

UN-Women Executive Board

Annual Session 2022

Background note: Briefing to the Executive Board of UN-Women

UN-Women's operational response at the regional level: Americas and the Caribbean

1. Context

Two years after its outbreak, the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered the most severe economic and social crisis in recent history, deepening structural gender inequalities and limiting women's autonomy and empowerment in all spheres.

Before COVID-19, in 2019 most women (56.7%) already had an informal job (ECLAC, 2022). And now, women are suffering the effects of the crisis through an increased burden of unpaid domestic and care work, in combination with a massive exit from the labor market that resulted in a setback of 21 years in terms of women's labor participation (World Bank, 2021)¹.

56.9% of women in Latin America and 54.3% in the Caribbean are employed in sectors where the pandemic is expected to have a higher negative impact in terms of employment and income, such as commerce, tourism, manufacturing and paid domestic work (ECLAC, 2021)². In 2021, 4 out of 10 jobs taken by women that disappeared during the pandemic were not recovered, whereas only 2 out of those 10 taken by men (ECLAC, 2022). This situation is also causing an increase in informality and poverty. In 2020, 3 out of 10 women who were not studying and were over 15 years of age did not receive personal monetary income. Also, 33.4% of women in LAC were in poverty and 13.3% in extreme poverty. Likewise, the unemployment rate of women over 15 years of age has not achieved the rates prior to the pandemic; in 2019 it was 9.5%, and in 2021 it was 11.8% (ECLAC, 2022).

The crisis generated by the pandemic has also deepened the gender gaps regarding women's access to financial resources, land and other productive assets, as well as to digitalization. In LAC, according to the latest World Bank Global Findex database (2017), only 52% of women have a bank account, 9.6% save and 8.5% have access to credit. A third of the region's inhabitants have no Internet connection or limited access due to their economic and social condition and location. There is still a considerable gender digital divide: 4 out of every 10 women in the region are not connected to internet (ECLAC, 2020)³.

¹ ECLAC (2021). Alicia Bárcena: We Must Pick Up the Pace Toward Economic, Climate and Gender Justice, and Transition to a Care Society. <https://www.cepal.org/en/news/alicia-barcena-we-must-pick-pace-toward-economic-climate-and-gender-justice-and-transition-care>

² ECLAC (2022). The economic autonomy of women in a sustainable recovery with equality. [The economic autonomy of women in a sustainable recovery with equality | Publication | Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean \(cepal.org\)](https://www.cepal.org/en/news/eclac-stresses-importance-promoting-womens-economic-autonomy-key-sustainable-recovery-equality)

³ <https://www.cepal.org/en/news/eclac-stresses-importance-promoting-womens-economic-autonomy-key-sustainable-recovery-equality>

The pandemic highlighted the centrality of care in the functioning of economies and societies. Even before the crisis, women spent three times as much time on unpaid domestic and care work as men, a situation that was exacerbated among lower-income women, who spent up to 46 hours a week on average on this work (ECLAC, 2020)⁴. The growing demand for care is accentuating the already existing inequalities in the sexual division of labor and placing a disproportionate burden on women and girls with implications for their health, well-being and economic autonomy (UN Women and ECLAC, 2021)⁵.

Latin America and the Caribbean leads the world rankings of women parliamentarians with 33.0% (ECLAC, 2022). In the executive branch, women represent only 28.5% of ministerial cabinets in Latin America, with an even lower participation in the Caribbean with 19.42% (ECLAC, 2021). Only five countries in the region are currently headed by women: Honduras, Barbados, Grenada, St Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago (UN Women, 2022). By 2020, at the local level, 24.9% of seats were held by women in local governments in LAC (UN-Women, 2020); and in 2018 women mayors represent only 15.5% in Latin America (ECLAC, 2022). Women have also been underrepresented at the pandemic response decision-making tables; only 29% of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis response groups are women (UNDP and UN-Women, 2021).

