



UNDP LAC C19 PDS N°. 25

# The impacts of COVID-19 on women's economic autonomy in Latin America and the Caribbean

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## Abstract

*The impacts of the coronavirus pandemic have not been gender-neutral. The crisis brought by COVID-19 has deepened pre-existing gender inequalities. This document analyzes the measures adopted by governments in Latin America and the Caribbean to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic, with the objective of determining the extent to which they recognize, make visible and/or focus on the impacts of the crisis in the life of girls and women. This research is based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the measures registered in the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker (GGR Tracker) related to women's economic security and their unpaid care and domestic work. The GGR tracker has registered the gender sensitive measures adopted by governments to face the impacts of the pandemic. Whilst Latin America is the region with the highest relative number of gender sensitive measures regarding related to women's economic security and their unpaid care and domestic work, the analysis reveals that government's interventions in this two dimensions have been limited in the number of measures implemented, fragmentary with respect to the areas addressed, and heterogeneous in their reach. Without more specific interventions targeting the economic autonomy of women during the pandemic, it will be difficult to overcome the reversal of decades of efforts in the promotion of gender equality.*

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Introduction to the series:

## Evidence, Experience, and Pertinence in Search for Effective Policy Alternatives

The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the most serious challenges the world has faced in recent times. The total cost in terms of human lives is yet to unfold. Alongside the cost of lives and deep health crisis, the world is witnessing an economic downfold that will severely impact the wellbeing of large parts of the population in the years to come. Some of the measures that are currently being used to counteract the pandemic may impact our future lives in non-trivial ways. Understanding the association between different elements of the problem to broaden the policy space, with full awareness of the economic and social effects that they may bring is the purpose of this series.

Thus far, the impossibility of targeted isolation of infected individuals and groups has led to policies of social distancing that impose a disproportionately high economic and social cost around the world. The combination of policies such as social distancing, lockdowns, and quarantines, imply a slowdown or even a complete stop in production and consumption activities for an uncertain period of time, crashing markets and potentially leading to the closure of businesses, sending millions of workers home. Labor, a key factor of production, has been quarantined in most sectors in the economy, borders have been closed and global value chains have been disrupted. Most estimates show a contraction of the level of output globally. For the Latin America and Caribbean region, the consensus forecasts are at -3 to -4%, and it is not until 2022 that the region is expected to go back to its pre-crisis output levels in scenarios that foresee a U-shaped crisis pattern. According to ECLAC, more than 30 million people could fall into poverty in the absence of active policies to protect or substitute income flows to vulnerable groups.

We face a crisis that requires unconventional responses. We are concerned about the level-effect: the impact of the crisis on the size of the economies and their capacity to recover growth after the shock. But we are equally concerned about the distributional impact of the shock. The crisis interacts with pre-existing heterogeneity in asset holdings, income-generation capacity, labor conditions, access to public services, and many other aspects

that make some individuals and households particularly vulnerable to an economic freeze of this kind. People in the informal markets, small and micro entrepreneurs, women in precarious employment conditions, historically excluded groups, such as indigenous and afro-descendants, must be at the center of the policy response.

UNDP, as the development agency of the United Nations, has a long tradition of accompanying policy-making in its design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It has a mandate to respond to changing circumstances, deploying its assets to support our member states in their pursuit of integrated solutions to complex problems. This series aims at drawing from UNDPs own experience and knowledge globally and from the expertise and capacity of our partner think tanks and academic institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is an attempt to promote a collective reflection on the response to the COVID-19 health crisis and its economic and social effects on our societies. Timeliness is a must. Solutions that rely on evidence, experience, and reasoned policy intuition –coming from our rich history of policy engagement– are essential to guide this effort. This series also contributes to the integrated approach established by the UN reform and aspires to become an important input into the coherent response of the United Nations development system at the global, regional, and national levels.

Ben Bernanke, former Governor of the US Federal Reserve, reminds us in his book *The Courage to Act* that during crises, people are distinguished by those who act and those who fear to act. We hope this policy documents series will contribute to the public debate by providing timely and technically solid proposals to support the many who are taking decisive actions to protect the most vulnerable in our region.

*Luis F. Lopez-Calva*

*United Nations Development Programme*

*Regional Director, Latin America and the Caribbean*

*New York, March 2020*

## I. Introduction

The impacts of the coronavirus pandemic have not been gender-neutral. The health, social, and economic crisis brought by COVID-19 has exacerbated existing gender gaps and deepened the already vulnerable situation of women and girls in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>1</sup> Recent studies show a deterioration of gender indicators, resulting from high rates of informal work, massive job losses and greater obstacles for women's return to the labor force, which have led to the accumulation of care tasks and the expansion of the silent epidemic of gender-based violence.<sup>2</sup> These factors have particularly affected women and girls on the basis of their race, disabilities, sexual orientation or identity, socio-economic background, their belonging to indigenous or Afro-descendant communities, or their migrant status.

On the face of this and other challenges generated by the spread of COVID-19, Latin American governments have responded through a variety of policies focused on the specific risks affecting women and girls. Against such backdrop, the purpose of this document is to analyze the scope of governmental measures adopted by States in the region to address the effects of the pandemic on women's economic autonomy and gender equality. With such a goal in mind, the following pages offer a quantitative and qualitative survey of policies to address women's economic security and unpaid care work to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on women's lives.

Our analysis is based on data provided by the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker database, a tool developed and coordinated by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) with technical contributions and substantive leadership from UN Women (hereinafter, the GGR Tracker)<sup>3</sup>. The GGR Tracker monitors the policies implemented by States in the context of the pandemic and identifies multiple **gender-sensitive measures** adopted from March to September 2020. The database defines **gender-sensitive measures** as those directly addressing the specific risks and challenges faced by women and girls in the context of the pandemic, including: a) all measures adopted to prevent and address violence against women; b) social protection and labor market measures addressing the impact on women's economic security or unpaid care work; and c) fiscal and economic measures that offer support to feminized sectors of the economy and advance women's economic security<sup>4</sup>.

The data provided by the GGR Tracker allows us to assess the extent to which States recognize, make visible, and/or focus on the gender dimension of policies adopted to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19<sup>5</sup>. For such purpose, the database includes measures that explicitly address the situation of women in the context of COVID-19. Likewise, the Tracker allows us to survey and weigh how gender-sensitive interventions were distributed between specific issues and policy areas. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that the information provided by the GGR Tracker is not sufficient to assess the scope and the impacts of the measures adopted by the States.

An initial analysis of the information systematized by the GGR Tracker shows that States have implemented a total of 2,517 measures in response to the COVID-19 crisis, of which 39% (992) have been gender-sensitive policies.

<sup>1</sup> The gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been addressed in numerous publications by international and civil society organizations. An exhaustive list of documents and reports produced by the United Nations can be found in "List of gender-related COVID-19 resources by UN entity", Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) and Development Coordination Office (DCO). Available on: [www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/how%20we%20work/unsystemcoordination/gender-related-covid-19-resources-by-un-entity-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1433](http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/how%20we%20work/unsystemcoordination/gender-related-covid-19-resources-by-un-entity-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1433).

<sup>2</sup> UN Women (2020). From Insights to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19.

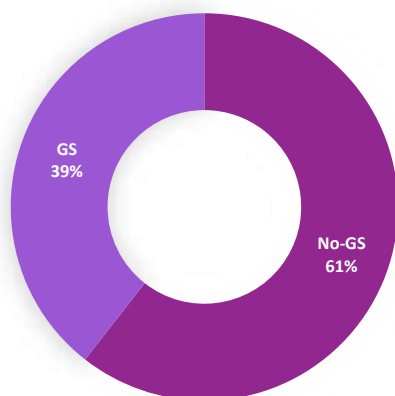
<sup>3</sup> Measures taken for the Latin America and Caribbean region were mostly imported from ECLAC's COVID-19 Observatory which includes a specific section on Gender Policy, produced in collaboration with UN Women. See: [www.cepal.org/es/temas/covid-19](http://www.cepal.org/es/temas/covid-19).

<sup>4</sup> This document is based on data collected by the Tracker as of September 28, 2020. For more details on the design of the GGR Tracker please see the [methodological note](#).

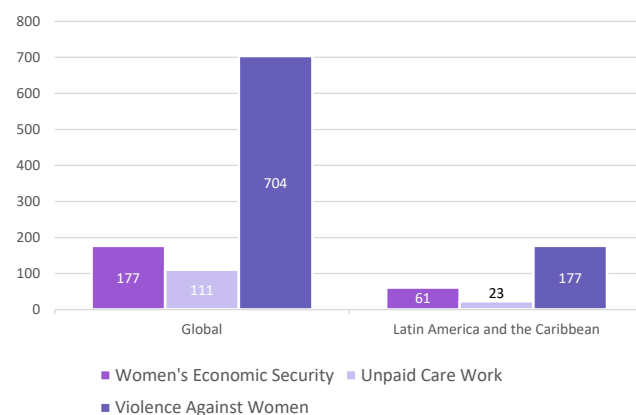
<sup>5</sup> The conceptual and methodological proposal of the GGR Tracker defines policies' "gender sensitivity" from a binary perspective, focused on cisgender women. In this sense, the data does not contemplate or reveal the situation of other identities, including gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual and non-binary people, who face particular conditions of social vulnerability as a consequence of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Furthermore, the vast majority of gender-sensitive policies implemented both globally and in Latin America, have focused on actions to prevent and address gender-based violence<sup>6</sup>. These policies include data collection and production, the development of action plans, awareness and information campaigns, and strengthening of services to address gender-based violence, which were considered essential services in some countries only. The focus on this agenda is the result of women’s historical struggle to increase awareness about the prevalence of violence against women and girls, an issue brought forward by women’s movements and feminist organizations around the world. The extensive presence of State policies targeting gender-based violence during the pandemic reflects the consolidation of this agenda within public policies and institutional design around the world.

■ Graph 1. Proportion of gender sensitive (GS) and non-sensitive (No-GS) measures globally



■ Graph 2. Measures by type – Global vs. Latin America and the Caribbean



Policies related to women’s economic security and unpaid care and domestic work deployed by States in the context of the pandemic are much more limited compared with those aimed at preventing and addressing violence against women. This fact underscores States lack of recognition of the pre-existing structural inequalities that place women in conditions of greater social and economic vulnerability under the current crisis. At a global level, women are more affected by poverty, have greater difficulties in accessing and sustaining jobs, face a higher incidence of informality, receive lower wages, and are disproportionately burdened by housework and unpaid work. As a consequence, women have precarious incomes and limited access to social security protections, making them more vulnerable to economic crisis<sup>7</sup>.

