

VITAL VIEWS OF THE WOMEN OF THE REGION



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1. Introduction

In June 2022, the IX Summit of the Americas was held in the city of Los Angeles, California. Since the First Summit of the Americas was held (Miami, 1994), this meeting space for the Heads of State and Government of the region has laid the groundwork for policy and action agendas on a series of key issues, while at the same time strengthening multilateralism with the adoption of concrete mandates by the high-level decision makers.

Since the Third Summit (Quebec City, 2001), important mandates have been adopted on gender equality and the empowerment of women. However, the participation and leadership of women and the representation of their agendas in the mandates adopted have been lacking. In fact, the low level of representation of women currently among the Heads of State and Government of the Americas is reflected in the fact that only two of the heads of state or government at the IX Summit are women.

Mindful of this imbalance, the Summits of Secretariat, in its capacity as Technical Secretariat and institutional memory of the Summits of the Americas process, has redoubled its efforts in recent years to strengthen the participation and advocacy of women's organizations in the region in the Summits process. In addition, more recently, in the framework of a regional project that it is implementing with the support of the Government of Canada to increase the participation of feminist and women's organizations in the process of the IX Summit. The Summits Secretariat has strengthened ties with the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) of the OAS in this area, and in this paper it aims to advance analysis of gender issues in relation to the core themes of the Ninth Summit with a view to enriching the gender agenda in the region.

In order to gather the opinions, feelings, and demands of women, thematic consultations were carried out in February 2022 on each of the five subthemes of the IX Summit in a process of dialogue and exchange that has yielded a compendium of recommendations that this document seeks to make visible, drawing attention to the most important aspects of the current situation of women in relation to the core themes of the IX Summit of the Americas: Action Plan on Health and Resilience in the Americas , Our Sustainable Green Future, Accelerating the Clean, Sustainable, Renewable, and Just Energy Transition, Regional Agenda for Digital Transformation , and Inter-American Action Plan on Democratic Governance. It also proposes a series of specific recommendations for the countries of the region in each of the sectors addressed to fulfill the mandates of the IX Summit of the Americas with a gender perspective, based on the dialogues with civil society organizations in the consultation processes, which are fundamental for advancing towards a sustainable, resilient, and equitable future. Therefore, this gender agenda is not a sectoral issue or a formality, but represents the richness and urgency of the experiences, needs, and demands of more than half the population of the Americas – more than half a billion people who embody boundless diversity.

This document has been prepared from a series of cross-cutting approaches, which in turn are fundamental for effective fulfillment of mandates adopted (through five documents referred to as political commitments) at the IX Summit of the Americas. These approaches, which constitute the cornerstone of the gender agenda and, therefore, of this document are as follows: The **human rights approach**, which makes it a priority for States to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate the series of decisions and actions they take using a permanent process of inclusion, deliberation, and effective social participation with the objective of guaranteeing the human rights of all persons; the gender equality approach, including a differentiated impact for the measures adopted for men and women, the experiences and demands of women and men at different moments of the political cycle, and the benefit of the measures adopted for narrowing the inequality gap; lastly, the intersectional approach, which highlights the importance of adopting differentiated measures within the group of women with diverse identities, taking into account factors that accentuate their situation of inequality: race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and others.

2. Crosscutting gender gaps

Although substantial progress has been made in the Americas in the area of women's rights and gender equality, women still face significant gaps that impede the full exercise of their rights, as do young women and girls. This situation has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its consideration is crucial for the legitimacy and sustainability of any specific action based on the mandates adopted at the IX Summit.

A review of the situation of women in the region prior to the COVID-19 pandemic shows that women lived in a **situation of feminized poverty that is rooted in existing structural barriers preventing them from achieving economic autonomy**. In 2019, it is estimated that for every 100 men living below the poverty line, there were 112.7 women in the same situation¹.

Women's labor force participation has been increasing in Latin American and Caribbean countries in recent decades, although there is still a considerable gender gap. Prior to the pandemic, 64.5 percent of women were in the labor force compared to 94.1 percent of men. For women living alone, without partners or dependents, the rate was 84.4 percent, compared to 92.6 percent for men². To a large extent, this gap has its origin in the sexual division of labor that assigns women the main responsibility for domestic and care work. In 2018, according to a study by the International Labour Organization (ILO), more than 50 percent of women between the ages of 20 and 24 considered their domestic work burden to be the main reason they did not seek paid work³.

During the pandemic, many women had to reduce their responsibilities at work, take leave, or leave the labor force altogether, due to being overburdened with unpaid work⁴, which had an impact on their retention in the formal and informal labor force. As a result, women's unemployment has increased and remains difficult to rectify to this day. In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that a high percentage of women in the labor force in the region are concentrated in economic activities such as retail trade, domestic work, education, accommodation and food services, agriculture, and health, which are precisely those that were among the worst affected by the economic crisis triggered by the pandemic⁵.

