Bending the Curve Towards Gender Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean by 2030

EQUAL MEASURES 2030
GENDER EQUALITY. DATA. GLOBAL GOALS.

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Introduction

In 2019, the Latin American and the Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights (CLADEM) established a partnership with Equal Measures 2030 (EM2030) – a joint effort of leading regional and global organizations from civil society and the development and private sectors who work together to connect data and evidence with advocacy and action on gender equality, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

To help accomplish these aims, EM2030 developed the **SDG Gender Index**, the most comprehensive tool to measure overall progress towards gender equality in 129 countries on 51 issues related to girls' and women's rights, across 14 of the 17 SDGs.

Bending the Curve towards Gender Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean by 2030 takes up 5 of the indicators contained in the SDG Gender Index to analyze how countries in the region are advancing (or moving backwards) towards achieving gender equality on key issues related to the economic, political, social and reproductive rights of girls and women, including their right to live free from violence.

The main conclusion of this report is that none of the 21 countries[1] in the region included in the SDG Gender Index will achieve these gender equality targets by 2030 if progress continues at the current pace.

It is important to note that the data and projections presented here precede the COVID-19 pandemic, which will likely impact these projections. Therefore, this report includes a section that describes the impact of this crisis on the lives of girls and women, reinforcing the need to accelerate progress towards gender equality by 2030.

Methodology

The selection of the five indicators (**Table 1**) included in this research was based on:

Universal issues that are of critical importance to the rights and experiences of girls and women.

The availability and coverage of data for countries covered in the SDG Gender Index with a sufficient number of data points in the last 10-20 years.

The alignment with the priorities expressed by advocates in the 2018 **EM2030 Gender Advocates Survey**

In order to look at the rate of change for these indicators across the 129 countries, and then extrapolate the same trend out to 2030, a linear regression was calculated to find the best fitted trend line among the values over time. That trend was used to calculate the value in 2030.[2]

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1 Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad & Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela.

2 For more information about the methodology, see the full EM2030 global report "Bending the Curve Towards Gender Equality by 2030" https://data.em2030.org/2020-index-projections/bending-the-curve-towards-gender-equality-by-2030/

Table 1.
Indicator characteristics and data sources

Indicator	Official SDG indicator or complementary?	Source	Unit	Target	First year	Latest year	Age range
Percentage of women married or in a union (aged 15–49 years) who have had their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods	SDG	UNDP	Per cent	100	2000	2018	15-49
Percentage of women aged 20–24 years who completed secondary education	Comp.	UIS	Per cent	100	2000	2018	20-24
Percentage of ministerial/senior government positions held by women	Comp.	IPU	Per cent	50	2001	2019	All
Extent to which the country has laws mandating women's workplace equality	Comp.	WBL	Score	100	2009	2019	15-64
Percentage of women aged 15+ who report that they "feel safe walking at night in the city or area where they live"	SDG	Gallup	Per cent	100	2006	2018	15+

Source: Equal Measures 2030, 2020.

Levels of gender equality and rates of progress in Latin America and the Caribbean

The analysis of progress in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) on the five indicators included in this research was based on the **countries' rate of change**, as well as their **overall levels of gender equality**, according to their position in the SDG Gender Index. This position is based on the overall index score which measures how countries perform on gender equality across the 14 SDGs included in the index, and the indicators that compose them.[3] The higher the score, the closer countries are to achieving the gender equality targets.

The SDG Gender Index retrieves data from diverse sources, including official national data, to show global average scores by goal and a national aggregate picture for each country.[4] However, it is important to highlight that **national averages can mask significant inequalities in opportunities, outcomes and fulfillment of rights for certain groups of girls and women**. Likewise, they might not reflect the perception of citizens about the advances or backsliding on key gender equality issues. Despite this, having data to understand the realities at the national level, and to make comparative analyses between countries and regions, allows the identification of gaps and can guide the design and implementation of public policies.

Figure 1 shows where the LAC countries are located based on two variables: their score on the SDG Gender Index and the pace of change on the five key gender indicators.[5] In the **top right quadrant** are countries with relatively high levels of gender equality and faster recent progress. In this quadrant we find Colombia, for example, with a global score of 68 out of 100 ('Poor') in the SDG Gender Index –8th regional position and ranked 57 globally. Colombia's rate of change over the last 10-20 years reveals that this country has achieved accelerated progress in regards to its legislation on workplace equality, and the representation of women in ministerial positions. Girls' and adolescents' completion of secondary education showed moderate progress in Colombia; access to modern contraception was slow, while women's perception of safety at night backslid – a trend that is also observed across the region.

3   Learn more about the SDG Gender Index https://data.em2030.org/2019-global-report/

4   For more information about the data sources, visit https://data.em2030.org/2019-sdg-gender-index/indicators-and-data-sources/

5   To learn more about the LAC countries rates of progress in these 5 indicators, visit https://data.em2030.org/2020-index-projections/data-explorer-global/

The **top left quadrant** shows countries with relatively high levels of gender equality, but slower recent progress. Uruguay, for example, which scores 75 out of 100 ('Fair') in the SDG Gender Index – 1st place regionally and 32nd at the global level – shows slow progress in 4 of the 5 indicators included in this report, except on its workplace equality laws where a more accelerated progress was identified.

The **bottom right quadrant** shows countries with lower levels of gender equality, and faster recent progress. Guatemala is located here, with a score of 58 out of 100 ('Very poor') in the SDG Gender Index – positioned at 21st regionally and 89th globally. In the last 10-20 years, Guatemala showed accelerated progress on secondary education of girls and adolescents, and on the number of ministerial

positions held by women. Moderate progress occurred in women's access to modern contraceptive methods, while perceptions of safety experienced slow change, and laws on workplace equality stagnated.

Finally, countries with low levels of gender equality and slow recent progress appear in the **bottom left quadrant**. The Dominican Republic, for example, scores 63 out of 100 ('Poor') in the SDG Gender Index – 14th place regionally and 76th globally. This country showed moderate progress on its workplace equality laws and on girls' and adolescents' completion of secondary education, slow progress on access to modern contraception and women's representation in senior government, and negative trends on women's perception of safety at night.

