

The Institutionalization
of a Gender Approach
in the Ministries of Labor
of the Americas:

Balance of a Decade

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The Institutionalization of a Gender Approach in the Ministries of Labor of the Americas: **Balance of a Decade**

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a decade



Introduction

Kim Osborne

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The world of work in the Americas is constantly evolving and transforming itself. Today, it is being challenged more than ever before owing to the socio-economic crisis occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic, accelerated technological change – under the Fourth Industrial Revolution –, the threat of climate change, and a demographic transition that implies a marked aging of the region's population. These trends have the potential to deepen existing inequalities between men and women in the labor market.

In recent decades, women have made great educational advances and considerably increased their labor participation; however, they face higher unemployment rates, are overrepresented in the informal economy, receive lower wages than men for equal jobs, and still have very low representation in leadership and decision-making positions in both the public and private sectors. These

inequalities have been exacerbated during the pandemic, which has had a disproportionate impact on women, considering the fact nearly 80% of women are employed in the sectors of the economy most affected by the pandemic.

In the light of these challenges a few key questions arise: How can these inequalities be best addressed? How do we ensure a more inclusive recovery with fairer and equitable labor markets where women enjoy the same opportunities as men?

While the answers to these questions lie in multiple actions involving individuals, organizations, companies and society as a whole, public policies and government actions are essential. This has been well recognized by the Ministries of Labor within the framework of the Organization of American States.

Actions undertaken by the OAS Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML)

Following the approval of the Inter-American Program on the Promotion of Women's Human Rights and Gender Equity and Equality (PIA) in 2000, and with the permanent advice of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), discussions on gender equality were installed at the OAS Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML). This Conference is the main forum for political dialogue on labor and employment matters of the OAS. During the XV IACML in 2007 in Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministers of Labor approved the "Strategic Guidelines for Advancing Gender Equality and Non-discrimination within a Decent Work Framework." The Strategic Guidelines triggered multiple cooperation and training actions under one important premise: strengthening gender mainstreaming and institutionalization in the Ministries of Labor is a fundamental requirement to move towards gender equality in the world of work.

In compliance with the Strategic Guidelines approved in 2007, the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development of the OAS, as the Technical Secretariat of the IACML, and the Inter-American Commission of Women developed different initiatives detailed below. These efforts were undertaken in partnership with the International Labor Organization (ILO) and received important financial support from the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Contribution Fund of the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL), supplemented by contributions from various countries.

Actions implemented since 2007:

- A Hemispheric Workshop of the RIAL / OAS on Gender Mainstreaming in the Ministries of Labor, held in Buenos Aires in 2009 with the participation of gender officers of 25 Ministries of Labor,

allowed for the exchange of experiences and identification of recommendations that were reflected in the study described below.

- The study "The institutionalization of a gender approach in the Ministries of Labor of the Americas" was published in 2009 after an extensive process of consultation with both the Ministries of Labor and the National Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women (MNM). It provided a hemispheric overview of the status of gender units or offices within the Ministries, their strengths and weaknesses, and recommendations that inspired further actions to support the Ministries in mainstreaming gender in their programmatic offer and institutional work. The 2009 study is an excellent baseline that today, through the study presented in this document, allows documenting progress.
- Four Sub-regional Training Workshops on Participatory Strategic Planning with a Gender Approach targeted the Specialized Gender Units of the Ministries of Labor and the Mechanisms of Women, with the goal of strengthening their institutional capacities to carry out policies aimed at promoting gender equality in the labor market. These workshops took place between 2010 and 2011, in Guyana for the Caribbean countries; in El Salvador for Central America, the Dominican Republic, and Panama; in Ecuador for the Andean region; and in Paraguay for the Southern Cone countries.
- The first Hemispheric Dialogue at the highest level, among Ministers of Labor and Ministers of Women Affairs, took place within the framework of the XVII IACML in 2011 in San Salvador. The authorities reiterated their commitment to continue working together in favor of gender equality in the world of work.

- Participatory Gender Audits, in partnership with the International Labor Organization (ILO) in the Ministries of Labor of El Salvador, Barbados, and Peru, took place between 2012 and 2013, which resulted in Action Plans to improve gender mainstreaming in policies, programs, and operations of the Ministries.
- Regional cooperation on gender equality was strengthened with bilateral cooperation among Ministries of Labor within the framework of the RIAL between 2012 and 2020. The Ministries of Labor of Chile and Guatemala offered technical support to the Ministries of Bolivia and Paraguay, respectively, in matters of gender mainstreaming. Additionally, the Ministries of Labor of Argentina, Uruguay, and Colombia provided technical advice – through on-site and experts visits – to the Ministry of Labor of El Salvador, allowing for the creation and strengthening of the "Gender Equality Unit" as well as the design of the IGUAL-ES Seal of El Salvador that takes up elements of the EQUIPARES Seal of Colombia. The Ministry of Labor of Costa Rica is developing the Pilot Plan for the Implementation of Convention 189 on Domestic Workers, an eminently female activity in the region, after learning from Uruguay's experience thanks to an on-site visit to the Ministry of Labor of that country.

The current commitment of the Ministries of Labor

Ten years after the publication of the first study on gender institutionalization in the Ministries, and after multiple interventions by the OAS, CIM, and ILO – some of which

were outlined above –, it is time to assess how much the region has advanced. A progress assessment on gender institutionalization was mandated by the Ministers of Labor during the XX IACML held in Barbados in 2017 under the slogan, "Building on our Achievements and Advancing Toward Social Justice, Decent Work, and Sustainable Development in the Americas," which had gender equality as one of its three central themes.

In the Declaration of Bridgetown, resulting from the XX IACML, the Ministers of Labor committed to "continue to work towards mainstreaming a gender perspective into employment and labor policies, as well as into our ministries' operations and structures." To support this commitment, the 2018-2020 Work Plan of the Conference included the execution of this study and a hemispheric workshop. The latter could not be carried out due to the pandemic; instead, a series of training and cooperation activities took place, including Hemispheric Dialogues among the Ministries' gender units in 2020 and 2021, and a Virtual Course on Gender-based Violence at Work, developed with CIM in the Educational Portal of the Americas and launched in September 2021.

The study presented herein informs on the advances made in gender institutionalization in the Ministries, identifies new challenges, and provides a basis for planning new strategies to support their efforts in the most effective way. It constitutes another contribution from the OAS to strengthen gender mainstreaming in labor policies and programs and in the daily work of the Ministries of Labor of the Americas, geared towards the achievement of a more equal and fairer workplace, where both men and women can reach their full potential.



Description of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the changes that have taken place in the institutionalization and mainstreaming of a gender approach in the Ministries of Labor since 2009, which is when the first baseline study was conducted. The structure of the information-gathering instruments sent initially to the Ministries of Labor and to the National Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women (NMAW) was retained, and some questions were added in order to further explore how the changes that occurred over the decade have impacted the organizational structure and gender relations within the Ministries. The information collected was systematized and compared to the baseline, while some new topics were added. Additionally, background information was added on countries from which no information had been received in the previous study.

As with the initial study, the OAS General Secretariat sent a questionnaire to all of the Ministries of Labor requesting information about the possible progress made and/or the setbacks that had occurred in the processes of institutionalization and mainstreaming of a gender approach. The NMAW were asked, through the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), to respond to a set of questions to complement the information received from the Ministries of Labor and provide an outside view.

Of the 34 governments that were asked for information, that is, all member states of the OAS, 23 Ministries of Labor and 14 NMAW responded. As shown in Table 1, six of the 30 countries that had responded in 2009 did not reply in 2019 (Bolivia, Dominica, Nicaragua, Peru, Suriname, and

gender

Uruguay). Two countries that did not respond in 2009, replied in 2019 (Grenada and Jamaica). Thus, it was possible to compare 21 countries in the region, which yielded a wealth of information and enabled trends to be identified in the region.

The information collected was organized in such a way as to be able to identify and show the changes that had occurred over the decade. The report includes an institutional mapping with charts summarizing the strengths and weaknesses of how the units had been incorporated into the Ministries, the effectiveness of the units' performance in gender mainstreaming, its impact on labor policies, and the sustainability of their role in terms of resources and strategies.

The study's preliminary version was presented during the Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML) Working Groups' meeting in December 2019 in Quito, Ecuador. It was open for comments and revision from the Ministries until March 2020. After the interruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the IACML authorities adjusted the Conference's Work

Plan in May 2020 to include new activities of the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL), allowing the Ministries to provide more material to the study and strengthen the conclusions and recommendations. In November 2020, the First Hemispheric Dialogue to Advance the Institutionalization of Gender in the Ministries of Labor was held in virtual format, and the Second Dialogue took place in May 2021, focused on "Telework and caregiving co-responsibility for a gender-responsive recovery." Participants for both events included gender units' Directors and experts from more than 25 Ministries of Labor, exceeding exchange level and participation expectations.

Hemispheric Dialogues in 2020 and 2021 were characterized by an active exchange among gender units. They provided an opportunity to discover these units' emerging needs in order to address new realities and the increase in gender inequality and discrimination caused by the pandemic.

In light of these needs, recommendations on Chapter 7 herein were revised and updated.

Table 1

Responses to the Request for Information sent to the Ministries of Labor and to the National Machineries for the Advancement of Women, 2009-2019				
Country	Ministry of Labor		National Machineries for the Advancement of Women	
	2009	2019	2009	2019
Antigua and Barbuda	•	•		
Argentina	•	•	•	•
Bahamas	•	•		
Barbados	•	•		
Belize	•	•		
Bolivia	•			•

Responses to the Request for Information sent to the Ministries of Labor and to the National Machineries for the Advancement of Women, 2009-2019 (continued)

Country	Ministry of Labor		National Machineries for the Advancement of Women	
	2009	2019	2009	2019
Brazil	•	•	•	
Canada	•	•		•
Chile	•	•	•	•
Colombia	•	•		
Costa Rica	•	•	•	•
Dominica	•			
Dominican Republic	•	•	•	
Ecuador	•	•		
El Salvador	•	•	•	•
Grenada		•	•	
Guatemala	•		•	•
Guyana				
Haiti	•			
Honduras	•	•	•	
Jamaica		•	•	
Mexico	•	•		•
Nicaragua	•			•
Panama	•	•		•
Paraguay	•	•	•	•
Peru	•			•
Saint Kitts and Nevis	•	•		
Saint Lucia	•			
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	•	•		
Suriname	•			•
Trinidad and Tobago	•	•		
United States	•	•	•	
Uruguay	•			•
Venezuela			•	
Total	30	23	13	14



Labor market in Latin America and the Caribbean: Female Employment

The situation of women in the labor market is the framework for the work of gender units of the Ministries of Labor as they seek to advance gender equality. The general overview presented below summarizes some of the achievements in reducing gender gaps, as well as the main challenges, to which we have added those arising from the health, economic and social crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the last decades, women's labor participation has increased considerably and the gap in relation to men has decreased, although it was still considerable. Women's participation rate in the labor market increased 3.6 percentage points between 1990 and 2000; 3.2 in the next ten years, and 2.5 between 2010 and 2018, reaching 51.9%. That same year, men's participation rate

reached 77.8%, meaning there was still a gap of 25.9 percentage points.¹

These figures show that, in the period prior to the pandemic, the increased participation of women in the region had already begun to slow down. This could seem contradictory, given that the factors that affect the female labor supply were favorable: the education level of women in the region increased significantly – surpassing men's –; fertility decreased and the average age of first-time mothers increased. In addition, the proportion of single-parent households

¹ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)/International Labour Organization (ILO), "Evolution of and prospects for women's labour participation in Latin America", *Employment Situation in Latin America and the Caribbean*, No. 21 (LC/TS.2019/66), Santiago, 2019.

employment

increased, among which 80% were headed by women, which would generate greater pressure for women to seek labor income. These facts evidence that the decrease in the growth rate of female participation is due to the persistence of factors that hold back the entry of women into the labor market, such as segmentation – horizontal and vertical –, the wage gap and the quality of employment.