1 Admin (June 15, 2021), Feminity index of poor households, Gender Equality Observatory. Retrieved March 28, 2022, from <https://oig.cepal.org/en/indicators/feminity-index-poor-households>

2 ILO (2020), New indicators by household type show the gendered effects of marriage and child rearing on labor market outcomes.

3 Retrieved March 23, 2022, from [https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/%20women/ILO \(2018\), Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work](https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/%20women/ILO%20(2018),%20Care%20Work%20and%20Care%20Jobs%20for%20the%20Future%20of%20Decent%20Work). Retrieved on February 23, 2022

from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_633135.pdf

4 ILO, 2021 Labour Overview, Latin America and the Caribbean, Lima, ILO / Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean.

5 ILO (2021), Servicio de Empleo, Mercados de Trabajo y Juventud, Organización Internacional del Trabajo, Retrieved February 20, 2022, from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_782877.pdf.

Gender violence: one of the main scourges affecting the situation of women. Despite the fact that the region was the first to adopt a specific legal instrument on the subject in the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belem do Para, 1994), 14 of the 25 countries with the highest incidence of gender-based violence in the world are in Latin America, where more than 4,000 femicides were recorded in 2019⁶. Likewise, 11% of women over the age of 15 in the region report having suffered sexual violence at some time in their lives, a figure double the world average.⁷ Domestic violence increased in 2020, as women were in lockdown with their aggressors, a situation reflected in the increase in calls to women's emergency care centers in different countries.⁸

Although all the countries in the region have laws on violence against women, only 13 countries have comprehensive laws that address, in accordance with the Belem do Para Convention, the multiple forms of violence against women in the public and private spheres. Similarly, only 17 countries have a national plan, policy, action, or strategy for preventing, addressing, and eradicating violence against women and girls.⁹ This reality is perpetuated and made worse by impunity and lack of justice in cases of violence against women, especially considering that the existing figures on violence do not reflect the full extent of the problem, and that what limited statistics there are for follow-up and resolution of reported cases are not very encouraging.

The progress in women's **participation in decision-making spaces** in recent decades has been substantial, although there is still a significant gap in various areas of their lives, with structural barriers that do not allow them to advance and develop in these spaces, much less participate in decisions that also affect their daily lives. The demands of civil society are now focused on gender parity in decision-making spaces, a concept that has been promoted in multilateral spaces such as the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM).

Likewise, gendered social norms in the region have a direct impact on women's representation in decision-making spaces. Of particular concern is the persistent negative perception of women's leadership skills, which undermines not only their

6 UNFPA, Qué hacemos. Violencia Basada en Género. Retrieved February 22, 2022 from <https://lac.unfpa.org/es/temas/violencia-basada-en-g%C3%A9nero>

7 ECLAC (2021), The pandemic in the shadows: femicides or feminicides in 2020 in Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC. Retrieved February 24, 2022 from https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/infographic/files/21-00792_folleto_the_pandemic_in_the_shadows_web.pdf

8 López-Calva, L. F. (2020), ¿No hay lugar más seguro que el hogar?: El aumento en la Violencia Doméstica y de género durante los confinamientos por covid-19 en alc: Pnud en américa latina y el caribe, UNDP. Retrieved February 20, 2022 from <https://www.latinamerica.undp.org/content/rblac/es/home/presscenter/director-s-graph-for-thought/no-safer-place-than-home---the-increase-in-domestic-and-gender-b.html>

9 MESECVI (2021), Third Follow-up Report on the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Committee of Experts of the MESECVI, Retrieved March 23, 2022, from <https://www.oas.org/en/mesecvi/docs/Tercer-Informe-Seguimiento-EN.pdf> (p. 39)

leadership in political and private spheres, but also the achievement of parity in all spheres, as well as women's ability to influence decision-making processes, including the specific issues and sectors addressed at the IX Summit. However, continued progress is constantly threatened by the exponential growth of movements and discourse against women's rights and gender equality, generally with high levels of political advocacy.