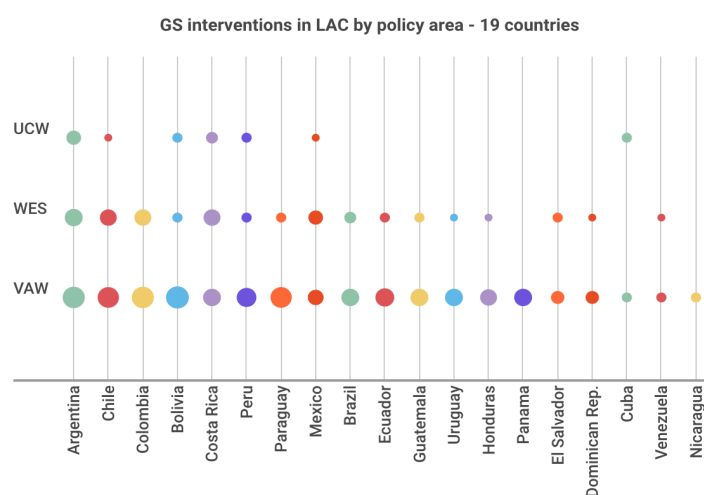
Whilst we recognize the centrality that the “silent pandemic” of gender-based violence has acquired in the current crisis, this document focuses on those policies adopted by the States to address **women’s economic security and domestic and unpaid care work**. Our objective is to illuminate and weight the progress and deficits of public policies to address these agendas. To that purpose, this paper analyzes the policies adopted in 19 Latin American countries<sup>8</sup>. According to data from the GGR Tracker, this group of countries has implemented a total of 415 measures to address the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. Half of these actions were gender-sensitive, and measures to prevent and respond to violence against women represented the largest proportion of interventions.

<sup>6</sup> For the descriptive analysis of global and regional data, please see the “COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Fact Sheets”.

<sup>7</sup> Gutiérrez, Diana; Martín, Guillermina; & Ñopo, Hugo (2020). “El coronavirus y los retos para el trabajo de las mujeres.” PNUD, LAC C19 PDS Nro. 18.

<sup>8</sup> The countries included in this study are Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Cuba, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

**Graph 3. Gender-sensitive interventions in Latin America by policy area – 19 countries**  
 UCW: unpaid care work  
 WES: women’s economic security  
 VAW: violence against women



From a comparative perspective, although there are differences in the number of measures implemented by the countries under study, all of them have deployed a greater number of interventions in the field of gender-based violence. At the same time, the vast majority of countries have implemented at least one measure to guarantee women’s economic security, with a notable deficit of measures to address domestic and unpaid care work.

The following pages offer an in-depth analysis of the interventions implemented to tackle women’s economic autonomy, to identify and describe the policies adopted by States and to highlight those measures with the real potential to increase women’s resilience and post-pandemic economic recovery. In turn, these measures can play a significant role in addressing gender-based violence. For instance, a greater redistribution of family resources, as well as an improvement in women’s access to income and the job market are key to reducing gender-based violence.<sup>9</sup> Without sufficient and high-quality policies aimed at strengthening women’s economic autonomy, we will not be able to comprehensively address the “silent epidemic” that continues to violate women’s physical autonomy and their decision-making capacity, both before COVID-19 and, even more strongly after it.

## II. Women’s Economic Security

Latin American women have faced the COVID-19 crisis in conditions of great economic and social vulnerability. Women have a lower labor market participation than men. Women’s labor force participation rate is close to 50% compared to a near 75% rate for men, which results in a gender gap of nearly 25 percentage points.<sup>10</sup> In addition, women have higher unemployment rates compared to men. The majority of women who have jobs work in low productivity sectors and sectors with high levels of labor informality. As a consequence, approximately 82% of Latin American women do not contribute to pension systems.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Aizer, Anna. 2010. “The Gender Wage Gap and Domestic Violence.” *American Economic Review*, 100 (4): 1847-59.

<sup>10</sup> Vaca Trigo, Iliana (2019). “Oportunidades y desafíos para la autonomía de las mujeres en el futuro escenario del trabajo”, serie Asuntos de Género, N° 154, Santiago, Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



A significant proportion of female employment is concentrated in economic sectors that have been most impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, including education and social services, retail trade, gastronomy, hotel activity and tourism. Women represent 54% of all workers in the tourism industry, and they have been heavily affected by the steep decline in activity in this sector during the pandemic.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, paid domestic work has been particularly impacted by the social isolation measures implemented by States to contain the spread of the virus, with disproportionate effects to the lives and livelihoods of millions of women. Estimates show that the domestic sector employs between 11 and 18 million people, with a very high participation rate of 93% for women.<sup>13</sup> On average, the sector represents between 10 and 14% of female employment in the region, with a high incidence of informality, whereby close to 77% of female workers lack access to social security benefits (including health insurance, paid leave, retirement, etc.).

Within this structural context marked by strong gender inequalities, female-headed single-parent households face conditions of even more extreme vulnerability. In Latin America, 78% of single-parent households are headed by single women, who take upon caring responsibilities for children and adults alike. For the most part, these households faced the COVID-19 crisis in conditions of extreme poverty, with limited and precarious incomes, and an overload of work for women given the great demands of combining productive and reproductive work, for those of them who were able to sustain their employment.<sup>14</sup>

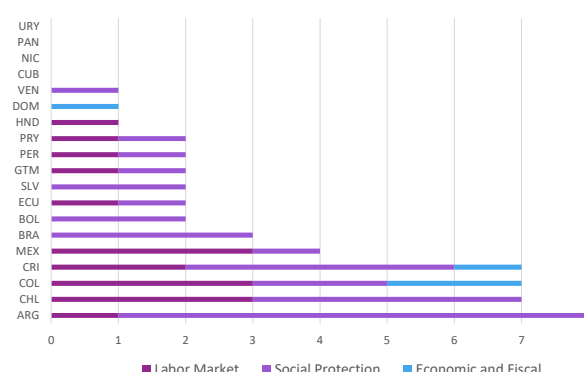
Finally, the pandemic has severely restricted remittances, a fundamental source of income for many households in the region. The duty to provide this income to their families back in their home countries falls disproportionately upon women, as they tend to send higher sums of money back home compared to men. More importantly, women in the countries of origin are also the main recipients of remittances from migrants abroad. Therefore, the restriction of remittance income as a consequence of the COVID-19 crisis has had a disproportionate gender impact on women and single-women dependent households.<sup>15</sup>

The interventions carried out in the area of **women’s economic security** for the 19 countries examined by this paper represent only 25% of all gender-sensitive measures and merely 12% of the total measures surveyed by the GGR Tracker, with an average of two interventions per country.

■ **Graph 4.** Measures on women’s economic security, by policy type – 19 countries, Latin America



■ **Graph 5.** Measures on women’s economic security, by country and policy type – 19 countries, Latin America



<sup>12</sup> Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres. (2020). “COVID-19 en la vida de las mujeres: Razones para reconocer los impactos diferenciados”.

<sup>13</sup> ONU Mujeres, OIT y CEPAL (2020). “Trabajadoras remuneradas del hogar en América Latina y el Caribe frente a la crisis del COVID-19”.

<sup>14</sup> Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres, op.cit.

<sup>15</sup> ONU Mujeres & CARE (2020). “Análisis rápido de género para la emergencia del COVID-10 en LAC”.



From a comparative perspective, there is great variation between the number of measures implemented by countries. While four countries did not adopt any measures to address women's economic security, most of the other countries implemented between one and two actions. Only **four of the 19 countries studied implemented between seven and eight measures, and they concentrate almost 60% of the interventions on women's economic security.** The vast majority of measures **are focused on the area of social protection, with a minority of actions centered on labor markets, and notably few measures related to economic and fiscal support.**

#### a. Progress regarding women's social protection and cash transfer programs

The vast majority of social protection gender-sensitive measures adopted during the pandemic consist of social assistance measures, with the rest focused on social security measures. In this sense, **social assistance policies account for the largest number of interventions related to women's economic security. Most countries in this study use social assistance policies to recognize the social and economic effects of COVID-19 on, and policies are focused mostly on impact mitigation.** Likewise, among social assistance measures, **income transfer policies (conditional and unconditional) have been the main tool deployed by the States.** Income transfer policies were implemented by the highest number of countries, even among those States that implemented the least number of measures in total.

Latin American countries have a long history of developing cash transfer programs (hereinafter, CTP) to support the most vulnerable populations and households. This tool has been central to Latin American states responses to the economic crisis generated by COVID-19 and, as mentioned above, it is the main mechanism deployed to promote women's economic security. However, it is important to highlight that 67% of the transfer policies implemented by the States in the region have not been gender-sensitive.

Half of all gender-sensitive social assistance measures implemented by States correspond to reinforcements and/or the expansion of previously existing cash transfer programs aimed at reducing child poverty.<sup>16</sup> In the context of school closures and social isolation measures, countries discontinued the conditionalities associated with the programs. These programs focus on women – heads and non-heads of households – as priority recipients, which is why they are highly feminized. As an example, 95% of the beneficiaries of Argentina's Universal Child Allowance (*Asignación Universal por Hijo*) are women, and Brazil's Family Financial Assistance (*Bolsa de Familia*) plan has 91% female coverage. However, in the design of these programs, women act as "operational beneficiaries," meaning they are meant to administer the income for the benefit of their children. This is based on the presumption that women have greater capacities in managing the household resources and care tasks.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, women are responsible for complying with any conditions established by the programs. From a gender perspective, these schemes have received numerous critiques for instrumentalizing women, and imposing responsibilities that in turn reinforce gender stereotypes about traditional social roles assigned to women.<sup>18</sup> **These programs were not designed from a gender-sensitive perspective that recognizes the specific conditions of vulnerability faced by women in our societies.**<sup>19</sup> On the contrary, they tend to reinforce these conditions, by deepening the unequal distribution of care work within the home, reinforcing gender roles and stereotypes.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The GGR Tracker does not distinguish conditional and non-conditional cash transfer programs. This definition has been qualitative, and the conditional transfer programs before the pandemic include: *Asignación Universal por Hijo* (from now on, AUH) y *Asignación Universal por Embarazo* (AUE) (Argentina), *Bono Juana Azurduy* (Bolivia), *Bolsa Familia* (Brasil), *Familias en Acción* (Colombia), *Tekoporá* (Paraguay), *Plan Nacional Parto Humanizado* (Venezuela).