Figure 1.
Levels of gender equality compared to the pace of change since early 2000s in Latin America and the Caribbean
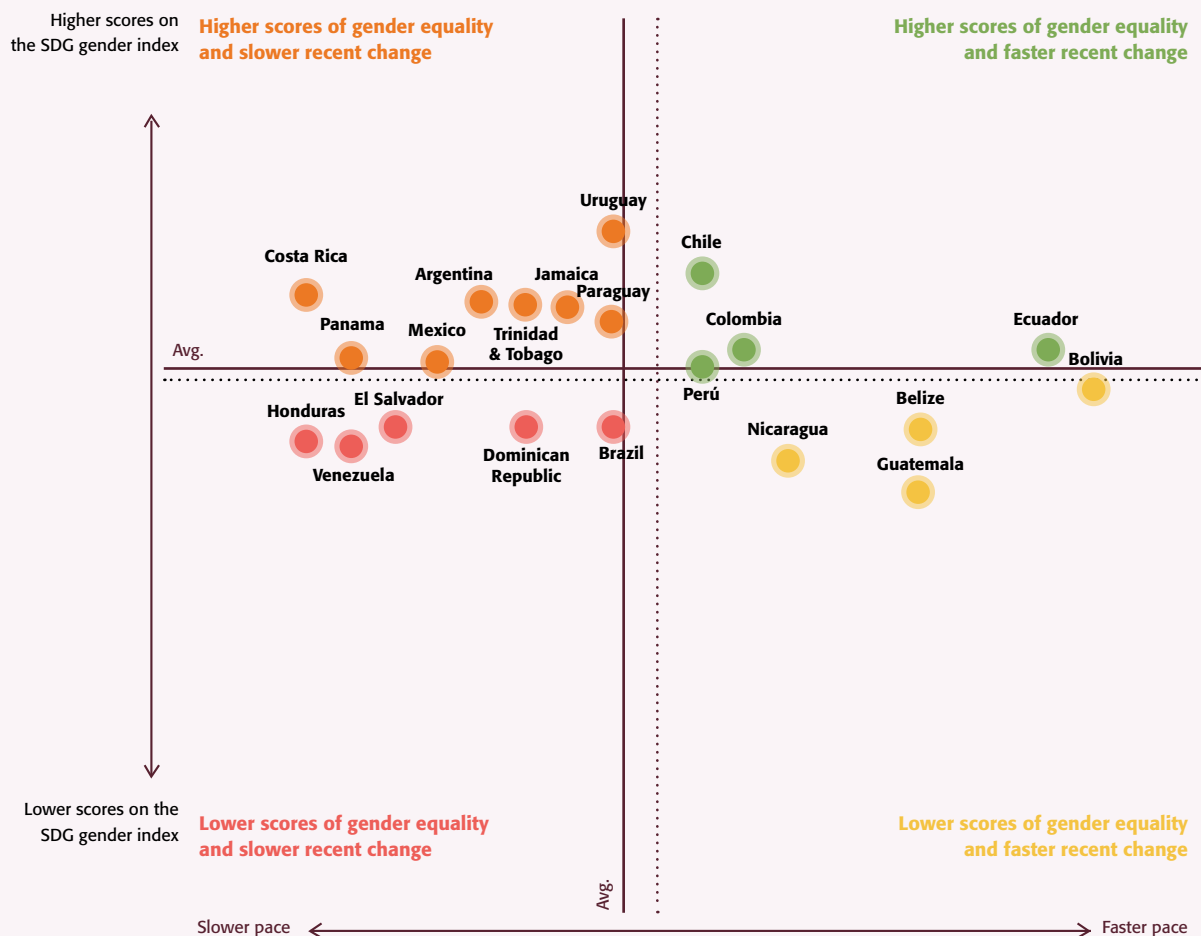

Source: Equal Measures 2030, 2020.

Access to modern contraception

In almost 20 years, the **Latin American and the Caribbean region advanced only 9 percentage points in access to modern contraception** for women of reproductive age (15-49 years), going from **70.4% in 2000 to 79.6% in 2018**. Countries with the highest and lowest access rates can be found in **Figure 2**.

Figure 2.
LAC countries with the highest and lowest access rates to modern contraception, 2018

% OF WOMEN WITH ACCESS TO MODERN CONTRACEPTION
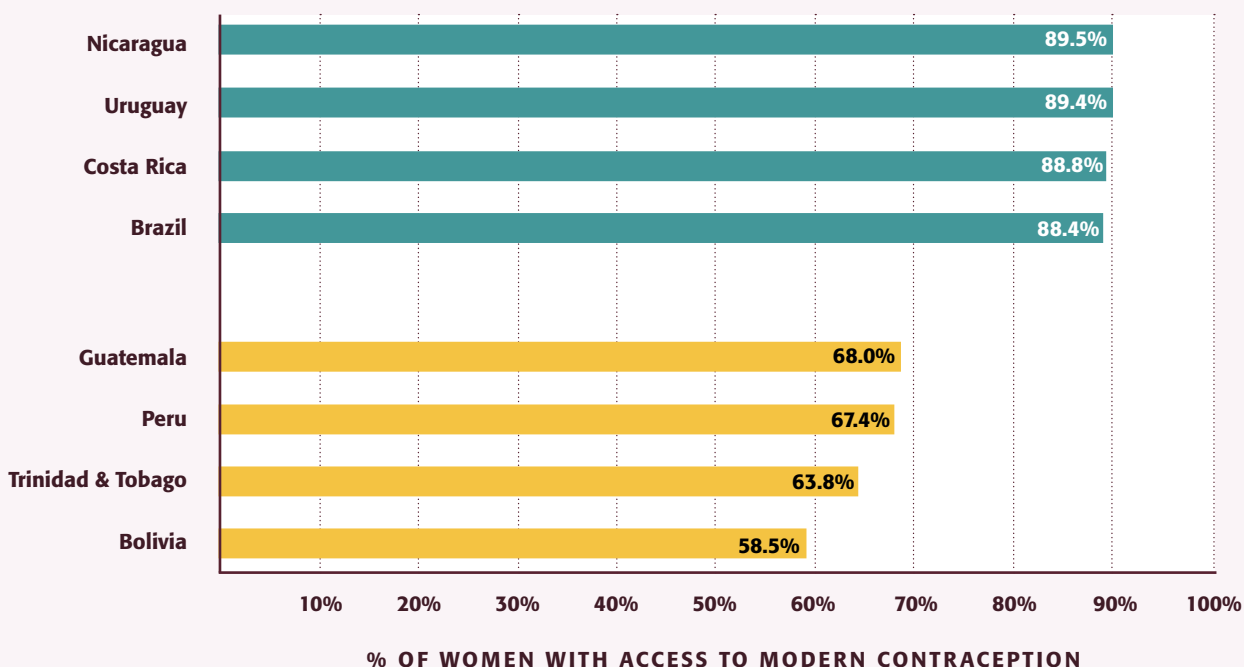
Source: CLADEM 2020 based on UNDP, EM2030 calculations.

The trend between 2000 and 2018 (**Figure 3**) shows that there are countries in the region that achieved significant progress in this period, such as Bolivia, Guatemala and Paraguay, which advanced between 17 and 20 percentage points. However, Bolivia and Guatemala have historically maintained the lowest percentages of access to modern contraceptive methods since the year 2000.