In some countries of the region, governance crises, social discontent and protest have been provoked or enhanced by the COVID-19 pandemic, occurring against a backdrop of pre-existing low trust in institutions, political and social polarization, and weak mechanisms of political representation. This has resulted in expanding narratives against gender equality and greater resistance to human rights and to women's rights, which poses risks for gender-responsive and human rights legislative and policy gains not being considered. At the same time, the region has suffered an increase of human rights violations, particularly violence against women in politics, women journalists, human rights and environmental defenders, as well as women in peace-building.

The high prevalence of violence against women and girls remains a major challenge. The health emergency, including new outbreaks, has had detrimental effects on the exercise of women's rights in general and in particular on the prevention and response to violence against women and girls. Data from prior to the pandemic, indicate that 1 in 3 women has experienced physical or sexual violence in her lifetime. 4,127 women were victims of femicide or femicide in 2020, in 16 countries in Latin American and the Caribbean⁶ (ECLAC, 2022). In addition, in the region⁷, there were 629 women deaths at the hands of their intimate partner or former partner in that year (ECLAC, 2022). The recently published report “Measuring the shadow pandemic: Violence against women during COVID-19”, which pools survey data collected in 13 countries from all regions (including Colombia and Paraguay), confirms in general terms, that the pandemic increased cases of violence against women and affected their sense of security (UN Women, 2021).

⁴ ECLAC (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating the care crisis in Latin America and the Caribbean. https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45352/4/S2000260_en.pdf

⁵ UN Women and ECLAC (2021). Towards the construction of Comprehensive Care Systems in Latin America and the Caribbean: Elements for implementation.

⁶ Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Peru.

⁷ 23 countries are considered: Anguilla, Argentina, Belize, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Antigua and Barbuda.

The increase in mixed flows of migrants and refugees across Central and South America and the Caribbean is also putting women at increased risk for gender-based violence, other human rights violations, as well as stigmatization and limited socio-economic integration in the host countries. Particularly, the region is experiencing the second largest migration crisis globally with more than 5.06 million ⁸Venezuelans having left their country and Colombia, Peru and Chile being the main receiving countries (R4V, 2022). This is occurring at the same time as an intense regional migration from Central America to the United States. Additionally, 79% of trafficking victims in Central America and the Caribbean are women and girls (UNHCR, 2021), 81% of whom are trafficked for sexual exploitation.

2. UN-Women's response 2018-2021: key results together with our partners

Governance and Leadership

Noteworthy legislative advances have been made in the region to ensure women's political rights. Currently, 18 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have quota and/or parity laws; and 10 countries in the region have generated regulations towards the eradication of violence against women in politics (VAWP). In the period 2018-2021, seven LAC countries approved quota or parity measures, while eight countries approved measures to end VAWP, most of which have had UN-Women contributions.

UN-Women, UNDP and International IDEA's joint initiative **ATENEA** implemented the Political Parity Index in seven new countries, reaching 13 LAC countries with data, analysis and recommendations to achieve parity. Within this joint initiative the Online Platform for Political Training for Women was also launched and 3323 women in politics from across the region have strengthened their capacities until now.

Partnering with different actors of the Inter-American system (MESECVI/CIM, Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, Center for Electoral Promotion and Assistance), the Association of Electoral Magistrates of the Americas, UN-Women has contributed to the increased awareness and comprehensive approach to VAW in politics and strengthening gender-responsive electoral justice. UN-Women also supported the establishment of the first Regional Observatory on Parity Democracy and Political Violence alongside national observatories on the same issues.

Women's Economic Empowerment

Currently, 11 LAC countries are designing or starting to implement **National Care Systems** with UN-Women support (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay). On regional level, UN-Women has pushed for the development of policy and legislative frameworks to promote the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work and care economy working with a variety of regional partners, especially the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Ibero-

⁸ by April 2022.

American General Secretariat (SEGIB) and the Ibero-American Social Security Organization (OISS).