<sup>17</sup> Rodríguez Enríquez, Corina (2011). "Programas de transferencias condicionadas de ingreso e igualdad de género: ¿Por dónde anda América Latina?", Serie Mujer y Desarrollo N°.109, CEPAL.

<sup>18</sup> Most conditions relate to periodic health check-ups and school attendance. When these conditions are not met, beneficiaries might be sanctioned.

<sup>19</sup> ONU Mujeres (2020). "Transferencias monetarias e igualdad de género: cómo mejorar su efectividad para enfrentar la crisis del COVID-19".

<sup>20</sup> "¿Son sensibles al género las transferencias monetarias en América Latina?", Constanza Ginestra, UNICEF, 24 de enero del 2020.

In addition to strengthening existing CTPs, in the context of COVID-19, countries in the region created new unconditional income transfer programs to compensate for the loss of income in the most vulnerable households. These measures have been implemented as an exceptional COVID-19 policy to guarantee a minimum income floor for families that: a) depend on self-employment, b) work in the informal sector of the economy, and/or c) have seen their income reduced or lost their jobs in the context of social isolation policies, whilst unable to access the benefits offered by the security systems. Half of the countries in this study implemented this type of program. Likewise, **most of the new cash transfer programs recognized at least one criterion for targeting women and achieved a majority female participation.**

At a comparative level, the design and implementation of these programs present important differences between countries, as described below:

**Targeting criteria.** The programs establish different criteria for targeting and prioritizing women. In most countries, programs grant only one income per family group and prioritize women in the allocation using different criteria. Ecuador's Emergency Family Protection Bond (*Bono de Protección Familiar por Emergencia*) and the Emergency Family Income (*Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia*) programs implemented by Argentina and Chile prioritize female applicants from the family group in the allocation of the benefit. Under a more restrictive criteria, Colombia's Solidary Income (*Ingreso Solidario*) and Costa Rica's Protect Bond (*Bono Proteger*) prioritize female heads of household only. In this regard, Brazil's Federal Government Emergency Assistance program (*Auxilio Emergencial do Governo Federal*) establishes the most comprehensive criteria, recognizing the possibility of assigning up to two incomes per family group, which enables both spouses to access the benefit. Likewise, the program recognizes a right for single mothers with dependent minors to receive a double benefit.<sup>21</sup>

**Compatibility with other cash transfers.** These cash transfer programs are not compatible with other social benefits. However, some programs made an exception in the case of the main family assistance programs. This has been the case for women beneficiaries of Argentina's Universal Child Allowance (*Asignación Universal por Hijo*) and Universal Pregnancy Allowance (*Asignación Universal por Embarazo*), Brazil's *Bolsa Familia* and Chile *Solidario* in Chile. Households that benefited from these family assistance programs automatically benefited from the cash transfer programs as well. In Argentina, these beneficiaries represent 27% of the total number of people reached by the Emergency Family Income (*Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia*, hereinafter, IFE) described below.<sup>22</sup>

**Participation.** Sex disaggregated data regarding program coverage is scarce, fragmented and piecemeal. Available figures show that women represent the majority of total beneficiaries in all programs. In this regard, the program implemented by Ecuador reaches the highest levels of female participation, with women representing close to 88% of the total number of beneficiaries – with 45% of them being heads of the family and 33% mothers of minors. In Argentina, Colombia and Costa Rica, women represent 56%, 57% and 53% of the total number of people covered by the new programs, respectively.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, in Chile, 62% of the households covered by the program are female headed households. In the case of Brazil, data is not available regarding the distribution of men and women in the population benefiting from the program, although the government has reported that six million female heads of household accessed it.

<sup>21</sup> Regarding the latter, the Senate approved a bill to prioritize single women heads of households in the granting of benefits in the face of conflicting information when the father also declares to be responsible for the children. This modification was meant to prevent parents who do not care for their children from obtaining help to the detriment of the mother. The modification was vetoed by the Executive and was not implemented.

<sup>22</sup> ANSES (2020). "Boletín IFE I-2020: Caracterización de la población beneficiaria."

<sup>23</sup> Ecuador: Ministerio de Finanzas de Ecuador (2020). "Reestructuración del ERL y salvaguardas para el Bono de Protección Familiar para la Emergencia por la presencia del COVID-19 en Ecuador." Argentina: ANSES (2020), op.cit. Colombia: DNP (2020). "Etapa 1, balance. Boletín de prensa" Costa Rica: MTSS (2020). "Plan Proteger. Sexto Informe Mensual de Seguimiento a la Ejecución del Bono Proteger." Chile: Ministerio de Desarrollo Social y Familia (2020). "Un 62,2% de hogares beneficiados hasta ahora con el Nuevo Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia tiene una mujer como jefa de hogar."

**Duration.** The programs were established as exceptional emergency measures with an initial duration of one to three months. Given the continuation of the policies of social isolation and/or the worsening of the economic and social crisis, States have implemented several extensions to the measures. Argentina and Chile have extended their programs on several occasions. In Colombia, the validity of the program has been extended until June 2021. In Brazil, after an extension of the program until December 2020, the Executive announced it would replace the program with a permanent Basic Income policy (*Renta Básica*).

■ Table 1. New gender sensitive cash transfer programs

Country	Program	A. Targeting criteria	B. Compatible Cash Transfer Program	C. Coverage	D. Validity
Argentina	Emergency Family Income ( <i>Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prioritizes women in the household</li> <li>▪ Includes domestic workers</li> </ul>	Yes	4,900,000 women, representing 55.7% of the total number of beneficiaries	Periodic extensions
Brazil	Federal Government Emergency Assistance ( <i>Auxilio Emergencial do Governo Federal</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ It grants up to two incomes per household, allowing both spouses to request the benefit.</li> <li>▪ Provides double benefit for single women heads of households with dependent minors (in case of conflicting information between mother and father, they prioritize women)</li> </ul>	Yes	6 million women heads of households received the benefit	Extended until December 2020
Chile	Emergency Family Income ( <i>Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prioritizes the woman within the household</li> </ul>	Yes	62,2% of households that receive the income are headed by a woman	Periodic extensions
Colombia	Solidary Income ( <i>Ingreso Solidario</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prioritizes women heads of households</li> </ul>	No	662,478 women, representing 57% of the total number of beneficiaries	Extended until June 2021
Costa Rica	Protect Bond ( <i>Bono Proteger</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prioritizes women heads of households.</li> </ul>	No	513,370 women, representing 53% of the total number of beneficiaries**	Information not available
Ecuador	Emergency Family Protection Bond ( <i>Bono de Protección Familiar por Emergencia</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prioritizes women heads of households.</li> <li>▪ Includes women under the Unpaid Domestic Work category</li> </ul>	No	351,916 women, representing 88% of the total number of beneficiaries	Information not available

Source: Drafted by authors, using reports and news articles from public bodies.

On the whole, **new cash transfer programs designed from a gender-sensitive perspective have had a positive impact on the inclusion of women.** All of them establish criteria for the prioritization of women in the allocation of benefits, and as a result, women represent the majority of recipients in all cases. These **tools have been implemented to guarantee an income floor in households with precarious and informal jobs. By focusing on women, the programs recognize the structural vulnerability faced by women in their access to employment, economic participation and income generation – a situation which implies a higher risk when faced with the impacts of a crisis.** In this sense, all programs guaranteed a greater protection for women, relative to men, based on the total number of people assisted.

To conclude, beyond the specific aspects of the design and implementation of new cash transfer programs, we must highlight the innovative nature of these programs when they **recognize women’s basic right to their own income.** The continuation and deepening of the economic and social crisis generated by COVID-19 requires action so

that these measures are broadened and expanded, to ensure that the most vulnerable women receive an income. In this sense, the experience developed by the countries under the new cash transfer programs should be framed within the global discussion on a universal basic income, strongly recommended by international organizations and civil society organizations in the context of the social and health emergency.<sup>24</sup> In this regard, Brazil has announced the creation of a Citizen's Rent (*Renda Cidadã*), a permanent universal basic income program that will replace the Family Financial Assistance (*Bolsa Família*) and Emergency Assistance cash transfer programs. This initiative seeks to guarantee a minimum income floor for approximately 10 million people who will be left without an income when the Emergency Assistance comes to an end in December 2020. As of the date of publication of this document, Brazil's Executive branch has not yet published details about the design, assigned budget and implementation scheme of the program, although it did announce that it will come into effect in January 2021.<sup>25</sup>

From a gender perspective, **basic income policies constitute a fundamental tool for the recognition and appreciation of the multiple unpaid social reproduction activities carried out mostly by women, especially in the domestic and care settings.** Likewise, in order for these schemes to contribute to greater gender equality, they must recognize and address the conditions of vulnerability associated with: gender, gender identity and/or sexual orientation, with special attention to the situation of women, transgender and non-binary people, the elderly, heads of household in single-parent families; indigenous, Afro-descendant and migrant populations; and victims of violence and/or sex workers, and people who have been trafficked or sexually exploited. Lastly, universal income should not act as a disincentive for the redistribution of domestic and care work or an obstacle to the insertion of women into the labor force. In order to avoid this, we must think about income policy from a broader perspective, with the specific aim to guarantee women's economic autonomy, including the removal of obstacles to access and remain in the labor market, as well as the recognition and distribution of care responsibilities between the State, the market and households and within the latter.