If we look at Bolivia's example, despite being the country that achieved the greatest progress, increasing the percentage of women with access to modern contraception from 38.2% in 2000 to 58.5% in 2018, this country still has a low rate of access to contraception and faces many challenges to progress. Bolivia has a legal framework that recognizes sexual and reproductive health and rights. Yet, feminist organizations have underscored the urgency of approving the National Strategic Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health, and ensuring that sufficient budget is allocated for its effective implementation.[6] They have also highlighted the

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6 Mira que te Miro (2018). *Social monitoring of the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development. Bolivia's National Report*. Available in Spanish at https://data.miraquetemiro.org/sites/default/files/documentos/MiraQueTeMiro%20Bolivia%20cartilla.pdf

importance of adolescents' access to modern contraceptive methods, including emergency contraception.

On the other hand, countries such as Uruguay, Costa Rica and Jamaica showed the slowest progress in this period. For Uruguay and Costa Rica, this may be due to the fact that they have had the highest percentages of access to modern contraception since 2000, therefore they are already closer to achieving the target by 2030. Uruguay, for example, has a robust legal, political, and programmatic framework for the delivery of sexual and reproductive health services, and offers a wide range of modern contraceptive methods in both public and private health institutions.

Figure 3.
LAC countries with the fastest and slowest rates of change in access to modern contraception, 2000–2018
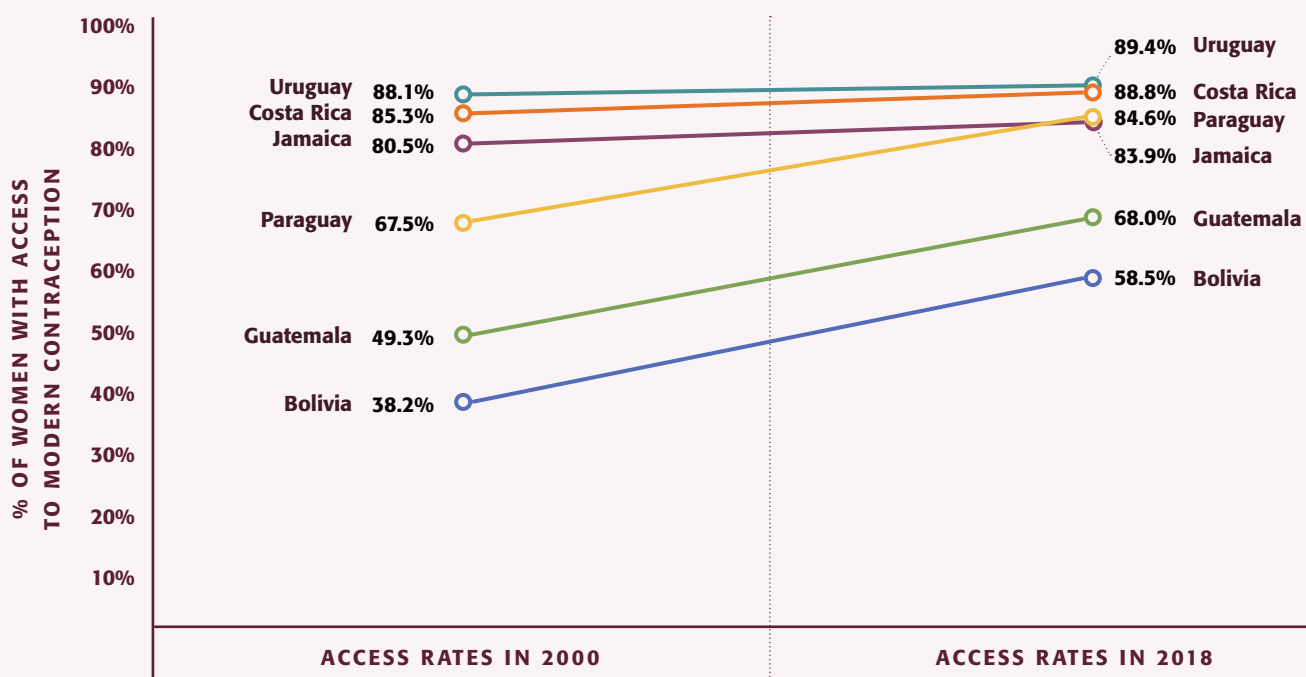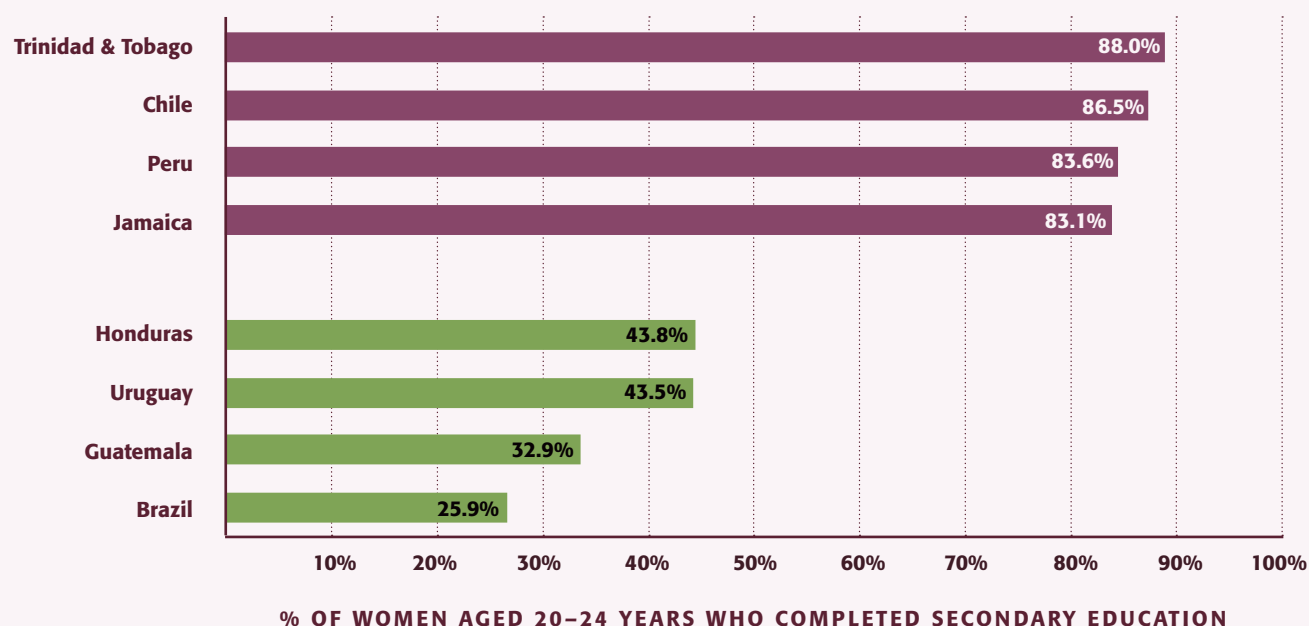

Source: CLADEM 2020 based on UNDP, EM2030 calculations.

