over these years may be relegated due to the prioritization of laws or policies that fail to take into account gender differences and/or respond to other and needs due to the pandemic.

This setback would not only have a major impact on women's rights, but would also lead to a further weakening of a democracy that requires the contribution of its women citizens to policies and the public agenda and strengthening them to further development by solving the complex problems of their societies, a contribution already highlighted by different case studies in several countries in the region. When women have equal access to positions of power, they negotiate the allocation of more resources and prioritize health, education, environmental and women-oriented policies, for example, in the area of gender-based violence, or the use of public revenue for care tasks. They also incorporate a gender perspective in their policies, create enabling environments to increase effectiveness and influence the creation of virtuous circles for the incorporation of more women.

Based on international instruments and political agreements that establish the States' obligation to work towards substantive equality, the elimination of discrimination and gender-based violence against women and girls, parity democracy and an intersectional approach to address the political rights of women, this document provides and overview of the main regional trends in women's access to decision-making in Latin America and

the Caribbean. Its purpose is to inform a regional discussion without overlooking the fact that the region is diverse and has differentiated gaps, not only as a result of subregional, but also national and even subnational realities with different challenges, demands, needs and policies. This aspect is also reflected in the lack of information disaggregated by sex in some realities. With this caveat in mind, we have identified the following resulting trends in the region:

- a. the use of gender quota laws, followed by parity and alternation measures as an accelerator of such access, with greater impacts on equality of results in the case of parity.
- b. an increasing presence of women in representation positions in some countries and certain branches and levels of government that results in different scenarios, some of them closer than others to a vision of parity despite persistent resistance.
- c. the need to translate quantitative changes into a real and equitable exercise of power by women, based on the exercise of their full autonomy, that allows for the promotion of the regional gender agenda and, therefore, their substantive representation.
- d. the need for increased efforts to promote an intersectional approach to political rights because, despite achievements in parity, this has not translated into an increased representation of indigenous, Afro-descendant or young women, women with disabilities, or migrant or sexually diverse women.
- e. the persistence of institutional and cultural barriers – including harmful practices, discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes – that limit the full exercise of women’s political rights, the resistance of political parties to changes that favor equality, and the existence of inequitable conditions for

the construction of leaderships and financing of their campaigns.

- f. a revitalization of women’s mobilization efforts in the public sphere - which are closely linked to an important feminist legacy - to demand the real effectiveness of their rights and their enhancement and, at the same time, resist threats to their rights.
- g. a number of pre-existing structural, sociocultural and economic barriers that limit their access to, and participation in, the public sphere.

These trends occur in a context of serious threats to women’s political participation in the public sphere in the region. On one hand, they face different forms of discrimination and gender-based violence, in different spaces, that undermine or hinder the construction of their political careers and their mobilization just for being women, and can also discourage their participation due to the normalization of acts that exclude them and come at an unfair and unacceptable cost. While attention has been drawn to the issue, laws and policies to prevent, punish and eradicate such violence are still limited in the different countries, although some progress has been made thanks to different strategies. At the same time, the emergence of public ultraconservative groups and discourses with a narrative contrary to gender equality that appeals to misrepresentation and fear as a tool is not only a threat to future achievements towards equality and the empowerment of women, but also to gains we thought we had already made.

Faced with these situations, the region has relied on one of its many strengths: an active and broad feminist and women’s movement that is creating an impact through mobilization for the formulation of policies and laws favorable to women’s rights and is achieving cultural transformations by rethinking conceptions regarding what is no longer tolerable, establishing new egalitarian values and setting new boundaries.

In this regard, this document includes a series of recommendations to establish what has already been achieved in terms of women's participation in the public sphere and further the consolidation of a gender parity democracy with an intersectional perspective that contributes to the construction of a new reality with gender equality as its main focus and in which democratic institutions are renewed through the participation and inclusion of citizens and listening to, and addressing, their demands.

I. INTERNATIONAL LEGAL COMMITMENTS AND GENDER AGENDAS ON POLITICAL RIGHTS: OPENING PATHS, MOVING TOWARDS A VISION OF PARITY

Latin America and the Caribbean has a strong tradition of political consensus that have influenced the international normative framework mandatory for all States, helped to advance the international agenda, and achieved substantive equality through the progressive construction of a roadmap that has already resulted in a Regional Gender Agenda. These instruments, on one hand, have informed national debates and given legitimacy to reforms and reform proposals and, on the other, have provided content for conceptual achievements in the field of women's political rights, based on feedback from national experiences.¹

They have also led to the establishment of parity democracy as a vision for its political systems and

public life, understood as a “model of democracy in which substantive parity and equality between men and women are the backbone of transformations undertaken by a responsible and inclusive State” with the objective of “establishing a new social contract and form of organization for society as a whole to eradicate all forms of structural exclusion, particularly against women and girls (and) a new social balance between men and women in which both of them assume shared responsibilities in all spheres of public and private life”.² It refers to a form of parity democracy that should also rely on comprehensive inclusion mechanisms for the participation of the diversity of women through an intercultural and intersectional perspective and in a context free of discrimination and gender-based violence.

I.1 International and regional normative instruments: substantive equality without violence against women in politics

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1981, is one of the main international instruments for women's rights that establishes the obligation of States parties to shift from formal equality to substantive equality through the adoption of measures aimed at eliminating discrimination against women in political and public life. This is a major qualitative leap from a series of international

and regional instruments that, between 1945 and 1969, established the principle of equal rights between women and men and shaped the content of political rights (at the formal level), which range from the UN Charter to the American Convention on Human Rights.³

According to article 7 of CEDAW, States have the obligation to take all appropriate measures to

1 Llanos (2019).

2 ONU MUJERES and PARLATINO (2016). p.11.

3 At the universal level, they also include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and, at the regional level, the OAS Charter, the Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Political Rights of Women, the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, and the American Convention on Human Rights.

eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure, on equal terms with men, the right:

1. “To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;
2. To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;
3. To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country”.

It also established temporary affirmative actions as a key strategy to accelerate *de facto* equality in access to power, as well as the adoption of appropriate measures for the elimination of stereotypical sociocultural patterns. As stated in General Recommendation No. 25 of the CEDAW Committee, which addresses the concept of substantive equality, “it requires that women be given an equal

start and that they be empowered by an enabling environment to achieve equality of results. It is not enough to guarantee women treatment that is identical to that of men. Rather, biological as well as socially and culturally constructed differences between women and men must be taken into account.” (Section 8).

Another key regional instrument is the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women, also known as *Belem do Pará* (1994). It states that violence against women prevents and nullifies the exercise of any right, including political rights, and addresses the importance of having appropriate conditions for the substantive exercise of women’s rights, as well as the increased vulnerability of certain women as a result of their race, ethnicity, age, disability and immigration status, among others. It also establishes the responsibility of States in the areas of prevention, punishment and eradication of gender-based violence. In this regard, States have an obligation to refrain from engaging in any act or practice of violence against women, act with due diligence and take all appropriate measures to eliminate gender-based violence against women.

I.2 Political agreements: towards parity democracy with an intersectional perspective

25 years after its adoption, the Beijing Platform (1995) still is the most important milestone as far as political agreements are concerned, considering it stresses women’s equal right to participate in the government of their countries in public positions, but also through leadership in their communities and informal organizations. With a comprehensive view and proposals for strategic action - many of which continue to guide actions in the region - one of its twelve spheres of particular concern is the political sphere, for which it proposes the adoption of a series of key measures by governments:

- a commitment to achieving gender balance between women and men with a view to achieving equal representation through the implementation of affirmative measures if necessary;
- promoting equal participation in political parties (through specific measures regarding their procedures, decision-making structures and programmes) and trade unions;
- reviewing the impacts of electoral systems on women’s participation and their reform if necessary;

- the generation of quantitative and qualitative data for the monitoring, evolution and dissemination of progress made by women in the public sphere, and supporting studies carried out by civil society and academia in this regard; and
- encouraging greater involvement of indigenous women, and measures for shared responsibilities in the household between women and men.

This roadmap has been enriched by different political consensuses in subsequent regional conferences organized by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) that have furthered the development of concepts and the implementation of complementary measures for achieving substantive equality as an essential component of democratic systems.

It was only after the Quito Consensus (2008) that parity was recognized as a democratic principle that promotes democracy, but also as a mechanism for equality in the exercise of power, decision-making, participation and social and political representation in social, economic, political and cultural relationships, and also in the private sphere, to eradicate structural exclusion.

The Quito Consensus calls on States to adopt positive action measures, legislative reforms and budget allocations to ensure the full participation of women in public positions and political representation in all branches of government, including at the international and regional levels, that define the security, peace and development agenda; develop policies (positive actions, financing and training, among others) aimed at incorporating the agenda of the diversity of women in political parties, and promote equal participation in all spaces and the empowerment of women to consolidate parity. It also calls for the adoption of legislative measures to prevent, punish and eradicate the political harassment of women in elected or appointed positions, as

well as in political parties and movements at the national and local levels.

In addition to governments and political parties, a call to action was also made for the media to acknowledge the importance of women's equal participation in political processes; provide fair and balanced coverage of all candidacies; and cover the various forms of women's political participation and issues that affect them.

In 2010, the Brasilia Consensus went one step further: it added the need to understand parity as a result and, therefore, in addition to nominations, it proposed the regulation of conditions for achieving equality, such as mechanisms for equal access to financing, electoral propaganda and decision-making bodies of political parties. It also stressed the need to strengthen citizens' electoral observation and institutional mechanisms to ensure compliance with legislative measures to guarantee the participation of women.

It also placed a particular emphasis on the double discrimination experienced by Afro-descendant, indigenous and young women, as well as women with disabilities, and called for measures such as: contributing to empower indigenous women's leaderships, eliminate existing gaps and ensure their participation in decision-making spaces; the adoption of measures (including affirmative actions) to ensure parity, inclusion and ethnic and racial alternation in all powers of the State, in special and autonomous regimes, at the national and local levels and also in private institutions; and the creation of mechanisms to support the public and political participation of young women free from discrimination and with respect for their different forms of organization and expression.

In 2013, the Santo Domingo Consensus conceived gender parity as a State policy that, through legislative-electoral measures, must ensure access and equal representation in all spheres of political power, including regional parliaments and spaces for

integration. It also pointed to a series of measures, including laws to ensure equal representation, as well as affirmative actions in political parties and other public or private institutions that include sanction mechanisms in case of non-compliance. As in the (previous) Brasilia Consensus it ratified the need for legislation to prevent, eradicate and punish harassment and administrative and political violence against women in public spaces, and made reference to electoral observation with a gender perspective and the need to encourage the media to commit to equality and parity and to cover other forms of women's political participation and the issues that affect them.

In the non-institutional dimension of political participation, it acknowledged the role of organizations and movements of women and feminists, indigenous, Afro-descendant and young women, women with disabilities and women human rights defenders, and made a call to promote exchanges and partnerships between them to promote adequate conditions for their participation, addressing the cultural and linguistic barriers that limit them, and identifying and seeking sources of funding. Finally, this Consensus called for financial and technical support for national mechanisms for the advancement of women and regional mechanisms for women's leadership, especially those targeted at young, rural, indigenous and Afro-descendant women and sexually diverse women.

As part of this incremental process for the construction of a regional roadmap, in 2017 the Montevideo Consensus shifted towards the concept of representative parity democracy and intersectionality and interculturality as two of the approaches that guide the construction of the regional gender agenda. It proposed quantitative and qualitative parity as a pillar to create conditions for the full exercise of women's citizenship, in addition to considering it as a key element for the enhancement, qualification and democratization of democratic political systems and thus achieve gender equality by 2030.

This new political agreement reaffirmed the emphasis of the Santo Domingo Consensus with regard to political participation through non-formal channels. Thus, it made reference to the concern over the criminalization of women human rights defenders; insufficient recognition of the contribution of the movements of women, feminists and Afro-descendant, young and indigenous women, as well as members of the LGBTI community, to democracy; and the need to create safe environments for participation and support organizational processes so women's and feminist organizations and movements can contribute to the design, application and monitoring of policies at the national and international levels in line with the regional gender agenda.

Finally, the Santiago Commitment (2020) reaffirmed the need to increase the representation of all women in decision-making – with an intercultural, ethnic and racial approach that includes women with disabilities – in all the branches of power of the State and levels and spheres of government, with the aim of achieving a parity democracy where the human rights of women participating in politics, women human rights defenders and women journalists are protected. It also added an explicit commitment to the adoption and implementation of actions, policies, laws and programs to eradicate the different forms of violence and gender discrimination against women, adolescents and girls, including the new forms of violence emerging as a result of information technologies and social media. Furthermore, it condemned political violence and called for measures to involve boys, young men and men as strategic allies for gender equality; advocate and protect women's rights and their economic autonomy and empowerment; the elimination of discrimination and gender-based violence, and the formulation of policies to promote shared responsibilities in household chores and care tasks.

Since their adoption, these instruments have contributed to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal No. 5, which aims to "Achieve

gender equality and empower all women and girls”, conceiving gender equality as a fundamental human right and an essential element to achieve sustainable development.

II. TRENDS IN WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES PRIOR TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

II.1 The legal path as an accelerator of women's access to public decision-making spaces

II.1.1 From quotas to political-electoral parity measures and other affirmative actions

Between 2019 and 2020, ten countries of Latin America and Caribbean⁴ enacted the largest number of gender parity political-electoral laws. Parity has been, in most cases and under certain design requirements, the most successful policy to increase the number of women elected in collegiate bodies, including parliaments. This process, which began in 2008 - when these measures were incorporated into the constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia and in Costa Rica's electoral legislation - cannot be understood without the learning process involved in the previous quota legal regulations initially approved in the region in the 1990s. That was one first key strategy to accelerate the incorporation of women in popularly elected positions and, to a lesser extent, in political parties' leadership positions and appointed positions in the Executive branch and the Public Administration in some cases (only two countries - Panama and Colombia - established 30% legal quotas).