Currently, due to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the overall participation rate fell dramatically from 62.2% in 2019 to 52.6% between the first and second quarters of 2020. In this situation, women are experiencing job losses with greater intensity than men: the range of male employment loss goes from 3% to 34%, while female falls between 7% and 43%², percentages that mask the massive departures from the labor force and, consequently, the increase in the inactive population. In the case of women, one of the reasons that explains this increase is the difficulty to reconcile care work caused by the closure of schools and day cares.

The horizontal segmentation of the labor market has historically exhibited a marked gender bias with a strong predominance of women in areas related to education, health, and services, areas with lower remuneration and considered in many cases “of lower value”, which affects their expectations and decisions to participate in the labor market. In 2018, women represented 64% of employment in the community, social and personal services sector, 37% of employment in the manufacturing industry, 40% in financial establishments, 26% in agriculture and fishing, and 14% in transportation, storage and communications. It should be noted that 15.3% of working women are engaged in domestic work, which is one of the

most precarious occupations in the region and has suffered a strong impact due to the health crisis³.

This marked segmentation has meant that the COVID-19 crisis has disproportionately harmed women, given that the most affected sectors, such as education, health⁴, social work or hospitality, have high percentages of female employment. In addition, labor market segmentation operates as a mechanism that strongly affects women in economic recovery plans that, in other scenarios, have focused on economic sectors with high proportions of male employment, such as the digital, energy, agriculture, construction, transportation, and mining industries, among others.

Women’s employment situation before the crisis already showed significant inequalities, making them vulnerable to further deterioration, such as being overrepresented in the informal economy (in 2018, 55% of women in middle-income economies and 78% in low-income economies had informal employment in the developing world)⁵. In addition, having informal and occasional jobs means women are often left out of the benefits granted by labor market policies, such as unemployment insurance or a subsidy for the preservation of employment. In fact, about 65% of informal workers do not have access to any safety net, such as social protection systems or social assistance programs⁶.

³ ECLAC / ILO. Op.cit.

⁴ Health systems, sector in which women represent 72.8% of people employed in the region (data obtained through the process of household surveys conducted in 16 countries in 2017, available in the ECLAC’s Database of the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG)), have registered an increased demand under extreme work conditions, such as extended workdays, in addition to having a high exposure to the virus.

⁵ ILO (2018), *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture*, 3rd ed, Geneva: ILO. <https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/--->

⁶ OCDE (2020), *COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean: Regional socio-economic implications and policy priorities*.

² ILO, *Labor Overview in times of COVID-19. Impact on the Labour market and income in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Second Edition. September, 2020.

The vertical segmentation of the labor market has also acted as a deterrent against women’s labor participation: in Latin America, the average proportion of women in managerial positions, including the upper and middle level, was 38% in 2017. The World Bank Enterprise Surveys show that, on average, only 19.9% of the firms in the region have a female CEO, a proportion that decreases directly according to the size of the company, reaching 8.7% among large companies⁷.

The wage gap between women and men has fallen between 2 and 3 percentage points from 2012-2017 in the region, persisting despite the measures taken in many countries to eliminate it. For every hour worked, women receive, for the same job, an average 17% lower labor income than men of the same age and education levels, and that have the same type of work and presence of children in the home, among other factors. In this regard, ECLAC estimates that the coronavirus will affect the quality of work in addition to rising unemployment, which would translate into lower wages and less access to social protection.⁸

Even when they are occupied within the labor market, women spend many more hours than men on care and unpaid work. This leads to more precarious or unstable job placement as a way to reconcile family responsibilities with the obligations of paid work. The gender distribution of housework is still overwhelmingly uneven; women take care of 80% of the household chores⁹.

⁷ ECLAC / ILO. Op.cit.

⁸ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (2020), *Latin America and the Caribbean before the COVID-19 pandemic: Economic and social effects*.

⁹ ILO (2019), *Women in the World of Work. Pending Challenges for Achieving Effective Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean*. (Thematic Labour Overview, 5). Lima: ILO/ Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean.

In 2018, 42.4% of working-age women reported that they were not looking for work or were not available to work because of unpaid work. Men in this condition barely reached 5.2%¹⁰, which shows that the unpaid workload constitutes the main barrier for women to participate in the labor market.

The pandemic has revealed the unequal distribution of care. In March 2020, around 154 million children and adolescents (more than 95% in the region) were temporarily out of school due to COVID-19 closures¹¹. The care of girls and boys was left to the families, particularly women who spend three times as much time daily on unpaid care and domestic work compared to men on the same tasks¹². In these circumstances, “social gender norms attribute the role of care to women, which limits their participation in the labor market, causes the wage gap and limits their access to quality employment”¹³.

Studies carried out in Europe indicate that, above all, women with young children have not been able to invest the time required by their paid jobs, and that this has happened to a much greater extent to women than to men (24% versus 13%, respectively). In Germany (certainly not the country affected the most), 27% of mothers cut their working hours to care for their children, compared to 16% of fathers. And many women in Italy (an estimated 20%) simply left the job market during the closures caused by the pandemic¹⁴.

¹⁰ ILO (2018), *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work* https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_633168.pdf

¹¹ UNICEF (2020), *COVID-19: More than 95 per cent of children are out of school in Latin America and the Caribbean, March 23rd* (online).

¹² ILO (2018), *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*

¹³ Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) (2020), *COVID-19 in Women’s Lives: Reasons to Recognize the Differential Impacts*.

¹⁴ https://www.eldiario.es/andalucia/desdeelsur/covid-19-revolucion-pendiente-cuidados_132_6123731.html

There is no doubt that recovering from this crisis will be very complex and the deep economic recession that accompanies the pandemic is more than likely to have a feminine face. A fairer reconstruction will only be possible by addressing these inequalities during the emergency and recovery phases. For this reason, it is essential to ensure that measures to stimulate the economy, such as cash transfers, credits, loans and financial bailouts, are aimed at women, regardless of whether they are entrepreneurs or business owners, work full or part-time in the formal economy, or occasionally in the informal economy.

In short, the aim should be to accelerate the development of instruments to ensure that social and economic policies incorporate a gender perspective and avoid discriminating against women, as well as avoiding wage reductions due to the decreased demand for employment, women's work becoming more precarious, and generating an even wider wage gap.

As long as we can recognize that an important part of the limitations of the progress

of women resides in the household, important cultural changes aimed at the deconstruction of gender stereotypes and the empowerment of women should be considered, together with employment policies that support female labor insertion. These policies include information and guidance services that meet the specific needs of women; child care centers or services; and training, education and re-skilling programs to improve their employability and their possibilities to access decent jobs that ensure a decent income, provide independence, economic security, social protection coverage for unemployment, and appropriate retirement pensions.

The crisis we are experiencing is an opportunity to rethink public policies and articulate new social contracts in the region that allow us not only to recover our economies but also to correct gaps and inequalities that we have been dragging on for a long time. The gender perspective in this process is essential to guarantee that the region truly enters an upward and sustainable path of growth, development and equality.



4

The processes of gender institutionalization and gender mainstreaming

The Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) endorsed gender mainstreaming¹ as a strategy for incorporating a gender perspective into the various levels and stages of the cycle of formulation, execution and evaluation of public policies. This was done with the goal of ensuring that both men and women benefit equally from those policies, and thus make progress toward closing the gender gaps in the various areas of economic, social, and political life.

As this strategy was adopted, the existence of gender systems in different societies became clearer. The strategy recognized that

no field is gender-neutral, that more inter-sectional analysis is needed, and that the State is responsible for doing it. Here, the role of the National Machinerys for the Advancement of Women (ministries, secretariats, councils) as the government agencies responsible for implementing this approach is paramount. The institutionalized nature of these mechanisms is considered key to success in implementing gender policies.

This new strategy seeks to avoid the tendency of governments to deal with gender issues as “women’s affairs,” confined to specific programs and decoupled from the mainstream of public policies. To implement the process, the national gender mechanisms need to strengthen gender institutions in public agencies, and reinvigorate women’s bureaus as policy

¹ This concept was defined at the Third World Conference on Women held in Nairobi and adopted as a strategy for action at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995).

mainstreaming

coordination bodies responsible for leading the gender mainstreaming process, and now influencing not only policies specifically geared toward women, but rather public policies as a whole.

To achieve this objective, agencies need to be fully imbued with a gender equality perspective by building an institutional framework to support the new equality-focused practices and to make them a matter of habit, so that they become the general rule.

A separate concept, but one that is closely linked to gender mainstreaming, is the institutionalization of gender, as expressed in the type of institution that is created (gender units, focal points, gender committees), the location of these units in the organizational structure, the legal framework that underpins them (including changes to the laws and regulations of public institutions, and changes in the procedures for the design, formulation, and evaluation of public policies), and extending the institution's gender practices to the entire organizational structure.²

This concept is used to refer mainly to the changes that are sought in the structures and dynamics of the State, and for this reason, it is often used as a synonym of "gender mainstreaming," although they refer to different processes.³

According to the Economic and Social Council, gender mainstreaming⁴ is "the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action,

including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres..."⁵

It follows from this definition that gender mainstreaming is not a goal in and of itself, but is rather a strategy for moving forward toward substantive equality. Its objective is to ensure that questions of gender equality are included in all public policies for achieving substantive equality between the sexes or gender-based equality. It emphasizes both gender inequalities and the political and institutional processes needed to implement policies on equality, which requires agencies to be reorganized to give them the capacity they need in order to promote policies of this nature. Gender mainstreaming is possible to the extent that the State has the capacity to coordinate many different institutions and institutional arrangements.⁶

Thus, the two processes intersect and reinforce each other: the institutionalization of a gender approach is a prerequisite for gender mainstreaming to be installed in all of the structures and actions of the agency as a whole. Gender content can be mainstreamed when there is an adequate institutional structure, when it becomes a practice that is recognized as "habitual", and when at the same time, it strengthens the institutions that have been created.

Seen in this way, gender mainstreaming is the mean for moving forward toward

substantive equality, which requires introducing the measures necessary to ensure that equality is in fact real, and removing cultural and other barriers that stand in the way of achieving it. Thus, mainstreaming a gender approach does not mean adding a "women's" component to public policies, but rather incorporating women into the entire cycle of policy design, formulation, monitoring, and evaluation.

It is worth mentioning that the processes of gender mainstreaming and institutionalization are not linear. Although there is a conceptual path that proposes the deployment of different successive stages, in reality, there are difficulties and obstacles that make this linearity impossible. To advance in these processes requires, in many cases, the development of several actions and instruments simultaneously.

² Participatory Gender Audit. "Methodology for gender mainstreaming in public institutions." Department of Economic and Social Development. Executive Secretariat for Integral Development/Inter-American Commission of Women. Organization of American States, 2014.

³ Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, INMUJERES. Glosario de Género, 2007. (Spanish only.)

⁴ Gender mainstreaming essentially means introducing gender into the mainstream of policy development.

⁵ United Nations Economic and Social Council, 1997.

⁶ Gustá, Ana. (2008). Las escaleras de Escher: la transversalización de género vista desde las capacidades del Estado. Revista Aportes para el Estado y la Administración Gubernamental. 14. 53-70. (



5

Institutionalization of a gender approach: Taking stock

The study conducted in 2009 showed that many of the Ministries of Labor in the region embarked on the process of institutionalizing a gender approach by creating specialized gender units or mechanisms inside the ministry. The present update corroborates

this growing trend, documents changes in the scope, objectives, and operations of these units, and identifies their strengths, threats, and challenges. These findings are summarized below.