Latin America and the Caribbean has a long way to go to reach this gender equality target by 2030. However, data show that there are countries that have achieved accelerated progress in the last two decades. If the region matches the pace of those countries with faster rates of change, by 2030, **18 million more women and girls in the region will have access to modern contraception**.

Girls' and adolescents' completion of secondary education

Available data between 2000 and 2016 on the proportion of women aged 20–24 years who completed secondary education in Latin America and the Caribbean vary significantly between countries and across years. During this period,[7] the region went from having **46% of women (20–24 years) who completed secondary education to 62.5%**. The country that showed the fastest progress in this indicator was Belize, which went from 14.7% to 51% in just 10 years (2006-2016). However, Belize is still only halfway toward achieving this gender equality target.

Figure 4.
LAC countries with the highest and lowest proportion of women aged 20-24 who completed secondary school, based on the latest year with available data (2011-2016)

Trinidad & Tobago 88.0%
Chile 86.5%
Peru 83.6%
Jamaica 83.1%
Honduras 43.8%
Uruguay 43.5%
Guatemala 32.9%
Brazil 25.9%

% OF WOMEN AGED 20–24 YEARS WHO COMPLETED SECONDARY EDUCATION

Source: CLADEM 2020 based on UIS, WIDE y la OECD, EM2030 calculations.

Although Latin America and the Caribbean is the second best-performing region based on the rates of secondary school completion among girls and adolescents, data show that it is still far from meeting this target by 2030. One of the main challenges that the region faces in regards to girls' and adolescents' education are the high levels of early school leaving as a result of poverty; child, early and forced marriages and unions; adolescent pregnancies; forced child pregnancies; and the uneven distribution of care work in their households, among other gender inequalities, which can be exacerbated in rural contexts. The early school leaving

7 First and latest year: Mexico (1997–2018), Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador and Panama (2000–2016), Bolivia, Chile and Guatemala (2000–2015), Venezuela (2000–2014), Trinidad & Tobago (2000–2011), Brazil, Honduras, Paraguay and Peru (2001–2016), Nicaragua (2001–2014), Jamaica (2001–2011), Argentina (2004–2012), Belize (2006–2016), Uruguay (2008–2016).

rate in Mexico and Central America is 14 percentage points higher than in the rest of the LAC region, and in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, these rates double those of other countries.[8] In this subregion, 20% of out-of-school girls mention pregnancy and unpaid care work as the main reason for not being at school.[9]

If countries' progress matches that of the fast movers, by 2030, **8 million more girls and women in the LAC region will have completed their secondary education**.

Ministerial or senior government positions held by women

In the last two decades, Latin America and the Caribbean went from having **12.1% of ministerial or senior government positions held by women in 2001 to 28.6% in 2019**. Also, LAC is the region in the world with the fastest progress and the fewest countries backsliding.

Countries in the region have promoted political and legal reforms to ensure women's equal access to decision-making spaces. These reforms have focused, for example, on allocating resources to strengthen women's leadership within their political parties (Brazil, Costa Rica, Colombia, Honduras, Mexico and Panama); creating incentives to increase women's opportunities to be elected (Colombia and Chile), and establishing indirect financing modalities through the obligation to allocate part of the media coverage to female candidates (Brazil). Some countries in the region have constitutionalized parity (Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico and Nicaragua). Equally important has been the role of electoral authorities in countries such as Costa Rica and Mexico, with the power to interpret the electoral system legislation, to oversee its implementation, and to create jurisprudence favorable to the equal exercise of women's political rights.[10]

However, moving from quota systems to models of political participation that incorporate parity as a democratic principle —both in electoral processes and in the appointment of cabinets— is one of the main challenges of the LAC region. So is the prevention and the elimination of violence against women in the political sphere.

Table 2.
Countries with highest % of women in ministerial or senior government roles globally, 2019

Country	% of women in ministerial or senior government roles globally
Spain	64.7%
Nicaragua	55.6%
Sweden	54.5%
Albania	53.3%
Colombia	52.9%
Costa Rica	51.9%
Rwanda	51.9%
Canada	50.0%

Source: Equal Measures 2030, 2020.

In 2019, **12 LAC countries continued to have fewer than 30% of ministerial positions held by women** (**Figure 5**). This same year, only 31% of parliamentary positions in the region were held by women.[11] **Bolivia**, **Guatemala** and **Brazil** were amongst the countries with the fastest annual rates of change in women's representation in ministerial positions between 2001 and 2019 globally. However, these countries, along with Belize and the Dominican Republic still had the lowest percentages of senior government roles held by women in 2019 in the region.[12]

8 Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). *School Dropout: The Pending Challenge of Mesoamerica.* Available at https://www.iadb.org/en/improvinglives/school-dropout-pending-challenge-mesoamerica

9 Inter-American Development Bank (IDB, 2019). *What are the main educational challenges of Mesoamerica?* Available in Spanish at https://publications.iadb.org/es/nota-cima-16-cuales-son-los-principales-retos-educativos-de-mesoamerica

10 Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM, OAS) (2016). *Parity democracy in Latin America. The cases of Mexico and Nicaragua*. Available in Spanish at https://www.oas.org/en/cim/docs/DemocraciaParitaria-MexNic-ES.pdf

11 Equal Measures 2030 (2020). *Bending the Curve Towards Gender Equality by 2030.* Available at https://data.em2030.org/2020-index-projections/bending-the-curve-towards-gender-equality-by-2030/

12 *Ibid*.

If Latin America and the Caribbean accelerates progress to match the pace of the fastest-moving countries, by 2030, **300 million more girls and women will live in countries where women are equally represented in senior government positions.**

Figure 5.
Percentage of ministerial positions held by women in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2001 and 2019