Since the approval of the first gender quota law in Argentina⁵ in 1991, a first wave of change swept through the region with a focus on the regulation of percentages (between 20 and 40%) for the incorporation of women in nominations for popularly elected positions. During this stage, which extended until 2011, the region experienced for the first time a period of "sustained progress"⁶ in terms of nomination and access to elected positions. Its gradual implementation, however, also revealed weaknesses in their design and application that reduced its effectiveness for the eligibility of women. One of those weaknesses was the absence of effective sanctions for non-compliance and mandates to prevent women from being moved to the bottom of the lists, their application to incumbent candidates and alternates, or exceptions to their application. Beginning in 2000, reforms were proposed to increase percentages and correct flaws in their design, and the type of electoral system subject to quotas and the need to adapt these measures to majority systems and single-member constituencies became central to improve eligibility. Between 2009 and 2017, one last group of countries

4 In line with the regional classifications of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2017), the countries included in Latin America are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela. The Caribbean includes Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago. However, data for all these countries are not always available.

5 Law No. 24.012 - Law on Women's Quotas.

6 Bareiro and Soto (2015). p. 41.

lagging behind approved legal quotas ranging from 30% to 40%-60% for popularly elected positions.⁷

These measures have resulted in a broader electoral offer, normalized the participation of women in the public sphere and accelerated women's access to political representation, depending on the design of measures to be implemented and the institutional context where they are applied.⁸ However, since they represent a normative change imposed on political organizations, multiple attempts have been made to fight their application and limit their effectiveness, a situation that clearly shows that these changes in political or organizational culture or informal practices were not automatic and new measures were required. The fact that gender quotas in many countries became a ceiling for women's participation, combined with emerging windows of opportunity for political-electoral reforms, and the persistence of the feminist movement and the broad women's movement in the quest for substantive representation expressed in political statements and advocacy actions, paved the way for new measures. But these measures, that were related to parity and alternation in the electoral political sphere and continue to evolve conceptually,⁹ seek, beyond the temporality of affirmative actions, a real redistribution of power through the achievement of equality of results.

At present, the Latin America and the Caribbean¹⁰ region shows three different stages of progress with respect to the legal regulation of affirmative or gender parity measures for popularly elected positions.

One is that of ten countries that have regulated gender parity in popularly elected positions

- Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Mexico, Honduras, Panama, Argentina, Peru and Colombia - some of them with models more effective than others as far as women's eligibility is concerned. These regulations include, for example, the registration of the list as the most effective sanction, alternation between women and men / men and women in the list and its application to lists to be registered. In this scenario, Ecuador is the only country that has passed legislation on vertical parity - with the equitable distribution of 50-50% of candidates in electoral rolls -, one of the measures that has met the most resistance among political organizations. Mexico, on the other hand, has taken a significant qualitative leap by legislating on parity in the three branches of power of the State (Executive, Legislative and Judiciary), at the three levels of government (federal, state and municipal), in political parties' candidacies for popularly elected positions and in the election of representatives in municipalities with indigenous populations. Finally, Chile approved a gender parity constituent assembly, which applies to its candidacies and composition, whose election will be held in 2021, an unprecedented reform in the world.

The second group includes several Latin American countries (Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Haiti, Paraguay, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay) and one country from the Caribbean - Guyana - that have gender quotas with percentages ranging from 20% to 40 % for those positions and where, again, the design of measures and their results vary, from those countries that only apply them to primary processes, which means they are diluted in the process of preparation of final nominations, to those that have no sanctions or alternation mandates and have established exceptions to their application.

7 These include El Salvador (a minimum of 30% of women), Colombia (a minimum of 30% of one of the genders), Chile (no sex can exceed 60% or be below 40%) and Uruguay (a minimum of 33.3% in 2009 with an indefinite extension approved in 2017).

8 Llanos (2019).

9 Llanos (2019).

10 According to ECLAC's regional classification (2017).

Finally, there is a third group that includes the rest of the countries - two in Latin America and the rest of the Caribbean¹¹ - that do not have quota or parity measures. This is, evidently, the group lagging furthest behind in terms of progress towards parity democracy.

But the realities of these countries are not static; the region has active and organized networks of women politicians and feminist and women's movements that promote bills for parity reforms. But in some countries these actions have met with resistance that has led to the approval of laws that are promoted as "parity laws" but do not include effective measures to achieve parity and alternation.¹² For this reason, in countries like Guatemala, where a strong resistance to bills presented to Parliament has had little success, women's organizations are working to strengthen the relationship between

the constitutional principles of gender equality and public/electoral policies through strategic litigation to achieve parity.

At the same time, the concept continues to evolve in practice towards a gender parity democracy that goes beyond electoral politics and access, and ensures that the search for access to power takes place on equal terms and, once in power, its equitable distribution and exercise by women favors a substantive representation that reflects their different problems and interests in laws, policies and budgets. It should also involve the democratization of the private sphere, where the existing imbalance in the burden of care is the first barrier to women's political participation, as proposed by the Regulatory Framework for Parity Democracy developed and promoted by UN Women and approved by PARLATINO in 2015.

II.2 Women as electors and elected and designated candidates

a. Electoral Participation

Women not only account for 50% of the population. Data available shows that, since 2008, women in Latin America account, on average, for 51% of electoral rolls that enable citizens to vote.¹³ In addition, according to data from the ATENEA Project,¹⁴ in recent years it was found that where

Electoral Tribunals have information disaggregated by sex, women's electoral participation, that is, the number of women citizens' able to vote that actually do so, was between 3 and 8 percentage points higher than male participation,¹⁵ even in countries where voting is voluntary or abstention is not sanctioned. Similar information for the Caribbean is not available.¹⁶ A situation that has attracted

11 According to ECLAC's regional classification (2017).

12 Llanos (2019).

13 Llanos and Sample (2008). Data calculated based on information from 18 Latin American countries.

14 ATENEA is an initiative promoted by UNDP, UN Women and International IDEA that seeks to accelerate women's equal political participation in Latin America, to which end it generates quantitative evidence and recommendations for reform in eight dimensions of political rights through 40 indicators that make up its Political Parity Index, as well as complementary information.

15 Data on elections in Mexico (2012), Honduras (2013), Guatemala (2015), Chile (2014), Panama (2014), Peru (2016), Colombia and Brazil (2018). Available at Llanos (2019).

16 For the purposes of this report, the following are considered Caribbean countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti and Cuba.

very little attention is that of migrant women, who currently represent 50% of migrants.¹⁷ Data from Mexico shows that, while the participation of women in the country's 2017-2018 elections was 8.1 percentage points higher compared to men, the participation gap in voter turnout outside of the country was 11.6%, which speaks of the need for electoral bodies and consulates abroad to promote and facilitate their vote.¹⁸

Electoral participation is a key indicator of citizens' participation, in this case women, in their countries' governance, with a high level of participation being a sign of a vital democracy, and a low level being a sign of increased apathy or distrust in the political process.¹⁹ It is essential for electoral authorities to disaggregate this information permanently, not only by sex, but also by age, ethnicity and race, in order to have a more comprehensive view of women's participation and, through an intersectional analysis, to identify any gaps in their participation.

b. Women at the national level: Executive, Legislative, Judiciary and Electoral Branches

EXECUTIVE BRANCHES

Forty years after the onset of democratic transitions in Latin America, six women have been elected, and two reelected, as presidents. As of early 2020, the Caribbean had two heads of government/State. While this situation has had a major symbolic impact in the region, disrupted masculinized gender roles in terms of power and provided new role models for women, at present there are no women in that position in Latin America.

Regarding women's participation as ministers of State, a historical look at 18 Latin American countries by the ATENEA Project shows that, over the course of the last three decades, on average, their participation tripled from 9% (1990) to 30.3% (2019).²⁰ This is a major achievement in terms of access, although it is still far from parity, especially if we consider the differences between countries as of 2019 – nine countries had 30% of women or less (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela); five between 30% and 40% (Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Uruguay) and four 50% or more (Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Nicaragua). However, the composition of cabinets in the absence of gender parity measures for this branch of power of the State, except for Mexico, depends on a political will that can fluctuate. Even in countries like Colombia and Panama, where a 30% quota has been approved, the presence of women may vary depending on the hierarchical level of the position in the former, or such presence is not even enforced or monitored in the latter. In addition, although women have held positions historically masculinized such as those of Economy, Defense, Foreign Affairs or the Interior in many countries, a look at current trends shows gender biases still exist in appointments, and women are mainly appointed to ministries associated with reproductive roles. In the Caribbean²¹, according to data from UN Women, the average number of women in ministerial cabinets was 17% at the beginning of 2020.²² However, of the 12 countries analyzed, eight were below 30% (including Belize with 6.3%, Bahamas with 6.7% and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines with no women); three between 30% and 40%

17 Mexico's National Electoral Institute. *Buscará INE participación de mujeres migrantes que enfrentan marginación.* ("INE to seek participation of migrant women facing marginalization") Comunicado de Prensa No. 24. January 16 2021.

18 Webinar on the vote of migrant women organized by Mexico's National Electoral Institute. January 2021.

19 Solijinov A. (2016). p. 13.

20 Llanos (2019).

21 According to ECLAC's regional classification (2017).

22 Calculation by the authors based on data from UN Women (2020). Anguilla, US Virgin Islands and British Virgin Islands are not included.

(Trinidad and Tobago, Dominica and Guyana) and one above 40% (Grenada).

On this point, it is essential to highlight the key role played by national mechanisms for the advancement of women in transforming state institutions and mainstreaming the gender perspective both in their internal activities and in the design of public policy, for which they should have the highest level of authority and the budgetary resources necessary.

Finally, in the case of Latin America's public service administration, States still face challenges in terms of statistical data, but recent assessments by international organizations show women account for approximately 50% of the jobs in the sector. However, they are underrepresented in managerial positions (they only hold between 30% and 40% of them) despite having the professional qualifications to do so. Therefore, the problem is not one of lack of professional merit but rather of informal barriers expressed in the form of less personal and political connections, which are requirements to be promoted to the highest hierarchical positions.²³ Similar data or studies for the Caribbean are not available.

LEGISLATIVE BRANCHES (LOWER/SINGLE CHAMBERS)

Calculations made for this document based on data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) from the early nineties to late 2019 show that - prior to the COVID-19 pandemic - the percentage of women parliamentarians in Lower/Single Chambers in

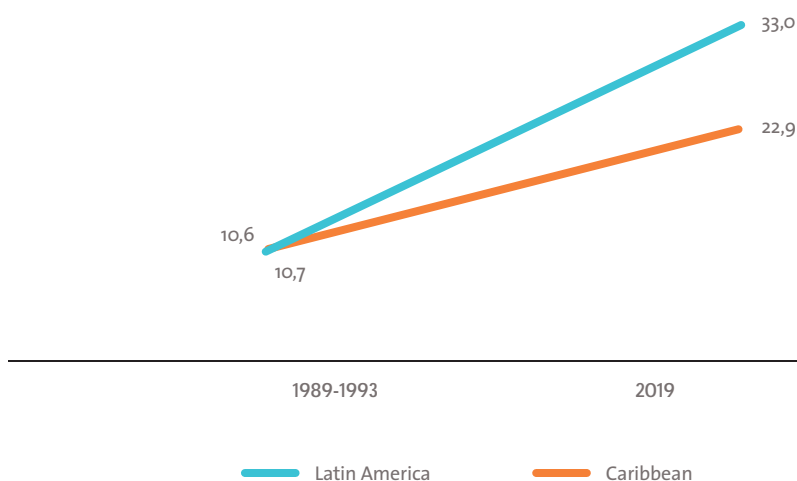
Latin America had virtually tripled, on average, from 10.6% to 33%.

While this is a significant incremental trend, we are still far from a gender parity scenario, as shown by the level of performance by country: eleven out of twenty countries reported less than 30% (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Paraguay, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela); three between 30% and 40% (Peru, Ecuador and El Salvador); five between 40 and 50% (Argentina, Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico and Nicaragua) and only one more than 50% (Bolivia). If we look at some of the countries that had legally approved political-electoral gender parity measures in nominations to be registered and had implemented them by the end of 2019 (Ecuador, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Nicaragua and Argentina), we can affirm - although with some nuances - that the approval of such measure has led to an increased presence of women lawmakers in those chambers.

There has also been some progress in those countries where the ATENEA Project has conducted assessments to determine whether women, once elected, have equal access to more important decision-making spaces in legislatures, for example, as chairs of general committees, chairs of commissions that issue opinions on matters less related to reproductive issues and as spokespersons for political parties. In general, it has been concluded that, while some progress has been made, women are still underrepresented, except for some particular cases.²⁴

²³ Rodríguez Gustá, Ana Laura (2020).

²⁴ Llanos (2019).

Graph 1: Evolution of women's access to legislative positions in Latin America* and the Caribbean²⁵

Source: calculation by the authors based on IPU's historical data, available at www.ipu.org. Data from 1989 to 1993 were used to reflect the range of elections held in this period and, thus, have data available for all the countries analyzed. No data was available for Puerto Rico.