A

The trend of creating and maintaining mechanisms for institutionalization of a gender approach in the Ministries of Labor has continued over the decade

The gender units within the Ministries of Labor have continued to operate. Not only that, but in the countries of the Caribbean, where the predominant trend was to have a Women's Bureau or Department (National Machineryes for the Advancement of Women) as the body responsible for gender mainstreaming

taking stock

in the ministries, two countries report that they have created a mechanism within their ministries. Since 2017, Grenada has had a focal point which coordinates with the Department and Inter-Ministerial Council for Gender Focal Points, whose mission is to ensure that gender issues are included and/or considered in the preparation and implementation of projects and policies and service delivery. Similarly, the Ministry of Labor and Small Enterprise Development of Trinidad and Tobago, where the Ministry’s Research and Planning Unit plays an advisory role in ensuring that gender is incorporated into the Ministry’s work, has had gender focal points since 2018. The focal points report to their Unit Heads (the Head of Research and Planning and the Head of the International Affairs Unit), who in turn report to the Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry.

In Peru, in February 2018, the Working Group for Gender Equality (mechanism for gender equality, in compliance with Supreme Decree No. 005-2017-MIMP) was created. This Working Group, which does not have its own budget or specialized personnel, is made up of a representative of the entity’s director; from the Planning and Budget area who is in charge of the Technical Secretariat; from the Human Resources area; from the Communications Office, and from the Line Agencies. In the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIMP) and in the Ministry of Labor and Employment Promotion (MTPE), various dependencies have been created which are linked and that allow articulation. This is the case of the General Directorate of Fundamental Rights and Occupational Safety and Health of the MTPE and the Directorate for the Promotion of the Development of the Economic Autonomy of Women of the MIMP, which can handle issues together¹.

In those countries that responded to the questionnaire, the gender mechanisms that were already in place have continued to exist, except in Honduras and Brazil. The Secretariat for Labor and Social Security of Honduras reported in 2009 that it had a technical and administrative structure that dealt with gender issues. This structure had come about as the result of the restructuring of the Women Workers Program, which operated under the Bureau of Social Security. At that time, the Strategic Plan on Gender Equity of the Honduran Secretariat for Labor (PEG 2009-2013) had been drawn up. The country now reports that it no longer has a gender unit due to budgetary restrictions.

The Secretariat of Labor of the Ministry of the Economy of Brazil, which took on many of the functions of the now defunct Ministry of Labor and Employment², reported that Decree N° 9.745 of April 8, 2019 established the structure of the Ministry of the Economy. In this structure, there are no units devoted to specific segments of the population and, as a result, there is no mechanism created specifically to promote the application of a gender approach to the policies, programs, or activities of the Secretariat. It reported that the

Secretariat of Labor of the Ministry of the Economy is responsible broadly for monitoring and regulating labor relations for all the Brazilian population, and that the National Secretariat of Policies on Women of the Ministry for Women, the Family, and Human Rights is responsible for developing cross-cutting policies that impact women in the workplace.

Table 2

Gender units in the Ministries of Labor 2009-2019		
Países	2009	2019
Antigua and Barbuda		
Argentina	•	•
Bahamas		
Barbados		
Belize		
Brazil	•	
Canada	•	•
Chile	•	•
Colombia	•	•
Costa Rica	•	•
Dominican Republic	•	•
Ecuador	•	•
El Salvador	•	•
Honduras	•	
Jamaica		
Mexico	•	•
Panama	•	•
Paraguay	•	•
Saint Kitts and Nevis	•	•
Saint Lucia	•	•
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	•	•
Trinidad and Tobago	•	•
United States	•	•
Uruguay	•	•
Venezuela	•	•

¹ Information provided by the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations of Peru.

² It should be noted that, in August 2021, between Brazil’s response to the survey and the publication date of this Study, a new Ministry of Labor and Welfare was created in the country.

Institutionalization of the Specialized Gender Units

The Gender Affairs Division of the Office of the Prime Minister of **Trinidad and Tobago** provided for the creation of Gender Focal Points for government ministries, departments and agencies, in an effort to ensure equality of opportunities and reduce discriminatory practices. The paper established the roles, functions, and main responsibilities of the focal points, as well as the qualifications, skills, and experience they needed to have.

In September 2019, the Ministry of Public Administration of the **Dominican Republic**, the body responsible for public administration, and the Ministry for Women signed a joint resolution that established Gender Equality Units in the public sector. It stipulated the functions and structure of the units and set up a training plan for them.

Most of the countries that reported they had no gender unit within the Ministry of Labor – mainly those in the Caribbean – noted that there were other internal or external offices that supported gender mainstreaming. Bahamas reported that while the Ministry of Labor currently has no institutional mechanism for gender issues in its portfolio, in 2016, the Bureau of Women’s Affairs was expanded to become the Department of Gender and Family Affairs in an effort to ensure a more integral and participatory approach to addressing the country’s social challenges, as well as to create education, training, employment, and social justice programs for men and women. Barbados indicated that the Bureau of Gender Affairs, a separate agency, is responsible for ensuring that gender is included in all national development plans and policies to ensure gender equity and equality. Belize reported that it is a priority area and hopes that it can be put in place in the future. Saint Kitts and Nevis reported that another Ministry deals with gender affairs; similarly, Jamaica reported that there is a gender unit within the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment, and Sport. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines reported that no Ministry has labor within its main portfolio, but rather that all labor matters are handled by the Department of Labor, which is currently part of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Rural Transformation, Industry, and Labor. There is now a Gender Affairs Division, which is part of the Ministry of National Mobilization, Social Development, Family, Gender Affairs, Persons with Disabilities, and Youth.

The reason why there are no such units in some Ministries is that there is another government agency responsible for gender mainstreaming. When asked about this, some of these Ministries showed no interest in creating a gender unit, precisely because these other external bodies exist, and also because a budget and trained human resources would be required. As to the Ministries’ commitment to gender equality, the responses tend to associate it with compliance with labor laws that prohibit gender discrimination or with gender-neutral policies. This constraint on a gender approach to policies leads us to assume that no gender mainstreaming process was initiated in these Ministries by the external agencies responsible for incorporating gender in the labor field.

B

Changes noted in the scope and objectives of some mechanisms for gender mainstreaming in the Ministries of Labor

Some gender mainstreaming mechanisms have undergone changes of various types.

In Argentina, since 2015, the Gender Equity Coordinating Office merged with the Tripartite Commission of Equal Opportunities between men and women in the world of work, which has been active within the scope of the Ministry of Labor since 1998. This has implied that the objectives and functions of the Office have to be articulated with the proposals that emerge from stakeholders that are a part of the Tripartite Commission. In the organizational structure, the area went from answering to the Chief of Cabinet to becoming the Bureau for Labor Protection and Equality, which until December 2019 was a part of the Secretariat for Promotion, Protection, and Technological Change. From that date on, the functions of the Secretariat were taken up by the Under-Secretariat of Inclusion Policies in the World of Work. These functions and the lines of work carried forward include, in addition to the policies on gender, other actions such as the ones related to people with disabilities, technological change and child labor.

In Colombia, the Gender Equity Group, which had existed since 2003 as part of the Bureau for Social Promotion, became the Internal Working Group for Victims and Gender-focused Labor Equity in 2017.

In the Ministry of Labor and Social Security of Chile, the figure of the Ministerial Gender Officer that existed since 2006 was replaced by the Ministerial Adviser on Gender in the Ministerial Cabinet, who leads the Ministerial Round Table on Gender, where the ten government services that form part of the Ministry are represented. The Ministerial Adviser provides advisory services and support to the Minister’s Cabinet and the Under-Secretariats for Labor and Social Security on gender issues, coordinating and leading the design, execution, and evaluation of the Ministerial Commitments on Gender. The Adviser is also a member of the team of Cabinet Advisors, answering to the Chief Adviser, who reports directly to the Minister and Vice-Minister of Labor. The Ministerial Adviser on Gender, as part of the Cabinet advisory team, is also the lead on the subjects of human rights, migrants, and diversity.

In Ecuador, the Gender and Youth Unit was created in the Minister’s Office in 2007 as the result of a ministerial agreement. However, it was absorbed into the Bureau for Priority Groups (DAGP), which was created subsequently. Its products and services include rights, equity and gender-based technical guidelines, and criteria on labor issues for priority and/or vulnerable groups.

The DAGP is a technical bureau that handles substantive processes, which is part of the Under-Secretariat for Employment and Wages and of the Vice-Ministry of Labor and Employment. The mission of the DAGP is to develop, evaluate, and follow up on public policy, by means of regulation, participation in inter-sectoral round tables, awareness processes, and services to promote enforcement of the labor rights of vulnerable and priority populations.

In the Ministry of Labor and Social Security of El Salvador, the Unit for Gender Equity, answering to the Office of the Ministry, was created in 2012. It added to the efforts made by the Special Unit on Gender and Prevention of Discriminatory Labor Acts, which exists since 2005 and depends on the General Bureau for Labor Inspection. By the end of 2019, both units were still functional.

In Mexico, the General Bureau for Labor Equality, which dated back to 1997, became the Gender Equality Unit (UIG) in the Secretariat for Labor and Social Security (STPS) in 2018. It shares a Director with the General Bureau for Labor Inclusion and Child Labor. Thus, the Gender Equality Unit is at the same time the General Bureau for Labor Inclusion and Child Labor, which means that the two entities make use of and manage the same human, material, and financial resources to carry out their different functions.

In 2014, the Gender and Employment Commission of Panama – created in 2007 – expanded its legal framework to involve other sectors. Its name changed to become the Office of Gender and Equality of Labor Opportunities, as an advisory body answering to the Minister and providing technical advice on the promotion, design, and execution of gender-focused labor policies.

In Paraguay, as part of the process of division of the former Ministry of Justice and Labor that began in 2014 and the creation of the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security (MTESS) as an independent entity, it became clear that a specialized body was needed to deal with gender gaps in the workplace. Addressing this concern, the Bureau for the Social Promotion of Working Women, which had operated since 1971, was given the rank of General Bureau in 2015-2016 – it is currently named the General Directorate for the Promotion of Working Women –. It includes two specialized units, one dealing with programs and projects, and the other dealing with labor affairs involving working women. As the Ministry's body dealing with this issue, it answers directly to the Vice-Minister of Labor, who in turn responds to the head of the Ministry. This represented a step forward in the process of institutionalization and was accompanied by a major increase in the technical staff and an increased budget.

In the Ministry of Labor of the Dominican Republic, the Bureau for Equality of Opportunities and Non-Discrimination became a strategic axis in 2012-2016, with the goal of bringing under one roof the different areas that were working with vulnerable populations but had been dispersed among other offices of the Ministry. This Bureau's structure currently has a Unit for HIV/AIDS, a Unit on Disability, and a Unit on Diversity, all of which are visible; but the Department of Gender Equity, while still part of the structure, has become hidden in the organization chart and in the budget.

As it can be seen in some cases, the areas of responsibility of the specialized gender units have expanded, improving their position in the organizational structure of their Ministries and having a greater impact on the process of formulation of policies, programs, and projects, all of which facilitates gender mainstreaming. In other cases (Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Chile and Dominican Republic), the gender units have been combined with areas that deal with vulnerable populations. This practice carries risks to the sustainability of the gender mainstreaming process, as explained in subsection I) on strengths, weaknesses, and challenges in this section of the study.



The perceptions of the factors influencing the continued existence of the gender mechanisms within the Ministries of Labor have changed

The main factor that was perceived ten years ago as having greater weight in the creation and continued existence of the mechanisms created to institutionalize and mainstream a gender approach was the political will of the government and/or of the head of the Ministry; following this factor was compliance with international commitments on gender matters.

Along with advances in a gender perspective in society as a whole, the perception has now shifted to those factors related to the very nature of the specialized gender units themselves: importance is now given to the increasing visibility of these mechanisms, the growing level of training of their professional teams, and the organizational structure of which they have become a part.

This shift suggests that in the majority of cases, the existence of gender mechanisms in the Ministries of Labor has been successful both in terms of the institutionalization process and of gender mainstreaming. The lesser emphasis on political will in the creation and maintenance of the gender mechanisms, and the shift to the outcomes they have delivered, leads us to assume that the units have become more stable, recognized, and legitimized in their Ministries as specialized units.