**b. The shortfall of labor market policies and economic-fiscal assistance with a focus on women**

Unlike their efforts to extend social protection to women during the COVID-19 pandemic, **the countries analyzed in this paper have implemented a relatively small number of gender-sensitive labor market measures.** These add up to a total of 17 measures, representing only a third of the actions related to women's economic security and less than 10% of the total number of gender-sensitive measures. **Furthermore, nine countries have implemented no gender-sensitive measure in this dimension, and six countries implemented one action only.**

■ **Table 2.** Labor market measures on women's economic security

Measures	Countries
none	9   Brazil, Bolivia, Cuba, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, Dominican Republic, Uruguay, Venezuela
1	6   Argentina, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru, Paraguay
2	1   Costa Rica
3	3   Chile, Colombia, Mexico

Source: Drafted by authors, using data from the GGR Tracker database

<sup>24</sup> *Tras la aparición del coronavirus, ¿ha dejado de ser una utopía la renta básica universal?* [news.un.org/es/story/2020/05/1473902](https://news.un.org/es/story/2020/05/1473902) Other arguments in favor of a basic income can be found at: [news.un.org/es/story/2020/07/1477601](https://news.un.org/es/story/2020/07/1477601). Un ingreso básico temporal desaceleraría el avance de la pandemia de COVID-19: [news.un.org/es/story/2020/07/1477821](https://news.un.org/es/story/2020/07/1477821) ECLAC's communique also recommends the implementation of a basic income for the most vulnerable populations to get over the impacts of the COVID crisis: [www.cepal.org/es/comunicados/cepal-propone-avanzar-un-ingreso-basico-ayudar-la-poblacion-mas-vulnerable-superar](https://www.cepal.org/es/comunicados/cepal-propone-avanzar-un-ingreso-basico-ayudar-la-poblacion-mas-vulnerable-superar)

<sup>25</sup> The government suspended this initiative at the end of 2020 and, therefore, will not be implemented.

Just over half of all labor market gender-sensitive measures correspond to actions that **subsidize wages and support entrepreneurs and the self-employed**. These measures provide access to lines credit under various financial instruments to support women who have their own productive enterprises. Most of the initiatives focus on the self-employed as well as micro-businesses within the informal sector. Only one initiative also includes small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) led by women. The rest of the measures correspond to actions to improve employability, most of which consist of virtual training in financial education, marketing, administration and/or logistics.

Regarding economic, fiscal and financial support measures, the GGR Tracker database includes measures that establish sectorial aid for companies and enterprises in specific economic sectors, namely, those with a greater participation of women in the labor force relative to men. In this dimension, six measures implemented by five countries were surveyed, representing 10% of the total number of measures on women's economic security. These policies cover different sectorial support actions, such as exemption in the payment of public services by educational institutions (Uruguay), special lines of assistance and financing in the tourism sector (Colombia and Dominican Republic), the agro-industrial sector (Colombia) and family micro-businesses (Mexico).

The lack of gender-sensitive measures on women's participation in the labor market and women's economic activity is worrying, especially given the statistical evidence that confirms the disproportionate impacts COVID-19 has had on women's employment in several countries of the region.

- In **Chile**, data shows that female-headed households have been the most affected by the employment crisis. 40% of female-headed households saw a reduction in the number of members in employment, and almost a third had no members in employment, compared to 24% of households headed by men. Likewise, although men and women have lost their jobs in a similar proportion during the crisis, women have a notoriously lower rate of return to the labor market. This is due to the greater effects of the crisis on highly feminized industries, as well as the inability to resolve the high demand of unpaid domestic and care work.<sup>26</sup>
- For their part, women between the ages of 25 and 54 have been the most affected by unemployment in **Colombia**, according to data indicating that for every man that lost his job, two women lost theirs. The number of employed women in the country dropped at a rate of 28% in July compared to a drop of 12% for men.<sup>27</sup> In parallel, the unemployment rate for women increased from 13.4% to 24.2% from the June-August 2019 trimester to the June-August 2020 trimester. During this period, there has been a significant increase in the unemployment rate gap for women compared to men, from 5.4 to 9 percentage points. Likewise, the data shows that women lost more jobs in highly feminized sectors strongly impacted by the crisis, such as in the textile and clothing industry which had a year-on-year contraction of 28% and where female jobs accounted for 80% of the drop in employment.<sup>28</sup>
- Statistics for **Costa Rica** show that between April and June, women's labor activity fell two percentage points below the activity of men and stands at 44.6%, almost 26 points below that of men. In absolute terms, the female workforce force was reduced by 110 thousand people in contrast to a 72 thousand decrease in the male labor force. Finally, the non-participation rate also had a higher increase among women, reaching 55.4% compared to 29.5% for men.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> MDSF, INE (2020). *¿Cómo ha impactado la pandemia a los hogares chilenos?*

<sup>27</sup> DANE, GIH-Mercado Laboral, agosto 2020.

<sup>28</sup> "Hay más desempleo en mujeres que en hombres", diario El Tiempo, Colombia.

<sup>29</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos (2020). "Encuesta Continua de Empleo al segundo trimestre de 2020, resultados generales". Costa Rica.



- Finally, in **Mexico**, approximately 11.6 million female workers left the workforce in April, which is equivalent to more than half of the jobs lost during the pandemic despite the fact that women represent only a third of the workforce. Similarly, in July, women's participation rate stood at 39.2% and showed a year-on-year loss of 5.8 percentage points – a drop slightly higher than that of men's who nevertheless had a rate of participation in the order of 72.2%. During the same period, unemployment showed a greater increase for women compared to men, with increases of 2.3 and 1.3 percentage points, respectively. In this regard, the unemployment rate for women was 6.3%, the highest level recorded since the start of the statistical series in 2005. Finally, the evolution of employment during the pandemic shows a noticeably greater recovery for men.<sup>30</sup> In this sense, of the 6.5 million new jobs created between May and July, less than a quarter have been for women. Likewise, the data shows that the recovery for female employment has been concentrated in the informal sector of the economy, marking a trend towards greater precarious work for women.

In sum, the data confirms the existence of gender-differentiated impacts of COVID-19 on employment. In this regard, women have suffered greater falls in labor participation and a greater incidence of unemployment, which shows the deepening of gender gaps and inequalities that pre-existed the pandemic. Even more worrying, as countries lift restrictions on mobility and economic activity recovers, women face greater difficulties in re-entering the workforce and do so in more precarious conditions.

#### Gendered impacts of “gender neutral” policies: Emergency Assistance for Work and Production in Argentina

In Argentina, one of the most important measures implemented for the preservation of income and employment has been the Emergency Assistance for Work and Production Program (Programa de Asistencia de Emergencia al Trabajo y la Producción, hereinafter, ATP). This measure focuses on the formal sector of the economy. Through the ATP, the State grants a complementary income to cover part of workers' salaries, for those registered in private sector companies. In addition, this benefit includes a zero rate credit line for independent workers in the formal sector, when their incomes have been affected by the pandemic. The design of this tool does not recognize the specific situation of women in the labor market, nor does it prioritize attendance for female jobs and/or feminized sectors. Consequently, published data indicates that women accounted for only 35.8% of the complementary salaries granted by the ATP, in contrast to 64.2% of men. This gap in coverage is explained by the concentration of profit in industry and commerce, both highly masculinized sectors. However, in terms of impact, the measure has had positive gender effects, as the aid granted covered, on average, 6% more of women's salaries compared to men. This differential impact is maintained for all ages, being slightly high for women over 40 years of age.

The difference is explained by the over-representation of women in economic activities with the lowest wages and/or in low-skilled positions, which are the wages that receive the greatest proportional support under this measure. In this sense, the policy to support employment and income in the formal sector should incorporate gender equality objectives that consider the challenges faced by women in the formal labor market. Among other things, the State must extend the scope of the program and prioritize: a) benefits to highly feminized economic activities – such as health, education, retail trade, textile industry, work in private homes, among others; b) strengthening female workers' incomes and reducing gender wage gaps, and c) focusing on women-led companies and independent workers. In this regard, the fifth installment of the AWP incorporated new sectors, among which highly feminized activities stand out, such as: nursery schools; long-stay residences for the elderly; homes and residences that provide services to people with disabilities. For its part, domestic service has not been incorporated as requested by the Housewives' Union (goes under the acronym SACRA) and the Auxiliary Staff for Private Homes (UPACP).

Source: “Informe de Panorama Productivo. Evolución de los principales indicadores de la actividad productiva”, Ministry of Productive Development of the Argentine Republic, May-June 2020.

<sup>30</sup> “COVID-19 pega doble a mujeres trabajadoras”, diario El Universal, September 27, 2020, México.

“5 gráficos del impacto del coronavirus en el mercado laboral de las mujeres”, diario El Economista, September 20, 2020, México.

### c. The (un)protection of women employed in domestic service<sup>31</sup>

The crisis brought by the pandemic has shed light on the fragility of paid domestic work in the region. This sector employs between 11 and 18 million people, and represents between 10% and 14% of total female employment in Latin America. An estimated 77% of domestic workers are informal workers, who lack access to social security benefits – including health insurance, paid leave and retirement, amongst others.<sup>32</sup> The absence of legal regulations in many countries adds to the vulnerability experienced by paid domestic workers; as a sector, they struggle to unionize and to collectively bargain over the terms and conditions of their already undervalued work. During the confinement period, this vulnerability has been deepened by the increased demand for housework and care work, as a result of school closures, and an increased demand for cleaning and health care work within households. In turn, this work has often fallen on female domestic workers, further exposing them to infection by the virus. The demand for health care linked to COVID-19 infection has also required that domestic workers perform activities for which they lacked training, such as monitoring the health of the people they care for. In many contexts, domestic workers have been unable to work because of restrictions of movement orders, leading to great uncertainty about the continuation of their employment and remuneration. This uncertainty was even greater for the vast majority of domestic workers who lack formalized contracts of employment. A vast majority of domestic workers had no access to paid leave, severance pay or unemployment insurance protection to guarantee an income during the time they were unable to work. Migrant domestic workers have been further impacted because of travel restrictions, and their situation was further impacted because their families often depend on remittances for their livelihoods.<sup>33</sup>

Data shows that **unpaid domestic work has been the occupational category most impacted by the pandemic** in several countries in the region, including Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Costa Rica. In Brazil, the domestic sector recorded a loss of 1,257,000 jobs between March and June, representing 21% of employment in the sector and more than double the percentage job loss in the economy as a whole. Furthermore, unemployment was higher in the informal sector, which lost 23.7% of jobs compared to 14% in the formal sector.<sup>34</sup>

On the other hand, **Chile** recorded a loss of 120,000 jobs in the domestic work sector with more than 22,000 domestic workers under temporary lay-off, receiving no income. This represents a total loss of 40% of existing jobs in the domestic work sector<sup>35</sup>. In **Colombia**, the domestic work sector experienced the largest drop in employment for the June-August quarter, with a year-on-year variation of 39%.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, **Costa Rica** recorded 63,500 lost jobs in the domestic work sector, which is equivalent to a 45% year-on-year reduction in total domestic employment.<sup>37</sup> In the formal sector only, statistics for **Argentina** show an estimated loss of more than 22,000 jobs, representing a 6% drop in the rate of employment over six months.<sup>38</sup> **Uruguay** also recorded a significant drop in domestic work, leading to a total loss of 11,000 jobs, or the equivalent to 14.8% of total domestic work.<sup>39</sup> Lastly, **Ecuador** registered a drop of 13,461 jobs within the formal domestic work sector, this is to say, workers who contributed to the social

<sup>31</sup> Given that in the region there are different terms to refer to women workers in this sector, throughout this document we will use interchangeably the reference to “paid domestic workers”, “domestic workers”, “domestic service workers” and “private house workers”.