In the Caribbean²⁶, data for the same period (from the early 1990s to the end of 2019) shows that, while the presence of women has doubled - from 10.7 to 22.9%, on average - its growth rate has been lower compared to Latin America, placing it even further from a parity scenario. A breakdown by country shows that eight countries were below 30% (Belize with 9.4%, Antigua and Barbuda with 11.1%, Bahamas with 12.8%, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines with 13%, Saint Lucia with 16.7%, Jamaica with 17.5%, Barbados and Saint Kitts and Nevis with 20%); three between 30% and 40% (Dominica, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago); and one above 40% (Grenada). Research carried out in Caribbean countries has identified a series of barriers to their participation – stereotypes of their emotionality, pressure to go against their principles, negative campaigns and verbal abuse towards them based on their appearance, family relationships

and intimacy, lack of funding for their campaigns, problems to reconcile political activities and their family life and even parliamentary infrastructures that lack basic facilities for them.²⁷

JUDICIARY AND ELECTORAL BRANCHES

According to data from the ATENEA Project, at the end of 2019 women magistrates accounted, on average, for 27.5% of the total number of magistrates in the supreme courts of the Judicial Power in eighteen Latin American countries, with eight countries reporting less than 30% (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama and the Dominican Republic), four between 30% and 40% (Chile, El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico), two between 40% and 50% (Guatemala and Uruguay) and one more than 50% (Ecuador).²⁸ This is a less studied area where no official historical or periodic data disaggregated by sex is available. However, evidence from studies

²⁵ According to ECLAC's regional classification (2017).

²⁶ According to ECLAC's regional classification (2017).

²⁷ Hesse-Bayne, L. and Kremer, T. (2018).

²⁸ Llanos (2019).

carried out in several countries shows women account for significant percentages²⁹ in the judiciary although, as in other public spaces, higher glass ceilings still persist. Women holding the position of president in these bodies are still an exception. The Caribbean, on the contrary, seems to have an opposite trend, with an average of 58.4% of women magistrates in the six countries for which data is available in ECLAC's Gender Equality Observatory. With the exception of Belize (with 16.7%), the rest of the countries report more than 50% of women in these bodies (Trinidad and Tobago, Bahamas, Guyana, Jamaica and Barbados).³⁰ However, data for the rest of the countries is still required to reach a more definitive conclusion.

In the case of the composition of national electoral jurisdictional bodies in Latin America, according to data from the ATENEA Project for eighteen Latin American countries, by the end of 2019 women magistrates, on average, accounted for 22.5% of those jurisdictional bodies. Twelve countries were below 30% (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Uruguay), four between 30% and 40% (Argentina, Costa Rica, Paraguay and Dominican Republic) and only two above 50% (Bolivia and Venezuela).³¹ There is no data available for the Caribbean's electoral systems.

c. Women at the local level: mayorships and council seats

As far as mayoral positions at the local level are concerned, data from ECLAC's Gender Equality

Observatory shows that only 15.2% of these positions were obtained by women in the 2018-2019 elections,³² compared to 5% in the 1990s.³³ But this still represents an extremely low percentage and a very slow growth rate in almost all of the countries, which brings to the center of the debate the biggest obstacles for women to access these positions of power where affirmative or equal measures are not legally applied, although some countries have explored the jurisprudence route to extend their application to these spaces. In some national contexts, biases still exist within political parties that prevent them from being nominated in similar proportions or simply nominate them in less desirable electoral districts or districts where political parties have less influence. Additional work is still required to identify other bottlenecks that are preventing their social leadership - in those places where they have a strong influence - from translating into political leadership. In the Caribbean region, the lack of data on women holding mayoral positions is striking, and in those countries for which data is available (with the exception of Saint Kitts and Nevis, with 9.1%) the null presence of women in these positions in Belize, Dominica, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago is deeply concerning.³⁴

As far as council seats are concerned, the results have been more favorable for women where quota or parity measures are enforced. Latin America has, on average, doubled the number of women councilors since the 1990s, from around 14%³⁵ to an average of 28.9% around 2018-2019, a calculation based on data available from ECLAC's Gender Equality Observatory.³⁶ While this is an achievement, it is still far from parity. However, we

29 op. cit. (2019).

30 Data available at: <https://oig.cepal.org/en>.

31 Llanos (2019).

32 Data available at: <https://oig.cepal.org>. These data do not include Haiti, as there is no information available for this country on this website.

33 op. cit. (2019). Data for eighteen Latin American countries.

34 Data available at: <https://oig.cepal.org>.

35 Llanos (2019). Data for 18 Latin American countries.

36 Data available at: <https://oig.cepal.org/en>.

must also mention that, while the percentage in countries like Bolivia, Costa Rica and Mexico is in the 40%-50% range, ten countries are below 30% (Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Guatemala, Panama, Peru, Paraguay³⁷, Puerto Rico, Uruguay and Venezuela). In the case of the Caribbean, there is no data available for some countries or States do not have up-to-date data. However, in the five countries for which data is available from ECLAC's Gender Equality Observatory, the average is 32.2%,³⁸ with countries like Belize with 67.2% or Dominica with 40.9% and, on the opposite end, Antigua and Barbuda with 0%.

In conclusion, quota and parity laws, especially in Latin America, have accelerated the descriptive representation of women (i.e. their access to power), mainly at the level of parliaments and to a lesser extent in council seats. The region has the largest number of countries with political and electoral gender parity rules. In this regard, the Caribbean is still lagging behind without affirmative actions or gender parity measures in most countries and a still distant vision of gender parity. These figures reveal that social and community leaderships in those places where women have high levels of participation – which are even more visible in contexts of economic and social crises, where they have shown a great capacity for self-organization and the creation of support networks – are not translating into political leaderships. They also reveal that there are barriers that prevent those leaderships from making a positive impact on

public policies that take into account their needs and interests. And that absence is even more visible in the case of rural, indigenous and peasant women, who are also affected by multiple forms of discrimination and are more exposed to situations of violence in the region, taking advantage of their increased vulnerability and exclusion.

In this regard, it is necessary to look at other branches of power and other levels of government where women's access is more limited or gender parity access is growing slowly, which means we must continue to work towards the adoption of new legislation, improving existing legislation, changing limiting structural conditions and convincing political parties to adopt egalitarian political practices to create more opportunities of participation for women in their diversity, in order to make sustained progress and avoid setbacks.

That said, once gender parity is achieved we will face new challenges. The main ones include ensuring that women's political careers are free from gender-based violence in every step of the way, that women who gain access to power have gender awareness and sufficient power to work for substantive representation so the gender agenda can be implemented in the region and they can work on the transformation of public institutions women have access to, which are characterized by an exclusive patriarchal culture that prevents or limits the exercise of power and their rights once they gain that access.

II.2 Intersectionality, an urgent but unfinished business: indigenous, Afro-descendant, rural, young, migrant and sexually diverse women and women with disabilities

Intersectionality, understood as the need to analyze overlapping categories and situations

of inequality in which women find themselves that, therefore, multiply the discrimination they

37 However, in the case of Paraguay, an important aspect is that of the approval of local parity ordinances for the creation of neighborhood committees.

38 Data available at: <https://oig.cepal.org/en> for Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Dominica, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

suffer, is part of an assessment still pending in the region. Although women account for half of the population, they are far from being a homogeneous group and, therefore, a multidimensional and intercultural approach is required that takes into account factors such as ethnicity, race, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability or migratory status, among others. These factors affect the full exercise of their rights, including their political rights, considering women in these situations, due to pre-existing structural forms of discrimination and harmful practices, face greater barriers to organizing, building a political career and making their voice heard through social movements.

When it comes to the exercise of politics through institutions, results show that advances in women's access to public or popularly elected positions have not translated into a presence that reflects their diversity. The lack of systematized and periodic official data in most countries, not only disaggregated by sex, but also based on these criteria, hinders the formulation of evidence-based policies. However, there is a minimum body of data that provides a snapshot of the double or triple exclusion women face. Regarding the leadership of indigenous women – which is also diverse depending on national contexts – we can affirm their participation in the state-municipal political system and community settings (where most of the leadership positions are held by men) is still very limited with only a few exceptions, such as that of Bolivia, where the approval of parity for popularly elected posts has led to a significant participation of indigenous women, or that of Guyana, where reports show that there are several indigenous women among the ten women currently holding ministerial positions.³⁹

In some cases, this leadership comes from indigenous organizations associated with political parties part of an ideological spectrum, and their political work is typically influenced by experiences of ethnic and gender discrimination within and outside of their native peoples, in addition to constant tensions between their formal and informal participation and their public and personal life.⁴⁰ However, several local experiences in the region show that belonging to these grassroots organizations can also be a strength, considering these organizations can support their leadership, particularly in those places where only a minority of them have access to public spaces.

Despite gradual achievements in the process of bridging gaps in their access to an informed vote – such as campaigns in indigenous languages, civil issuance of identification documents in indigenous areas or their organization for the discussion of policy proposals in electoral contexts – their participation in political decisions is still part of an unfinished agenda.⁴¹ In general, their access to public office has been minimum so far, despite the fact that several countries, like Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela and Bolivia, have reserved seats in their legislative branches for representatives of indigenous populations or special indigenous constituencies that elect their own representatives and that, in the first three countries, have historically been occupied by indigenous men.

For this reason, countries like Mexico or Chile have designed legal mechanisms to ensure the equal inclusion of indigenous women, either through the combination of new affirmative actions and pre-existing parity measures or through the application of the principle of parity to existing mechanisms to allocate reserved seats in legislatures. In the first

39 FILAC, ONU MUJERES and ORDPI (2020).

40 PNUD (2012).

41 op. cit. (2012).

case, one example is Mexico, a country where for the 2017 legislative elections, the National Electoral Institute, endorsed by the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judicial Power (TEPJ), ruled that in 13 of the 28 electoral districts (elected by relative majority) with more than 40% indigenous population, the candidacies nominated by political parties should include, as a minimum, 50% of indigenous women,⁴² a decision that has been extended to the 2021 election.

In the second case, one example is that of Bolivia. While its current constitution makes reference to intercultural parity democracy as pillar of its political and constitutional system, creating spaces for dialogue to establish linkages between the gender and ethnic visions has remained a challenge.⁴³ In the 2020 elections, however, indigenous peoples' organizations had an opportunity, for the first time, to nominate candidates without the intermediation of political organizations and through their own organizations, to run for seats in the Plurinational Legislative Assembly in the country's seven special electoral districts⁴⁴, a significant contribution to intercultural and community democracy. After the election, based on their own rules and procedures and with respect for gender parity and alternation rules, as established in the national legislation, four indigenous women now hold seven seats in the seven indigenous electoral districts. The other example is the process to convene a parity Constituent Assembly in Chile, to be elected in April 2021, where 17 out of 155 seats have been reserved for the ten native peoples that exist in the country. The law establishes that, to guarantee gender parity, each candidacy must include an

alternative of the opposite sex so that, if necessary, adjustments can be made to achieve parity of results in the allocation of seats.⁴⁵

In Ecuador, where gender parity has been regulated, a similar measure has had a limited impact on indigenous and Afro-descendant populations and, therefore, attention has been brought to the need for a representation quota for indigenous, Afro and Montubia women in a context of illiteracy, lack of training to improve the quality of their performance or the lack of political experience of the indigenous movement, among other things.⁴⁶ In Guatemala, in 2016 the Supreme Electoral Tribunal submitted a bill to amend the Law on Elections and Political Parties that included a proposal for parity, alternation and inclusion of indigenous peoples in the representation that was not approved by the Congress of that country. That bill considered the alternation of woman and men and indigenous and non-indigenous people, in order to take ethnic diversity into account.

Despite a series of setbacks in access by indigenous women to decision-making positions in Guatemala, and given the limited the presence of indigenous people (indigenous deputies only account for 10%, even though indigenous people account for 44% of the country's population),⁴⁷ a very innovative political advocacy mechanism was created to increase their representation and give them their a voice. A 2020 vice presidential agreement gave birth to the Indigenous Women's Platform, which includes the participation of 50 indigenous women from seven different generations (professionals, community leaders, human rights defenders –including Rigoberta Menchú, winner of the 1992 Nobel Peace

42 See *Crónica del Proceso Electoral 2017-2018* ("Chronicle of Electoral Process". November 2017 – Instituto Nacional Electoral (ine.mx).

43 Llanos (2019).

44 Reglamento para la Inscripción y Registro de Candidaturas N° 043/2000 ("Rules for Registration of Candidacies No. 043/2000"), January 2 2020).