3. Thematic pillars of the IX Summit: Challenges and opportunities for advancing the gender agenda

Action Plan on Health and Resilience in the Americas

The pandemic revealed the shortcomings in the region's healthcare infrastructure, as it was not able to both address the health emergency and continue to meet the population's needs. Within this gap, women—especially women from vulnerable or marginalized groups—have been the worst affected. Women's involvement in the informal labor market, in which they are overrepresented, excludes them from social protection systems, as they do not have labor benefits for most of their lives. This limits their access to public health services, which are insufficient and, in many cases, not of the quality required to address even basic health problems, let alone complex ones. Hemorrhaging and hypertension continue to be the main causes of maternal mortality in the region. Scenarios associated with abortions performed clandestinely are third on the list, with 10% of maternal mortality in the region resulting from this cause.¹⁰ It is estimated that annually, 62 women out of every 100,000 die from clandestine abortions.¹¹

The teen pregnancy rate in Latin America and the Caribbean continues to be the second highest in the world, disproportionately affecting girls and young women from rural areas, indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, and the lowest socioeconomic levels, who are four times more likely to become pregnant than young women in urban areas with higher levels of education and income.¹² Approximately 2 percent of women in Latin America and the Caribbean reported having had their first pregnancy before the age of 15, indicating alarming rates of sexual violence against girls. This is due, in part, to barriers to access to contraception: it is estimated that only 28 percent of adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19 in the region used contraception in 2019.¹³

Access to contraceptives by women of reproductive age declined with the COVID-19 pandemic, with the number of women with unmet contraceptive needs estimated at more

10 PAHO (2018), Plan of Action for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health 2018-2030. 56th Directing Council, 70th Session of the Regional Committee of WHO for the Americas. Retrieved February 23, 2022, from <https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/49609/CD56-8-e.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

11 Vera, I (2021), Aborto en América Latina: estatus legal y cifras tras despenalización en Colombia. Actualidad. Retrieved February 20, 2022 from <https://www.bloomberglinea.com/2021/09/28/el-aborto-en-america-latina-en-cifras-su-estatus-legal-e-impacto-en-cada-pais/>

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

than 32 million, a 14 percent increase over the pre-pandemic figure.¹⁴ Latin America and the Caribbean is the region with the highest rate of unwanted pregnancies worldwide; it is also the region where 97 percent of women live in countries that have strict abortion laws.¹⁵ In light of this public health emergency, which exclusively affects women, the World Health Organization has recently issued calls to facilitate access to voluntary pregnancy termination, where possible, along with new guidelines on access to safe abortions.¹⁶

On the other hand, on the spectrum of intersectionality, trans women face a series of obstacles to equal access to health information and services that is free of violence and discrimination, including sexual and reproductive health services and diagnosis and treatment for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). They are constantly mistreated by a system that does not recognize their identity, and thus the discriminatory treatment denies them their right to access to health.

The gender gap in health is evident not only for women users of health services, but also for women working in the sector. It is estimated that half of the medical staff and more than 80 percent of the nursing staff in the region are women,¹⁷ who come in greater and more regular contact with patients, including in the context of COVID-19. This figure for representation of women in this profession is the highest in the world, and yet women remain underrepresented among managers and decision-makers in the healthcare sector, even as they face a salary gap of 28 percent.¹⁸

"The adolescent fertility rate in Latin America and the Caribbean continues to be the second highest worldwide, disproportionately affecting girls and young people from rural areas, indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, as well as the lowest socio-economic levels"

Recommendations

The commitment to collaborate in the development of an "Action Plan on Health and Resilience in the Americas" takes into account the health of women and girls and the importance of their participation in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the biological determinants of health, it recognizes sociocultural, economic, and structural determinants, one of which is structural gender inequality. It prioritizes individuals and communities and specifically mentions sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. In this context, from the gender agenda, the following recommendations should be taken into account in the negotiation of the Action Plan, which should also incorporate equal participation and women's leadership:

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ IWMF, Reproductive Health, Rights, and Justice in the Americas, Programs. Retrieved February 20, 2022, from <https://www.iwmf.org/programs/reproductive-health-rights-and-justice-in-the-americas/>

¹⁶ WHO (2022), WHO issues new guidelines on abortion to help countries deliver life-saving care. Retrieved on February 23, 2022 from <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-03-2022-access-to-safe-abortion-critical-for-health-of-women-and-girls>

¹⁷ IDB (2020), Women in Latin America and the Caribbean face greater risks from coronavirus. Retrieved March 23 from: <https://blogs.iadb.org/igualdad/es/mujeres-enfrentan-mayores-riesgos-ante-coronavirus/>.

¹⁸ WHO (2019), Gender equity in the health workforce: Analysis of 104 countries. Retrieved March 23 from:

- I. **Strengthen social protection for women working in the informal economy and doing part-time jobs, domestic labor, and those engaged in unpaid care.** It is essential to offer quality health coverage to women in these sectors, in all their diversities and taking into account their different needs.
- II. **Increase access to sexual and reproductive health information and services under equal conditions for all women and free from violence.** Analyze existing economic and social barriers to access to modern contraceptive methods and family planning services, including but not limited to emergency oral contraceptives and fertility diagnostics, among other services. This access must be adapted to the intersectionalities of women: in different languages, with access for women with disabilities, illiterate women, women in rural areas, trans women, etc., thus recognizing that access to contraceptives is an inherent right of women and that the decision to access them is theirs alone and does not correspond to the health system or to others.
- III. **Increase efforts to prevent child and teen pregnancies that focus on violence prevention, sexual education, and access to services, including elective pregnancy termination.** Increase access to contraceptives for adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19, not only through health services to which they often do not have access, but also by diversifying how these methods are provided in order to adapt them to the daily lives of adolescent women to increase their effectiveness. This includes providing these services to migrant women and trans women who regularly experience institutional discrimination.
- IV. **Increase the quality of support services for women who are the victims of violence.** Provide adequate support for response to the different types of violence that have a differentiated effect on women, in all their diversities, including situations of physical and psychological violence that impact the mental health of women, as well as support to women who, because of their status, have experienced traumatic situations: migrant women, victims of human trafficking, loss of pregnancies, etc. recognizing women's mental health as a right and a basic health service, as a component of overall welfare.

- V. **Incorporate a gender approach in the educational health curriculum and in the health services care protocols.** Incorporating a gender approach in the educational curriculum of all health training areas will strengthen informed decision-making at all stages of women's lives, as well as the application of care protocols for preventing gender-based violence and providing support in response to it. Likewise, develop proper implementation of a gender approach in the national educational curriculum to promote the sexual and reproductive education necessary to increase access to information for young adolescents.

"The commitment to collaboration in the elaboration of a" Plan of Action on Health and Resilience in the Americas "recognizes, in addition to the biological determinants of health, the socio-cultural, economic and structural determinants, one of which is structural gender inequality."



Our Sustainable Green Future

Due to a variety of factors, Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the regions most economically and socially impacted by the effects of climate change. Among these impacts, their negative effect on the lives of women, and especially women facing vulnerability, have differentiated facets that affect women and relate to the socioeconomic inequalities that separate them.¹⁹ Women's ability to adapt to climate change is limited by the inequalities that are the result of the gender inequality that takes the form of gaps in access to land, natural resources, technology, economic independence, migration, and other aspects.

The impact of climate change is greater when it comes to women from rural areas or indigenous communities, who not only care for natural resources but also depend on them for their daily subsistence and that of their families. The women from these communities bear the responsibility of

"At the regional level, 30 per cent of rural women owned land; however, only 5% have access to tools and know-how to adapt their crops to the new global conditions."

collecting basic resources, such as water, and are also responsible for their communities' food security. When these resources become scarce, the time women must dedicate to gathering them—considered to be time spent on care—increases, which has a directly negative impact on the time available for remunerated labor, and therefore on their economic autonomy. Regionally, 30 percent of women in rural areas are landowners; however, only 5 percent have access to the technological tools and knowledge to adapt their crops to the new planetary conditions. Soil erosion, rising sea levels, and droughts directly impact the economy of women who work in agriculture, the majority of whom work in the fields doing part-time, informal labor without labor rights; that is, jobs from which they can be easily dismissed if produce is not profitable.²⁰

Additionally, women from the most vulnerable groups tend to be the ones with the most knowledge for conserving biodiversity, wisdom that could lead to specific solutions for mitigating the effects of climate change; however, they are also the ones most excluded from decision-making in these spaces.²¹ Such is the case even when there is evidence that greater representation of women in these spaces leads to positive actions: a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) study concluded that parliaments with a greater representation of women have a greater likelihood of approving multilateral treaties establishing processes to prevent and mitigate climate change.²²

19 Ibid.

20 Erthal, A (2020), Gender, Climate and Security in Latin America and the Caribbean: From Diagnostics to Solutions, Climate Diplomacy. Retrieved February 20, 2022, from <https://climate-diplomacy.org/magazine/cooperation/gender-climate-and-security-latin-america-and-caribbean-diagnostics-solutions>

21 Ibid.

22 Herrera, C (2018), Las mujeres de Latinoamérica, agentes poderosas en la lucha contra el cambio climático. NRDC. Retrieved February 28, 2022, from <https://www.nrdc.org/es/experts/carolina-herrera/mujeres-latinoamerica-agentes-poderosas-lucha-cambio-climatico>

Despite the serious consequences expected, only six countries in the region have developed gender and climate change action plans. Likewise, the Escazú Agreement, which establishes protocols for socio-environmental conflicts by empowering communities and strengthening institutions, has not seen significant uptake in the region. That agreement is the only one in the world that seeks to guarantee a safe environment for environmental defenders, who face constant harassment and political, psychological, and physical violence—including death, in an alarming number of cases—for the role they take on.