This is one of the principal advances in gender mainstreaming and institutionalization seen over the decade, since it indicates that it is a process that has gathered strength and is no longer questioned.

Gender Equality Management Systems: a growing practice in the region

A review of practices in Latin America reveals a long history of developing tools for intervention in the arena of paid work, in an effort to produce changes in gender asymmetries. These practices include the Gender Equality Management Systems (GEMS), which are designed to transform organizations and break down gender inequalities within a company or organization.

Most of these experiences give awards called Gender Equality Seals when the requirements are met. The GEMS are public policies developed by the Ministries of Equality or Institutes for Women, in some cases in conjunction with the Ministries of Labor. They consist of a series of requirements, procedures, and practices in gender-focused organizational management designed to root out the practices that cause gender inequalities in the workplace.

They are therefore able to transform the management of human resources and organizational processes to ensure greater equality of opportunities, treatment, and outcomes for men and women workers (UNDP, 2014).

GEMS are implemented in eleven countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. **Costa Rica** was pioneer in an unstoppable certification career for private companies, with the Gender Equality and Equity Management System (SIGEG) in 2002. **Mexico** continued with the Gender Equality Model (MEG) in 2003; then Brazil with the Pro Gender Equality Seal, in 2005; and finally in 2009, **Chile** with the Good Labor Practices Program with Gender Equality, “Sello Iguala”; **Argentina** with the Gender Equality Model for Argentina (MEGA 2009); and **Uruguay** with the Quality Management Model with Gender Equity. In December 2019, Paraguay’s MTESS signed an agreement with UNDP to begin the process that will allow the Ministry to obtain a Gender Equality in the Public Sector Certification, and then to launch in 2021 a Certification in Gender Equality for the Private Sector.

Some examples of Gender Equality Management Systems are:

Occupational Management Equality System of Argentina (SIGECO):

It is a voluntary quality certification norm on gender equality for organizations and companies. It may apply to both the organization and its value chain. It includes criteria in accordance with the internationally recognized management system regulations, based in the conceptual framework defined by the ILO for the definition of Decent Work. SIGECO is part of the gender equality initiative of Argentina, whose objective is to reduce economic gender gaps and fuel development.

Equity Labor Seal “Equipares” of Colombia

It is a program of the Ministry of Labor of Colombia, with the support of the Presidential Counseling for Women’s Equity and the United Nations Development Programme, which certifies companies and organizations that implement effective actions to close gender gaps. It is implemented through the PHVA cycle (Plan, Do, Verify and Act), based on an Organizational Diagnosis, the elaboration of a Labor Equity with a Gender Approach Policy within companies and organizations, and the implementation of a Plan of Action aimed at closing gender gaps. Thanks to the OAS RIAL, the experience with “Equipares” was transferred to El Salvador, where the IGUAL-ES Seal was created, as detailed below.

Gender Equality Management Systems: a growing practice in the region (continued)

Mexican Standard NMX-R-025-SCFI-2015 in Labor Equality and Non-Discrimination

The Mexican Standard NMX-R-025-SCFI-2015 in Labor Equality and Non-Discrimination is a voluntary adoption mechanism to recognize enterprises that have practices in the field of labor equality and non-discrimination, in order to favor the integral development of workers.

This certification is addressed to all public, private, and social work centers of any size, sector, or activity established in Mexico. To obtain the certification, the work centers must receive a third party audit to verify that their policies and practices comply with the requirements of labor equality and non-discrimination.

Its main axes are the following: to incorporate a gender and non-discrimination perspective in recruitment, selection, mobility, and training processes; guarantee equal pay; implement actions to prevent and address workplace violence; and carry out joint responsibility actions to balance work, family, and personal life of their workers, with equal treatment and opportunities.

IGUAL-ES Seal of El Salvador

The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, in strategic alliance with the Ministry of Economy, and the Salvadoran Institute for the Development of Women have developed a Labor Equality Seal called IGUAL-ES. This program offers companies the possibility to voluntarily adopt the seal’s certification standards and move forward in the construction of equal opportunities for men and women in the labor market, allowing companies and the State to work together to achieve the goal of equality. It should be noted that El Salvador received technical advice from Colombia, through a bilateral cooperation of the OAS RIAL, to design and launch this Seal.

D

The lack of resources of the gender mechanisms continues to be one of their main weaknesses

Even though gender mechanisms have been able to achieve a better position within the ministries, the lack of resources continues to be seen as one of the threats to their continued existence. When asked about the source of the units’ budgets, most of the few (six) countries that answered this question stated that they had their own budget, but that it was less than 0.1% of the Ministry’s overall budget. Also noted was a significant drop in sources of external financing, particularly international funding. One exception is the General Bureau for the Promotion of Working Women of the MTESS of Paraguay, which has international support for specific initiatives, with a Ministry budget solely for staff and basic operating costs. Another form of alternative funding is found in the Ministry of Labor of Chile, which has entered into partnerships with civil society organizations that have committed funds for carrying out specific projects.

In regards to staffing, in most of the countries that responded to this question, the units have more staff than a decade ago (Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador,³ Panama, Paraguay and Dominican Republic). In two countries – El Salvador and the United States – the staffing was lower vis-à-vis 2009 levels, while in Chile and Costa Rica there was no change.

Table 3

Functions of the specialized gender units									
Country	Research and/or studies	Drafting of regulations or standards	Development of policy proposals	Cross-cutting support to Ministry units	Formulation of projects	Evaluation of projects	Production of statistics	Dissemination	Training/awareness
Argentina*		•	•	•	•	•		•	•
Bahamas						•			•
Canada*				•	•			•	•
Chile*	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Colombia	•		•	•	•			•	•
Costa Rica	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Dominican Republic*	•		•	•			•	•	•
Ecuador*		•	•	•	•			•	•
El Salvador				•	•	•	•	•	•
Grenada	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Mexico*			•	•				•	•
Panama	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Paraguay		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Trinidad and Tobago	•		•	•	•	•		•	•
United States*	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

³ It is not clear whether Colombia and Ecuador have more staff specifically in the area of gender because they were reorganized into other issues.

*** The gender units added other functions, in addition to those specified in the Questionnaire:**

Argentina	Tripartite Commission on Equal Opportunities, social dialogue mechanism that functions without interruption since 1998 and is made of trade unions, labor unions, business associations, and government institutions.
Canada	Develop tools and guidelines to help Departmental staff use the GBA+ in their work
Chile	Join the Committee of Technical Advisors on the Government’s Gender Parity Initiative
Dominican Republic	Inter-agency coordination with the Cabinet for the coordination of social policies (PROSOLI), with the Ministry for Women, and with the National Council for the Ageing (CONAPE)
Ecuador	Advice on labor rights, equality, and non-discrimination. Formulation of proposals for cooperative agreements with other institutions
Mexico	Promote gender mainstreaming throughout the planning, programming, execution, and evaluation of programs, projects, regulations, actions, and public policies of all administrative units and decentralized agencies of the Secretariat, and monitor and check compliance; coordinate its activities to implement a gender perspective and a substantive equality approach with administrative units and decentralized bodies of the Secretariat for Labor and Social Security; coordinate with the Program and Budget Bureau in reviewing the Secretariat’s budget to ensure that it is prepared with a gender perspective in mind; and participate in monitoring the resources assigned to the Secretariat for equality between men and women, earmarked in the Federal Budget.
United States	The Women’s Bureau develops policies and standards and conducts inquiries to safeguard the interests of working women; to advocate for their equality and economic security for themselves and their families; and to promote quality work environments. The Women’s Bureau’s activities include grant-making; advising and cooperating with internal and external organizations to support projects efforts that are pursuing common objectives; researching and collecting promising practices, testimonies and/or reports, pertinent statistics and facts on women workers; providing technical assistance, and analyzing proposed legislation and regulations.

As noted in 2009, the resources assigned to the units are still not enough to match the scale of the tasks undertaken. This shortage of funds is also a matter of concern to all of the Machineries for the Advancement of Women that replied to the questionnaire, seeing it as one of the greatest challenges for promoting gender institutionalization within Ministries of Labor.

This is probably a remnant from the time when the gender units were created, when they addressed many tasks with a very tight, sometimes non-existent budget. However, these tasks were executed with great enthusiasm by the people in charge, wanting to make these long-desired units fully operational.

E

The inter-agency network of the specialized gender units continues to be a strength in their institutionalization

Since their inception, the specialized gender units of the Ministries of Labor have developed significant ties to other stakeholders. Their relationships with the various offices of the Ministries of Labor have prevented them from being siloed into walled-off units, and this has enabled them to develop a more comprehensive approach to incorporating a gender perspective. Many of the relationships inside the Ministry are the result of the gender and labor affairs training and sensitization in which these units have engaged.

In all of the countries, there is a close link with the National Machineries for the Advancement of Women (NMAW, Ministry, Gender Bureau). The link is generally the result of legislation or rule-making, and takes the form of joint programs and actions, although the relationship is predominantly through training and sensitization activities.

According to the information provided by the NMAW about their views on the gender units in the Ministries, they indicated that the relationship between them was very good, as was the progress the units had made in the past ten years, while giving very high marks to the advances that the Ministries of Labor have made in gender mainstreaming.

In the collection of information for this study, interesting experiences of coordination between the NMAW and the Ministries were found, such as the following: the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations of Peru, through the General Directorate of Gender Mainstreaming (specifically, the Directorate of Sectoral and Interinstitutional Articulation), provided technical assistance in the composition of the work tables of the entire sector (Ministries of Labor, Social Security, and Health, as well as the National Superintendence of Labor Inspection) and supported each group to prepare annual action plans.

In Argentina, the National Institute for Women (INAM)⁴ considers that the main challenge to achieve an effective mainstreaming of a gender approach in the Ministry of Labor is to maintain an interrelation between the two institutions. The Equal Opportunity Plan is a fundamental tool in this direction. The Salvadoran Institute for the Advancement of Women (ISDEMU) affirms that the work that has been carried out with the staff of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare lays the foundations for progress in gender mainstreaming.

⁴ In December 2019, the INAM was transformed into the Ministry of Women, Gender, and Diversity. The policy lines developed by the INAM are being re-designed.

Agreement between the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, the National Institute of Women and the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination of Mexico

On September 12, 2014 the Secretariat for Labor and Social Welfare of Mexico signed an action cooperation agreement with the National Institute for Women and the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination to coordinate their work to prevent and eliminate discrimination.

It sets the requirements for government, private and social workplaces, regardless of size or activity they are engaged in, to include and implement practices on equality at work and non-discrimination in their management and human resources processes in order to enhance worker development.

Its areas for evaluation include:

- Incorporating a gender perspective in their recruitment, selection, promotion, and training processes, and ensuring wage equality.
- Taking action to prevent violence in the workplace.
- Implementing good practices in the area of joint responsibility in work, family, and personal life, with equal treatment and equal opportunities.

In general, the inter-agency network set up in the ministries examined is comprised of a broad range of stakeholders from different government offices, people from the private business sector, workers, civil society organizations, the media, and international organizations.

The creation of a gender network within the ministries has proven to be one of the most effective mechanisms for gender mainstreaming. Gender commissions, committees, or councils in the different areas of the Ministry, coordinated by the specialized unit, provide differing views about how to address the process and how to disseminate and evaluate it. A gender network was created and is coordinated by the specialized gender units in the ministries of countries such as Canada, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United States. The creation and consolidation of Tripartite Commissions, comprised of government, employers and workers, is considered an advancement on gender mainstreaming in national policies and programs. It is not possible to advance on employment matters without the involvement of social actors.