45 See Law No. 21.216 and Law 21.298.

46 Bloj, Cristina (2013).

47 FILAC, ONU MUJERES and ORDPI (2020).

Prize—, social activists, businesswomen, government officials and nationally and internationally recognized leaders). This platform advises the Economic and Social Development Cabinet, which is made up of ministries and government secretariats, the Vice-presidency and the Congress of the Republic, and can influence government policies, programmes and strategies in political, economic, social, environmental, legal and legislative matters, with a gender and inclusion approach and the aim of addressing the historical and structural needs of women and indigenous peoples.⁴⁸

In the case of Afro-descendant women, it is estimated that half of the 150 million people of African descent that exist in Latin America are women, a population ranging from 10% in Central America to 50% in Brazil and the Caribbean.⁴⁹ However, according to some estimates 0.1% of women parliamentarians are of African descent, which means neither affirmative nor parity measures have had a quantitative impact on their access to certain positions of power,⁵⁰ even though in recent years they have been gained more prominence in certain fields, such as municipalities, governorships or the executive.⁵¹ The election for the first time—in 2018—of an Afro-descendant woman as Costa Rica’s Vice President has had a major symbolic impact by breaking a double glass ceiling (in terms of sex and race) in an Executive Branch. And recent analyses show a similar level of political participation through voting among people of African descent, from an aggregated regional perspective whose starting point are the historical structural barriers for these populations created, for example, by illiteracy or economic dependence.⁵²

All this in a context of normalized racism in the region, often rooted in political institutions and their representatives, that requires the creation of collective awareness and the elimination of structural discrimination through anti-racist policies for the realization of the right to equality. But this is not the only country. Racism “still persists and reproduces itself as a distinctive trait of Latin American societies”, and in almost all the countries for which information is available “people of African descent are described as part of a group subject to more discrimination compared to non-Afro-descendants”.⁵³ For this reason, the demands of people of African descent have been shifting towards the search of a pluriethnic citizenship through different processes to further democracy that incorporate affirmative actions as anti-discrimination measures to better respond to their needs.⁵⁴

It is important to note that the concept of intersectionality in itself is part of a legacy of anti-racist and anti-colonial “black feminisms” of the Global South, characterized by the key role and contribution of Latin American and Caribbean feminists that, in several studies and through activism efforts, questioned the invisibility of structural inequalities leading to gender inequality. For several decades and with renewed impetus in the region since the late 20th century, Afro-descendant feminists from the Global South brought attention to the voice and demands of the movement of Afro-descendant women for the inclusion of their reality in gender analyses, including the concept of intersectionality, within feminist movements, the main currents of gender studies and movements

48 The main strategic partner of this platform is UN Women Guatemala.

49 Campbell Barr, Epsy. n.d., p. 6.

50 op.cit. (n.d.) pp. 8.9.

51 CEPAL and UNFPA (2020).

52 op. cit. (2020).

53 CEPAL and UNFPA (2020). p. 58.

54 op. cit. (2020).

against racism and colonialism.⁵⁵ While this process is the result of several decades of activism of feminists from the Global South, it is only in recent times that it took hold in the public sphere.

Information about the political participation of young women, women with disabilities and women from the LGBTIQ+ community in the public sphere is even more scarce. Young women demand seats reserved for the diversity of women and complain about their lack of political participation due to practices of discrimination towards these identities and barriers to the exercise of their right to protest and its criminalization.⁵⁶ In the case of young women in the Caribbean, it has been found that, despite the active work of political parties, they still face barriers resulting from gender and age biases that exclude them due to their lack of experience.⁵⁷ For this reason, they demand opportunities for training and empowerment, as well as dialogue with States to ensure their effective participation.⁵⁸ In the case of women with disabilities, it is necessary to guarantee their access to voting during electoral processes and information and mechanisms for the exercise of their political rights as candidates, as electoral observers or in appointed or elected positions.

Another major challenge is that of changing negative attitudes and fighting the stigmatization of women from the LGBTIQ+ population and defenders of their rights.⁵⁹ When it comes to the exercise of political rights, it is essential to have normative frameworks and national mechanisms that guarantee the human rights of transgender persons and their gender identity. In this respect, Argentina's Law No. 26.743 on gender identity (2012)

allows LGBTIQ+ persons to vote using a document that shows their self-perceived identity. And Law No. 19.684, the Comprehensive Law for Transgender Persons in Uruguay (2018), recognizes their full citizenship and promotes the implementation of public policies and affirmative actions in the public and private spheres to reverse the situation of discrimination and stigmatization they have historically suffered.

In the case of measures implemented by electoral bodies, for Mexico's 2018 elections, the National Electoral Institute (INE) approved a Protocol to ensure that transgender persons can exercise their right to vote on equal terms and without discrimination, and in 2020 Colombia's National Electoral Council approved a similar protocol. Likewise, as part of Mexico's 2021 electoral processes, INE adopted a series of affirmative measures for political parties and coalitions to include, on equal terms, candidacies for indigenous and Afro-descendant persons and members of the LGBTIQ+ community, as well as persons with disabilities.⁶⁰ In addition, as part of this process, as already described in the section on women as electors, actions have been taken to guarantee the vote of migrant women, but increasing their access to representation positions still remains a challenge, with legislative posts and other affirmative policies still subject to debate in Mexico and the region.

Finally, the election of a lesbian woman as mayor of Bogotá in 2019, the appointment for the first time of a transgender activist as the National Coordinator of Diversity in the Executive Power (in 2016), or that of the Undersecretary of Diversity Policies of the Nation in Argentina (2019), have helped to bring attention to, and normalize, the

55 op. cit. (2020).

56 Generación Igualdad (2020).

57 ONU MUJERES (2020b).

58 op. cit. (2020b).

59 op. cit. (2020b).

60 INE (2021). [Establece INE acciones afirmativas para la participación de grupos vulnerables en elecciones 2021](#) ("INE implements affirmative actions for the participation of vulnerable groups in the 2021 elections").

political participation of women and LGBTIQ+ collectives. In this regard, the transgender employment quota in the national public sector in

Uruguay⁶¹ and Argentina⁶² has also set a precedent that, in addition to making access possible, could lead to major transformations in the State.

II.3 Institutional and cultural barriers that hinder egalitarian political participation

II.3.1 Institutions indifferent to gender inequalities: political parties

Political parties as promoters of democratic participation and representation are a key element to guarantee the plurality of interests and inclusion of diverse sectors of society in political systems. Despite repeated calls to action for gender equality in their structures, rules and programmes, political organizations - with few exceptions - still refuse to become partners in the process of achieving women's substantive and equal participation. Immersed in their own crises of trust (according to *Latinobarómetro* in Latin America, on average, only 13% of citizens in the region trust them),⁶³ in several countries political parties have been unable to resolve the disconnect that distances them from increasingly critical and demanding citizens. Their weaknesses not only affect party systems, but also the legitimacy of democratic systems where, despite reforms in some countries in favor of the nomination of independent candidates, they continue to hold a monopoly on political representation, appointment to public posts and the formulation of laws and policies.

As already pointed out in this document, the biggest changes in their actions - especially in the electoral sphere - have been driven by an external factor: the

law. To what extent have the laws that require the implementation of mechanisms for gender equality influenced the actions of political parties? Studies carried out in a significant number of countries in the region show a certain level of openness in their formal rhetoric that is mainly found, for example, in the adoption of guiding principles regarding gender equality and non-discrimination in their statutory documents. While the inclusion of this kind rules is a starting point to assert the rights of women, if that rhetoric does not translate into specific party policies that promote their participation, leadership and access to decision-making, the masculinized and excluding status quo will remain unchanged.⁶⁴ The inclusion of gender equality principles in their statutes increases the probability for political parties to have a representation of women above 20% in their national executive committees (NECs).⁶⁵

Evidence - where data is available - shows that women account for 40% to 60% of their membership, but those organizations that have achieved gender parity in the composition of their national executive committees are real exceptions, with the average number of women in their executive committees ranging from 17.3% to 33.3%, a situation that clearly shows their underrepresentation in decision-making spaces.⁶⁶ This despite the fact that in six countries - Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras

61 Ley N.º 19.684 – *Ley integral para personas trans* (“Comprehensive Law for Transgender Persons”).

62 Argentina (2020) *Cupo laboral para personas travestis, transexuales y transgénero* (“Employment quota for transvestite, transsexual and transgender persons”).

63 Corporación Latinobarómetro (2018). p. 48.

64 Llanos (2019).

65 Llanos, Beatriz and Vivian Roza. (2018).

66 Llanos (2019).

and Panama - gender parity has also been regulated for the election of party leadership positions, while others have established quota rules. These results are the consequence of their weak design - which in several cases does not include sanctions for failure to comply with the rules - and a lack of analysis of the compatibility between these measures and their internal election rules, which means equality of results is simply difficult to achieve. Still, the existence of a national quota or parity law increases the representation of women above the average.⁶⁷ The Commonwealth countries of the Caribbean are a good example of the lack of quota or parity rules, which forces political organizations to present a minimally balanced electoral offer. Even though women are the ones mainly responsible for running campaigns in communities during electoral periods and organizing fundraising initiatives, their participation as candidates is weak.⁶⁸

On the other hand, in those countries where quota or gender parity measures for popularly elected positions exist, political parties have gradually designed strategies to limit their impact and thus control the extent of egalitarian changes proposed, including strict or minimum compliance and an uneven distribution of more competitive positions on nomination lists, such as top or main candidate positions. However, women's units in political parties, which could have the capacity to work on gender mainstreaming inside their parties, are weak either due to a lack of formal attributions or their limited political influence in the party's actions. Another challenge is that of translating women's political participation into a critical mass to fight for changes within political organizations that include not only formal aspects, but also all the informal unwritten rules that respond to a partisan political culture that excludes them, makes their

political career more difficult and does not consider their leadership an asset.

II.3.2 Culture and gender stereotypes that limit women's political participation

Despite the adoption of affirmative actions, followed by political-electoral gender parity measures (which tend to be more effective) that have accelerated and increased women's access to popularly elected positions – as well as a gradual process of normalization of their participation – cultural changes and, therefore, culturally constructed frameworks that determine the perceptions of women's participation in the political sphere, continue to be influenced by gender biases and stereotypes that limit their actions. Defined by CEDAW as “prejudices and (...) customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles of men and women” (art. 5), these social and cultural patterns are harmful, because they can lead to discrimination and limitations that undermine women's human rights by restricting their ability to develop and make decisions in their lives,⁶⁹ in this case with respect to their political careers.

Studies conducted worldwide show that 91% of men and 86% of women interviewed in 75 countries expressed biases against gender equality in areas such as politics, the economy, education, intimate partner violence or women's reproductive rights. In the political arena, 50% of the male and female interviewees consider men are better political leaders than women, with a significant percentage of both women and men revealing strong biases.⁷⁰ The proportion of people with moderate or strong biases is increasing in several countries, which is

67 Llanos (2019).

68 Hesse-Bayne, L. and Kremer, T. (2018).

69 Oficina del Alto Comisionado para los Derechos Humanos de Naciones Unidas. Los estereotipos de género y su utilización.

70 United Nation Development Office (2020).

concerning considering that countries with high levels of bias in social norms tend to have higher levels of gender inequality.⁷¹

Stereotypes associated with norms transmitted from one generation to another beginning in the early stages of education, that see them as normal behaviors or practices – through parenting styles and traditional roles within families – and are socially reproduced later on, for example, through mass or digital media, social discourse, popular culture or advertising, should not be ignored by public decision-makers. With their main focus on laws, policies and promise of expenditures, given their tangible nature, they should consider that in order to understand social change, they must take into account the invisible power of these cultural norms⁷² that, in the case of political leaderships, causes them to be perceived and valued by a significant part of the public opinion still trapped in a masculine perspective.

This situation has a significant impact on the unfair conditions and diminished opportunities for women in political and public life. To begin with, the current distribution of care responsibilities is extremely unbalanced, considering they mainly fall on households and are mainly fulfilled by women without pay (also at the community level). Despite its importance, this work is invisible, underestimated and neglected in the design of economic and social policies in Latin America and the Caribbean. A clear reflection of the stereotype of feminization of care is the role of “natural” caregivers that societies assign almost exclusively to women and girls and generates an excessive work burden for them. This limits their opportunities and choices, undermines their rights and represents a major obstacle to gender equality

and the empowerment and autonomy of women. In many cases, it also limits the possibilities, time and means to participate in political and public life, especially in electoral processes and/or in the exercise of elective and appointed positions at all levels of government.⁷³

In addition, women are often questioned about their capacity to participate in public life and their potential contributions to political processes, in addition to the creation of unreasonably high expectations that assume that all elected women share a common ideology, thus denying their diversity.⁷⁴ They also continue to be judged based on their physical appearance or personal life, and even on their age if they are older persons, with questions, judgments and perceptions that are not applied to men. These biased perceptions affect women who, as a result of the prevailing culture, may exclude themselves due to social practices and discourses that support and promote those limiting self-perceptions that create a “cement ceiling” for them.⁷⁵

Finally, there is also an association between the notion of leadership and certain attributes conceived as traditionally masculine – such as strength, rationality, ambition and competitiveness – that are highly valued in the case of men, but not in the case of women. But there are also other attributes that can be just as useful, especially during a crisis – such as empathy, solidarity or communication skills – but are typically undervalued and pejoratively associated with women, especially during crisis situations, where they are perceived as more helpful for the construction of new forms of leadership that do not respond to stereotypes that force them

71 op. cit. 2020.

72 op. cit. 2020.

73 ONU Mujeres and CEPAL (2020)

74 UN Women (2020c).

75 García Beaudoux, Virginia (2014).

to behave under traditionally roles constructed exclusively from a male perspective. And mass media continue to play a key role in this respect – through their coverage of women in the public sphere, they can either contribute to perpetuating stereotypes – as is often the case – or adopt a gender perspective in their coverage to promote and accelerate cultural changes.

II.3.3. Strengthening leaderships and campaign financing

The issue of (institutional) political financing and its gender dimension in the region has been addressed mainly by legislating on a “second generation of affirmative actions” in four areas: the allocation of percentages of public financing to reinforcing women’s leadership (Brazil, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Chile and recently Bolivia as part of annual training plans led by the Plurinational Electoral Body); incentives based on the number of women elected (Colombia and Chile); allocation of airtime in free electoral time slots for women candidates, which is a form of indirect financing (Brazil and recently Bolivia)⁷⁶ and, finally, the allocation of percentages of the so-called “political party fund” to finance electoral campaigns for female candidates (Brazil).⁷⁷

The objective of these measures is to provide equal opportunities for women to build a political career and participate in an electoral race where women have been shown to be at a disadvantage. With respect to the former, although women have advanced in the exercise of several of their rights compared to previous periods, they are still far from political participation as a natural space due to the above-mentioned political and cultural aspects. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce them to, or reinforce, certain skills required to operate in the political arena. The allocation of public financing to political parties can be a good

policy as long as its adequate implementation is guaranteed and monitored. There are examples in the region of how, in light of an ambiguous regulation on the use of these resources – in terms of the type of activities allowed and their contents – these funds are often used by political parties to cover ordinary expenses that have nothing to do with their intended purpose, that is, strengthening the leadership of women politicians and their capacities, including those required to promote transformations in the area of gender equality once they gain access to positions of power. In this regard, countries like Mexico and Colombia have improved their regulations and/or processes to account for such expenses, but political parties must also be willing to leave behind the strategies they typically adopt to oppose legal changes.