Recommendations

The document adopted by the Heads of State and government “Our Sustainable Green Future” encourages greater attention to women and girls, including their participation in education, research, and training initiatives. In this context, from the gender agenda, the following recommendations should be taken into account in its implementation, which should also incorporate parity participation and women’s leadership:

- I. **Incorporate a gender approach for implementing mitigation and risk management plans and actions at the local, national, and regional levels.** A priority must be placed on identifying and adopting standards and collecting data, testimony, and other information—still hard to come by in the region—to identify the specific ways in which climate change is impacting the lives of women. Based on this, take a participatory approach to drafting action plans to mitigate these impacts that are based on the experiences and knowledge of women, thereby fostering their leadership and supporting their work, and taking into account that women in situations of vulnerability are the ones most affected. Likewise, allocate adequate financial resources to implement measures to counteract the effects of the intersection between climate change and gender.
- II. **Implement educational actions on climate change focused on women. Particularly aimed at women** who subsist—along with their families—on the exploitation of natural resources to ensure, in the process, that they take into account the impact that the collection and utilization of these resources can have on care for biodiversity, greenhouse gas emissions, and the management of water resources, among other things. Specifically, for women who work in agricultural areas, make efforts to promote agroecology as among best practices to ensure care for the environment on which they depend.

- III. **Promote women's access to technology for mitigation and adaptation to the effects of climate change.** Through subsidies for new and clean technologies, hand in hand with training programs focused on women in all their diversities. Likewise, promote women's access to credit so that they are able to have access on their own to technology that is friendly to the biodiversity. Additionally, promote the participation of women in careers related to the development of new technologies: mathematics, engineering, and science.
- IV. **Recognize the importance of ratifying the Escazú Agreement, which has been ratified by 13 countries in the region.** This, in view of the importance of establishing processes for resolving socio-environmental conflict and protecting environmental defenders by establishing a new pact between civil society and decision-making processes for mitigation actions. Additionally, establish spaces for exchange between women's civil society organizations throughout the region to learn about important climate change mitigation and adaptation experiences.

"Despite the serious consequences, only six countries in the region have developed Gender and Climate Change Action Plans."



Accelerating the Clean, Sustainable, Renewable, and Just Energy Transition

In addition to creating solutions to prevent climate change from worsening, the clean energy sector is creating economic and job opportunities worldwide at an exponential rate. However, this growth has not included women, as they have historically been underrepresented in the traditional energy sector. The electricity, gas, and water sectors generate 50 percent of the jobs worked by men globally.²³ There is a likelihood that the renewable energy sector, as a growing activity, will create more inclusive spaces so that in future women are adequately represented, not only in the labor market, but also in terms of having a say in the design and implementation of the energy sector of the future that suits their needs and those of their communities.

At present there are a number of barriers to women in terms of their entry and development in the energy sector and, therefore, in the clean energy sector, that limit their participation. These barriers are related to gender stereotypes and roles; a lack of technical training, as they are underrepresented in the fields from which the sector hires (engineering, mathematics, and science); and cross-cutting barriers that impact labor market participation, such as the burden of care.

As of 2017, women accounted for only 22 percent of the oil and gas workforce. It is calculated that only 17 percent of executive and managerial decision-making positions are held by women.²⁴

Additionally, access to energy has a fundamental impact on the human development of women. It is estimated that those who have access to energy in their homes are more likely to find employment than those who do not.²⁵ Therefore, access to energy, but especially to clean energy, is key for women and girls who perform domestic labor, as it reduces not only the time spent on domestic labor, but also their exposure to health risks from biomass combustion (wood, coal, etc.), as well as giving them access to information through communication tools such as the internet.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Senay Habtezion, GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE: Gender and sustainable energy. New York, UNDP. Retrieved March 1, 2022. .

Recommendations

The document adopted by the Heads of State and Government “Accelerating the Clean, **Sustainable, Renewable, and Just Energy Transition**” encourages greater attention to women and girls, the integration of a gender equality and equity approach, and empowerment of women in the energy transition. In this context, from the gender agenda, the following recommendations should be taken into account in its implementation, which should also incorporate equal participation and women’s leadership:

- I. **Recognize the importance of women’s access to services and sources of clean energy.** Increase the collection of information on the impacts of the lack of access to energy, especially in households in indigenous communities, rural areas, and low-income single-parent households. This, taking into account the impacts that access to clean energy has on women’s health, on ease of access, and therefore on the use of time in housework, and even on opportunity to access a paid job.
- II. **Incorporate a gender approach in clean energy development plans at the regional and national levels.** Conduct a structural analysis of the barriers preventing women from entering this sector’s workforce, since incorporation of women into these spaces and in decision-making spaces is vital to taking into account the reality and needs of women in all their diversities in the design of clean energy access plans.
- III. **Promote women’s access to science, technology, engineering, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers:** This, by eliminating gender stereotypes and roles around these careers; increasing grants and scholarships for women in them; promoting women in STEM through primary and secondary education; and promoting job promotion plans for women in these sectors.