<sup>32</sup> ONU Mujeres, OIT y CEPAL (2020). “*Trabajadoras remuneradas del hogar en América Latina y el Caribe frente a la crisis del COVID-19*”.

<sup>33</sup> “*La pandemia de Covid profundiza la crisis de cuidado en América Latina y el Caribe*”, CEPAL.

<sup>34</sup> “*Brasil perde mais de 1,2 milhão de postos de trabalho doméstico em três meses, aponta IBGE*”, THEMIS – Gênero, Justiça e Direitos Humanos, September 3rd, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Fundación Friedrich Ebert, op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas de Colombia (2020). “*Boletín Técnico, Gran Encuesta Integrada de Hogares (GEIH), Agosto 2020*”.

<sup>37</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos de Costa Rica (2020). “*Encuesta Continua de Empleo al segundo trimestre de 2020*”.

<sup>38</sup> Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social de la Nación Argentina. “*Situación y evolución del trabajo registrado, Agosto 2020 - Datos a mayo*”

<sup>39</sup> Weller, Jürgen et.al. (2020). “*El impacto de la crisis sanitaria del COVID-19 en los mercados laborales latinoamericanos*”, Documentos de Proyectos, CEPAL.



security system. This represents 13.41% of all formal domestic work in the country. No data is available regarding informal domestic workers in Ecuador.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the highly vulnerable economic and employment conditions faced by domestic workers during confinement, including many of whom lost their jobs and income, **only five countries implemented measures that target domestic workers.**<sup>41</sup>

■ **Table 3.** Assistance policies for domestic work

Country	Type of measure	Description	Employment sector
Argentina	Social Security	It grants registered domestic workers paid leave benefits for the duration of the confinement. Salary increases.	Formal
	Social Assistance	Priority in accessing the Emergency Family Income (Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia), a cash transfer program for informal workers which includes registered domestic workers (the only formal workers who can access this benefit).	Formal and Informal
Chile	Social Security	Possibility of suspension of the contractual relationship, and access to personal contributions to social security under the concept of “compensation for all situations.”	Formal
Ecuador	Social Security	It includes informal domestic workers within the cash transfer program. Family protection bond for workers in the informal sector.	Informal
Mexico	Financial Support	Financial support for private domestic workers already included in Mexico’s program to formalize domestic workers.	Formal
Peru	Legal Adjustment	Measures to guarantee and control domestic workers’ social and labor rights protections (including a compulsory contract of employment and the right to fair and equitable remuneration).	Informal

Source: Own elaboration based on data published by the GGR Tracker. For the Latin American and Caribbean region, the measures were mostly retrieved from ECLAC’s COVID-19 Observatory, which includes a specific section on Gender Policies, produced in partnership with UN Women.

**Argentina** has an estimated 1.4 million domestic workers, a figure that represents 17.4% of employed women and 5.6% of total employment in the country. Of all people employed in the domestic work sector, 99.3% of them are women.<sup>42</sup> The country implemented a set of measures targeting domestic workers in the context of the pandemic. At the start of the social distancing measures, domestic work was considered a non-essential activity – except when it entailed assistance to isolated elderly people or assistance to workers who had no other support to care for family members. In this context, the Executive Branch banned the termination of employment for domestic workers and granted paid leave to formally employed domestic workers. Finally, the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security established a salary increase for domestic workers’ minimum hourly and monthly wages (10% increase in two stages, March and May). When comparing formal and informal workers in the domestic work sector, the latter had priority in accessing the Emergency Family Income (Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia, or IFE), the cash transfer programs for informal workers mentioned in the previous section. This benefit was also granted to registered domestic workers, being the only formal activity covered by the program. According to official estimates, 95% of domestic workers met the requirements and were entitled to receiving the IFE.<sup>43</sup> As of July, 188,000 registered domestic workers had accessed the benefit.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> “Empleadas domésticas, damnificadas del virus”, El Comercio, September 9, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> This analysis does not reveal other actions such as dissemination and awareness campaigns that have been implemented by several countries. For a review of these measures, consult the report by UN Women, ILO and ECLAC (2020). “Paid domestic workers in Latin America and the Caribbean in the face of the COVID-19 crisis.”

<sup>42</sup> López Mourelo, Elva (2020). “La COVID-19 y el trabajo doméstico en Argentina”.

<sup>43</sup> “Estiman que cobrarán el IFE el 95% de las trabajadoras del servicio doméstico”, TELAM, Agencia Nacional de Noticias de Argentina.

<sup>44</sup> ANSES (2020), op. cit.

In **Chile**, at the beginning of the pandemic, an approximate 300,000 women were employed in domestic service, representing 14% of total female employment. An estimated 53% of domestic workers do not count with a formal employment contract.<sup>45</sup> In April 2020, Chile passed the Employment Protection Law (*Ley de Protección del Empleo*, Law N° 21.227) in April, allowing access to an Unemployment Insurance Solidarity Fund (*Fondo Solidario del Seguro de Cesantía*) for workers who have been laid off or had their working hours reduced in the context of the pandemic. However, registered domestic workers were initially excluded from this benefit, as they were not previously covered by the Unemployment Insurance Law (*Ley de Seguro de Desempleo*). The Government allowed employers to temporarily dissolve these workers' contracts, however, workers were entitled to access their social security contributions under the concept of "compensation for all situations" (this consisted of a monthly contribution of 4.11% of their original salaries). This situation generated numerous complaints from domestic service workers organizations, who indicated that domestic workers were forced to use their own funds and, unlike other sectors, were not accessing any form of assistance from the State. In addition, they stated that these funds were often insufficient, as a consequence of the sector's high turnover and its undervalue. Finally, in September, Chile passed a law (N° 21.269) to incorporate domestic workers to the country's unemployment insurance scheme. Furthermore, by receiving social security funds, domestic workers were excluded from the Emergency Family Income (Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia - IFE) for informal workers, effectively leaving domestic workers out of the classification for "vulnerable populations".<sup>46</sup> In this regard, domestic workers' organizations have filed a claim for the non-compliance with ILO's Convention 189, as the State discriminated against domestic workers when providing access social assistance.<sup>47</sup> In turn, domestic workers in the informal sector, who are in fact the majority of domestic workers in Chile, are eligible to access the IFE. This program however excludes migrant workers, who account for at least a third of domestic workers in the country.

According to the 2010 census by **Ecuador's** National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos*, INEC) there are 222,495 domestic workers in the country, and 70% of them are not formally employed. Informal domestic workers were included as beneficiaries for the Family Protection Bond (*Bono de Protección Familiar*) for informal sector workers. The domestic workers' organizations have demanded that the government extend this benefit to formal domestic workers as well.<sup>48</sup>

In **Mexico** counts with 2.2 million female domestic service workers, representing 90% of workers in this sector. An estimated 47% of women domestic workers earn less than a minimum wage, in contrast with 27% of men in the sector.<sup>49</sup> Only 23,057 domestic workers are registered with Social Security, due to a pilot program implemented by the Mexican Institute for Social Security (Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social, IMESS) for the formalization of employment within the sector. This figure represents less than 1% of all domestic workers. In Mexico, domestic workers were included in the Solidary Loan Program (Crédito Solidario a Palabra), which offers microcredits with three years of financing for people whose working hours have been reduced as a result of the pandemic.<sup>50</sup>

In the case of **Peru**, official estimates indicate that more than 450,000 people were employed in the domestic sector in 2008, 95% of which were women. Out of the total number of workers within the domestic sector, 92% are informal workers. Within the context of the pandemic, the Peruvian Executive Branch issued Legislative Decree N°.1499, establishing a set of measures to promote the formalization of the sector and implement mechanisms to

<sup>45</sup> "Trabajadoras remuneradas del Hogar y su lucha por el trabajo decente", FESminismos, Fundación Friedrich Ebert, 26 de agosto de 2020.

<sup>46</sup> Id.

<sup>47</sup> ONU Mujeres, OIT y CEPAL (2020), op. cit.

<sup>48</sup> Ministerio de Finanzas de Ecuador (2020), op.cit.

<sup>49</sup> "Estadísticas a propósito del día internacional del trabajo doméstico (22 de julio)", Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía de México.

<sup>50</sup> "A partir del 13 de mayo el IMSS apoyará a más de 22 mil 300 trabajadoras del hogar para acceder al Crédito Solidario a la Palabra", Gobierno de México, mayo de 2020.

protect and oversee workers' labor rights. This regulatory adaptation seeks to implement the obligations stipulated by ILO Convention 189, ratified by Peru in 2018. At present, no information is available about the implementation of the new decree.

Whilst in many cases there are no measures targeting domestic workers in other countries of the region, many of them meet the eligibility requirements to access income cash transfer programs for workers and informal sector workers. In this regard, a study carried out by Ipea-UN Women estimates that in Brazil, 2,800,000 domestic workers are eligible for **Brazil's** Emergency Assistance program (*Auxilio Emergencial*), a figure that represents approximately 68% of informal domestic workers in the country.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, in **Costa Rica**, domestic workers can apply for the Protect Bond (*Bono Proteger*), the only cash transfer program for informal workers that includes migrant workers. However, sex disaggregated data is not available to establish the real coverage of assistance programs for domestic workers in the region.