Table 4

Inter-Agency links of the specialized gender units of the Ministries of Labor 2009-2019

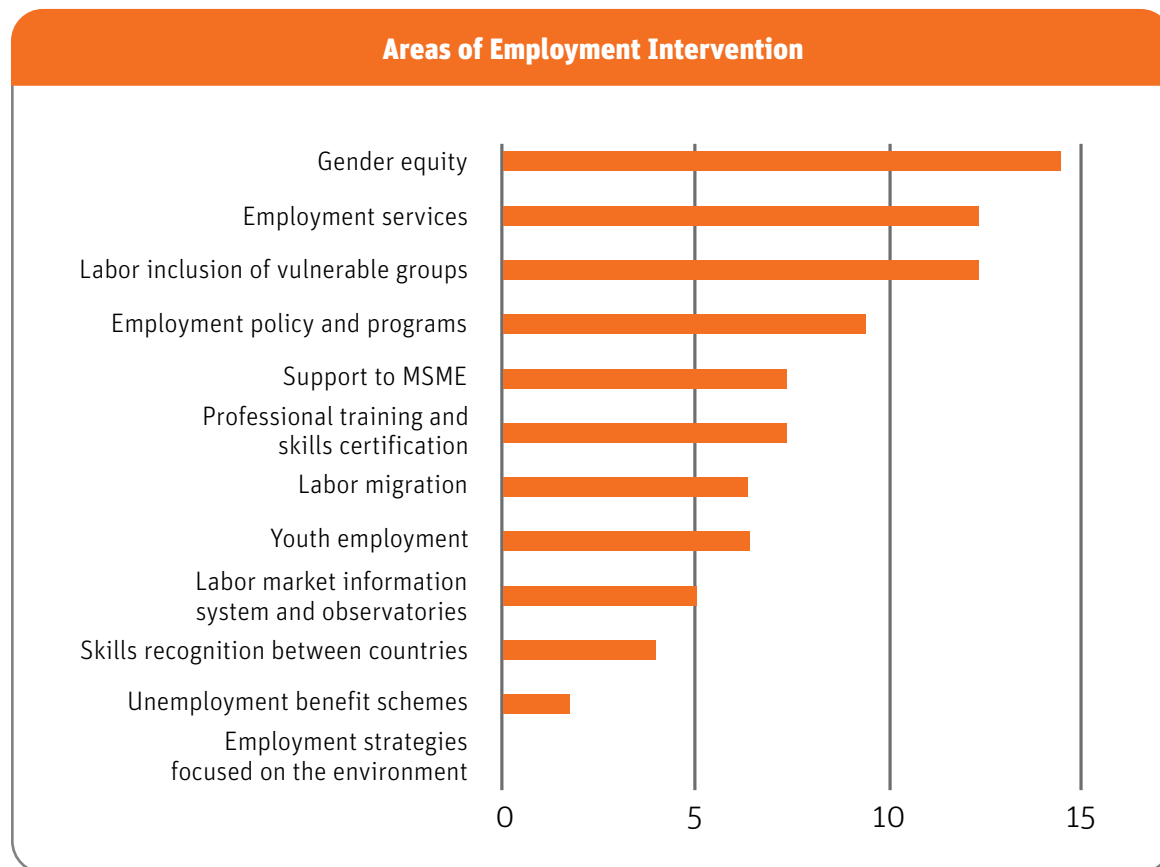
Country	Year	Other Ministry Departments	National Machinery for Gender Affairs	Other Government Offices	Entrepreneurs	Workers	Civil society organizations	Media	International organizations
Antigua and Barbuda	2009	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	2019		•						
Argentina	2009	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	2019	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Bahamas	2009	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	2019	•							
Canada	2009	•	•	•					
	2019	•	•	•					
Chile	2009	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	2019	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Colombia	2009	•	•	•		•	•	•	•
	2019	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Costa Rica	2009	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	2019	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
Ecuador	2009	•		•			•		•
	2019	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
El Salvador	2009	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	2019	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
United States	2009	•		•	•	•	•	•	•
	2019	•		•	•	•	•	•	•
Grenada	2009				•	•	•		
	2019	•	•		•	•	•		•
Mexico	2009	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	2019	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Panama	2009	•	•						
	2019	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Paraguay	2009		•	•	•	•	•	-	•
	2019		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Dominican Republic	2009	•	•						•
	2019	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Trinidad and Tobago	2009								
			•	•					

F

The work of the specialized gender units has diversified

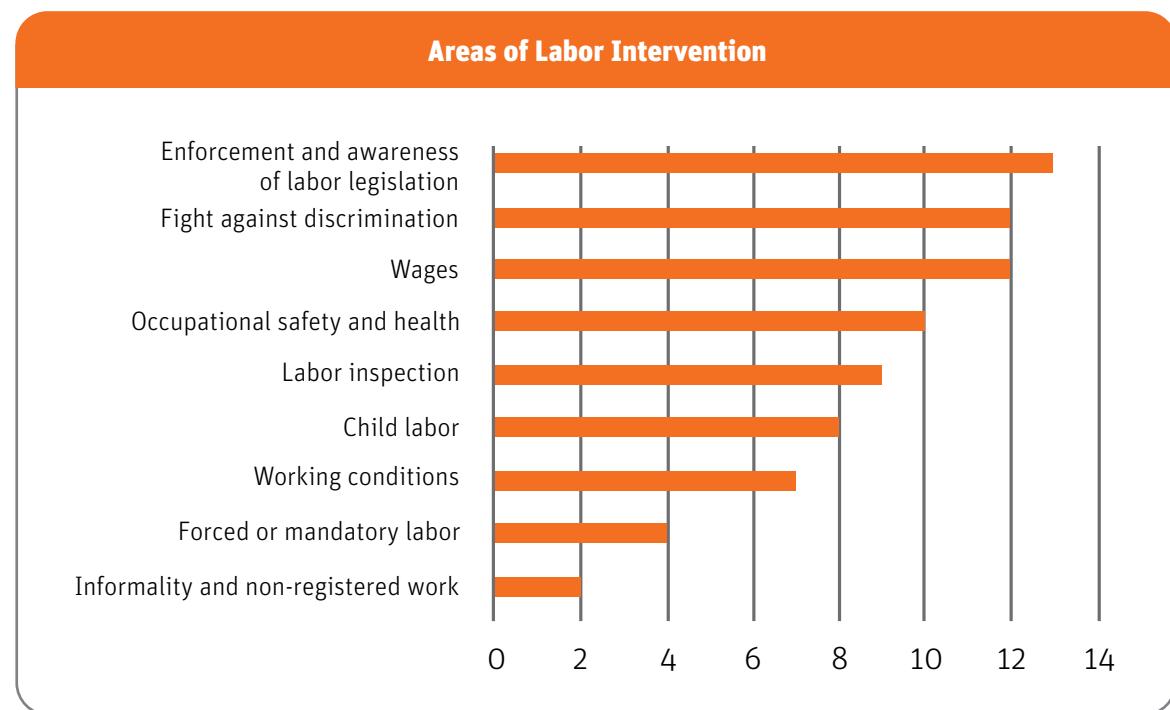
Ten years ago, the work of the specialized gender units in the Ministries was primarily directed to raising awareness, training, and holding workshops and events, and, in general, to activities characteristic of a start-up phase where the first order of business was to break down any resistance to incorporating a gender approach into the Ministry’s work. An interesting shift has now taken place in the activities undertaken within the Ministries.

The units provide assistance to the different areas within the Ministry on the inclusion of a gender perspective. Several units mentioned the labor inspectorate as a priority area for assistance and training, given that in their daily duties they may observe situations of discrimination, sexual and labor harassment, gender violence in the workplace, among other central issues for equality and non-discrimination in the workplace. The Guide on Labor Inspection with a Gender Perspective from the Ministry of Labor of Costa Rica, developed in collaboration with the National Women’s Institute of Costa Rica (INAMU), is worth mentioning.



In the area of labor, the efforts of gender units are focused on compliance with and dissemination of labor laws, wages, and the fight against discrimination. In the area of Employment, the units address gender equity and entrance of vulnerable populations into the workforce. Regarding the latter, the importance for gender units to provide accompaniment and training to employment managers and officers from employment services in general, on topics such as non-discrimination in access to employment and gender equality, was revealed.

As to internal management, the functions of all the gender units include coordination with other agencies. This change is seen as an important step forward in fulfilling their role in gender institutionalization and gender mainstreaming in their ministries. It also shows that these units have engaged in a process of legitimization and developed a level of maturity.



In this regard, the work of the following units stand out: the Unit for Gender Equity of the MTSS of El Salvador, whose activities cover all of the areas that come together in the gender mainstreaming process; the Gender-Focused Workplace Equity Group of the Ministry of Labor of Ecuador, which explicitly mentions mainstreaming gender into public policy as one of its activities; and the Unit for Gender Equality of the STPS of Mexico, which coordinates the Secretariat’s gender certification process, and conducts the supervisory audit of Mexican Law NMX-R-025-SCFI-2015 on Equality at Work and Non-Discrimination, activities that ensure gender mainstreaming in the institutions.

External activities continue to focus on the work of dissemination, training, and participation in seminars and workshops. However, El Salvador and Mexico noted their participation in gender equality certification programs in private enterprise in their countries. These facts allow us to conclude that the structure of the gender mechanisms inside the Ministries of Labor has been enhanced.

Since the mission of the specialized gender units is what drives their action, the countries were asked again to report on the units’ missions. The reference to gender mainstreaming is retained in the ministries of the four countries that had reported it earlier (Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Panama), to which are now added the ministries of El Salvador, Mexico, Grenada, and Trinidad and Tobago. The gender units reported that they had contributed to mainstreaming gender in the development of policies, programs, and projects, but did not refer to their role of pushing for the organizational and cultural changes that are needed if there is to be effective gender mainstreaming in the ministries. This gap in the mission statements is probably related to the incomplete understanding of gender mainstreaming that was prevalent at the beginning of the process; today, that more limited vision is giving way to looking at the need to make substantive changes not only in agency policies, but also in the organizational culture.

When asked about the challenges they see in the organizational culture, a large percentage of ministries – including those of Argentina, Costa Rica, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, and Panama – said that there was a need to push forward with gender mainstreaming throughout all of the Ministry’s work. The MTSS of El Salvador monitors and evaluates the implementation of the Institutional Gender Policy, and its functions include providing technical support for mainstreaming a gender approach in the Ministry, and from time to time, evaluating the Unit’s progress and achievements.



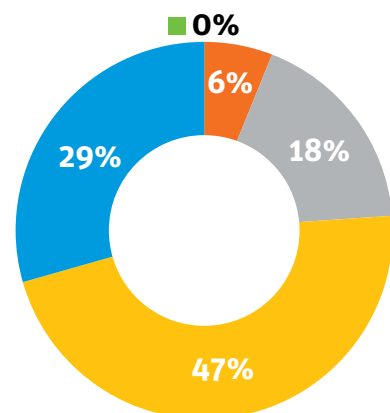
There is a positive perception of the advances in the gender mainstreaming process within the Ministries of Labor

As was said earlier, there are many sides to gender mainstreaming, one of which is to push for changes in the organizational culture.

The units were asked about their perception of the staff’s commitment to implementing a gender policy in their institution. More than 75% of the answers were “quite a bit” (47%) and “to a great extent” (29%). These responses are very consistent with the considerable amount of training and sensitization that these units have been doing in the ministries since they were created.

Staff Commitment to Implement a Gender Equality Policy

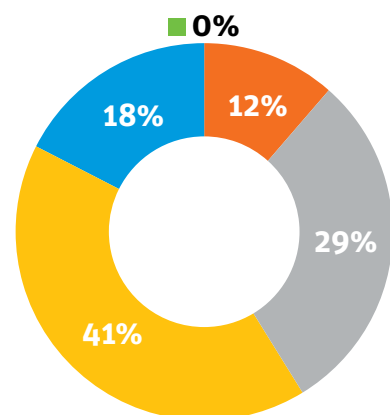
■ Not at all ■ A little ■ To a moderate extent ■ Quite a bit ■ To a great extent



The Units were also asked about the staff’s knowledge that would enable them to incorporate a gender approach into their work. This question provided information on the skills needed for mainstreaming gender into policies, programs, and services, and is related to the processes that are occurring in most of the Ministries of Labor concerning the design, monitoring, and evaluation of labor policies from a gender perspective. Around 41% thought that the staff had little or moderate knowledge of the topic, while 59% felt that the level of knowledge was “quite a bit” (41%) or “to a great extent” (18%). This percentage of people who incorporate a gender approach into their work is fairly high; however, it opens up an opportunity for continuing to work on a topic that is essential to the success of the gender mainstreaming process underway.