“Access to energy, but especially clean energy, is key for those women and girls who are burdened with housework, not only reducing the use of time in housework, but also their exposure to health risks”



Regional Agenda for Digital Transformation

According to Plan International,²⁶ girls and women have less access to technology and the internet compared to boys and men, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, where women find it difficult to finance their access to such platforms. It is also often the case that girls are the last priority when it comes to access to the internet at home. A study carried out by the Institute for the Integration of Latin America and the Caribbean concluded that as of 2018, women in the region were less familiar with the use of cell phones and digital platforms. This is confirmed by the International Telecommunication Union, which reports that on average, over 50 percent of women globally are not “online.”²⁷

The gender gap in education, the educational level of the parents, and the socioeconomic level of the household are usually part of the explanation of the digital gap between boys and girls, as is the negative perception of the Internet in areas with low access, with girls and young women often restricted from using the internet to protect them from becoming the victims of violence or inappropriate contact.²⁸ For many women, the wage gap, low income levels, and economic dependence are the main obstacles to accessing internet services and equipment, a situation that is aggravated in single-mother households. This impacts not only their choice of whether or not to have internet but also the type of service: Usually the least costly services with less data. This makes women more sensitive than men to price increases for Internet services in remote areas, increasing the likelihood of being left without service.

Additionally, there is a relationship between women doing part-time labor and working in the informal sector and their access to the internet, digital platforms, and related training. Companies usually invest in training their staff who are employed full time—which is often not the case for a high percentage of women—and who have been with the organization a long time or are expected to be. Currently, worldwide, more than 90 percent of jobs have a digital component and will progressively require more human capital with these skills.²⁹ The lack of access to and training in digital sectors in turn limits women’s access to and permanence in the best jobs—that is, the less access women have to good jobs, the fewer opportunities they will have to access the Internet and digital platforms, thus limiting opportunities to access formal and decent work.³⁰

26 A humanitarian and development organization working in more than 75 countries in Africa, the Americas, and Asia to promote children’s rights and equality for girls.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Plan International, Bridging the Gender Digital Divide. Retrieved March 2, 2022, from <https://plan-international.org/education/bridging-the-digital-divide>

30 Galperin, H., & Arcidiacono, M (2021), Employment and the gender digital divide in Latin America: A decomposition analysis. Telecommunications Policy, 45(7), 1–12. Retrieved March 2, 2022, from https://annenbergh.usc.edu/sites/default/files/2021/06/21/Galperin_Arcidiacono_Gender_Digital_Divide_TP.pdf

Recommendations

The Regional Agenda for Digital Transformation approved by the Heads of State and Government recognizes the gendered digital divide and encourages the inclusion of women and girls in national plans or strategies on digital transformation and innovation. In this context, from the gender agenda, the following recommendations should be taken into account in its implementation, which should also incorporate equal participation and women's leadership:

- I. **Increase public internet services in strategic locations in order to close the digital divide.** Whether in the form of hotspots, youth centers, especially in rural areas, government assistance centers, etc. Access to these services must be free and provide training in the facilities themselves or at the access point to ensure that women and girls know how to use them. Internet access should be declared a fundamental right, meaning provision of this service is recognized as essential for the personal and professional development of persons.
- II. **Work on adding education on digital platforms to educational curricula at the national level.** From an early age, strengthen introduction to the knowledge and tools related to internet access and related topics, as well as responsible use thereof.
Promote the inclusion of girls and young women in STEM careers by eliminating gender stereotypes related to the national educational curriculum and creating recreational spaces on these issues, as well as making women in rural areas visible. Likewise, focus on guaranteeing internet service in schools, especially in educational institutions in rural areas where accessing an internet connection is complex and expensive.

"For many women, the wage gap, low levels of economic income and economic dependence are the main obstacles to accessing services and equipment with an internet signal, a situation that worsens in single-parent households."
- III. **Promote digital solutions for the variety of situations facing women in the region.** Achieve this by including access to gender-based violence services, sexual and reproductive health services, and mental health services. These actions must include a strategic focus on incorporation in areas with good access to digital services, a quality internet connection, and an adequate digital literacy rate, to guarantee their full access to such services.

- IV. Increase the collection of information on the gender gap in digital transformation.** This, including a repository of good practices in the region, in order to identify the specific barriers that girls and women face when inserting themselves in digital services and design specific solutions to these obstacles in the short, medium, and long term. This information must consider the intersectionality and diversity of women, taking into account that their economic status, race, ethnicity, and level of education, among other considerations, are factors that contribute to widening the digital divide and must be identified in order to provide solutions adapted to these contexts.
- V Incorporate training programs on digital platforms and electronic commerce in national and local plans for the economic empowerment of women.** This should be done with the aim of promoting their businesses with adequate tools, adapted to the needs of today's entrepreneurs. Additionally, set up trade and exchange portals for women from rural areas and indigenous communities-mostly artisans-with the aim of opening a door to increasing their income through e-commerce.