As a summary, an analysis of all measures designed to protect domestic workers during the pandemic shows a clear deficit in their recognition and prioritisation as a sector. Likewise, the heterogeneous and limited nature of measures implemented by the States sheds light on the absence of an integrated framework to design protection policies for domestic workers in the region. This lack of protection becomes even more serious when taking into account the deep employment crisis within the domestic work sector as revealed by official statistics from several Latin American countries.

### III. Unpaid care and domestic work

Women in Latin America spend three times as much time as men doing unpaid care and domestic work<sup>52</sup>. Before the pandemic, women spent between 22 and 42 hours a week more than men on unpaid domestic and care tasks, that is, women spend between half and an entire workday more than men doing unpaid work every day<sup>53</sup>. These inequalities also increased for Afro-descendant women, indigenous women and those who lived in the most impoverished households. In 11 countries of the region, before the COVID-19 crisis, women living in poverty already dedicated almost two more hours a day to unpaid care work compared to women from the highest socioeconomic sectors<sup>54</sup>.

The confinement measures implemented by States as a response to the pandemic have exacerbated these already existing inequalities. School closures and limited child care spaces increased the burden of domestic work and home care, which fell predominantly on women and girls. Among them, women heads of households and those who are unemployed or in precarious jobs suffered the greatest impact. Confinement also resulted in a decrease in the support that many households received to carry out care tasks from paid domestic workers, or supporting neighbors and relatives. Thus, the number of hours spent within households for the care of children and the elderly increased, as well as the hours spent on cleaning, cooking, managing domestic chores and organizing the home. The impact of confinement has also been especially problematic for essential workers who continued working outside the home<sup>55</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> Pinheiro, Luana; Tokarski, Carolina; Vasconcelos, Marcia (2020). "Vulnerabilidades das trabalhadoras domésticas no contexto da pandemia de COVID-19 no Brasil". Ipea-Onu Mujeres Brasil.

<sup>52</sup> ONU Mujeres (2017). *El Progreso de las Mujeres en América Latina y el Caribe, con datos CEPALSTAT: Bases de Datos y Publicaciones estadísticas*. Consultado en diciembre de 2016. [estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/WEB\\_CEPALSTAT/Portada.asp](http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/WEB_CEPALSTAT/Portada.asp).

<sup>53</sup> CARE+ONU Mujeres (2020). "Análisis Rápido de Género para la Emergencia de la COVID-19 en América Latina".

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> ONU Mujeres y CEPAL (2020). *Cuidados en América Latina y el Caribe en tiempos de COVID-19: Hacia sistemas integrales para fortalecer la respuesta y la recuperación*.

A survey carried out in Brazil revealed that 57% of women who switched to remote working reported the highest increase in care work within the home, while in the case of men the burden increased only 21%<sup>56</sup>. Another survey conducted in the same country indicates that 50% of women began caring for someone, and 72% of women stated that the pandemic increased the need for care and companionship from family members<sup>57</sup>. The disproportionate burden of domestic and care work that has fallen upon women and girls in turn has negative impacts on their psychosocial, physical and emotional health, causing stress and exhaustion, especially for those with formal jobs or work outside the home<sup>58</sup>.

The overload of care tasks has also affected girls, teenagers and young women who have been unable to continue their education due to the pandemic. They are the ones who traditionally undertake domestic and care tasks within the home. In May 2020, around 154 million children in Latin America, more than 95% of those enrolled, were not attending classes as a result of the closure of early childhood centers and primary and secondary schools<sup>59</sup>. According to projections based on data from the Ebola pandemic in Sierra Leone, it is estimated that around 20 million school-age girls worldwide will drop out of school and will not return to class once the COVID-19 crisis is over<sup>60</sup>. Although the isolation and social distancing measures were necessary in terms of public health outcomes, the impact of their application has not been neutral for women<sup>61</sup>.

Regarding the policies implemented in the 19 Latin American countries considered in this study, the GGR Tracker collects a total of 15 gender-sensitive measures focused on addressing domestic and unpaid care work. This number represents 5.7% of the total gender-sensitive measures adopted in Latin America and 2.6% of the total measures surveyed in the region. Although Latin America is one of the regions that has implemented the greatest number of measures to address unpaid care and domestic work, coverage is still limited, with significant variation between countries and 50% of the measures centered in Argentina and Costa Rica. The number of measures related to unpaid care tasks registered in the GGR Tracker is highly variable amongst countries. Five countries implemented one or two measures, whereas Argentina had a total of five measures representing 31% of the total. The remaining twelve countries did not implement any measures to address domestic and unpaid care work.

The most common measures have been initiatives on long-term care for the elderly and care for people with disabilities (five measures total) and family, parental or childhood leave (four measures total). Only one of the policies implemented granted cash for care, and one measure addresses care services for girls and boys. Among the policies included in the category “other measures”, two of the policies included a reduction in working time and remote working.

<sup>56</sup> “Mulheres chefes de família e a vulnerabilidade à pobreza”, Cristina Pereira Vieceli, Democracia e Mundo do Trabalho em Debate, August 30, 2020.

<sup>57</sup> Sempreviva Organização Feminista “Pesquisa. SEM PARAR o trabalho e a vida das mulheres na pandemia.”

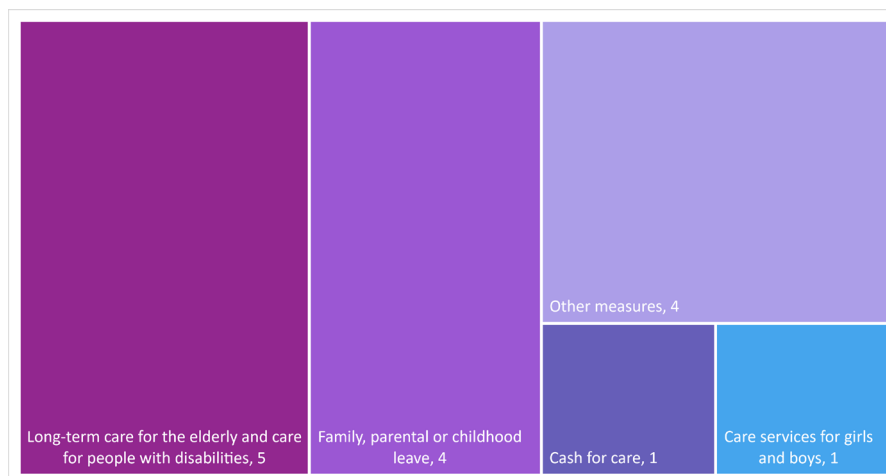
<sup>58</sup> Infobae (2020). “Los cuidados no remunerados hechos por mujeres representan 23% del PIB en México”.

<sup>59</sup> UNICEF (2020). “COVID-19: Más del 95 por ciento de niños y niñas está fuera de las escuelas de América Latina y el Caribe”.

<sup>60</sup> Malala Fund (2020). “Girls’ education and COVID-19: What past shocks can teach us about mitigating the impact of pandemics”.

<sup>61</sup> Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres. (2020). “COVID-19 en la vida de las mujeres: Razones para reconocer los impactos diferenciados”.

Graph 5. Number of measures related to domestic work and unpaid care by policy type



**a. The role of the State in care work**

The State can play a key role in both facilitating the reconciliation between paid work and family care responsibilities as well as promoting joint responsibility between the State, the private sector, the community and households<sup>62</sup>. In order to address the barriers to women’s insertion in the labor force exacerbated by caring responsibilities, the State must invest in comprehensive care policies. According to the International Labor Organization, these policies include “the direct provision of child or elderly care services, as well as transfers and social protection benefits related to care for workers with family or care responsibilities, to formal and unpaid caregivers or people in need of care”.<sup>63</sup>

A small number of measures surveyed in the GGR Tracker have the capacity to reduce the care work that falls on households. These measures include initiatives that: a) provide childcare services, as in the case of **Costa Rica**, b) provide long-term care services for the elderly and people with disabilities, as in **Argentina**, and 3) implement cash transfers destined to pay for care work, as in **Mexico**.

One of the measures adopted in **Costa Rica** includes an extension of services by the National Child Care and Development Network (*Red Nacional de Cuido y Desarrollo Infantil, REDCUDI*). Hence, several implementing agencies continued to provide childcare services during the health emergency caused by COVID-19. In this way, these measures allowed parents with caring responsibilities to continue focusing on their paid work without having to shift caring responsibilities to elderly or otherwise high-risk members of their families and their support networks. Another measure, adopted by the National Council of People with Disabilities (*Consejo Nacional de Personas con Discapacidad*), consists of supporting the population in state of emergency, through a device to a) facilitate short walks, accompanied by a personal assistant, in the case of people within the autism spectrum and people with cognitive and psychosocial disabilities; b) gather information on food and health needs; c) create committees for personal assistants to provide support to people with disabilities during restricted hours; d) provide “COVID homes” (Hogares COVID) for people with disabilities who have been abandoned; and e) request extraordinary funding from the National Emergency Commission (Comisión Nacional de Emergencias), among others.

<sup>62</sup> ONU Mujeres y CEPAL (2020). *Cuidados en América Latina y el Caribe en tiempos de COVID-19. Hacia sistemas integrales para fortalecer la respuesta y la recuperación*. Brief v 1.1. 19.08.2020.

<sup>63</sup> OIT (2019). *Panorama Laboral Temático 5: Mujeres en el mundo del trabajo. Retos pendientes hacia una efectiva equidad en América Latina y el Caribe*. Lima: OIT/Oficina Regional para América Latina y el Caribe, 2019. p. 200.