Staff’s Knowledge to Work with a Gender Approach

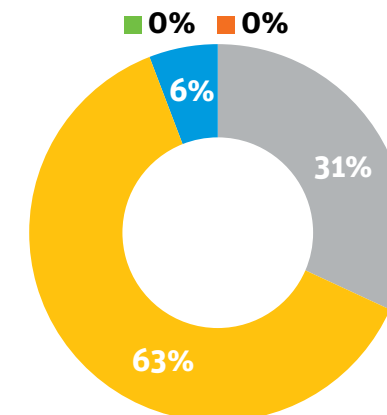
■ Not at all ■ A little ■ To a moderate extent ■ Quite a bit ■ To a great extent



We asked about the perception of the evolution of the quality of the workplace environment for women in the Ministry over the last ten years. On this point, some 63% felt that it had improved quite a bit, with 6% saying “to a great extent”. The remaining third thought that the workplace environment for women had changed only moderately.

The Work Environment Has Improved Over the Past Ten Years

■ Not at all ■ A little ■ To a moderate extent ■ Quite a bit ■ To a great extent



It is notable that there were no responses under “not at all” or “a little”. These perceptions are very revealing of the progress that has been achieved in the process of mainstreaming gender within the Ministries of Labor.

When other aspects are considered, such as whether attention is paid to gender-sensitive language and images in the documents produced by the Ministry, the Units’ responses paint a very positive picture.

Table 5

Progress Indicators In The Incorporation Of A Gender Approach In The Ministries Of Labor			
Country	Use of gender-sensitive language and images	Gender-focused staff induction	Inclusion of gender in the budget
Argentina			
Canada			•
Chile	•		•
Colombia	•		•
Costa Rica	•	•	
Dominican Republic	•	•	

Progress Indicators In The Incorporation Of A Gender Approach In The Ministries Of Labor (continued)			
Country	Use of gender-sensitive language and images	Gender-focused staff induction	Inclusion of gender in the budget
Ecuador	•	•	
El Salvador	•	•	•
Grenada		•	•
Mexico	•		
Panama	•		•
Paraguay	•	•	•
Trinidad and Tobago			
United States	•	•	•

Reviewing the Ministries’ web pages, what was seen this time, unlike what was observed a decade ago when almost no references were found to the gender issue, is that the issue is now visible in a number of Ministries: The Ministry of Labor of Colombia has the “Gender-focused Labor Equity,” which describes the legal framework that sets out the Ministry of Labor’s obligations on promoting the human rights of women in the workplace, and presents the objectives, functions, and areas of Gender-focused Labor Equity. A second example is the Ministry of Labor of Chile’s webpage, where under the tab “Social Benefits” the webpage shows the “Gender Agenda” detailing the commitments emanating from Government Program 2018–2022, the Gender Agenda, and Ministerial Commitments for the same period. In Costa Rica, the Gender Equity Unit of the Ministry of Labor plays a prominent role as the advisory body on gender issues, and this is reflected in the Ministry’s webpage. In the Ministry of Labor of Paraguay, there is no direct mention of the gender area, but it is found in the organization chart of the Bureau for the Social Promotion of Working Women, which answers to the Vice-Minister of Labor.

The Department of Gender Equity, which is part of the Bureau for Equal Opportunity and Non-Discrimination of the Ministry of Labor of the Dominican Republic, appears as one of its Bureaus and Offices, but with no description of its functions or objectives. The STPS of Mexico has a link to Mexican Law NMX-R-025-SCFI-2015 on Equality in the Workplace and Non-Discrimination.

There have also been very satisfactory outcomes with regard to inclusion of a gender perspective in the staff induction process, as an indicator of gender sensitivity in the area of human resources.

Lastly, incorporation of a gender perspective in the preparation of the budget has been a significant achievement in a number of countries, which means it has permeated, on the one hand, the political will, and on the other hand, the

financial and planning areas. The budget is basic to the application of gender mainstreaming, inasmuch as it can reorganize the Ministry’s procedures to include the goal of gender equality in all of its work areas.

Many of the gender units have diversified their actions into public policies and evaluation of those policies, and into the design and use of sex-disaggregated data, and gender indicators in the labor market. We also note that many Ministries of Labor have incorporated the gender variable in developing their operating plans.

This is a substantial difference from what was seen in 2009, when it was reported that the programs being carried out by the gender units were not in line with the Ministry’s definition of gender mainstreaming, but rather “mostly meant direct execution of programs to improve women’s living conditions,” or programs that responded more to the idea of women and work, rather than gender mainstreaming.

Table 6

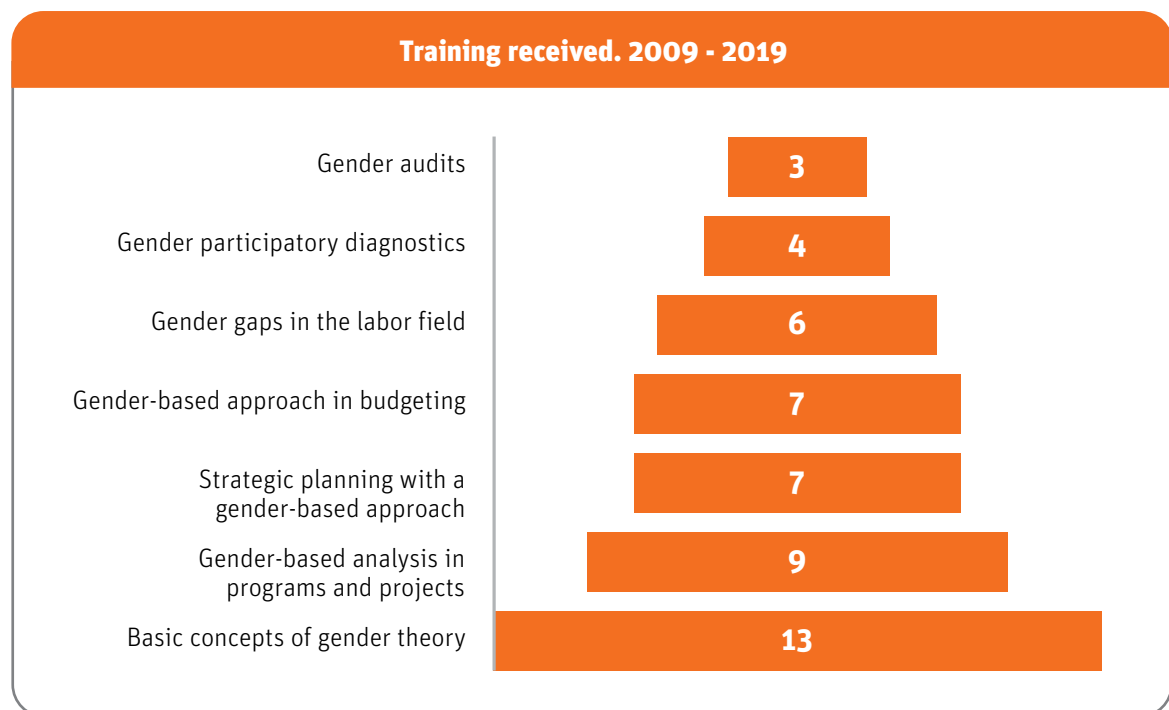
Use of gender analysis tools in the cycle of formulation, evaluation, and monitoring of public policies and operating plans				
Country	Gender equality objectives in annual operating plans	Use of sex-disaggregated data in policy design	Use of sex-disaggregated data in policy evaluation	Use of gender indicators in monitoring and evaluation
Argentina		•	•	•
Bahamas				•
Canada	•	•	•	•
Chile	•	•	•	•
Colombia	•			•
Costa Rica	•	•	•	•
Dominican Republic	•	•	•	•
Ecuador	•	•	•	
El Salvador	•	•	•	•
Grenada	•	•	•	•
Mexico	•	•	•	•
Panama	•	•	•	•
Paraguay	•	•	•	•
Trinidad and Tobago		•	•	•
United States	•	•	•	•



The demand for training aims at developing capacities to strengthen the role of the specialized gender units

Except for three countries (Bahamas, Colombia, and Saint Kitts and Nevis), those specialized gender units that responded to the question about their participation in gender training received instruction in a number of subjects to help improve their performance as promoters of gender equality in their ministries. The different agencies have responded to the demand for training raised a decade ago, which was concentrated on gender-focused strategic planning and gender-focused budgets.

Regarding other types of training received, most of them are related to violence (violence against women, abuse, regulations and good institutional practices to eradicate violence against women), sexual and workplace harassment, and national and international legislation on gender. Canada reported university courses such as Women’s Studies, Indigenous Studies, Social Intervention, and Sex Studies.



The current demand for training varies considerably and is linked to how the specialized gender units evolved. The demand is now centered on building skills that will help support gender mainstreaming in the Ministries. Both in 2009 and now, the demand for training in some areas remains, as is the case with strategic planning or gender-focused methodological tools; but a decade later, the demand is much more for specific tools that are related to their mission and that allow them to provide better assistance to the different areas of the Ministry, like gender analysis in programs and projects, evaluation of programs with a gender approach, or gender diagnostics. In this regard, it is worth noting the importance of having training and knowledge on the substantive areas of the Ministries; for example, social security, employment policies, and collective bargaining, among others. Specific topics like the inclusion of a gender perspective in the identification of infractions by the labor inspectorate, and emerging issues, such as violence in the workplace, sexual and labor harassment and discrimination, have also been added to training demands.

- Principal demands for training reported in the study**
- Gender audits
 - Gender assessments
 - Gender-focused strategic planning
 - Gender gaps in the labor field
 - National and international legislation
 - Gender analysis in proposed legislation and project proposals
 - Evaluation of policies and programs
 - Development of indicators
 - Programs on employability for the most vulnerable sectors
 - Preparation of gender-focused procedures
 - Gender mainstreaming in public administration
 - Strategies to overcome obstacles and resistance to mainstreaming
 - Sensitization and tools in labor inspection to identify gender violations
 - Gender violence in the workplace

I

Specialized gender units: strengths, threats, and challenges

A variety of factors have collaborated to ensure the creation or continued existence of the gender units in the Ministries. The first of these are the advances of the gender perspective in society as a whole, and in national and international law.

For some Ministries, political support and the positioning of the Unit at the highest level were important to the continued existence of the Unit, along with the support and advice received from the National Machineryes for the Advancement of Women, and the high level of gender-focused training in legal and social matters.

Many of the specialized gender units said that one of their strengths was the high level of qualifications and sensitization to gender among their staff. This is reflected in different ways; for example, for the United States Department of Labor (DOL) it is seen in its strategic capacities for research and analysis.

Some countries associate their strengths with the existence of machinery to help them in their work, such as an Institutional Policy (Costa Rica), a Plan of Action (Argentina), or mechanisms such as the Strategic Institutional Plan, the Annual Plan of Operations of the Ministry of Labor, and PLANEG II of the Ministry for Women (Dominican Republic).

The units' positioning in the organizational structure is highlighted as a strength in the case of Costa Rica, Paraguay, Dominican Republic, and Mexico, where the units are located in the organizational structure in positions that are very helpful for them to perform their functions.

As to the perceived threats to achieving expected outcomes, the units mention budget shortages, a shortage of resources in general, and changes in government priorities or changes in administration. Political will and internal resistance to the gender issues that were cited a decade ago as the main threats are no longer paramount, which represents a notable advance.