As far as campaign financing is concerned, women have historically faced difficulties to advance and consolidate their economic autonomy, which means they have access to fewer financial resources to finance political candidacies. Also, they usually have less access to power networks and less time for fundraising activities, funders are often men with pre-conceived notions of the viability of their candidacies, or they are not willing to pay the compensations demanded in exchange for said financing, especially if that involves political patronage practices.

At the same time, electoral campaigns in some countries in the region can be very expensive, especially where election systems have preferential votes for certain candidates and lack public financing mechanisms for electoral campaigns. However, experience has also shown that where such financing exists, political parties have designed strategies to divert funding to male candidates or their allocation to women candidacies has not been equitable. That said,

76 Llanos, Beatriz and Martínez, Marta (2016).

77 See Law 13.165/2015.

in order to improve the conditions of equity in the money, gender and politics equation, it is necessary, for example, to continue to promote (direct and indirect) public financing systems with clear and transparent allocation rules, in addition to caps on campaign expenses, because the larger they are, the lower the participation of historically discriminated groups.⁷⁸ Those financing systems should also have an intersectional perspective to reach women who, for several reasons, experience multiple forms of discrimination. At the same time, new campaign fundraising strategies with a collaborative approach – such as crowdfunding – must be implemented to promote equality agendas without conditions imposed on any private financing they may receive.

The lack of transparency and widespread corruption in political campaign financing due to the absence of legal frameworks or effective accountability measures pose a challenge to the political participation of the diversity of women and the achievement of parity democracies. An analysis

of the link between gender and corruption in the region by EUROsocial+ has shown that those networks that influence, in different manners, access to spaces of power, are often sustained in traditionally privileged structures and, once again, exclude women.⁷⁹

In other words, advancing the agenda of transparency and accountability of political campaign financing, its regulation, and allocation of public funds and public oversight practices, is directly proportional to the increased participation of women in politics.

Finally, it is important to note the significant achievements made by feminist and women's movements in favor of women's rights and gender justice, despite their limited resources. But this also means that a new balanced financing ecosystem is required to eliminate barriers, including difficulty to access funds, unfair conditions for their allocation, contradictory programs or the need for intermediation to obtain financing instead of direct allocation.⁸⁰

78 Muñoz Pogossian, Betilde and Freidenberg, Flavia. “¿Cómo consiguen dinero las candidatas para sus campañas?” Published on the website of *Proyecto Reformas Políticas en América Latina* (“Political Reforms in Latin America Project”).

79 EUROSOCIAL (2019).

80 AWID (2019).



III. THE THREATS TO WOMEN'S FULL PARTICIPATION IN THE PUBLIC SPACE

III.1 Violence against women in politics (VAWP)

Violence against women in politics has been defined by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences - based on CEDAW Committee's General Recommendations No. 19 (1992) and 35 (2017), and art. 1 of CEDAW- as that which, in and beyond elections, "consists of any act of gender-based violence, or threat of such acts, that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering and is directed against a woman in politics because she is a woman, or affects women disproportionately".⁸¹ In the case of electoral jurisprudence in the region, countries like Mexico have added a particular criterion: the identification of violence in politics resulting from actions that have "(...) the objective or result of undermining, or depriving them of, their political-electoral rights, including the performance of public functions".⁸²

This form of violence is an act of discrimination that affects the quality of democracies, because the exercise of the political rights of half of the population tends to be associated with expressions of violence, a way of doing politics that reproduces unequal gender relations, pre-existing gender-based violence and power asymmetries.⁸³ In addition, as stated by the above-mentioned rapporteur, some women "may be more exposed to risks of gender-

based violence than others, including human rights defenders; young, indigenous, lesbian, bisexual and transgender and intersex activists; members of opposition or minority groups; and those voicing minority, dissenting or 'controversial' views."⁸⁴

It is also a reaction to major achievements in access to public office and a form of violence that permanently reinvents itself and adapts to the different physical, and now online, spaces where politics takes place. And it is not limited to the physical sphere, which includes femicides/feminicides, but also has other expressions. One example is that of symbolic violence, where women are the target of judgments based on gender stereotypes, or economic violence, where they are deprived of financial resources they are entitled to as a result of their political activities, or online violence (cyber bullying) when they interact on social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or Instagram, among others). Women's online activities also make them the target of threats, attacks or acts of intimidation, as reported in Mexico's 2018 elections (85 acts of aggression against 62 women candidates in 24 states).⁸⁵ In Argentina, 2018 research showed eight out of ten female interviewees reported having been victims of violence during their political careers, in 62% of the cases on the Internet.⁸⁶ And

81 United Nations (2018). p. 7. Violence against Women in Politics. Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Dubravka Šimonović. New York: United Nations.

82 Jurisprudencia 48/2016 de la Sala Superior del Tribunal de Justicia Electoral de la Federación de México ("Case Law 48/2016, Mexico's Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judicial Branch"), July 12 2017.

83 Albaine (2020).

84 United Nations (2018). p. 5.

85 Barrera, Lourdes V. et. al. (2018).

86 Equipo Latinoamericano de Justicia y Género ELA. (2018).

in Ecuador, an analysis of the social media activity of women elected showed that the more visibility they had, the more they were exposed to multiple forms of violence, which ranged from posts using violent language to spreading rumors or false information, creating memes and the use of hashtags, with the authors of those posts being mainly men (51% on Twitter and 64% on Facebook).⁸⁷

Although most countries in the region – with the exception of Bolivia and Mexico – do not have official statistics that allow for the periodic monitoring of cases, international organizations, civil society and academia have been documenting for several years the spaces where this form of violence occurs, its specific actions and its impact on the exercise of women’s political rights. Despite the need for additional comparable empirical evidence, these efforts provide an initial overview of the situation of violence against women participating in politics, understood in a broad sense as that taking place in the public space and not only through formal institutions, in order to place this issue – that had been absent until now – at the center of the public agenda.

In the arena of formal politics, in countries like Guatemala and Honduras, among others, this form of violence starts within political organizations themselves, where women report internal acts of violence, and also in processes for the selection and nomination to popularly elected positions and access to such positions. But these organizations lack mechanisms to report those incidents, investigation protocols and sanctions for these

cases and, therefore, these actions remain invisible and go unpunished.⁸⁸ This form of violence is exacerbated in the case of indigenous women in countries like Guatemala.⁸⁹ In the electoral sphere, a survey on Peru’s 2014 regional and municipal elections found that 26.4% of women candidates interviewed reported having experienced gender-related political harassment.⁹⁰ In Brazil’s 2018 general elections, there were reports of political parties that demanded the reimbursement of public financial resources allocated to finance women’s candidacies for use by male candidates, a clear example of economic violence against them.⁹¹

At the legislative level, a study conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in five regions, including the Americas, found 81.8% of female parliamentarians had experienced psychological violence; 66.5% had been the target of sexist insults; 44% the target of death threats, rape, beatings or kidnapping; 20% had been victims of sexual harassment, and another 20% of physical violence while in office.⁹²

However, as of the date of the study (2016), in this region only Costa Rica’s parliament had a specific internal policy for the protection of female parliamentarians against these acts of discrimination.⁹³ In recent years, the Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism to the *Belem do Pará* Convention expressed its concern over situations of violence against women in politics not only in the case of national female parliamentarians, but also against female representatives of regional bodies, candidates, magistrates, journalists and activists.⁹⁴

87 ONU MUJERES Ecuador (2020).

88 Torres, Isabel. (2017).

89 op. cit. (2017).

90 Pinedo, Enith et. al. (2017).

91 Llanos, 2019.

92 Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016).

93 op. cit. (2016).

94 See <https://www.oas.org/es/mesecvi/expertas.asp>.

This kind of situations have also been normalized by victims, perpetrators and society, who tend to look at these acts as one of the costs of doing politics in the region, particularly in countries where politics is already violent.

In Colombia, for example, a survey of women who had held popularly elected positions found that 57.1% of women mayors interviewed saw these actions as something normal in politics.⁹⁵ However, this problem not only affects women formally participating in politics, but also their participation in public life, including feminists, women activists, journalists, women human rights defenders and even migrant women leaders, as a result of nationalist or local narratives.

For this reason, this form of violence must be “recognized and characterized as a challenge to democracy rather than a women’s issue” that is part of a reaction to silence women, limit their participation in public life, discourage the participation of new generations of (young) women and, in general, as a response that challenges traditional concepts of power and the status quo.⁹⁶ To address the issue, the region has adopted normative strategies (legislation), in addition to instruments such as protocols or pathways of action based on pre-existing normative frameworks.⁹⁷

From a legislative standpoint, Bolivia, Panama and Mexico have enacted specific laws or implemented more comprehensive cross-cutting reforms to eradicate this form of violence. Bolivia was the first country to address cases of gender-based violence in politics that targeted women councilors in rural areas. In 2012 it approved its

“Law against Harassment and Political Violence towards Women” (Law No. 243), the regulations of which were approved in 2016. But no sentences have been handed down so far, and there have been major problems for the implementation of the law by the different public bodies responsible for enforcing it. The only exception is Bolivia’s Supreme Electoral Tribunal which, in compliance with the law, adopted a protocol to deal with complaints of harassment and political violence (between January and April 2018, that Court heard 65 cases).⁹⁸ In 2020, Mexico amended eight laws (that address gender-based political violence against women in electoral matters and political parties, in the actions of the prosecutor’s office, the judiciary and the administrative sphere) in an effort to classify, eradicate and punish this form of violence in a cross-cutting manner. And in late 2020, Panama passed a law that established measures to prevent, punish and eradicate political violence against women (Law No. 184).

In addition, some countries have incorporated the specific concept of this form of violence in their existing laws. Ecuador approved its initial inclusion in its national law on gender-based violence, and in 2020 its political-electoral law (Code of Democracy) was amended to classify this crime as a serious electoral offense that includes women human rights defenders, feminists and female social leaders among the possible victims. El Salvador has included aspects related to violence against women in politics in its national law on gender-based violence, but without any explicit definitions.⁹⁹ And other countries, like Argentina, Panama, Paraguay and Uruguay, have included it, with explicit definitions, in similar national laws.¹⁰⁰

95 Information taken from the website of the Observatory of Violence against Women in Politics, <http://mujeresypoliticasinviolencia.org/assets/infografia-digital.pdf>.

96 UN Women (2020c).

97 Albaine (2020).

98 Llanos (2019).

99 op. cit. (2019) and Albaine (2020).

100 Albaine (2020).

In the case of the second mechanism - protocols or pathways of action- one example that stands out is that of Mexico where, in the absence of legislation (prior to the aforementioned regulation), electoral authorities adopted international mandates to protect women against gender-based violence, and in 2016, in partnership with the women's mechanism and other bodies such as the Prosecutor's Office, developed an Action Protocol to address political violence against women. Mexico's Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judicial Branch, on the other hand, has issued judgments that have established jurisprudence for the protection of women's political-electoral rights in response to this form of violence. In 2019, Chile approved several protocols to address situations of violence against women in politics in the Legislative Power, and in Mexico and Argentina political parties approved protocols to report and punish it.¹⁰¹ The Inter-American Model Law on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women in Political Life and the Model Protocol for Political Parties to Prevent, Address, Punish, and Eradicate Violence against Women in Political

Life have had a significant influence on advancing these efforts. These documents were prepared by the Inter-American Commission of Women of the Organization of American States (CIM-OEA).¹⁰²

These legal changes, as well as the different protocols and roadmaps designed, face several challenges in achieving the effectiveness required to adequately protect the diversity of women from this kind of violence. The first challenge is an effective implementation to guarantee access to justice with actions that incorporate a gender perspective, so that these behaviors can be identified and punished. The second is the need for an intersectional perspective to protect women who, as already mentioned, can be particularly affected. One example are indigenous women: in countries like Mexico and Bolivia, their increased access as a result of parity measures has brought unwarranted forms of violence against them that hinder the performance of their public functions, such as the refusal to allocate budgetary resources or the lack of processing or implementation of their initiatives.

III.2 Ultraconservative discourses against the rights of women and their empowerment in the public sphere

In recent years Latin America and the Caribbean has witnessed the emergence of ultraconservative discourses. This “resurgence of gender inequality and narratives, based on centuries of discrimination”¹⁰³ is a reaction by political actors and/or religious groups that oppose changes in values and the increased visibility of women's leaderships, promoting

openly discriminatory discourses and practices that threaten their rights.¹⁰⁴

These discourses appeal to the misrepresentation of concepts such as that of “gender” – which has been an analytical and methodological tool to expose gender inequalities – creating confusion in the public

101 Albaine (2020).

102 In this regard, as a tool that can help States implement a comprehensive approach, in March 2021 the ATENEA project will release the publication *Violencia contra las mujeres en política: Hoja de ruta para prevenirla, monitorearla, sancionarla y erradicarla* (“Violence against Women in Politics: a roadmap for its prevention, monitoring, punishment and eradication”).

103 Statement by Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. “UN human rights chief warns of women's rights complacency”. UN News. February 25 2020.