To care for people with disabilities, **Argentina** also created the Economic Assistance Program for Homes and Residences for People with Disabilities (*Programa de Asistencia Económica a Hogares y Residencias para Personas con Discapacidad en el Marco de la Emergencia COVID-19*). This initiative provides exceptional economic assistance through residential benefits for people with disabilities, in order to cover expenses for the acquisition of supplies and protection elements used to prevent COVID-19. It applies only to homes, small homes and residences exclusively for people with disabilities, and financial assistance can only be used for the purchase of personal protective equipment and supplies (alcohol, bleach, disposable protective material, etc.).<sup>64</sup>

In **Peru**, the Ministry for Development and Social Inclusion (*Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social, MIDIS*), has implemented a long-term care measure to assist people with disabilities and the elderly. This policy resulted from a coordinated effort between different governmental organisations officials at the national, regional and local levels. It resulted in the creation of a Support Network (*Red de Soporte*), prioritizing people over 60 years old and those with severe disabilities. The network is implemented in three phases: identification and georeferencing of at-risk people through each municipality, delivery of a service package and monitoring of the target population.<sup>65</sup>

**Mexico** was the only country to establish a cash transfer program for care. The Support program for the well-being of girls and boys, children of working mothers (*Programa de apoyo para el bienestar de las niñas y niños, hijos de madres trabajadoras*) aims to improve the conditions of mothers, single parents or guardians who work, seek employment or study and do not have access to child care. Mothers, single fathers or guardians with dependent children (between one and four years old) receive financial support of 1,600 Mexican pesos (US \$72) per child every two months. If the tutors have children with disabilities between one and six years old, the amount rises to 3,600 Mexican pesos (US \$162) per child every two months. The funds must be used to pay for care services. During the health emergency caused by COVID-19, the government delivered bank cards door to door to the program beneficiaries<sup>66</sup>. Official data estimate that 97% of the beneficiaries are women.

UN Women and ECLAC recommend the implementation of policies that consider care services essential work, guaranteeing that care workers can perform their work safely during times of confinement. To reduce unpaid care work faced by households, and within them, women, these agencies recommend that care services stay open, and that resources are destined to ensure these services are strengthened, including the provision of personal protection equipment.<sup>67</sup> With the exception of Mexico, the lack of cash programs to cover the costs of care services disproportionately affects essential workers, who do not have access to paid leave or the possibility of working from home.

<sup>64</sup> Agencia Nacional de Discapacidad (2020). “Programa de Asistencia Económica a Hogares y Residencias para personas con discapacidad en el marco de la Emergencia COVID-19.”

<sup>65</sup> Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social del Perú (2020). “Red de soporte para la persona adulta.”

<sup>66</sup> Gobierno de México (2020). “Programa de Apoyo para el Bienestar de las Niñas y Niños, Hijos de Madres Trabajadoras.”

<sup>67</sup> ONU Mujeres y CEPAL (2020). *Cuidados en América Latina y el Caribe en tiempos de COVID-19. Hacia sistemas integrales para fortalecer la respuesta y la recuperación*. Brief v 1.1. 19.08.2020.



### Awareness campaigns on domestic and unpaid care work

Awareness campaigns have been the main measure implemented by the States to address domestic and unpaid care work burdens under COVID-19. Out of the 19 countries analyzed in this paper, seven implemented awareness campaigns on care work, which focused on recognizing and redistributing tasks among members of the household. In terms of their theme, campaigns designed during the pandemic emphasize the need for co-responsibility for care work between men and women, with slogans such as “in this household we are a team” (**Dominican Republic**) or “at our home we share activities” (Ecuador). The other distinctive feature of said campaigns is their national reach, as they have been disseminated through national media and, in some cases, through the use of social networks.

Awareness campaigns that promote co-responsibility for care can generate changes in people’s attitudes and behaviors. However, changes in attitudes and behaviors take time, so the effects of awareness campaigns are far from immediate. Additionally, campaigns must address both the individual and the social level of the problem, focusing on the redistribution of the burden of care work between the State and the market, as well as within families.<sup>68</sup> UN Women and ECLAC recommend, among other measures, the continuity and strengthening of awareness campaigns, thus seeking a sustained cultural change at the societal level.<sup>69</sup>

Campaigns designed in the framework of COVID-19 are, for the most part, aimed at individuals and families. In other words, the campaigns emphasize families’ individual responsibilities to redistribute care tasks within the home, leaving aside States’ responsibilities to enact policies that alleviate the unequal division of labor and the time demands on women and girls exacerbated by the crisis. In this sense, awareness campaigns are significant but not sufficient to face the extraordinary burden of unpaid care work that has fallen on women given the COVID-19 health emergency.

One of the exceptions to this trend is the case of Argentina, which launched the national campaign “Care in Equality. Need, right and work (*Cuidar en Igualdad. Necesidad, derecho y trabajo*)”<sup>70</sup> Unlike the others, the campaign conceptualizes care activities as work, and aims to “contribute to the improvement and expansion of public care policies in its different capacities, to promote an integrated approach to achieve an equal distribution of these tasks.”<sup>71</sup> In this way, the campaign promotes the central role of the State in recognizing, redistributing and reducing unpaid care work.

## b. Remote and flexible work

Two of the measures on domestic work and unpaid care work included in the GGR Tracker regulate remote work or flexible work. As of September 2020, these measures had been adopted in Argentina and Costa Rica, which indicate a lag in other countries of the region when it comes to addressing the central issue of work in the context of a pandemic.

In **Argentina**, Law N° 27.555, passed during the COVID-19 confinement, guarantees equal treatment for work, whether it is in person or remote work modality, including equal recognition and remuneration. Likewise, the law establishes that working hours must be previously agreed and prevents work assignments outside the established schedule, ensuring that employers may not request tasks outside of working hours. The law makes a special mention to care responsibilities, specifying that workers in charge of caring for people under the age of thirteen, people with disabilities or the elderly have the right to schedule their work day in a way that is compatible with their caring responsibilities. This includes the possibility of interrupting the working day and resuming work at a later hour. The law guarantees this right both for people who have exclusive responsibility for care work, as well as for family members who share these responsibilities, thus recognizing the right to care for more than one person within each household.<sup>72</sup> In this way, this policy promotes the co-responsibility for the business sector, who must adjust schedules and enact other measures that contribute to the reconciliation between work and time for caring.

<sup>68</sup> ONU Mujeres (2012). “*Campañas de cambio de comportamiento.*”

<sup>69</sup> ONU Mujeres y CEPAL (2020). *Cuidados en América Latina y el Caribe en tiempos de COVID-19. Hacia sistemas integrales para fortalecer la respuesta y la recuperación.* Brief v 11. 19.08.2020.

<sup>70</sup> It should be noted that this campaign has not yet been reported in the UNDP and UN Women Dashboard, however it does appear in the ECLAC Dashboard on 8/13/2020

<sup>71</sup> Ministerio de las Mujeres, Géneros y Diversidad (2020). Campaña Nacional “*Cuidar en Igualdad*”

<sup>72</sup> Boletín Oficial de la República Argentina. (2020). *Régimen Legal del contrato de teletrabajo.*



**Costa Rica**, for its part, has approved Law N° 9.832 on the Reduction of Working Hours (Reducción de Jornadas de Trabajo), which allows employers to temporarily reduce working hours for their employees, as long as they can demonstrate that their company’s income has been affected by the COVID-19 emergency. The law includes an article for the protection of women, establishing that this reduction in hours and wages will not apply to pregnant or breastfeeding women workers.<sup>73</sup> Likewise, the law provides for gender parity measures, specifying that the reduction of working hours must be applied proportionally amongst men and women on the payroll within the same or equivalent positions.<sup>74</sup>

**c. Care leave during restrictions generated by the pandemic**

Among the measures to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 emergency on care work, family, parental and childhood leaves come to the forefront. Out of the 19 countries analyzed for this paper, only four have adopted this type of measure. Three of those measures designate a broad scope of family leave, which includes mothers, fathers or guardians (or a family member in charge of care work). The leave policies designed by **Argentina** and **Bolivia** extend to pregnant women and older adults. Argentina also adds at-risk groups.

■ **Table 4.** Family, parental or childhood leave during the pandemic

Country	Type of measure	Scope
Argentina	Leaves and remote work modality. The leave is granted to one of the parents and/or guardians. Pregnant women, those over 60 and at-risk groups are discharged from attending their workplace <sup>75</sup> . The measure was extended for the duration of the preventive and compulsory social isolation measures.	People employed in the public and private sector, with dependent children and who must perform care tasks.
Bolivia	Granting of special paid leave to: older adults, pregnant people, and fathers, mothers or guardians of children under the age of 5. <sup>76</sup>	Employed people (mothers, fathers or guardians) with dependent children under the age of 5; pregnant women.
Chile	Extension of postnatal parental leave through a “Preventative Parental Medical Leave” ( <i>Licencia Médica Preventiva Parental</i> ), granted for 30 days, can be prolonged up to two times (charged to the respective health insurance). Mothers will enjoy a subsidy with the equivalent amount as the subsidy for postnatal parental leave. Workers affiliated to unemployment insurance who are in charge of caring for one or more children born after 2013 and who are not making use of a parental postnatal leave may request the suspension of their employment contract because of caring responsibilities, while the educational establishments, kindergartens and nurseries that the child attends are closed.	People employed in the public or private sector, dependent or independent.
Cuba	Labor, salary and social security measures related to the prevention and mitigation of COVID-19. Beneficiaries receive during the first month a salary guarantee equivalent to 100% of the basic salary and if the suspension is maintained, the guarantee would be 60%. The extension of the unpaid leave is established for the mother who is enjoying supplementary maternity leave and upon expiration her incorporation is impossible because she does not have another relative who can take care of her child and the granting of the nursery was postponed. <sup>77</sup>	Mother, father or family member in charge of caring for children whose classes were suspended in primary, special and nursery school education

Source: Own elaboration based on data published by the GGR Tracker. For the Latin American and Caribbean region, the measures were mostly imported from ECLAC’s COVID-19 Observatory, which includes a specific section on Gender Policies, produced in partnership with UN Women.

<sup>73</sup> Gobierno Abierto Costa Rica (2020). Asamblea Legislativa aprueba la Ley N. 9832 Autorización de Reducción de Jornadas de Trabajo.

<sup>74</sup> CEPAL (2020). “COVID-19 Observatorio en América Latina y el Caribe. Impacto económico y social.”

<sup>75</sup> Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security (2020). “Coronavirus: leave and remote work in the public and private sector.”

<sup>76</sup> Infoleyes Bolivia (2020). “Decreto Supremo 4196.”

