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**REGIONAL
CONFERENCE
ON WOMEN
IN LATIN AMERICA
AND THE CARIBBEAN**



FACT SHEET

ECLAC document “*What kind of State? What kind of equality?*”:

REDISTRIBUTION OF REPRODUCTIVE WORK: THE BLIND SPOT IN PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

A reconciliation of work and family life on the basis of a redistribution of reproductive tasks among the State, the market and families remains the blind spot of public policy in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Despite the progress in public policies that have contributed to gender equality, social and political institutions continue to operate on the assumption of a strict sexual division of labour that maintains the stereotype of women as caregivers and men as breadwinners.

Most labour codes and specific regulations in Latin America have focused on maternity protection without taking care of equality, and this situation has not been reviewed for 30 years.

The State's actions regarding care are generally limited to two broad spheres: protection of working mothers within the framework of the formal labour code, and the provision of child-care.

Neither the market nor the State provides options for reconciling work and family life, in addition to which men's share of family responsibilities is minimal and women who work in the informal sector are excluded from social protection systems and from the full exercise of their rights.

This impedes women from searching employment and when they finally get it they must accept precarious conditions without protection.

Public child-care services in the region are deficient, and in countries that require firms to provide nurseries –when they are associated to the quantity of women at the workplace, and not at the number of

men- this requirement is not, in fact, fully complied with.

To promote the access to decent employments a fiscal policy that is favourable to gender equality is required. This will be one that:

- (i) improves the distribution of economic resources, assets, land, credit and wages;
- (ii) increases the scope of economic opportunities for men and women in order to overcome the labour segmentation;
- (iii) creates positive incentives for women's entry into the labour market, especially in private enterprises;
- (iv) lifts the barriers which prevent women's full integration into the labour market, especially those relating to care responsibilities;
- (v) promotes the involvement of men in providing care.

One of the tools governments are currently using to improve the socio-economic situation of the poorest households is conditional cash (or no cash) transfers. These schemes have earned favourable evaluations for their impact on the income level and stability of the most vulnerable households as well as on children's education conditions and health. However, the benefits for the specific situation of women, who are 63% of the recipients of these funds, are ambiguous.

On the one hand, transfers have given women a certain level of income, which contributes to their economic autonomy. On the other, the counterpart contribution

required (regarding their children's health and education) and the actual management of the programme impinge on women's time.

Moreover, the transfers may discourage women from joining the workforce because in many cases the benefits cease if there is another source of income.

Public policy in action

Gender equality is part of the public policy agenda of the governments of the region. Many have adopted national equality laws, implemented gender-sensitive budgets and mainstreamed gender in their planning systems.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras and Paraguay have established ministerial-level agencies, but in smaller, less-developed countries, especially in the Caribbean, women's affairs remain the domain of social ministries or continue to be associated with welfare programmes.

Some countries have created programmes to improve women's work situation, including unemployment subsidies, affirmative action for job creation and business development, and measures to improve employment opportunities for women.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador and the Plurinational State of Bolivia have recognized the unpaid work performed by women in their constitutions.

In Costa Rica, Ecuador, Jamaica and Suriname, care needs are beginning to form a specific field of public policy. Costa Rica is placing an emphasis on building up care infrastructure and promoting a cultural shift towards co-responsibility between men and women. In Jamaica, legislation on maternity leave is under review with a view to offering greater protection to pregnant women. The civil code of Suriname now includes the right to paid maternity leave.

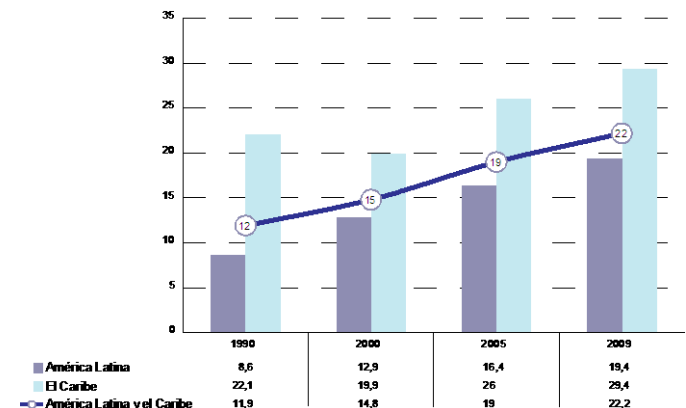
Some countries are granting paternity leave, which seeks to promote the sharing of responsibilities in households.

Mexico set up a programme of day-care nurseries to help working mothers and the public policies of the Plurinational State of Bolivia seek to redistribute care responsibilities in the home. Under the *Chile Crece Contigo* programme, Chile has increased the number of public nurseries by 240% since 1990. Suriname provides day-care centres and Trinidad and Tobago offers tax cuts to companies that provide nurseries.

In Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Spain and Uruguay, new approaches for reconciling work and family life are being introduced in private companies. Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Paraguay have pioneered gender equality policies based on programmes created to perform mandatory follow-up and oversight functions.

Colombia, Guatemala and Peru are addressing both gender inequality and racial and ethnic discrimination simultaneously, specifically targeting indigenous and Afro-descendent women with their policies on productive development, employment and economic, social and political participation.

Latin America and the Caribbean: proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (simple average) (Percentages)



Source: United Nations, Millennium Development Goals indicators database [online] <http://millenniumindicators.un.org>, 2009.

Some countries, such as Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru and Uruguay, have adopted legislation establishing equal rights in all areas. New laws on women's sexual and reproductive health have also been passed. Furthermore, in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Colombia, Costa Rica and Mexico new legislation has been introduced to tackle violence against women beyond the domestic sphere.

Overall, there are fewer women than men in the executive branch of government, although in some countries women represented a higher proportion, such as in Grenada (54.5%). However, in Argentina, Ecuador and Peru, women make up just under 30% of the executive branch. The lowest levels of women's representation in the executive branch can be seen in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, the Cayman Islands, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica and Puerto Rico, with less than 15%.

The percentage of women in parliaments has grown over the past 10 years but remains low for the region overall at only 22.2%.

Thirteen Latin American countries now have quota legislation requiring the registration of female candidates for congressional elections and the inclusion of women on candidate lists for internal political party elections. The percentage of women required by law varies from 20% in Paraguay to 45% in Ecuador.

For the regional legislative councils in November 2008, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela introduced regulations requiring 50% of the candidates to be women, while the Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia provides that the principles of parity and gender alternation must be taken into account. In Ecuador, the Constitution establishes the principle of parity in nomination and appointment to public office. The electoral legislation of Costa Rica establishes the principle of parity in political participation.