104 UN Women (2020c).

opinion and naturalizing inequality and discrimination. This paves the road for setbacks in policies already in place or to hinder new achievements in the realization of the rights of women and other sectors of diversity.

These forms of resistance to changes in gender equality are expressed in different forms and usually emerge during electoral processes and in public debate, in response to the achievement of positions in political representation bodies or processes, and even in different processes for the design and/or implementation of public policies. They have been found to “appear every time institutional and public policy changes seeking to transform gender relations are proposed [...]”.¹⁰⁵ Women leaders, feminist and women’s rights organizations and women human rights defenders are the ones most affected by this type of discourses¹⁰⁶ and the different forms of political violence. On the other hand, polarization around the debate on the advancement of the rights of women, girls and their diversity affects the consolidation of democracy and the exercise of citizenship in the broad sense, because it undermines women’s rights and the foundations of egalitarian societies formally established in the majority of constitutions in the region.

In the arena of public debate, multiple forms of resistance have emerged in reaction to the scope of gender-sensitive proposals during the discussion

of peace agreements;¹⁰⁷ the incorporation of a gender approach in school curricula;¹⁰⁸ the passing of laws related to education and access to reproductive and sexual rights and health; and the recognition of the rights of the LGBTIQ+ collective, among others. In the arena of political representation, these discourses have permeated existing political organizations or have consolidated new political movements that, in several countries, now hold seats in legislative branches, in some cases creating tensions between secularism in legislation and the debate around it.

These narratives used by different political and religious actors, opinion leaders and even civic movements, promote an agenda that restricts the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ people and in some cases are presented as “pro-family and pro-life”. Faced with this situation, in 2017 the ministers of Women of the region reaffirmed that non-violence against women and gender equality are human rights, and released a joint statement that affirmed that, “speeches and campaigns that defend the patriarchal political and economic order as natural and refer disparagingly to the analytical category of ‘gender’ as an ideology, hinder substantive equality, since they deepen machismo and misogyny, and reinforce and perpetuate discriminatory gender stereotypes and roles and a culture of intolerance that affect democratic coexistence, hinder the exercise of women’s rights and legitimize violence against them”.¹⁰⁹

105 Cornejo-Valle, Mónica, Pichardo, J. Ignacio, (2017).

106 UN Women (2020c).

107 Llanos, 2019.

108 Llanos, 2019

109 Organization of American States (2017). Declaration on Gender and Women’s Empowerment for the Good of Humanity, Follow-Up Mechanism to the Convention of Belém do Pará, p. 9.

IV. FEMINIST, WOMEN'S AND DIVERSITY MOVEMENTS: DRIVING PROGRESS AND EXPLORING OPTIONS TO OVERCOME SETBACKS

The historical exclusion of women from formal political processes has not prevented them from finding new and different ways to participate in public life, influence decision-making and fight for the recognition and full exercise of their rights, as well protection and reparation mechanisms where those rights are violated.¹¹⁰ One of the most dynamic assets in the history of the region is the feminist movement and the broad women's movements that, through a series of alliances as one of their main strategies, have been behind many of the conceptual debates around gender equality. From the standpoint of political rights, they have promoted mechanisms and strategies to expand the participation and representation of women in different spaces and construct not only a feminist and gender equality agenda, but also one of social cohesion to reduce discrimination and bridge gaps. These partnerships have gone beyond the scope of those movements and have established linkages with women in positions of power and translated these demands into specific laws through plural and multi-party consensus.

In 2015, women took the streets in mass demonstrations as part of a new feminist wave that swept across Latin America and the Caribbean, inspiring transformative mobilization efforts at the national, regional and global levels. On the one hand, this represents an active wave of mobilization pushing for the expansion of, and effective access to, their rights. On the other hand, it is fighting threats and setbacks¹¹¹. In the case of

the former, the fight against gender-based violence and femicides/feminicides has led women to take the streets under the slogans *#NiUnaMenos* ("Not One [Woman] Less"), *#NiUnaMás* ("Not One More") and *#VivasNosQueremos* ("We [Women] Want To Live"), among others, which are acts of mobilization facilitated by the use of new technologies for coordination, the creation of common identities and achieving a high level of visibility.

Bringing attention to the demands of women and the feminist movement has become an incentive to report situations of violence that have been normalized and silenced – for example, cases of sexual abuse and harassment by university professors – and has also encouraged young students to organize, file police reports and demand punishment. In addition, these actions have increased participation in university democratic movements considering they are pushing for major institutional changes in student organizations and universities themselves. In the fields of culture, journalism, sports and politics, this has also resulted in the creation of different forms of organization, the opening of informal channels to report cases and/or the transformation of regulatory frameworks and mechanisms. In some countries, these mobilization efforts have led to the prioritization of public policies to address these violations of women's rights: the allocation to more resources to work on gender-based violence, the creation of more emergency centers and hotlines, or better equipment for law enforcement.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ UN Women (2020c).

¹¹¹ Llanos (2019).

¹¹² Morrison, Andrew. "La aportación de la economía en la era de *#NiUnaMenos*". *El País*. November 24 2018.

Economic rights have comprised another area driving the multiple mobilization efforts by women in different countries who have demanded the end of the salary gap, with slogans such as #YoParo (“I Strike”) and #NosotrasParamos (“We Strike”) around March 8, in addition to demands for increased participation in trade unions and new forms of organization for domestic workers and informal sectors of the economy. Other important mobilization efforts include those around sexual and reproductive rights and, in particular, the debate on voluntary termination of pregnancy in Argentina that, combined with a broad discussion and fueled by mass protests organized by the so-called “green tide” movement, led to its legalization in late 2020. Political rights have also been the object of mobilization and coordination of women’s networks that have managed to place gender parity on the agendas of political or constitutional reforms as a democratic aspiration, similar to the approval of a gender parity Constituent Assembly in Chile.

All these processes have driven cultural changes in the region that have set new boundaries to issues that can no longer be tolerated. And in several cases, outside of institutional channels, they are transforming women’s mobilization efforts into specific laws and public policies despite the resistance of more traditional political actors. The use of technology and mobilization through the use of social media, which allows many of these

movements to connect with global movements, as well as historic movements for women’s rights, has been an asset to increase their participation outside institutional channels. However, this process also poses significant risks that can exacerbate inequalities. Digital gaps still persist among women, which means this form of participation expresses the voice of one sector, but not necessarily that of the different sectors of diversity or their intersectionalities. In addition, the digital world has proven a hostile environment where violence against women is expressed in the form of violent attacks against them and, therefore, they must be able to interact and become visible in these spaces on equal terms and without any form of slandering, stereotypes and violence.¹¹³

Despite significant achievements made thanks to the mass mobilization of women, this is still considered the most dangerous region for activists (particularly when it comes to environmental issues), who are killed for fighting for these issues in countries such as Colombia and Brazil, among others.¹¹⁴ In the case of women, the femicides/feminicides of Berta Cáceres, an indigenous activist and environmentalist murdered in Honduras in 2016, and Marielle Franco, a social and political leader murdered in Brazil in 2018, among many others, are emblematic. All these situations also constitute violence against women in politics because, as already explained, political rights include activism and mobilization in the public sphere.

113 UN Women (2020c).

114 De Miguel, Teresa. “América Latina, la región más mortífera para los ecologistas”. El País. August 3 2019.

V. THE UNFORESEEN PANDEMIC: HOW THE COVID-19 CRISIS IS DISRUPTING THE STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS FOR WOMEN'S EFFECTIVE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

V.1 The risk of deterioration of the democratic context for the exercise of women's political rights.

Democracies in the region entered the COVID-19 health emergency scenario after a long process of “fatigue”¹¹⁵ 40 years after the onset of democratic transitions. This is reflected in the diminishing support of democracy – only 48% of citizens prefer it as a form of government – with less support from women (45%) than men (51%).¹¹⁶ Furthermore, there is little trust in the main democratic institutions – governments (22%), congresses (21%) and political parties (13%).¹¹⁷ Also, since 2013, around 45% of Latin Americans consider their democracies face serious problems, and only 24% affirm they are satisfied with their performance,¹¹⁸ which clearly shows their distance from a political system that has not managed to provide effective solutions to their problems. This was clearly shown by the social and political crises experienced in the region in 2019, where demands for increased equality led citizens to take the streets to demand political, economic and social reforms, as in Chile.

Despite the region's significant economic growth in recent decades, the high levels of inequality have weighed heavily on it. COVID-19 was met in many cases by weak States with fragmented welfare systems, heavily concentrated economic structures and strong biases and discrimination

against lower-income groups or groups defined by their gender, age, race or ethnicity.¹¹⁹ One of the problems observed in 2020 is that, in the absence of adequate state protection, its impacts are worse for the most vulnerable sectors. And these sectors include many women. The lack of an effective response to the health crisis is compounded by the economic, social and political crisis, as well as the humanitarian crisis caused by the growing mixed flow of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, and vulnerability to disasters. All this further undermines the perceptions of democracy and its efficacy to solve problems and, therefore, its legitimacy, all of which has led to growing social protests in several countries.

The pandemic has posed several challenges to democracy: first, it is increasing inequality and differences between social groups, which can lead to an increased perception of unresolved problems that affect vulnerable groups; second, the emergency context has created tensions in the full access to, and exercise of, citizens' human rights and the response capacity of governments; third, more powerful groups of interest could use the crisis to impose an agenda; and fourth, it puts on the table the urgent need to rethink democratic participation

115 Alcántara Sáez (2019). p. 8.

116 Corporación Latinobarómetro. (2018). p. 24.

117 op. cit. (2018). p. 48.

118 op. cit. (2018). pp. 34-35.

119 United Nations (2020).

in light of the growing use of new technologies and the participation of women's, diversity, youth and civil society movements.¹²⁰ And last, but not least, as in other crises, there is a potential risk that women are forced to return to the private sphere, which would limit their availability or willingness to embark on a political career and could hinder some of the above-mentioned achievements and/or cause women to be even more underrepresented in some powers or levels of government.

In the electoral sphere, the region has held different elections (presidential, parliamentary, local) by reformulating and adapting electoral processes to new bio-health requirements and ensuring the pandemic does not translate into lower voter turnouts or a new wave of infections. Several countries had to postpone their elections, but others made the decision to hold them. Presidential / parliamentary elections are scheduled for 2021 in Ecuador, Peru, Nicaragua, Honduras, Haiti, Curacao, Saint Lucia and Chile (also for a constituent assembly and local powers); midterm (federal and local) elections in Argentina and Mexico; regional elections in Bolivia and municipal elections in El Salvador (which will also hold legislative elections), Paraguay and Haiti (which will also have a constitutional referendum this year).

The possibility of having to postpone elections due to new peaks of the pandemic is already part of the public debate in some countries, a situation that

could erode the electoral dimension of democracy as a result of citizens' potential doubts about the relevance of these decisions influenced by biased information, especially on social media. We are talking about a democracy that, so far, has been the most favorable scenario for the advancement (not without resistance, attempts to create setbacks and persistent challenges) of several aspects related to women's political rights.

This situation has also changed the way of running electoral campaigns, considering in-person political rallies have been limited and/or have moved online. In the particular case of women, this means they must quickly adapt to new languages and tools, after a pre-pandemic context where they already faced significant gaps in terms of connectivity, resources and capacities, particularly in the case of indigenous and Afro-descendant and rural women or women with disabilities. In addition to traditional acts of violence in physical spaces, repeated acts of gender-based violence against women in politics have also been identified in the digital realm. For example, during the electoral campaign for Brazil's 2020 municipal elections, between September and November 2020, seven attacks on women and five threat incidents were reported.¹²¹ Finally, when it comes to financing their campaigns, women usually rely on their own resources or resources provided from people close to them, a process that can become even more complex amid the current financial crisis.

120 United Nations (2020).

121 Monitoring by the organization *Terra de Dereitos y Justicia Global*.

V2. The impact on other rights that interact with political rights

V.2.1 Private life and shared responsibilities

The full exercise of women’s rights in the public sphere cannot be analyzed without considering other basic rights that, if not developed under conditions of equality, can act as “structural knots”, that is, as sociocultural or economic barriers that limit their participation and prevent bridging the gaps between formal and real equality.¹²²

Prior to the declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic, women in Latin America and the Caribbean had historically borne most of the burden of time dedicated to care and household chores. In several countries, the number of hours women dedicated to unpaid work in the private sphere was two or three times higher than men, according to data from ECLAC’s Gender Equality Observatory,¹²³ although the proportion is higher among poorer women. In addition, women who generate income dedicate, on average, 23 hours a week more to household chores compared to men who generate income.¹²⁴ The region also has a high percentage of women heads of household and, as a result of an unjust social division of labor, women are the ones mainly responsible for caring for the sick or the elder. For this reason, progress made in different aspects of women’s economic or public life has not translated into a higher level of shared responsibilities with men in the household and in care tasks, leading to the cyclic reproduction of a patriarchal household model. This asymmetry means that women’s opportunities to succeed in other areas have been historically affected because they lack a limited resource: time.

The COVID-19 crisis not only exacerbated this disparity, it also made it more visible. Mandatory lockdown measures, school closures and restrictions to in-person work have forced women to work longer days, combining the care of children or older adults with supervision of their children’s online education, their own jobs and household chores. And women and girls, who are the ones mainly performing care tasks, now have an added pressure: caring for the sick.¹²⁵ The promise of the flexibility of working from home was not necessarily a reality, and women have become overwhelmed, with impacts on their physical and mental health and fewer options for free time to dedicate to other activities.