"The less women have access to decent work, the fewer opportunities they have to access the internet and digital platforms, thus limiting their likelihood of access to decent, formal work."



Inter-American Action Plan on Democratic Governance

Currently in the region, only two women hold the highest position in the Executive Branch (in Barbados and Honduras).³¹ Overall, the countries of the region have taken substantive steps towards equality in representation by adopting new legal frameworks at the international and national levels that have promoted the participation of women. The region thus has the highest average number of women legislators in the world, with 33.9 percent.³² It has been demonstrated that these advances are explained in large part by the application of gender quota laws and, above all, by parity laws.³³

However, in more than half of the countries, the representation of women in legislative bodies is under 30 percent, and there have even been declines in that figure.³⁴ At the local level, there has been less progress: In 2018, less than 15 percent of mayors in the region were women.³⁵

This asymmetry is not just in elected positions: Only 27.5 percent of Supreme Court judges in 18 countries in the region were women as of the end of 2019.³⁶ The figure for women's representation in cabinets is 30 percent.³⁷ This inequality has much to do with the lack of women in decision-making positions in political parties, which are fundamental vehicles of political representation: Although women account for around 50 percent of party membership, they hold only 19 percent of decision-making positions.³⁸

The problem of political underrepresentation of women in the region is worse from an intersectional perspective, with indigenous women, women from rural areas, women of African descent, women from LGBTQI+ communities and migrant women, often facing multi-faceted discrimination and violence when seeking to enter politics. The lack of disaggregated data on political participation with a focus on diversity makes it difficult to more forcefully raise awareness on this issue. For example, some estimates calculate that only 0.1 percent of women parliamentarians in the region are of African descent.³⁹

31 UN Women (2021), Towards parity and inclusive participation in Latin America and the Caribbean. Regional overview and contributions to CSW65. Retrieved March 5, 2022, from https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/document/files/lac_consultation_csw65.pdf

32 Global and regional averages of women in National Parliaments. Parline: the IPU's Open Data Platform. (2022, March 1). Retrieved March 28, 2022, from <https://data.ipu.org/women-averages>

33 CIM (2016), La Democracia Paritaria en América Latina. Organization of American States. Retrieved March 28, 2022, from <https://www.oas.org/en/cim/docs/DeclaracionViolenciaPolitica-ES.pdf>

34 Global and regional averages of women in National Parliaments. Parline: the IPU's Open Data Platform. (2022), Retrieved March 5, 2022, from <https://data.ipu.org/women-averages?month=3&year=2022>

35 ECLAC (2021), Elected mayors who are female, Gender Equality Observatory. Retrieved March 5, 2022, from <https://oig.cepal.org/en/indicators/elected-mayors-who-are-female>

36 Op cit., UN Women (2021).

37 Ibid

38 Llanos, B., & Roza, V. Partidos políticos y paridad: una mirada subregional a América Central, República Dominicana y México, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA). Retrieved March 5, 2022, from <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/partidos-politicos-y-paridad.pdf>

39 Op cit., UN Women (2021).

The conditions for women and men's participation in politics remain asymmetrical. This is primarily due to structural inequality when it comes to domestic labor and care work, which fall mainly to women. Additionally, the persistence of negative gender stereotypes prevent women from freely exercising leadership, and they face multiple scenarios of unequal access to political resources, including political financing, access to the media, and overall access to power networks. The greatest resistance to increasing the political participation of women takes the form of political violence, a type of violence intended to intimidate women in decision-making positions.⁴⁰ A survey by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) found that globally, 81.8 percent of women parliamentarians say they have experienced psychological violence at some moment during their time in office.⁴¹

In the last decade, the focus and demand of feminist and women's organizations in the region has been parity, not only in legislative bodies, but in all areas of government (executive, legislative, judicial, public administration, etc.) both to place women in decision-making positions and to position the gender agenda at the highest political level. This demand has been heeded by a growing number of countries in the region, nine of which have adopted some parity measure. The CIM has highlighted and promoted the significant advances in the region around the concept, which it understands as *"a matter of justice with three aspects: (i) opportunity for equal participation in decision-making positions in decision-making positions in the public and private sector, from the international to the local level; (ii) the exercise of political and economic power on an equal footing— that is, free from gender-based discrimination and violence; and (iii) the incorporation in public policy of the agendas for women's rights and gender equality transversally to regulatory frameworks and public policies at the internal level with an intersectional, intergenerational, and intercultural (and human rights) perspective, recalling that the equal participation of women is an essential element of democracy."*⁴²

"The region has the highest average of women legislators in the world, with 33.9%. It has been shown how these advances are largely explained by the application of gender quota laws and, above all, by parity laws."