Macroeconomic policies and fiscal stimulus packages have been engendered in the context of the COVID-19 response working with several partners such as ECLAC and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Different gender assessments on fiscal stimulus packages have been developed with ECLAC and ILO in Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Costa Rica and Chile. An urgent priority to reach results across our portfolio, **financing for gender equality** is a growing area of work where we the Regional Office has focused on expanding partnerships. The Regional “Investors for Equality” Initiative was launched by partnering up with 16 actors of the financial ecosystem, private sector, and institutional investors. UN-Women, as part of more longstanding efforts in the region, also promoted **gender-responsive budgeting (GRB)** to help governments identify gender-related needs and allocate resources to specific programs that are key to achieving a gender-responsive recovery. Finance Ministries of 15 LAC countries now have improved knowledge on GRB.

The implementation of regional and subregional programmes in the region contributed to the increased access to opportunities for income generation and sustainable livelihoods through **financial and digital inclusion** and **gender-responsive business models and procurement**.

The “**Win-Win: Gender equality means good business**” programme (implemented by UN-Women and ILO with EU funding) in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica, and Uruguay reached more than 20,000 women entrepreneurs through knowledge exchange events and capacity building and trained more than 1000 businesswomen & entrepreneurs in the “Virtual Skills School”. 94% of representatives of women’s networks and associations reported strengthened capacities to support women entrepreneurs to start and grow their businesses. More than 500 companies approved and implemented non-discrimination and equal opportunity policies, strategies and/or diversity and inclusion units and 5,650 companies had access to knowledge and tools on gender equality. The programme also engaged 900 new Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEP) signatory companies in the region (total in May 2022: 1848)⁹.

The **MELYT (“Women, Local Economy and Territory”)** programme contributed to 2457 rural women’s strengthened entrepreneurship, provided advisory services to 40 start-up companies, and overall reinforced territorial management for equality and women’s access to financial services in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras by working closely with national and local authorities and the Central American Integration Bank (CABEI). The programme culminated its reach with the creation of the Guarantee Fund, accompanied by UN-Women technical assistance and financing, which has increased the availability of financing for guarantees for US\$1 million under the “Financial Sector Support Facility for financing Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises affected by the crisis generated by COVID-19” implemented by CABEI with a total amount of US\$650 million.

The “**Second Chance Education**” programme in Chile and Mexico delivered to more than 10,000 women quality education content for them to either start a business, insert themselves in the labour

⁹ As of May 9, 2022, there were 1848 WEP signatories in the region.

market or continue their education. The transformative results of the programme show that guaranteeing the right to education both improved the livelihoods of thousands of women and their communities and contributed to women defining themselves as individuals with rights, voice and agency to pursue their life objectives. With more than 50,000 indirect beneficiaries the programme also contributed to social transformations in terms of how men and the whole community evolved in their understanding of gender equality.

Ending Violence against Women (EVAW)

The **Spotlight Initiative to End Violence against Women**¹⁰ has been implemented through country programmes in Argentina, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, Guyana, as well as through regional scoping programmes for Latin America and the Caribbean. In Latin America, the Spotlight Initiative is prioritizing ending femicide/feminicide and in the Caribbean the programme works to prevent domestic and family violence by raising awareness, establishing and implementing laws and policies and improving quality essential services for survivors. Through the Spotlight Initiative in Latin America implemented by UN-Women, UNFPA and UNDP, CSOs capacities on EVAW were strengthened with 1,1 million direct beneficiaries and 35.8 million indirect beneficiaries, 80.8% and 63.2% women, respectively. In addition, 19 laws and policies were enacted or strengthened, 97 knowledge products were generated and 155 CSOs were strengthened. Likewise, 29 campaigns were carried out with close to 5.2 million people reached.

UN-Women supported the development and adoption of the **Inter-American Model Law on Femicide/Feminicide** and promoted legal reforms at country level, in partnership with MESECVI. UN-Women supported the adaptation and adoption of the **Latin American Protocol Model for the investigation of violent deaths of women for reasons of gender (femicide/feminicide)** through: i) the development of a virtual self-training course in conjunction with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Women Training Center; ii) the systematization of the protocol adaptation experience in Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador, and Guatemala to identify lessons learned, good practices, and guidelines for other countries/local governments; iii) a Follow-up Mechanism for the application of the Latin American Protocol for the investigation of femicides/feminicides; and iv) support to the development of investigation and litigation guidelines for prosecutors on femicide in the context of organized crime (collaboration with UNDP).