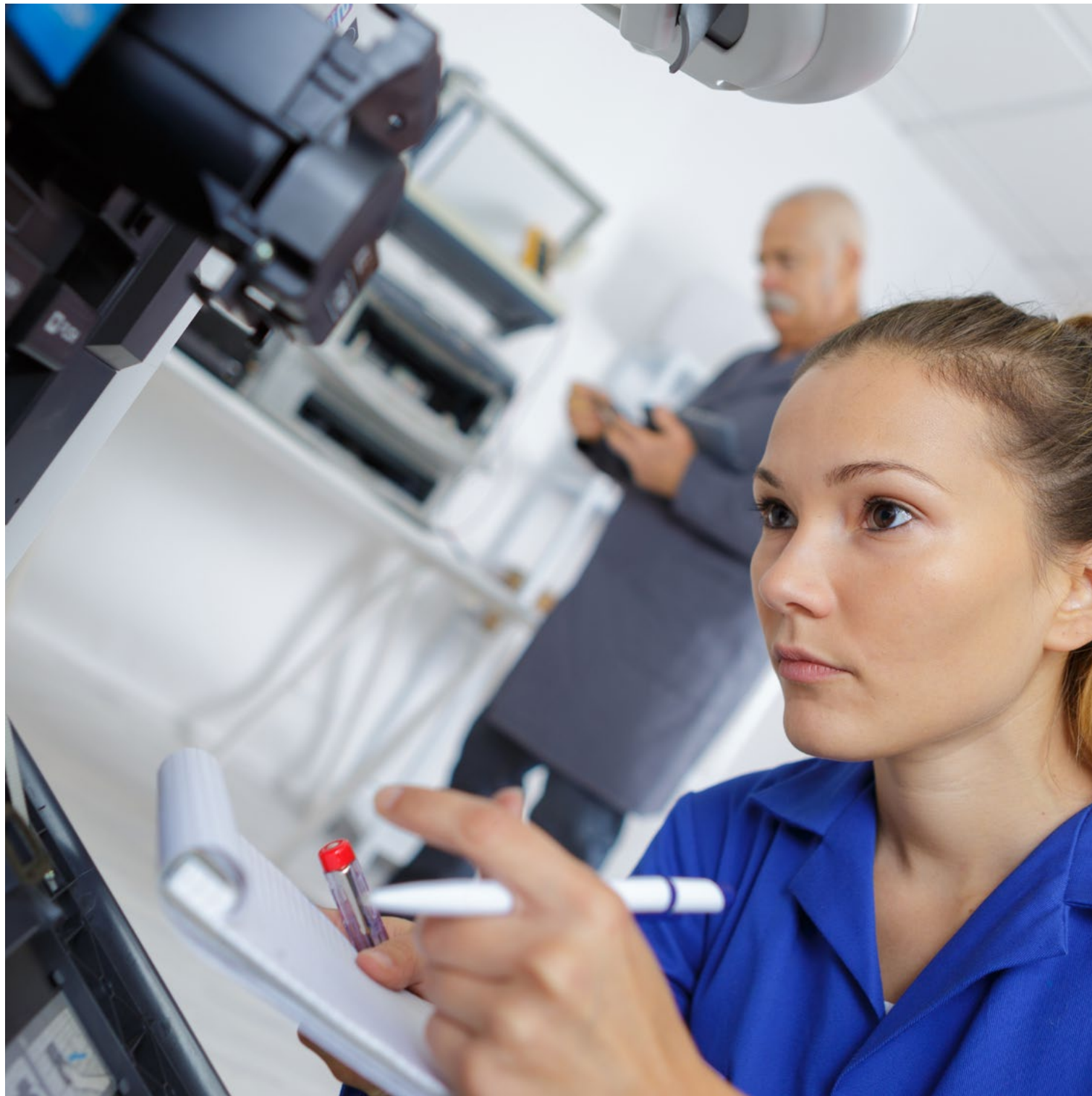
The challenges identified by the units clearly show that their interests are focused on strengthening the gender mainstreaming process underway and ensuring equal opportunities in fields inside the Ministry. Most of them focus on ensuring that the gender perspective is established throughout the Ministry's work, insisting on the need to incorporate it into the planning, execution, and evaluation of programs, projects, regulations, actions, and public policies of all of the administrative units, and to monitor it and ensure compliance. There is significant interest in obtaining gender-focused budgets.

The units also refer to cultural changes such as the use of inclusive language and openness to emerging issues that had not been central to the labor arena but that now occupy a dominant place, such as violence in the workplace, sexual and workplace harassment, and discrimination.

A major challenge is the tendency to combine existing gender units with structures or offices that deal with vulnerable populations. This could run the risk of making existing gender gaps in the workplace invisible and detracting from the goal of gender mainstreaming in order to focus on vulnerable persons – which would, supposedly, include women.

This idea means, on the one hand, suggesting that gender equals “women”, and on the other, viewing all women as a vulnerable population group, whereas vulnerability tends to come from the intersection of different inequalities; thus, being a woman is one factor in determining vulnerability, but not the only one. Thinking of women as a vulnerable group therefore requires some clarification of the very concept of vulnerability and of the concept of women as a social group.

In addition, since a gender unit is not an area that has human, material, and financial resources of its own, it may find itself subject to a division of resources and whether they are sufficient to enable it to carry out all of its functions. Equally, the broad scope of the responsibilities of the areas with which it shares resources involves setting priorities, which may presume a limitation on the gender unit's actions.



findings



Final considerations: Main findings

Over the ten years since the first study was conducted, we have seen major progress in the institutionalization of a gender approach in the Ministries of Labor of the Americas. First, the importance of gender institutionalization is today largely accepted. If a decade ago, sensitization and awareness raising took precedence in the effort to position the topic within the Ministries of Labor, today we see a different picture, in which the concern is how to strengthen and enhance gender mainstreaming in the policies, programs, projects, products, and services of the Ministries of Labor, and in the organizational culture as a whole. Second, what could be called a maturation of the specialized gender units has taken place. This can be seen in the different areas they are dealing with, and the objectives, priorities, and challenges they identify in moving forward.

The initial study found that some units were just beginning to come into existence along with others that had existed for a longer time; but, regardless of their duration, they were characterized by a rather incomplete understanding of their objectives with regard to gender mainstreaming in their own ministries. Thus, a decade ago, we concluded that “in many cases, specialized gender units have become, in practice, women’s affairs offices tending to operate in isolation, implementing projects for women and mostly focused on education or training.”¹ Today, we see a major shift in these units, both in the way in which they have been incorporated into the Ministries and in their mission and objectives.

¹ The Institutionalization of a Gender Approach in the Ministries of Labor of the Americas. Organization of American States. Washington, D.C., 2006.

The conclusions that can be extracted from this study include both, advances in the gender institutionalization and mainstreaming processes, as well as identification of areas that have lagged behind.

1. The gender units in the Ministries of Labor have become stronger and have demonstrated progress in how they have been incorporated into the institutions. They have achieved a greater impact on the Ministry's work, and consequently, greater visibility in the institution.
2. In most of the specialized units, gender mainstreaming has become a strategic action objective, displacing the paramount attention to awareness-raising and training activities that prevailed a decade ago.
3. The incorporation of a gender perspective in the policies, programs, and projects of the Ministries of Labor is increasingly dealt with by the specialized gender units in their work. Most make use of sex-disaggregated data and gender indicators in the design and evaluation of policies. Few ministries still develop projects targeted at specific groups of women in order to improve their living conditions (which is what was seen ten years ago), rather than taking cross-cutting actions to incorporate a gender perspective into policies, programs, and projects.
4. The gender units within the Ministries of Labor are recognized and legitimized as specialized units with responsibilities in gender affairs. This has been influenced by the application of a gender mainstreaming strategy, the development of policies on equality in the workplace, the organizational structure into which they were incorporated, and the increasingly higher level of training of the units' professional teams.
5. The institutional gender commissions within the Ministries of Labor and inter-institutional work, particularly with National Machineries for the Advancement of Women (NMAW), are very valuable in advancing gender mainstreaming. Also, they contribute to attenuate the weaknesses of gender units. It is also recognized that Tripartite Gender Commissions, formed by government, workers and employers, are effective mechanisms and must be further promoted in the region.
6. Generally speaking, the gender units' mission statements do not include their roles of pushing organizational and cultural change in order to ensure effective gender mainstreaming in the Ministries of Labor. This gap in their mission statements is probably related to the incomplete view of gender mainstreaming that was prevalent at the beginning of the process and that influenced its progress. Gender sensitization and training constituted the predominant strategy for promoting a culture of equality, but did not go hand in hand with other actions in the areas of human resources or communications that could promote equal opportunities in areas such as access, staff promotions, measures to achieve a work-life balance, and the use of inclusive language, which can truly make an impact on changes in the organizational culture.
7. There continue to be subregional differences in the progress toward gender institutionalization and mainstreaming. Although the creation of focal points in two Ministries of Labor in the Caribbean is recognized as a significant milestone, the lack of specialized gender units in the Ministries of Labor seems to have resulted in their less than successful ability to introduce a gender perspective into all of the areas of the ministries. This gap is largely due to the structure of the National Machineries for the Advancement of Women (Gender Bureaus) in the region, and to the placement of lead agencies on gender in Ministries that are not necessarily within the sphere of action of the Ministries of Labor. Budgetary and trained personnel restrictions were also mentioned as one of the reasons for not having chosen that option.
8. There is a tendency to combine gender units with areas that are focused on vulnerable populations. As stated earlier, by looking at women as a vulnerable group, the gender specifics of more than half the population become invisible, and this entails the risk of thinking of them as beneficiaries rather than as rights holders who are empowered to demand their rights. Administratively, when their material and financial resources are shared, the priority given to each of the issues that are grouped together will depend on internal factors not necessarily associated to gender goals.
9. Budget shortages continue to be one of the principal threats perceived by the gender units to fulfill their activities. They are even linked to factors that might threaten their continued existence, or at the very least, the performance of their functions. Paradoxically, most of the units occupy a position in the ministry hierarchy that is strategic enough to enable them to move ahead with gender mainstreaming, given that they are very close to the decision-making levels; however, their limited budgets and staff do not reflect the position they reached.
10. It was not found – at least in the information received – that the specialized gender units often conduct any studies or research. If true, attention should be paid to this issue, since it is important to produce information in order to be able to influence policy formulation and detect new problems and gender inequities in the workplace related to changing social dynamics.
11. The activities of the gender units reflect the changes that have taken place. From a strong emphasis on sensitization and training in accordance with the initial need to overcome resistance, they have now expanded to include activities such as dissemination of and compliance with labor laws, wages, and fighting discrimination. This change is seen as an important step forward in carrying out their role of gender institutionalization and gender mainstreaming in their ministries.
12. Perceptions about the gender mainstreaming and institutionalization processes are positive. It is expressed in the staff commitment to implement a gender policy, the willingness of the staff who have been trained in the subject, and the improvement in the working environment experienced by women.
13. A decade ago, political will and internal resistance to the gender issue were reported as the main threats to the continued existence of the gender units. Today, the main threats are the shortage of funds and changes in priorities as the result of changes in direction of different governments.

During the Hemispheric Dialogue to advance the institutionalization of gender in Ministries of Labor in November 2020, participants shared the current situation and emerging needs of gender units, while the

findings of this study were presented. A wide range of proposals were put forward to improve on progress made and deal with the new demands caused by the pandemic.

For this reason, before delving into recommendations, it is important to focus on the main results from the Hemispheric Dialogue, attended by delegations from 30 Ministries of Labor of the Americas, represented by the Directors and heads of gender units.

The delegations agreed on the difficult situation experienced by women in the labor market, since their unemployment, inactivity and informality levels have deepened due to the COVID-19 pandemic and acknowledge the widening of gender gaps in the region. Similarly, there was an enriching exchange on different programs and initiatives to address women issues in general and some other groups' issues in particular, in addition to recent developments in gender mainstreaming within the Ministries.