● Percentage in 2001   ● Percentage in 2019
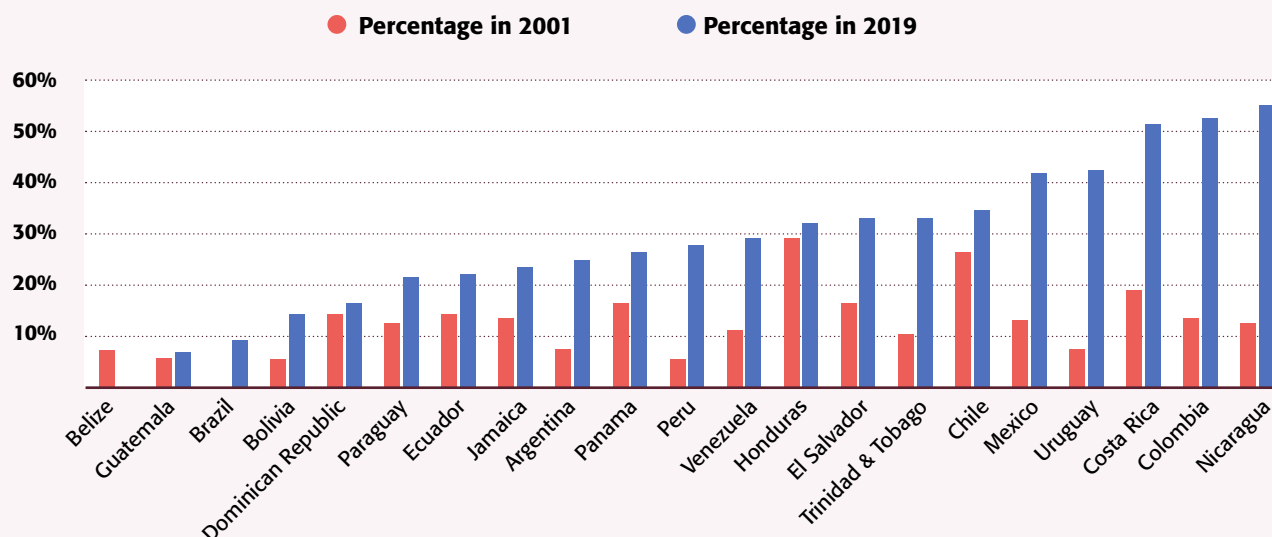
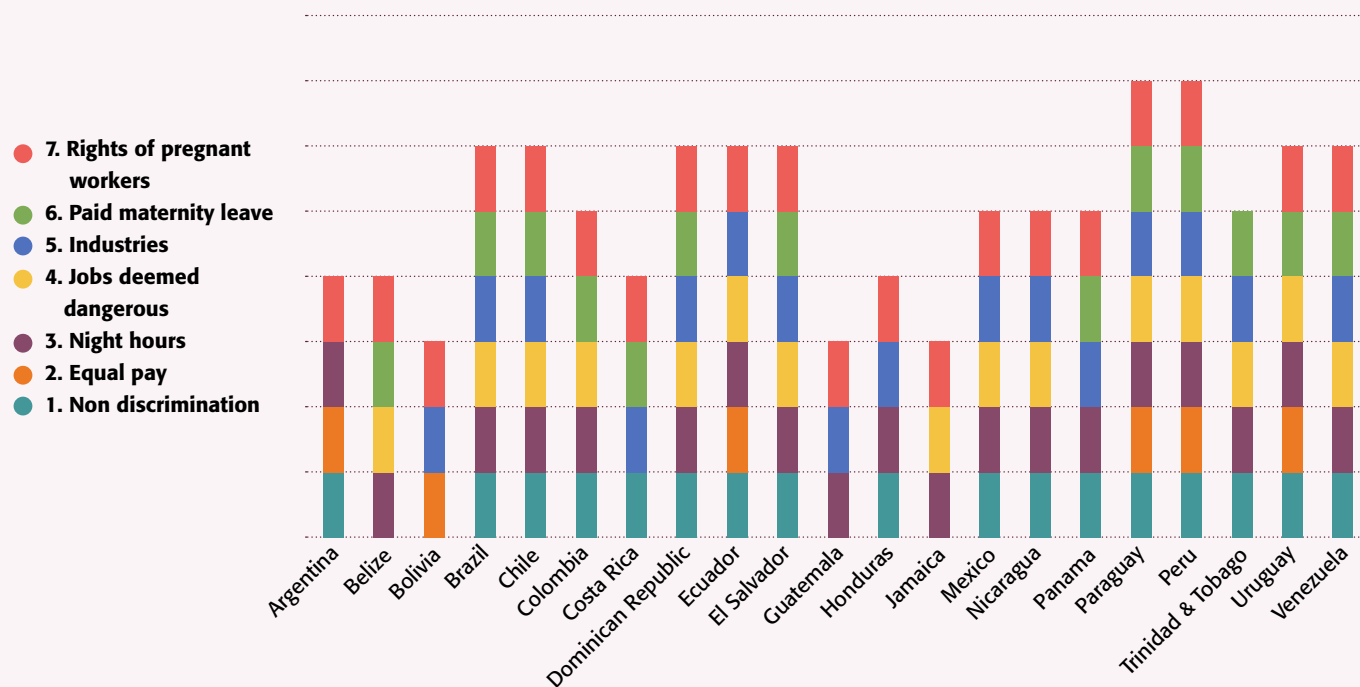**Source**: CLADEM 2020 based on CIA (2001) and IPU (2019), EM2030 calculations.

Laws on workplace equality

To analyze progress on this composite indicator, countries obtain a score from 0 to 100 based on **7 normative standards on workplace equality, including laws on equal pay and against gender-based discrimination (Table 3)**. The average regional score for this indicator in **2009 was 55.6/100**. In **2020**, the score went up to **69.2/100**.

Table 3.
Normative standards on workplace equality

1	**Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender?**
2	**Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?**
3	**Can women work the same night hours as men?**
4	**Can women work in jobs deemed dangerous in the same way as men?**
5	**Can women work in the same industries as men?**
6	**Is paid maternity leave of at least 14 weeks available to women?**
7	**Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?**

Figure 6.
Laws on workplace equality in LAC countries (2020)

Legend:
- 7. Rights of pregnant workers
- 6. Paid maternity leave
- 5. Industries
- 4. Jobs deemed dangerous
- 3. Night hours
- 2. Equal pay
- 1. Non discrimination

Countries: Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad & Tobago, Uruguay, Venezuela

Source: CLADEM 2020 based on World Bank "*Women, Business and the Law*" 2020.

Figure 6 shows that Bolivia, Guatemala and Jamaica are the countries with the lowest scores on workplace equality (well below the regional average), while Peru and Paraguay meet all 7 standards.

At the regional level, one of the most challenging issues is women's right to **equal pay** – only Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay acknowledge it in their legislation.

Similarly, women's right to **paid maternity leave** advanced only 2 percentage points in a decade, placing Latin America and the Caribbean in second to last place at the global level, only above Asia and the Pacific, with **18% of women (15-49 years) with a legal right to paid maternity leave** (**Table 4**).[13]

The region's challenges are not only limited to the legal aspects of workplace equality, but also to the effective implementation of these laws. If we want to make sure that all (meaning at least **143 million**

Table 4.
Proportion of women (15–49 years) with legal right to paid maternity leave, 2009 and 2020

Region	% of women 15-49 years	
	2009	2020
Middle East and North Africa	48%	64%
Europe and North America	54%	63%
Sub-Saharan Africa	28%	41%
Latin American and Caribbean	16%	18%
Asia and the Pacific	3%	9%
Global Average	18%	25%

Source: Equal Measures 2030, 2020.