40 Inter-American Commission of Women (2019), Model protocol for political parties: Preventing, addressing, punishing, and eradicating violence against women in political life, Organization of American States. Retrieved March 28, 2022, from <https://www.oas.org/es/-/cim/docs/ViolenciaPolitica-ProtocoloPartidos-EN.pdf>

41 Unión Interparlamentaria (IPU). (2016). Sexismo, acoso y violencia contra las mujeres parlamentarias. París; Unión Interparlamentaria (IPU). Extraído el 10 de Marzo de 2022 de <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians>

42 Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres (2022). Declaración de Panamá: Tendiendo Puentes para un Nuevo Pacto Social y Económico Liderado por Mujeres.

Recommendations

The “*Inter-American Action Plan on Democratic Governance*” adopted by the Heads of State and Government takes into account the historical exclusion of women and girls and commits to: promoting the full and equal participation of women by eliminating barriers for women to run for political office; generating initiatives that emerge from the priorities of women and girls and that promote the development of all people within the framework of intercultural dialogue; promoting gender equity and equality and the empowerment of women and girls in measures to combat corruption; promoting mechanisms at the regional level to encourage the meaningful participation by civil society and social and social actors—including women’s and youth organizations—in monitoring the implementation of Mandates of the IX Summit; and ensuring inclusiveness and diversity by including a gender perspective in all aspects of governance.

“The conditions for women’s and men’s participation in the political sphere remain asymmetrical. Firstly, this is due to the structural inequality in housework and caregiving, which falls mainly on women.”

In this context, from the gender agenda, the following recommendations should be taken into account in the following recommendations should be taken into account in the implementation of the Action Plan, which should also incorporate equal participation and women’s leadership:

- I. **Promote the incorporation of a gender approach in electoral bodies and legislation** in order to not only recognize gender inequalities in elections but also to design actions that go beyond existing quota legislation. The focus would be on campaign finance regulations, how political party leadership is chosen, political violence against women during campaigns and within the parties, and other areas.
- II. **Promote spaces and design tools to enhance women’s abilities to participate in politics**, identifying the differentiated aspects in political competition and tools such that, when the women are elected, they have the knowledge necessary to play a key role in the development of their country. Likewise, design spaces for exchanging good practices between non-profit civil society organizations and government bodies that already undertake these types of processes.
- III. **Focus efforts on women who have historically been excluded from decision-making** spaces including indigenous women, women of African descent, women from rural areas, LGBTQI+ women, women with disabilities, and young women. The efforts must be adapted to women’s different realities and contexts, taking into account the characteristics of the communities that surround them and their poor proximity to State power.

- IV. Open spaces for exchange and participation for political parties** in order to achieve greater inclusion of women in decision-making within political parties, as well as to take on a broad agenda of party reforms that includes issues such as political violence, campaign finance, and others.

4. Final considerations

The current situation of women in the region is challenging in a number of ways. The stagnation, or, in some cases, reversal of the progress made as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (estimated at around two decades), will increase the time needed for the gender gap between men and women to close. The pandemic has exacerbated the precarious situation in which women in the region live, and at the same time made it more visible, drawing attention to the situation of a large cohort of women. It is crucial right now to analyze these diverse realities and design policies, strategies, plans, and actions that center the dignity of women and full respect for the rights, as set forth in the different conventions that the countries of the region have signed over the years.

It is interesting to note, the crosscutting gender gaps affect women's situations in each sector mentioned in the document even as women's situations in each sector widen these crosscutting gaps. For example, the care burden prevents them from getting jobs in the formal sector, significantly reducing the likelihood of women accessing digital platforms and technological tools. This, in turn, hinders their opportunities for personal and professional development, producing economic dependence, one of the reasons why women who are victims continue to live with their attackers. A consequence of the decision-making participation gap is that the gender agenda has historically not been a priority. The real needs of women are thus not included on the list of government policy actions, which include increasing the participation of women in politics.

The technical and political challenges addressed in each sector analyzed at the IX Summit of the Americas and during later stages not only have a differentiated impact on women but also require their participation and leadership to ensure that the benefits of promoting each of these challenges amount to a broader benefit, for their families and communities. Clearly a sustainable, resilient, and equitable future will not be possible without an inclusive agenda that focuses on rights, gender and intersectional equality, and the political will to close this gap that affects both women and men in the region.

43 Según el último Índice Global de la Brecha de Género, serán necesarios 202 años para que la brecha económica mundial entre hombres y mujeres se cierre. Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo: Empleo femenino más allá de las cifras. <https://www.iadb.org/es/mejorando-vidas/empleo-femenino-mas-alla-de-las-estadisticas#:~:text=Una%20situaci%C3%B3n%20que%20se%20da,hombres%20y%20mujeres%20se%20cierre.>