LAC Public Prosecutors response against VAWG during COVID-19 were also strengthened and UN-Women contributed to enhancing prevention and care efforts provided by work teams in 15 countries through a regional network of accompaniment, containment, support and self-care.

As an emerging strategy against violence, UN Women has increased efforts on the use of innovative tools to eliminate VAW, including through behavioral sciences to engage men in VAWG prevention and through the generation of knowledge on VAWG on social networks and online platforms comparing pre-and post-pandemic content using big data in Brazil, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

¹⁰ <https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/>

Women Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action

The region has advanced in adopting, implementing, and establishing accountability mechanisms for the women, peace, and security agenda that include **National Action Plans**, localization and regionalization initiatives. Peru and Mexico adopted their first National Action Plans to implement Security Council Resolution 1325 with UN-Women technical assistance, alongside five other countries Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay receiving technical support to formulate or renew their National Action Plans.

With the support of the **Peacebuilding Fund**, UN-Women has promoted increased participation of women and youth peacebuilders and human rights defenders in response to the new peace and security challenges in Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, and Honduras (15 projects in the period 2018-2021). **Networks of women peacebuilders and mediators** have been strengthened throughout the region, particularly national networks in Mexico, Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia and Venezuela, and support is being provided to consolidate three regional initiatives. Additionally, UN-Women has achieved **catalytic results in the security sector** to ensure women's participation in peace operations in Mexico and Uruguay, increased work with the public security sector of Colombia, Chile and Bolivia and preventing VAWP in Haiti.

In the area of humanitarian action, the Needs Assessments and Humanitarian Response Plans of Colombia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Venezuela incorporated the gender and intersectional perspectives. UN-Women also ensured that the gender perspective was strengthened in the actions developed within the **Regional Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V)**, a mechanism convening more than 190 partners, led by IOM and UNHCR.

Crosscutting work

UN Coordination

Throughout the region UN-Women continued to strengthen collaboration and coordination within regional and national bodies and working groups, which has materialized in improved gender mainstreaming across the UN system efforts. 49% of UN-Women's 2018-2021 portfolio in the region were Joint Programmes with other UN agencies. The United Nations Country Team (UNCT) system-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (SWAP) Gender Equality Scorecard and the (UNCT) Gender Equality Marker (GEM) were implemented as key tools for measuring and improving the gender capacities of the UN in 12 LAC countries. More than 1000 UN personnel from all over the region trained in gender mainstreaming for the Cooperation Frameworks, and only in 2021 eight new generation Cooperation Frameworks were developed with high-quality gender perspective.

Intergovernmental support

UN-Women has worked closely with the governments and civil society and women's organizations of the region to ensure advanced results, protect gender equality gains and incorporate emerging issues in global and regional intergovernmental processes through continued support to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Substantive and political support to CEDAW and other HR bodies has also been given, e.g., to the development and consultation processes for CEDAW General Recommendations on the rights of indigenous women and girls

and on trafficking in women and girls. ECLAC and UN-Women are co-hosting the Regional Conferences on Women in LAC and the regional CSW consultations since 2020, which has resulted in stronger regional high-level intergovernmental coordination for gender equality.

Strengthened civil society approach

UN-Women reinforced its alliance with LAC Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) through the establishment regular meetings and regional dialogues. Additionally, the first call for proposals of the Regional Fund for Feminist Organizations and Movements was launched by governments, CSOs and ECLAC under the Regional Conference on Women in LAC and hosted by UN-Women since early 2021. A first round of grants for COVID-19 response were given to 18 CSOs. The XV Regional Conference on Women in LAC constitutes an opportunity to deepen this partnership and pledge for contributions from ODA, LAC governments and other donors to the Regional Fund.