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13 Only 13 countries in the region, out of 21, meet this standard: Belize, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad & Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela.

more) women are protected under these standards by 2030, Latin America and the Caribbean must match its progress to the pace of countries that have consolidated robust legal frameworks to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in the workplace.

Women's perception of safety at night

This proxy indicator of violence against women is the only one of the five analyzed in this report that shows a negative trend in the region. Data coverage for Latin America and the Caribbean varies, with data available since 2006 until 2018, except for Belize (latest year, 2014), Jamaica, Mexico, Paraguay, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela (latest year, 2017). During this period, the region went from **41.4% of women aged 15+ who reported feeling safe walking at night to only 40.6%**.

Figure 7 shows that, in 10 countries, women's perception of safety worsened: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Dominican Republic and Venezuela. The results for Bolivia and Peru remained almost the same since 2006, while Belize, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Jamaica, Paraguay, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay registered slight improvements. **Mexico had the most significant decline in this indicator**: women who feel safe walking at night went from 51% in 2006 to 33% in 2018, and it is among the 5 countries in the region with the worst performance on this indicator, including the Dominican Republic, Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela.

Figure 7.
Proportion of women aged 15+ in LAC who report "feeling safe walking at night", baseline and latest year with available data (2006-2017/18)
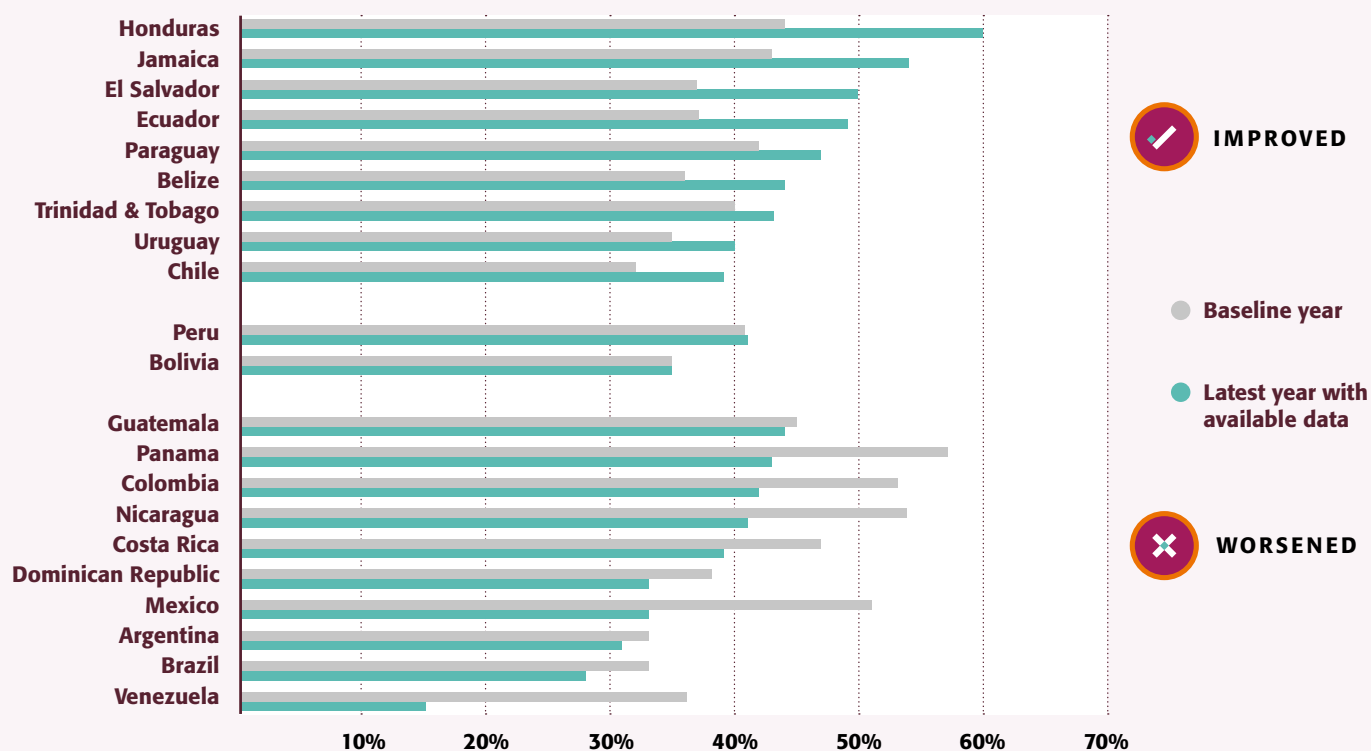
Source: CLADEM 2020 based on Gallup, EM2030 calculations.

It is important to consider this data alongside another indicator from the SDG Gender Index that reveals the extent to which gender-based violence affects women in Latin America and the Caribbean: **female victims of intentional homicide (per 100,000 population)**. Based on the index scores, Venezuela, Guatemala, Belize, Jamaica, Honduras, and El Salvador are the countries with the lowest score on this indicator in the region, and are amongst the 10 worst performing countries in the world.

Between 2014 and 2018, 15 women were killed in El Salvador per 100,000 inhabitants, the highest rate recorded in the region, followed by Honduras and Jamaica with 10 and 9 femicides per 100,000 inhabitants, respectively.[14] The situation of generalized violence in some Central American countries has worsened in recent years, causing deep democratic crises and new migration waves of thousands of women, girls, young people and men who seek to escape from violence, poverty and food insecurity.[15] In Mexico, the militarization approach to public safety adopted since 2007 led to a dramatic increase of women's assassinations and femicides, which also explains the country's decline on women's perception of safety.[16]

At the current pace, **it will take more than 6 generations for all girls and women to feel safe walking at night globally**. The LAC region looks at a similar scenario if the region does not reverse this regressive trend and strengthens its policies to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against girls and women. If accelerated progress is achieved by 2030, **167 million more girls and women in Latin America and the Caribbean will feel safe walking at night**.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls' and women's rights

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), inequality is a historical and structural characteristic of our region that persists and reproduces even in periods of economic growth, becoming an obstacle to the eradication of poverty, to sustainable development and to the safeguarding of people's rights.[17] In this context, the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 intersect with gender, territorial, ethnic, racial and generational inequalities, resulting in major setbacks that persist over time, mainly affecting populations with greater vulnerabilities.