During the Dialogue, a series of live surveys were carried out to learn about participants' experiences and visions on the role and preparation of gender units in the Ministries of Labor to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

The first question was about the extent to which gender-differentiated impacts were considered in the Ministries' responses to the health and economic crisis. Almost 20% of participants reckoned gender-differentiated impact was taken seriously into account in their Ministries responses to the crisis. However, the majority (60%) believed that measures' gender impact was little or barely considered. Only 5% of gender units felt that gender impact was not taken into account.

The second question was related to the way in which gender units participated in the definition or execution of response

measures to the pandemic. Consistent with the previous question, gender units' participation came to about half (51%) for some or moderate influence; those that considered to have actively participated reached 17% and, same as with the previous question, only 5% did not participate in the definition of these measures.

When analyzing the answers to both questions, it can be inferred that about 18% of the gender units that responded were seriously involved in the decisions made by their Ministries; about half made a moderate contribution and 5% felt excluded from decision-making on the matter. This means that more than a third of the gender units or areas of the Ministries represented in the survey were moderately or seriously involved in the response measures to the COVID-19 crisis.

The third question inquired into the perception of the gender units' preparation to inform the response measures to the pandemic from a gender perspective. In this case, about a third (31%) felt the units to be well-prepared; 43% reckoned they were "a little" prepared, whereas 20% considered they were little prepared and 5% felt they were ill-prepared.

Regarding the group that believed they were well-prepared (31%), this percentage is superior to that of the units that felt they were seriously involved in the decision-making from a gender perspective (17%). This may suggest that, in part, a percentage of the gender units did not participate in the decision-making despite feeling they were sufficiently prepared. Reasons for this may vary, including a weak political will to integrate a gender approach and a neutral vision from Ministry authorities about the policies' impact. It would also be important to delve into the specific actions carried out by gender units to make themselves heard in the decision-making process.

As with the previous questions, there is still a 5% outside of the decision-making, which, in this case, matches the perception of a lack of preparation to face the health and economic crisis from a gender perspective. These units should be identified to provide them with specialized support.

The answers to the live surveys, as well as the interventions during the Hemispheric Dialogue, denote that the presence and

involvement of the gender units have been diverse. It is essential to restate the importance of maintaining fluent communication with gender units and of advancing towards the identification of their needs and address them permanently, so that they can continue consolidating the integration of a gender perspective into the measures taken by Ministries of Labor, especially now that foundations have to be laid to ensure a gender-equal recovery.



recommendations

7

Recommendations and future cooperation and training activities

As noted, the changes that have taken place in the Ministries of Labor since 2009 with regards to the process of gender mainstreaming and institutionalization have been significant, and in general, highly positive.

A decade ago, some specialized gender units created in the ministries were just beginning work, in some cases rather timidly; but today, they have been able to legitimize themselves and strengthen their mission in key areas of the process of mainstreaming gender into the formulation of policies, programs, and projects of the Ministries of Labor. These units have not weakened or disappeared (except in two countries), but rather became stronger institutionally, and their continued existence is no longer a matter for discussion.

Even with these achievements, it is still necessary to continue supporting the consolidation of these gender units and/or areas, on the one hand, by strengthening its leading role in incorporating a gender approach in the policies, programs, and projects that are formulated and executed in the Ministry, and, on the other hand, by consolidating a gender-sensitive organizational culture in their respective institutions. This means developing internal policies that impact the institution's norms and regulations to take action to further extend gender mainstreaming within the ministries.

The 2009 study spearheaded specific actions to strengthen the capacities of the Ministries of Labor in their gender mainstreaming and institutionalization processes. These actions had some significant outcomes, and

included hemispheric and subregional training workshops, cooperation and technical assistance activities among Ministries of Labor, as well as Participatory Gender Audits conducted in the Ministries of Labor of Barbados, El Salvador, and Peru. These activities were conducted by the OAS under the auspices of the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL) and the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM/OAS), and in partnership with the International Labor Organization (ILO).

The Introduction to the present study gives more details about these actions.

As a result of the study and considering the proposals presented by the delegations that participated in the Hemispheric Dialogue, the following actions are recommended to strengthen the processes of gender institutionalization and gender mainstreaming now underway, in the context of the health, social and economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

1

Strengthening the Specialized Gender Units

- 1.1.** Create a network of gender units of the Ministries of Labor of the Americas to facilitate the exchange of successful experiences that could be implemented in different countries. This recommendation was welcomed with great interest among the delegations that participated in the Hemispheric Dialogue, in order to boost cooperation among gender units/areas and strengthen their initiatives and organization. This initiative could start as a specialized network within the RIAL.
- 1.2.** Strengthen the specialized gender units as institutions by defining their mission, functions, and scope of work. During the Hemispheric Dialogue, this activity was deemed very relevant, considering that the progress made must be protected and consolidated. The importance of gender units having a clearly-defined mission and functions was noted, so that they would not become blurred by including them in diverse groups. One concrete initiative was to prepare a Basic Guide or Manual of Gender Units that includes their functions, scope, and location within the institutional structure, among other details, to be disseminated and implemented in every gender unit/area within the Ministries of Labor. By this study's publication date, this Manual has been developed and is being revised by the Ministries.
- 1.3.** The continued existence of the specialized gender units is strongly influenced by the strength of the National Machineries for the Advancement of Women (NMAW) in the public administration and of civil society organizations, women's organizations in particular. For that reason, it is recommended to create a fluid inter-institutional cooperation and coordination relationship within the countries, in order to strengthen the capacity of the NMAW to promote, support, and monitor the mainstreaming strategy. This work could be done in conjunction with the Inter-American Commission of Women.

2

Building capacities to carry out the process of gender mainstreaming and institutionalization

- 2.1.** Design and implement a training program for specialized gender units, whose topics include gender-focused methodological instruments and other tools related to their institutional mission of gender mainstreaming.

Given the level of consolidation that specialized gender units have achieved and, in accordance with the needs identified in this study, strategic planning with a gender approach remains an important demand. This is because it ensures the incorporation of a gender approach in the operational plans and in the Institutional Strategic Plan of the Ministries of Labor, securing mainstreaming in policies, programs, and projects.

Another area that is also important in the state of development of gender units is the evaluation of policies, programs, and projects with a gender focus to advance their leading role of gender policy in the Ministries of Labor, delivering recommendations and assistance to the different units in their preparation.

It is worth noting the importance of having training and knowledge on substantive areas of the Ministries, such as social security, employment policies, and collective bargaining, among others, given that it allows gender units to provide better assistance to the areas that deal with these issues.

At the same time, it would be advisable to address specific areas, such as the incorporation of a gender approach in the identification of offenses during labor inspection, and emerging issues that have been gaining increasing importance, such as violence in the workplace, sexual and labor harassment, and discrimination. In particular, one of the most repeated demands by delegations participating in the Hemispheric Dialogue was the availability of tools to prevent, detect, and deal with violence and harassment in the workplace. For this reason, it is important to encourage as many units as possible to participate in the Virtual Course on Gender-based Violence at Work, which is being developed by the RIAL in partnership with CIM/OAS and offered through the Educational Portal of the Americas.

This training program could be in person or online. The OAS Educational Portal of the Americas has recognized experience in providing online training and has already begun to deal with gender issues in

an important way.¹ The Portal could design a specific curriculum for representatives of gender units and/or for all staff in the Ministries of Labor of the Americas.

- 2.2.** Offer internships to staff of specialized gender units so that they can learn about good practices and obtain tools for dealing with any setbacks that may arise in the process.

One of the issues dealt with successfully between two cooperating Ministries of Labor (Colombia and El Salvador) is the design and implementation of Gender Equality Management Systems (GEMS). These give awards called Gender Equality Seals, a quality certification on gender equality for voluntary organizations and businesses. Spreading this tool can be one of the most important ways to reduce and eliminate gender pay gaps in private and public institutions.

- 2.3.** During the Hemispheric Dialogue, many countries offered to disseminate successful practices in various areas. Therefore, it is advisable to put together all the good practices related to strengthening gender institutionalization and gender mainstreaming in order to present them to any requesting country.
- 2.4.** Provide gender units/areas with advice on strategies for the formalization of women workers and the expansion of social security coverage for unpaid work.
- 2.5.** Strengthen the leadership capacity of people working in specialized gender units. The development of effective leadership attitudes and behaviors within the units is essential to lead the gender mainstreaming process in their institutions. Training in this area would have the following objectives: to increase or make more effective the impact of leaders within their organization, team, and/or exchange networks, and improving standards in communication.

3

Preparing roadmaps to continue moving forward with the gender mainstreaming now underway

- 3.1.** Based on what has been done and to delve deeper into the changes needed in the organizational culture of the Ministries of Labor, it is recommended that Participatory Gender Diagnostics (PGDs) be con-

¹ Courses on Gender Equality and Equal Rights in Policies, Programs and Projects (“Enfoque de Igualdad de Género y Derechos en Políticas, Programas y Proyectos” *Spanish only*) and Strategic Planning with a Gender Approach (“Planificación Estratégica con Enfoque de Género” *Spanish only*).

ducted. The PGDs are a methodology developed by the OAS, based on the ILO’s Participatory Gender Audits, to support government agencies in the process of institutionalizing and mainstreaming a gender approach. A PGD helps understand and analyze the strengths and difficulties that different units of a government agency experience in being able to mainstream a gender approach in the institution, addressing human resources management, the organizational culture, and the final delivery of its products and services to the beneficiaries.

To achieve an appropriation of the methodology of the PGDs and for it to become a tool of the gender units, the proposal is to make a simultaneous methodological transfer to representatives of the NMAW and the gender units of the Ministries of Labor. This would allow them to assume the commitment to carry out the participatory gender diagnostics in the Ministries of Labor of their respective countries. The transfer would culminate in the establishment of an agreed Action Plan between the two institutions. This transfer could be given in subregional workshops that bring together representatives of both institutions of each sub-region.

- 3.2.** Provide technical support to the Ministries of Labor of Caribbean countries which have gender focal points linked to the NMAW and that are interested in creating a gender unit.
- 3.3.** Offer advice to continue supporting the development of Budgets with a Gender Approach in the Ministries of Labor. A Gender-based Budget is an analytical tool in which the government budget is disaggregated and the effect of expenditure and income policies on women and men is analyzed, given their difference in social and economic position. Gender-based budgets are one of the ways in which governments can fulfill their commitments related to gender equality in an effective way; identify the contradiction between political objectives of equality and budgetary endowment for them; and contribute to achieving the sustainable development goals, among other benefits for the institution.

4

Encouraging governments to take measures

- 4.1.** Formulate public policies aimed at strengthening the care system as a social responsibility of governments. This demand became widespread among the delegations participating in the Hemispheric Dialogue, which has revealed deficiencies in existing policies, exposing inequities and inequalities in the care system in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Such deficiencies have an unequal impact on sectors where women are overrepresented, increasing the barriers to women accessing and staying in the labor market.

- 4.2.** Promote the ratification of and compliance with the ILO Conventions, in particular:
- Convention 189 on domestic workers, which has become urgent considering the strong impact of the pandemic on women, who carry out most of the domestic work.
 - Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the workplace. This convention, as it protects workers from any kind of violence, could be applied to telework.
- 4.3.** It is essential that the Specialized Gender Units have sufficient resources to fulfill their entrusted function. This implies the hiring of qualified personnel in gender affairs, having their own budget, in accordance with the foreseen activities in an Annual Operating Plan of the Unit, and an adequate infrastructure.

The XXI Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML), and the resulting commitments and actions, will be essential to work on the recommendations above and, therefore, protect all the progress made so far, boost efforts to continue institutionalizing a gender approach in the Ministries of Labor, and advance towards equality between men and women in the world of work.

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