Network-based operational model

Strong efforts have been made by the Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean (ACRO) to enhance the operational efficiency and effectiveness of the regional operational response, particularly in the pandemic and post pandemic context. The operational networking model that was set in motion during 2020 is implemented to better assess and serve internal and external partners' needs and to scale results drawing on automated processes and mobilizing expertise and talent from all offices in the region. In order to make a better use of human resources, existing knowledge and capacities and ensuring personnel continuity, and in order to ensure sustainable structures, respond to increasing demands in countries where UN-Women is Non-Resident Agency (NRA), ACRO revisited the traditional structure of replication of all roles in all Country Offices (COs), sharing personnel and roles across the region. UN Women offered this possibility through Virtual Deployments during COVID-19, and this allowed for a much more cohesive team where colleagues from one office are supporting other COs or ACRO. The procurement team has been working fully as a regional network and this has resulted in enhanced capacities, standardization, reduction of operational costs, overcoming division among different organizational levels (e.g., field-regional office-HQ) and more value for money.

Since January 2020 ACRO has used the existing IT platforms under Microsoft 360 to develop further automation solutions for over 80 processes and the business intelligence has increasingly made processes more efficient in accordance with corporate policies and procedures. These ongoing efforts have facilitated oversight & quality assurance with the aim to improve data-driven management and UN-Women's positioning as a knowledge-based organization both internally and externally. The use of Artificial Intelligence and automation in Operations and Programmes through these solutions reduced administrative and internal communications response times, increased performance and improved internal controls. This model has been applied for all ACRO operations, all NRAs and 12 out of 13 COs.

3. Moving forward: priorities to achieve scale and impact in the period 2022-2025

Based on lessons learned from the implementation of the previous Strategic Plan and major programmes, UN-Women Americas and the Caribbean will continue to work with a wide range of partners to deepen and expand its work in the region. In the first year of the Strategic Plan (SP)

2022-2025 we are consolidating advanced results across thematic areas, while expanding some of the regional initiatives and integrating emerging issues.

Particular focus for the regional implementation of the SP will be on expanding and consolidating care policies and systems in LAC and influencing recovery strategies contributing to behavioral changes and the reduction of inequalities across all thematic areas. Special attention will be put on women human rights and environmental defenders, indigenous, Afro-descendant and migrant women.

UN-Women's regional efforts will continue to contribute to the strengthening of democratic institutions, women's political participation and promoting parity on all levels. In the areas of Women, Peace and Security, humanitarian and disaster risk reduction, strong continued focus will be on strengthening women's role in local mediation, social dialogues and peace promoting initiatives, as well as engendering disaster risk reduction and humanitarian responses and policies.

Building on the investments and impact from the Spotlight Initiative, UN-Women will continue to innovate to change violent patterns and social norms based on evidence, particularly through behavioral sciences and big data analyses. Further efforts will also be made to support the consolidation of national mechanisms for prevention and response for VAW victims/survivors, increasing their access to justice and reparation.

An emerging priority is climate change and women's economic empowerment through circular economy and green technology initiatives. Financing for Gender Equality and advancing gender equality through public and private gender responsive financing policies, public budgeting and innovative strategies and instruments will also be a key in UN-Women's strategies and initiatives in the period 2022-2025.

Regional efforts for an accountable and driven UN system to deliver a UN-Women led gender equality centered response to support countries achieve the 2030 Agenda will continue to be a core priority. UN-Women will continue to engage with Resident Coordinators and UN agencies to ensure system-wide integration of gender equality and women's empowerment in programming and cooperation frameworks.

UN Women will continue to work closely with ECLAC and national partners to advance the SDGs in LAC, improving gender data and statistics, forecasting analyses, as well as creating enabling environments for gender-responsive policies and programmes. As a key contribution to this, a regional analysis of the main gender-specific SDG indicators and a dashboard that consolidates gender and intersectionality statistics for LAC will be launched on UN-Women's website in 2022.