Therefore, the health crisis also exposed the crisis of an unfair and unbalanced system of care that has historically placed the burden on the shoulders of women, who do work that should be more visible, shared, quantified and subject to State policies – such as the universalization of care systems or the recognition of unpaid work and its integration into national accounts – that should approach this issue not as a private matter, but as a public priority. To this end, a new model is needed where, on one hand, the care role that is “naturally” fulfilled by women is considered necessary and essential work shared both in its productive and reproductive dimensions, and, on the other, care is conceived as a universal, cross-cutting and intercultural right, going back to notions such as those solidarity, reciprocity and human interdependence.¹²⁶

122 ECLAC (2017a).

123 Data taken from <https://oig.cepal.org>.

124 CEPAL (2017).

125 United Nations (2020).

126 Articulación Feminista Marcosur. Pronunciamento *El virus de la desigualdad y el mundo que necesitamos construir* (Statement “The virus of inequality and the world we must build”)

V.2.2 Economic rights

According to ECLAC estimates for 2020, due to the effects of COVID-19, the economy of Latin America and the Caribbean had a contraction of -7.7% before experiencing a 3.7% growth, although mainly due to a rebound effect.¹²⁷ Economic autonomy was already a challenge before the pandemic due to major gender gaps in the areas of unemployment, job types and pay inequality. Furthermore, 1 in every 4 households are headed by women, and poverty has a woman's face, considering they are mainly employed in precarious or informal jobs.¹²⁸

Other projections, also from ECLAC, showed that, by the end of 2020, the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic would leave 118 million women in poverty; in addition, 57% of women are employed in economic sectors with a higher risk of loss of income or loss of jobs.¹²⁹ In countries like Peru, which is the most-affected country in the region due to the economic contraction, 39.6% of the active population (6.7 million Peruvians) have lost their formal job, with a greater impact on women (45.3%) than men (39.4%).¹³⁰ The pandemic has also had an impact on women owners of small and mid-size businesses, some of which have a high level of development in rural areas where women, nevertheless, have less access to loans than men or only have access to smaller loans with higher interest rates.¹³¹

On the other hand, in more precarious sectors, where the majority of workers are women, for example, the domestic work sector, they have been

hit by lockdowns and restrictions on mobility. These women have been affected because, due to the health crisis, they were not allowed to return to the homes of their employers and did not have access to social unemployment benefits, or because they were forced to quarantine in their employers' homes far from their families, working long days and subject to abuse in the workplace. In the case of domestic workers, we must also consider that, if women are migrants, refugees, young, indigenous, of African descent or have a disability, that discrimination is even worse.¹³²

The health crisis has exposed the need for policies to compensate and protect women from economic vulnerability due to loss of income. For this reason, in an attempt to counter the economic impact of the pandemic, several countries implemented cash transfer policies that in some cases have faced implementation challenges and, therefore, have kept women in situations of increased economic precariousness.

Focused on their economic survival and that of their families, as well as increasing care responsibilities, it is likely that women's motivation, timing and opportunities to participate in politics will diminish, considering this activity involves personal and financial costs that they may deem an excessive burden in these circumstances, especially those already experiencing challenges, such as indigenous, African descendant or young women, women with disabilities and migrant, refugee or sexually diverse women.

127 ECLAC (2020).

128 CARE International and UN Women (2020).

129 Statement by Ana Gúezmes, Chief of ECLAC's Division for Gender Affairs, to *El Dinero* newspaper. Online edition of December 2 2020.

130 Taken from *Diario Perú 21*. Online edition of September 20 2020.

131 Statement by Ana Gúezmes, Chief of ECLAC's Division for Gender Affairs, to the *El Dinero* newspaper. Online edition of December 2 2020.

132 CARE International and UN Women (2020).

V.2.3 The right to a life free of gender-based violence

Data prior to the pandemic show that violence against women has affected, on average, 1 in 3 women in their lifetime; 19.2 million (12%) of women in the 15 to 49 age range were victims of physical or sexual violence by their current or former intimate partner in the last 12 months,¹³³ and in 19 countries of the region - according to data from the ECLAC's Gender Equality Observatory - 4,640 women were murdered just for being women in 2019.¹³⁴

The pandemic has exacerbated the different forms of gender-based violence, as shown by the persistence of femicides/feminicides and rapes of women and girls; the increased use of hotlines and services of support to victims of violence; and the increased risk of sexual and physical violence against women, particularly women with disabilities.¹³⁵ In this regard, a major problem has been the lack of access to comprehensive health services, which has affected their sexual and reproductive rights, limiting access to contraception and increasing the risk of unwanted pregnancies and child and/or adolescent early and forced unions. Lockdown measures have also prevented women and girls victims of violence from leaving the places where they live with their abusers.¹³⁶

In addition, sexual exploitation of women is usually a way to deal with the lack of resources to meet the basic needs of families.¹³⁷ Migrant, refugee,

asylum-seeking and returned women, on the other hand, may face an increased risk of becoming the victims of physical, psychological and sexual attacks as a result of discrimination, the lack of access to services or official documents and the use of dangerous migration routes, which exposes them to sexual trafficking.¹³⁸ In this context, the pandemic has exacerbated humanitarian crises caused by an increased flow of persons in a situation of human mobility, estimated at 14.8 million in 2020.¹³⁹ According to data from the IDB, the costs of violence against women range from 1.6% to 2% of the GDP of Latin American and Caribbean countries.¹⁴⁰

The different forms of violence, on the other hand, continue to reinvent themselves as the digitalization of communications in everyday life (remote work, tele-education, training, activism) continues to grow exponentially due to lockdowns imposed in response to the pandemic. And there is a reported increase in online violence: cyberbullying, intimidation, boycotts and hacking of meetings or online events, particularly feminist events or spaces, with misogynistic comments, playing unsolicited pornographic videos or sexual comments posted in chatrooms during online work meetings or classes.¹⁴¹ And women human rights defenders now face bigger security concerns: increased threats, criminalization and high risk of femicide/feminicide.¹⁴²

In response to these situations, state response services were reinforced in some countries, but

133 UN Women (2020d).

134 ECLAC, *Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean*. Last accessed on January 15 2020.

135 CARE International and UN Women (2020).

136 op. cit. 2020.

137 op. cit. (2020d).

138 op. cit. (2020d).

139 Aggregate data for South America, Central America and the Caribbean available at: migrationdataportal.org. Last accessed on January 25 2021.

140 UN Women (2020d).

141 op. cit. (2020d).

142 UN Women (2020d)

in others they deteriorated. In the case of the former, some countries declared support services for victims of violence essential (Mexico) or made them available 24/7. Some of them designed specific protocols and guidelines (Ecuador, Bolivia and Uruguay), and some others lifted quarantines for women and LGBTIQ+ victims of gender-based violence (Argentina) and automatically extended precautionary measures to protect women (Argentina and Uruguay), in addition to signing agreements with hotels to remove victims from the homes where they were subject to violence (Argentina).¹⁴³ Other countries created hotlines to report situations of violence and programmes to report cases of violence and support women at risk (Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica) or used messaging services such as WhatsApp, e-mail or websites (Brazil) and launched campaigns to raise awareness of the problem (Peru, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil and Ecuador). Campaigns such as the

so-called *Bandera Blanca* (“White Flag”) campaign in Mexico, *Mascarilla 19* (“Face Mask 19”) in Chile and *Barbijo Rojo* (“Red Face Mask”) in Argentina were also launched. There were other countries, like Honduras, where Public Prosecutor’s Office made the decision to investigate persons promoting violence against women on social media.¹⁴⁴ Another important strategy was the creation of mental health support hotlines.¹⁴⁵

Finally, in some countries (Mexico and the Caribbean) campaigns were launched to promote positive, collaborative and shared responsibility masculinities (Mexico), in addition to hotlines to work with male perpetrators of violence (the Caribbean).¹⁴⁶ However, prioritizing the use of public resources to deal with the pandemic or the virtualization of services through the use of new technologies can lead to increased barriers in access to services for victims of gender-based violence.¹⁴⁷

V.3 The consequences and challenges of COVID-19 for women’s political rights: a regional overview of a multidimensional crisis

As already shown in previous sections, the region (Latin America more than the Caribbean) must protect gains made and, at the same time, strive to increase women’s access to the public sphere either through institutional participation channels and political representation or women’s movements, which have amplified, through mass mobilization, their voices and influence and are helping to raise feminist awareness. In the case of the former, significant progress has been made towards gender parity access in several countries in terms of parliamentary positions and council seats, a situation that coexists with major deficits in other

branches of power such as the judiciary (in Latin America) and mayorships at the local level, where we find the highest levels of underrepresentation.

The countries with the biggest achievements so far are those that have legislated on parity and alternation which, up until now, has proven the most effective strategy to achieve equality of results. These normative frameworks are another strength in the region, not only where they have already been approved – 10 countries in Latin America – but also in those countries that see them as a gender parity paradigm that permeates debates around

143 op. cit. (2020d).

144 op. cit. (2020d).

145 Proyecto ISLAC (2020).

146 UN Women (2020d).

147 op. cit. (2020d).

the distribution of power in Latin America and the Caribbean. Despite these strengths, the region still faces weaknesses, such as the need to guarantee access by women and their diversity to the public sphere, incorporating a cross-sectional approach not only in the analysis, but also in policies designed, and the need to translate access to the public sphere into a substantive representation of women's interests, as part of a regional gender agenda, something that has been already achieved in emblematic cases thanks to the hard work of women with gender awareness. Other weaknesses include resistance to change in favor of substantive gender equality and the transformation of rules, structures and formal and informal practices within political parties that exclude women, as well as the need to strengthen their leadership through effective affirmative actions and giving them fair conditions to participate. This is also part of a bigger problem – the need to accelerate the cultural changes necessary to eliminate discrimination and gender-based violence.

COVID-19 only adds to the two most visible existing threats to women's political rights: gender-based violence in politics and ultraconservative discourses against substantive equality. The growing gender gaps created by the pandemic and related crises can complicate progress made and, unless measures are taken, pave the way for setbacks. From the standpoint of its interrelation with other rights, the full exercise of political rights requires other autonomies, including economic autonomy, a life free of violence and a rational use of time in which shared responsibility and public support systems allow for the reconciliation of care and household tasks so women can participate in public life.

From an economic standpoint, data available shows that women will bear the brunt of the resulting economic crisis, as has happened in the past. Many are losing their jobs, while others are seeing their

incomes reduced, a situation that will bring them back to poverty, informality and the private sphere, and will force them to focus on subsistence tasks. In this scenario, indigenous, Afro-descendant, young and sexually diverse women, as well as women with disabilities, migrant and refugee women, who already experienced higher levels of poverty, will face an even more complicated situation. On the other hand, the persistence and, in many cases, the increase in the different forms of gender-based violence perpetuate a message of impunity and high risk for women that limits their right to security and life and makes political participation and the political arena a hostile environment for them.

This at a time when, now more than ever, women with gender awareness are required so they can participate in decision-making spaces and mobilization efforts to make gender equality a public policy priority until the health crisis ends and it becomes part of the post-pandemic reality. Given the diversity of problems created by a crisis of this magnitude in the different countries affected, resources will be scarce and the temptation will remain to reduce the priority of equality on the public agenda and in decision-making spaces. In countries of the region like Brazil, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala, it has already been documented that, when women have equal access to positions of power, they negotiate the allocation of more resources and prioritize health, education, environmental and women-oriented policies, for example, to address gender-based violence, or the use of public revenue for care tasks. They also incorporate a gender perspective into their policies, work for the disaggregation of data by sex for policy design, create enabling environments to improve effectiveness and influence the creation of virtuous circles for the incorporation of more women.¹⁴⁸

Data on this issue generated during the pandemic shows both positive and negative aspects. On one

148 McKinsey & Company and UNDP (2017).

hand, of the 634 measures implemented, 44% (281) were gender-sensitive, in most cases related to gender-based violence (30%) and financial security (15.8%).¹⁴⁹ On the other hand, although women account for 73% of the labor force in the health sector in Latin America, their incomes are 25% lower compared to their male peers,¹⁵⁰ and men hold 75% of all leadership positions in the health sector.¹⁵¹ In other words, thanks to coordination and advocacy efforts and partnerships promoted by international organizations, women's movements and civil society are managing to place on the public agenda the importance of formulating gender-responsive policies to mitigate the differentiated impacts of the pandemic, which points to an opportunity in the making. However, many of the public decision-making spaces that are key to overcoming this crisis are still highly masculinized.

All this in a context where democracy in the region is subject to multiple pre-existing tensions - such as mistrust, a lack of trust in leaderships and distancing

from institutions – coupled with precariousness and the additional disenchantment created by the pandemic, in particular among groups of highly vulnerable women and amid a highly polarized public debate where there is no deliberation or empathic listening.

These ingredients have resulted in a high level of volatility that could create an enabling environment for the emergence of political leaderships or options with extreme views, or populist or authoritarian leaders that will make democracy even more precarious. And all of this precisely at time where the experience of the pandemic shows we need more empathic, transparent and collaborative leaderships based on evidence and the truth, and building trust among the population. This is an example we have already seen in the actions of several women in the highest positions of power in the world during the first wave of the pandemic in countries such as Germany, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, New Zealand or Taiwan.¹⁵²

149 Taken from the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Tool

150 United Nations (2020).

151 CARE International and UN Women (2020).

152 BBC News Mundo. "Coronavirus. 7 mujeres que están al frente de algunos de los países que mejor están gestionando la pandemia". 16 de abril de 2020.



VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CONSOLIDATION OF PARITY DEMOCRACY AS A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR THE REGION

As already stated by the UN, the scenario brought by the pandemic should be an opportunity to achieve a higher level of equality, defense of peace, democracy and human rights, and respect for nature and the environment, where there is no room for marginalization and discrimination.¹⁵³ A world where women, girls, adolescents and young people have the conditions necessary to exercise their rights and achieve their full potential, and where different ways of living, organization and social coexistence, a different type of State and other institutions can be built, creating a new collective conscience that also addresses inequalities for reasons of sex, ethnicity, race, gender and age¹⁵⁴ and reflects the interests and needs of the diversity of women.

In short, a new social contract that guarantees the enhancement and strengthening of current democracies that, so far, have failed to guarantee gender equality in all dimensions of participation and representation, including the diversity of women. But also a process of democratization of families and social organization that allows women to exercise their autonomy, share responsibilities and fully exercise all their rights. That said, in the current scenario, and the new scenario ahead of us, we cannot rule out that the magnitude of the damage caused by the multiplicity of crises that the region and the world are currently experiencing will pose a risk to gains already made and also that, when more volatile and highly uncertain realities set in, women's participation in the public sphere

will be affected by the need to prioritize other aspects (such as subsistence, care or health, to name a few examples), and the implementation of the regional gender agenda will be relegated due to the prioritization of actions by States as a result of the pandemic.

For this reason, we recommend a series of actions in the following areas so that, as stated in the 2020 Santiago Commitment,¹⁵⁵ we can “take all necessary measures to accelerate the effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Regional Gender Agenda”, also considering the recommendations of the Report of the UN Secretary General for CSW65, which highlights “Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”.¹⁵⁶

STRENGTHENING NORMATIVE, LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS AND PUBLIC POLICY FOR THE CONSOLIDATION OF PARITY DEMOCRACY

1. Strengthen gender institutions and architecture, through the prioritization of the machineries for the advancement of gender mainstreaming at the different levels of the State and government, increasing the allocation of human and financial resources, gender-responsive budgeting, and monitoring

153 United Nations (2020).

154 Articulación Feminista Marcosur. Pronunciamiento “El virus de la desigualdad y el mundo que necesitamos construir” (Statement “The virus of inequality and the world we must build”)

155 14th Session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. Santiago Commitment. Agreement 5, p. 3.

156 United Nations (2021).

- and accountability, with a view to strengthening the implementation of equality policies, as stated in the 2020 Santiago Commitment.¹⁵⁷
2. Reaffirm the regional commitment to parity democracy as a political and social vision, adopting well-designed parity mechanisms that guarantee a balanced distribution of power between women and men, with an intersectional approach in all public spaces, levels of government and State powers, both in popularly elected and appointed positions, that leads to equality of results.
 3. Provide technical assistance for the formulation of public policies to those countries in Latin America and the Caribbean where there are no quota or parity measures, recognizing national experiences and good practices in the region implemented by States, international organizations, civil society and/or academia.
 4. Ensure the effective and full implementation of parity measures regulated, with affirmative policies on intersectionality and the eradication of violence against women in politics, considering the region must reinforce the implementation and enforcement of laws and policies in practice.
 5. Identify the factors that hinder women's political participation in decision-making spaces where they are extremely underrepresented, for example, in executive positions at the local level, especially in the case of indigenous, Afro-descendant, young and migrant women, women from the LGBTIQ+ community and women with disabilities; and make existing quota or parity measures compatible with other affirmative actions that allow for the participation and political representation of the diversity of women, with an intersectional approach.
 6. Urge the State, with the support of international organizations, to implement actions for the review of laws and public policies to monitor the inclusion of measures aimed at achieving substantive equality for women in the public sphere and parity democracy with an intersectional approach.
 7. Support the systematic generation of periodic, comparable and accessible data - disaggregated by sex, ethnicity, race, age, disability status and geographical (rural/urban) distribution - on the participation of women in public decision-making spaces in all powers, levels of government and political representation institutions (such as political parties).
 8. Optimize the use of administrative records of existing public institutions so that, by incorporating variables or using existing ones (sex, ethnicity, race, age, disability status and geographical distribution, for example) more evidence can be obtained for the formulation of laws and policies that favor women's equal participation in the public sphere with an intersectional approach.
 9. Promote the use of the methodology of the ATENEA Project, a mechanism for the advancement of women's political participation in Latin America (promoted by the United Nations Development Programme – UNDP –, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women – UN Women – and the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance – International IDEA –), which measures progress towards parity through 40 indicators and 8 dimensions of analysis, makes parity reform recommendations and is already being used in 12 countries in the region.

157 ¹⁴th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. Santiago Commitment. Agreement 5 p. 6.

10. Support the actions of women's and feminist movements and multi-party spaces for women politicians, strengthening their tools to carry out mobilization and advocacy actions, with the aim of getting States to fulfill their duty to achieve substantive equality in the political and public spheres, preferably through parity and alternation measures, with an intersectional approach.
11. Disseminate the use of strategic litigation as a tool to materialize in parity laws the concept of equality enshrined in national constitutions in those countries with the greatest resistance to the approval of said measures, and also to increase access to justice for women victims of political gender-based violence.

PREVENT AND ELIMINATE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN PUBLIC AND POLITICAL LIFE

12. Ensure all public institutions adopt and abide by codes of conduct by virtue of which they have zero tolerance for violence, discrimination and ill-treatment, as well as internal reporting and complaint mechanisms.
13. Ratify and enforce the 2019 ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment (No. 190).
14. Promote the adoption of legal regulatory frameworks to prevent, monitor, punish and eradicate violence against women in the public and political spheres in its different manifestations, establishing efficient protocols and reporting channels and strong penalties, in addition to prompt reparations for the violation of their political rights, particularly in the case of electoral processes, with institutional competencies clearly identified to address them.
15. Promote, together with National Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women, the adoption of protocols for action in cases of violence against women in politics in the absence of laws that regulate them and/or guarantee their implementation, in coordination with different powers of the State and levels of government, ensuring the allocation of the funds and resources necessary to guarantee support for, and the comprehensive protection of, women reporting gender-based violence.
16. Strengthen the capacities of state statistical systems to generate and disseminate, periodically and systematically (both online and by other means) data on gender-based violence, especially against women in public life and politics, including women human rights defenders, activists, community leaders and journalists, among others, in addition to providing funding to regional bodies or mechanisms for the defense of women's human rights, with the aim of monitoring that form of violence and so they can continue to generate evidence, conduct assessments and make public policy recommendations.
17. Ensure the mainstreaming of the gender approach in the actions of electoral bodies and electoral justice and/or administrative bodies related to the organization of elections, so that they can identify the differentiated impacts of the pandemic in electoral contexts and can provide adequate protection to women victims of violence in politics through protocols for action, in compliance with international mandates on the matter, even in the absence of specific legislation.
18. Promote the creation, by political parties, of plural and multi-party alliances for parity and against violence towards women in politics, that include the adoption of internal protocols for action, encourage equal participation between women and men and can be measured and monitored, for example, through accreditations of compliance with parity commitments, with the support of civil society and/or international organizations, among others.

19. Specifically include in the definitions and protection mechanisms established in the law women human rights defenders, activists, journalists and community leaders, among others, as potential victims of violence in the public sphere.
 20. Guarantee the construction of safe environments, including online, and effective protection for the participation of women from social, territorial, union, youth, student, journalistic, environmental, neighborhood, and human rights defenders movements and organizations, among others, with a particular focus on women in armed conflict and post-conflict contexts, who are more exposed to violence, criminalization, stigmatization and harassment, supporting the consolidation of specific programs for the defense of indigenous women rights defenders, with an intercultural, collective, preventive and gender perspective, and enabling a public and political life free of violence, with agile investigation, reparation and justice processes to eradicate impunity.
 21. Bring attention, through specific campaigns, to the different manifestations of violence against women in political and public life facilitated by the use of information technologies and social media; build the capacities of women who participate in the public sphere to neutralize and report such acts; and develop protocols and regulations, together with companies providing social media services, to establish action and repair mechanisms to protect women against them. In case acts of this nature occur in electoral campaigns, electoral authorities should have specific and agile procedures in place for the filing of complaints and reparations.¹⁵⁸
- CONSOLIDATE INSTITUTIONAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL REFORMS THAT ADDRESS GENDER ISSUES**
22. Ensure public policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have a gender and intersectionality perspective, sufficient resources and are designed with the participation of more women with gender awareness and their diversity in crisis committees, so that no women or girls are left behind and they can fully exercise their rights, including their political rights.
 23. Ensure the participation of civil society, women experts and women community leaders in advisory groups for decision-making and monitoring the process of mainstreaming the gender and intersectionality perspective in public policies related to the pandemic response and recovery, in addition to supporting initiatives to strengthen their leadership and coordination, mobilization and advocacy capacities.
 24. Support the creation of an environment conducive to the participation of women in the public sphere and decision-making, promoting their economic autonomy through gender-sensitive counter-cyclical measures to mitigate the effects of economic crises and recessions on the lives of women, as well as the feminization of poverty, and promoting normative frameworks and policies to boost the economy in key sectors, including the care economy, in addition to addressing the burden of unpaid care, child, early and forced marriage and unions, unequal access to rights and sexual and reproductive health and education.

158 Albaine (2020).

25. Place the issue of the unequal distribution of care tasks at the center of the public agenda and approve and implement comprehensive public care policies that guarantee that women have sufficient time to participate in the public and political space, with an intersectional perspective.
26. Recognize the leadership of women and youth in the area of conflict prevention, highlighting their contribution, through self-organization, to mitigating the socioeconomic crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic – as well as in previous crises – especially on issues related to community care and food distribution (community organizations and soup kitchens, among others).
27. Promote public and massive public awareness campaigns and actions, together with the media, to eradicate stereotypes, sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, lesbophobia, transphobia and discrimination, as stated in the Santiago Commitment,¹⁵⁹ as well as to accelerate cultural changes, build new masculinities and deconstruct the perception of politics as a male territory through differentiated messages that promote positive images of women's leaderships based on their diversity (by ethnicity, race, age, disability or as part of the LGBTIQ+ population).
28. Promote the adoption of transparent legal measures, subject to oversight, for the earmarking of public financing by gender, in order to strengthen the tools and skills required by women to participate in politics – including gender-sensitive training to advance substantive representation – and allocate public funds for electoral campaigns that allow them to have a minimum floor for their electoral activities, ensuring their equitable distribution, transparency and public accountability.
29. Together with National Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women, electoral bodies, political parties and international organizations, strengthen the implementation of specific training processes to build women's leadership capacities, taking into account their diversity, with *ad hoc* contents, to increase their equal participation in public spaces.
30. Build the capacities of women politicians to raise funds from different sources, including private sources (without conditioning their proposals or actions) or innovative initiatives such as crowdfunding, to expand and diversify their private funding sources, with the support and assistance of National Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women, electoral bodies, political parties and international organizations, among others.
31. Eradicate the barriers that hinder the financing of feminist and women's movements, and promote the creation of specific funds to strengthen the leadership of adolescent, young, indigenous, Afro-descendant and migrant women, women with disabilities and women from the LGBTIQ+ community.

INCREASE THE AVAILABILITY OF QUALITY FINANCING FOR THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC AND POLITICAL LIFE

28. Promote the adoption of transparent legal measures, subject to oversight, for the earmarking of public financing by gender, in order to strengthen the tools and skills required by women to participate in politics – including gender-sensitive training to advance

STRENGTHEN THE VOICE OF WOMEN AND LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND IN PUBLIC LIFE

32. Promote better conditions for the participation of women in all their diversity, identifying and addressing the structural barriers that may exist for such participation, through specific assessments conducted by National

159 14th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. Santiago Commitment. Agreement 6. p. 4.

Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women, international organizations or the academy, among others; and generate knowledge about the participation of women and the barriers they experience in little-explored spaces such as unionization, among others.

33. Strengthen the capacities of women to access, operate and participate in digital ecosystems that can be used as tools to amplify their voice so they can participate in politics and strengthen their leadership with an intersectional perspective that includes rural, peasant, indigenous or migrant women, who face more digital barriers; all this within the context of the construction by the State of a digital market in Latin America and the Caribbean through improved regulation and infrastructure, as stated in the Santiago Commitment.¹⁶⁰
34. Recognize the historic strength of feminist and women's movements in our region and the effervescence of their activism, which promotes cultural transformations, sets new limits to what is no longer tolerable by promoting and bringing attention to thematic agendas often absent and, through their mobilization, promotes the formulation of specific legislation and policies, as well as public debates with a gender, intersectionality and human rights approach, to ensure the implementation of the Agenda on Sustainable Development.
35. Support the creation of exchange networks between feminist and women's movements and women politicians to share strategies and lessons learned, establish partnerships and define common thematic agendas to protect gains made and promote new advances in the participation of women in institutional spaces, as well as in movements and non-governmental organizations.
36. Create and/or reinforce strategic mechanisms to coordinate and work on actions to strengthen the social and political leadership of women at the local level, where they are disproportionately underrepresented in executive spaces of government, in addition to providing them with more tools to advance their political careers and formulate and articulate public policy proposals with a gender and intersectional perspective.
37. Institutionalize public and participatory platforms or mechanisms that allow women from movements and non-governmental organizations, in particular those that represent the diversity of women and have had less access to political representation, to be heard, do advocacy work and provide advice for the formulation and implementation of public policies that incorporate their interests and needs.
38. Bring attention to the situation of migrant women – within the context of the greatest migratory crisis produced in the region and aggravated by the pandemic – and the barriers to the exercise of their political rights in their countries of origin and destination in this context.

¹⁶⁰ 14th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. Santiago Commitment. Agreement 21. p. 5.

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