14 Equal Measures 2030 (2019). *Harnessing the power of data for gender equality: Introducing the 2019 EM2030 SDG Gender Index.* Available at https://data.em2030.org/2019-global-report/

15 Oxfam International (2019). *Seven key questions about the Central American migrant caravans and Oxfam's response*. Available in Spanish at https://www.oxfam.org/es/7-preguntas-clave-sobre-las-caravanas-de-migrantes-de-centroamerica-y-la-respuesta-de-oxfam

16 INTERSECTA (2020). *The two wars: The Impact of Armed Forces Clashes on the Murders of Women in Mexico (2007-2018)*. Available in Spanish at http://www.intersecta.org/lasdosguerras/

17 ECLAC (2019). *Social Panorama of Latin America*. Available at https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/44989-social-panorama-latin-america-2019

Sexual and reproductive health

The pandemic negatively impacted the provision of sexual and reproductive health services, resulting in the interruption of supply chains, quality care and the reallocation of health resources, undermining the sexual and reproductive health and rights of girls and women, including access to modern contraception.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that 47 million women in 114 low- and middle-income countries will be unable to use modern contraceptives, and that an additional 7 million unintended pregnancies will occur if the disruption of services continues for 6 months.[18] In Latin America and the Caribbean, projections indicate that 18 million women will lose regular access to modern contraceptives, given the current COVID context.[19]

Education

School closures as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak affected more than 1.5 billion girls, boys and young people globally; half of whom are girls. It is also estimated that around 20 million more girls could drop out of secondary education after the crisis.[20] Plan International and UNESCO warn about the possible increase in school dropout rates that will disproportionately affect girls and adolescents, deepening gender gaps in education.[21]

According to the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) this situation both increases the amount of time that families must dedicate to their children, and also changes the nature of the time allocated for care work, which disproportionally affects girls and women, particularly in lower-income households.[22] Also, the increasing dependence on technological devices and platforms highlights the digital gap between women and men. Globally, there are 200 million more men than women with access to the Internet, and women are 21% less likely to have a mobile phone.[23] A report by the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF) highlights that an average of 68% of the households in the LAC region have access to the Internet, with large differences between countries and with access gaps based on households' income levels.[24]

18 UNFPA (April, 2020). *Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and Ending Gender-based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage.* Available at https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19_impact_brief_for_UNFPA_24_April_2020_1.pdf

19 UN (April, 2020). *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women*. Available at https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy_brief_on_covid_impact_on_women_9_apr_2020_updated.pdf
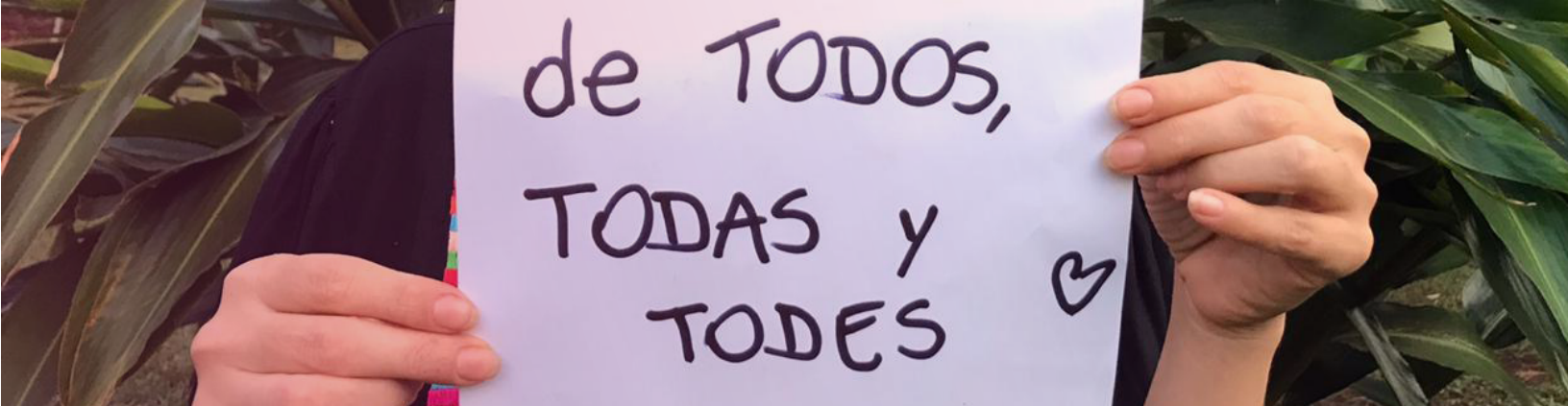
20 Malala Fund (2020). *Girl's Education and COVID-19. What past shocks can teach us about mitigating the impact of pandemics.* Available in https://malala.org/newsroom/archive/malala-fund-releases-report-girls-education-covid-19

21 UNESCO (2020). *Covid-19 school closures around the world will hit girls hardest.* Available in https://es.unesco.org/news/cierre-escuelas-debido-covid-19-todo-mundo-afectara-mas-ninas

22 Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM, OAS) (August, 2020). *COVID-19 in Women's Lives: The global care emergency.* Available in Spanish at http://www.oas.org/es/cim/docs/CuidadosCOVID19-ES.pdf

23 *Global Fund for Women's Technology Initiative*. Available at https://www.globalfundforwomen.org/our-approach/initiatives/technologyinitiative/

24 Development Bank of Latin America, CAF (2020). *Technology to overcome the closure of schools?* Available in Spanish at https://www.caf.com/es/conocimiento/visiones/2020/04/tecnologia-para-superar-el-cierre-de-escuelas/

Employment and economic empowerment

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) women are overrepresented in the most impacted sectors and amongst frontline care workers to respond to the pandemic (70% globally); in Latin America and the Caribbean, Central America is the subregion with the highest proportion of women working in the most affected sectors (58.9%). Also, they usually hold less qualified and underpaid positions. Closure of schools and childcare services increased the burden of unpaid care work for women. Before the pandemic, women were responsible of about three-quarters of this work. In all regions, women make up the majority of domestic workers at risk. The ILO estimates, as of June 2020, that 55 million domestic workers worldwide (72.3%) were at risk of losing their jobs and income as a result of the lockdown.[25] In Latin America and the Caribbean, half of the medical staff and more than 80% of the nursing staff are women. However, they represent a minority in decision-making positions and face salary gaps of 28%.[26]

It is also important to note that women earn and save less. They represent the majority of single-parent households and hold, to a greater extent, the most insecure jobs in the informal economy or the service sector with the least access to social protection, according to UN Women.[27] This undermines their capacity to cope with economic crises. Globally, there is a higher proportion of women working in the informal sector compared to men. In Latin America and the Caribbean, 54% of women work in the informal sector (contrary to 52% of men). UN Women warns that the pandemic could result in an extended drop of women's income and participation in the economically active population, with informal workers, migrants and young women being the most susceptible to dismissal.[28]