<sup>77</sup> CEPAL-Stat (2020). “COVID-19 Observatorio en América Latina y el Caribe. Impacto económico y social. [cepalstat-prod.cepal.org/forms/covid-country-sheet/index.html?country=CUB&theme=8](https://cepalstat-prod.cepal.org/forms/covid-country-sheet/index.html?country=CUB&theme=8)

UN Women and ECLAC recommend promoting measures such as family leaves and flexible work agreements, which make it easier for workers to make care responsibilities compatible with paid work<sup>78</sup>. However, the measures identified by the GGR Tracker have several limitations in this regard. For example, they do not contemplate special leaves for mothers, fathers or guardians who must care for a dependent person isolated or quarantined by COVID-19. This is particularly problematic for essential workers, who do not have access to the types of leaves detailed in Table 4. Additionally, the absence of data on the number of leaves granted by each country and their scope and duration, creates a difficulty in quantifying the problem. Moreover, the extent of informal work among women makes it impossible to determine the real coverage of paid and unpaid leaves for the entire population. The measures analyzed show the lack of a comprehensive approach for the design of care policies within the context of this pandemic.

## IV. Conclusions

Latin American women have responded to the pandemic in multiple ways, occupying leadership roles as health professionals and providers of other essential services while also playing key roles to sustain care needs in communities and homes in the region.

Despite the enormous efforts made by countries in the region, the data indicates that, unless specific measures are implemented to strengthen a gender perspective in the response to the pandemic, by the time it ends, the situation of women will have deteriorated, reversing decades worth of efforts to promote gender equality. In this context, this document has offered an initial analysis of the responses provided by 19 Latin American countries registered by the GGR Tracker as of September 29, 2020. The paper's objective has been to establish the extent to which States in the region have recognized and addressed the gendered impacts of their actions on women's economic autonomy. Although Latin America as a region has the highest proportion of gender-sensitive measures as indicated by the GGR Tracker, the analysis shows that the State's interventions have been limited in the number of measures implemented, fragmentary with respect to the areas addressed and heterogeneous in terms of their scope.

Measures to address women's economic and social security, accounted for a small percentage of all gender-sensitive measures, as well as a small percentage of the total number of actions implemented by States analyzed in this study. In addition, the distribution of interventions shows notable disparities among the countries analyzed, with only four countries implementing the vast majority of actions. These data confirm the historical debt shown by the States regarding commitments to substantive equality.

The vast majority of measures aimed at improving women's economic security surveyed by the GGR Tracker are targeted towards social protection. Within this category, most countries focused on social assistance measures, recognizing in this way the economic and social effects of COVID-19 on women. These policies were also designed to mitigate and minimize the impact of the pandemic on women. As a counterpoint, gender-sensitive interventions have been scarce in terms of labor market policies and almost nil in relation to economic and fiscal support for the most feminized sectors of the economy. This sheds light on a lack of recognition of these central dimensions to the achievement of women's economic autonomy.

In terms of social protection and assistance, cash transfers (both conditional and unconditional) have been the gender-sensitive policy adopted by the largest number of countries. However, it is important to note that the vast majority of cash transfer policies implemented did not integrate specific gender-sensitive considerations. Half of

<sup>78</sup> ONU Mujeres y CEPAL (2020). *Cuidados en América Latina y el Caribe en tiempos de COVID-19. Hacia sistemas integrales para fortalecer la respuesta y la recuperación*. Brief v 1.1. 19.08.2020.

the gender-sensitive cash transfers correspond to new programs implemented in the context of the COVID-10 emergency. The design of these programs established at least one criterion for targeting women, guaranteeing a majority female coverage among the beneficiary population. Beyond the differences in the implementation schemes, it is important to highlight the innovation that the new CTPs represent in relation to the recognition of women's basic right to earn their own income. However, the continuation and deepening of the economic and social crisis generated by COVID-19 requires the expansion and strengthening of measures to guarantee an income for the most vulnerable women in the region.

In this regard, the experience developed by the countries in relation to the new CTPs should be integrated within the global discussion on universal basic incomes, promoted by international organizations and civil society organizations in the context of the social and health emergency. Likewise, this policy should be thought of as part of a broader framework to guarantee women's economic autonomy. This is to say, States should actively remove women's barriers to access and remain within the labor market. This includes making a concerted effort to distribute care responsibilities between State, market and households, as well as within the latter. Notwithstanding, this analysis of Latin American State's response to the COVID-19 crisis and their interventions to protect women shows a lack of recognition and action in both areas.

In relation to the above, the number of gender-sensitive actions implemented by the countries analyzed in relation to the labor market is very limited. In fact, half of the countries have no gender-sensitive measures in this policy type. Given the precarious and vulnerable employment conditions experienced by most women in Latin America, the lack of gender-sensitive policies in relation to the labor market is particularly alarming. As has been mentioned before, the data available for some countries in the region show that, as a consequence of the pandemic, women have suffered greater falls in labor participation and a greater incidence of unemployment. In turn, this exposes a widening of already existing gaps and deepening of gender inequalities that existed before the pandemic hit. Even more worrying is the fact that, as countries lift restrictions on mobility and resume economic activities, women will face greater difficulties in re-entering the labor force and will do so in even more precarious conditions.

Likewise, it is urgent to point out the special lack of attention and coverage in the States' response to protect domestic workers, the occupational category most heavily affected in several countries of the region. Only five countries implemented at least one action for the protection of domestic workers. In general terms, these actions have been fragmentary, heterogeneous and insufficient, indicating the absence of a comprehensive framework for the protection of female workers within this sector. Likewise, this situation reveals a lack of recognition of the fundamental work that these workers carry out to sustain our region's households and communities. In this sense, the relative lack of policies to protect paid domestic workers constitutes one of the most significant debts exhibited by the GGR Tracker in terms of Latin American States' gender-sensitive responses to the COVID crisis. The study of the specific impacts of the pandemic on this group remains urgent, as does the design of policies to protect women working in this sector of the economy.

Finally, the crisis in women's employment is explained, among other factors, by the collapse of economic activity in sectors where women are overrepresented, such as services, hotels, tourism, care work or education. Economic and fiscal support measures for production and employment have not incorporated a gender-sensitive perspective to their design to focus on these highly feminized activities. On the contrary, as observed in previous crises, public assistance tends to be directed towards the most male-dominant sectors, such as industry and construction. For this reason, the recovery of female employment requires prioritizing the implementation of measures for the economic reactivation of these feminized sectors. Likewise, it is essential to guarantee economic assistance to women-led companies and female entrepreneurs, which tend to be concentrated in low-productivity sectors and face significant obstacles in accessing credit.

The domestic work and unpaid care measures considered reveal a significant deficit in Latin American States' ability to take into account the already existing care crisis, which has only been aggravated by the pandemic. These types of measures represent a very small minority of the gender-sensitive actions surveyed by the GGR Tracker at the global level and, in the case of the countries analyzed, only 15 measures implemented by governments aim to recognize, reduce or redistribute unpaid care and domestic work. Half of these measures were implemented by Argentina and Costa Rica.

Regarding the type of policy, few countries implemented actions to reduce domestic and care work within homes in the context of social isolation policies and the closure of kindergartens, schools and community spaces. In fact, Costa Rica is the only state that continues to provide childcare services through a comprehensive care network, guaranteeing parents' continued ability to work without having to depend on family or social networks for care work. This issue is key for those employed in essential activities who could not access licenses and/or the possibility of working remotely, as well as for single-parent households. For its part, Mexico has extended a cash transfer program to cover the costs of child care and provides financial support to mothers, fathers, or guardians with dependent children so that they can afford these services. In turn, Peru, Costa Rica and Argentina have implemented or reinforced long-term care policies for the elderly and/or people with disabilities.

Finally, only four countries implemented family, parental, or childhood leave. Most of these measures have been comprehensive and grant leaves to the mother, father and/or guardian (or relative in charge) of the child. In some cases, leaves are also granted to older adults and at-risk groups. The actual coverage of such leaves is difficult to quantify due to the lack of data.

The limited number of policies implemented to recognize, reduce and redistribute care tasks exacerbated by confinement as well as the type of measures prioritized by States and their coverage expose the still limited scope of the unpaid care agenda in most countries of the region. This conclusion is reinforced by the focus placed on the design and implementation of awareness campaigns to push for greater co-responsibility for care work within the home, despite the fact that the effects of these campaigns may not be immediate. On the other hand, the heterogeneous and limited nature of the measures implemented highlight the lack of agreement about the social function of care and the absence of a comprehensive framework of services and policies to solve the care crisis experienced in the region. Latin American countries have a long way to go to address inequalities in unpaid care work through transformative measures to guarantee the rights of their inhabitants. The limited response observed suggests that, if not remedied, the impact of the pandemic will further deepen our societies' historical debt with the redefinition of the social organization of care.

In the current context, targeted interventions are essential to guarantee that women are not left behind in the processes of economic recovery and to avoid the segmentation of opportunities for reintegration into the labor markets, which could reinforce gender inequalities mainly because of the allocation of unpaid work to women. To do this, policies must focus on women's employability, labor participation and business development, as well as unpaid domestic and care work and support for productive sectors and feminized occupational categories.

In addition to targeting, the complexity of the challenges posed by the recovery from the COVID crisis requires coordinated responses at the State's different organizational levels, as well as at the regional level. Policies need to be accompanied by coordinated efforts that are sensitive to communities, families and individuals' specific risks and needs. To better integrate the responses, we recommend that policies have physical and social proximity to different sectors of vulnerable women. To this end, it is important to take into account the diversity of women that inhabit the region and the differentiated effects that this crisis has had on their lives. In this regard, it is essential to have official statistics and data that can account for the intersectional impacts of the pandemic, in relation to age, gender

identity, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, migratory status and conditions of employment as well as disability. It is important that the policies implemented recognize this diversity so that the strategies for tackling the crisis can adapt to different environments, creating conditions of equality for everyone. Furthermore, future research should focus on these dimensions and develop innovative methodologies to further evaluate the impacts of the crisis at the intersectional level.

Another crucial dimension for the incorporation of a gender approach in policy-making to address the current crisis requires the inclusion of women in institutions and decision-making processes for response and recovery, both at the local and national levels. In this regard, the evidence on the response to other crises such as the Ebola crisis indicates the benefits provided by the inclusion of various groups of women in decision-making and response design processes.<sup>79</sup>

Lastly, the challenges posed by the current crisis reaffirm the need to strengthen gender institutions and mechanisms for the advancement of women within the States in order to move towards greater integration of gender policies in the areas of prevention of violence, economic security, and the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid domestic and care work. This process is key to developing a comprehensive response that contributes substantially to promoting the economic, physical and political autonomy of women.

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