Violence against women

CLADEM has referred to violence against women during the COVID-19 crisis as the "other pandemic". While violence against women, particularly domestic violence, during the lockdown increased, prevention and protection support for women victims of violence were reduced due to lockdown measures. Increased violence against women, as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak forced girls and women to live with their abusers, causing a ripple effect that escalated to deadly levels. A journalistic and transnational research on violence against women, conducted across 21 countries in the LAC region and Spain, documented 2,403 violent deaths of girls and women, in 106 days of lockdown. It also revealed an increased number of cases of sexual violence against girls and adolescents under

25 *ILO (June, 2020). ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. 5th Edition. Updated estimates and analysis*. Available at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_749399.pdf

26 CIM, OAS, op. cit.

27 *UN (2020). How COVID-19 impacts women and girls*. Available at https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/explainer/covid19/es/index.html

28 *Ibid.*

the age of 18, data gaps on violence against women, and inconsistencies between official data and the information collected by feminist and women's rights organizations.[29]

UNFPA anticipates a slowdown in progress to end gender-based violence, and foresees an increase of 31 million more cases of violence if the lockdowns continue for 6 months. It has also underscored that COVID-19 will have an impact on initiatives aimed at eliminating child, early and forced marriages and unions (CEFMU), estimating an additional 13 million CEFMUs between 2020 and 2030.[30]

According to *Girls Not Brides*, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the often informal nature of early unions (characterized by cohabitation without legal registration) contrasts with the more formal practices seen in other parts of the world, which tend not to be considered as "marriage" or as existing between "children". This reduces awareness on the problem and its impact on the rights of girls and adolescents in the region. Two of the 20 countries with the highest absolute numbers of women in union before the age of 18 are in Latin America and the Caribbean (Brazil and Mexico rank 5th and 8th, respectively), while the Dominican Republic ranks 14th for unions before the age of 15 (12% of girls).[31]

Women's participation

Data and evidence show the disproportionate impact of COVID-19, and governments' response strategies, on the rights of millions of girls and women. However, decision-making remained in the hands of men, often appointed through pre-existing power structures where women were already marginalized and under-represented. When decision-making processes exclude women, they are more likely to be gender blind or to have negative impacts on gender equality.[32]

In Costa Rica, for example, feminist organizations expressed their concern when the National Institute for Women (INAMU) decided to transfer part of its budget to another government entity in support of people affected by COVID-19. However, this institution did not prioritize girls' and women's needs.[33]

In this context, the post-COVID recovery phase becomes an opportunity to examine the structures and decision-making processes of governments, at all levels, as well as to promote women's equal participation. This is critical to resist the deprioritisation and rollback of gender equality and to safeguard the rights of girls and women throughout the recovery.

29 *Violence against women: The invisible pandemic (2020)*. Available in Spanish at https://www.connectas.org/pandemia-invisible/index.html

30 UNFPA, *op.cit.*

31 Girls Not Brides (2020). *CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE AND UNIONS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN*. Available at https://www.girlsnotbrides.es/centro-de-recursos/matrimonios-y-uniones-infantiles-en-alc/

32 Boel McAteer Türkmenolu (septembre, 2020). *Why decision-making structures in the COVID-19 response matter to gender equality*. Available at https://https://www.genderandcovid-19.org/editorial/why-decision-making-structures-in-the-covid-19-response-matter-to-gender-equality/

33 Sombrilla Centroamericana (2020). *Newsletter: Central America in times of COVID 19. Threats to health, life and rights*.

Recommendations

The commitment to leave no one behind requires governments in Latin America and the Caribbean to strengthen their policies, programs and budgets to accelerate progress towards gender equality by 2030 – observing the call of feminist organizations and movements that urge to rethink the existing development model in order to achieve a sustainable development that allows a more equal distribution of wealth and prioritizes human rights, including girls' and women's rights.[34]

Below are key public policy recommendations that seek to contribute to the advocacy work of feminist and women's rights organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean, based on the analysis presented in this report.

Include sexual and reproductive health services in the package of essential health service delivery, as well as the access to information and to a **wide range of modern contraceptive methods, including emergency contraception**. It is also important to eliminate the legal and administrative barriers to access safe and legal abortion services.

Renew efforts to provide **comprehensive sexuality education** at all levels and across socioeconomic sectors.

Address the structural factors that increase early school leaving rates of girls and adolescents, and **reduce the digital gender gap** to ensure online learning is accessible and safe for them.

Acknowledge **parity** not only as an electoral mechanism, but as a **democratic principle** to ensure women's access to decision-making spaces, free from violence and discrimination. This entails **transforming gender roles and stereotypes** that hamper their inclusion in spaces where economic, financial and fiscal decisions are made.

Prevent and eliminate violence against women in the political sphere, and strengthen parliaments at all levels to incorporate a gender lens into their work.

Promote women's leadership in crisis management as a commitment to parity and justice, and in the care work agenda, essential for crisis mitigation.

Recognize **care work as critical factor of the current emergency**, of the economic empowerment of girls and women, and of countries' recovery.

Design and implement public policies to **redistribute the burden of unpaid care work**, including special measures for home based jobs, and **more equal parental leave**.

Continue advocacy efforts for the **ratification of ILO's conventions** on workers with family responsibilities (Convention 156) and domestic workers (Convention 189).

Adopt measures of **direct compensation** for informal workers, including domestic workers and migrant women, and ensure their inclusion in **cash transfer programs**. Incorporate **universal basic income (UBI)** approaches to women's economic empowerment.

Ensure the **continuity and strengthening of protection services for victims of violence in the response plans to COVID-19**. Shelters and hotlines should be included as essential services with **specific budget** to safeguard

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34 CoNGO CSW LAC (2019). *A 25 años de la Plataforma de Acción de Beijing, Luces y Sombras. Documento alternativo de la sociedad civil de América Latina y el Caribe*. Disponible en http://ngocswlac.org/inicio/beijing-25-luces-y-sombras/

their **availability and accessibility** for girls and women, including solutions and technological tools **that take into account the digital gap between women and men**.

Understand and address the specific needs of indigenous, rural and black women across the 5 indicators analyzed in this report, acknowledging the multiple forms of discrimination that they face and the **disproportionate impact that the COVID-19 crisis has had** on them and their communities.

Invest in the generation of disaggregated data and gender analysis for evidence-based decision-making that allows a thorough understanding of the short, medium and long-term impacts of the pandemic on the rights of girls and women.

Place feminist and women's rights organizations at the center of the pandemic response and recovery process and secure sufficient funding to sustain their work, recognizing the important role they play in crisis management (political, health, economic, environmental) to protect girls' and women's rights.

Acknowledgements

Explore the Gender Advocates Data Hub, an online platform showcasing the results of the 2019 SDG Gender Index, other data and evidence, data visualizations, stories, tools, and country-, region-, and issue-specific resources for and by advocates.

www.data.em2030.org