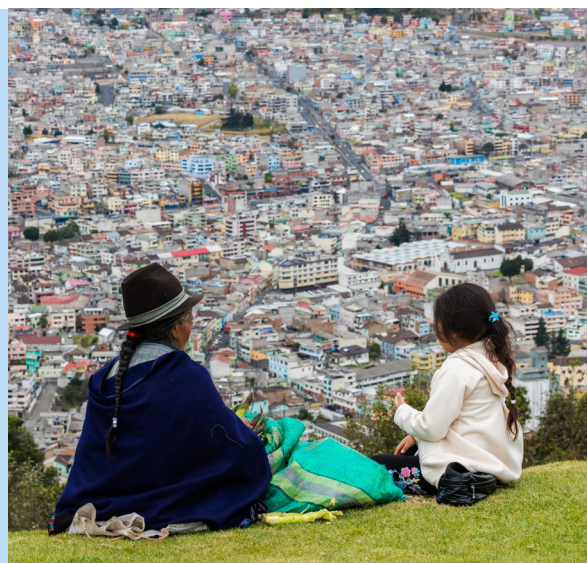




The need to look beyond regional averages: furthering women's empowerment through participation in the labour force

Summary and proposed policy actions for the first 1,000 days of the SDGs

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Introduction

In Latin America, there has been a large increase in female labour force participation (LFP) over the last three decades, from 43% in 1990 to 58% in 2011. However, since 2011 this figure has remained unchanged. In 2014, 58% of women participated in the labour market, compared to 84% of men (International Labour Organization, ILO, estimates for 15-64 year olds; World Development Indicators, 2015).

Participation rates and trends vary widely across countries and groups of women within countries. Participation is lower among poorer women (who are often rural and indigenous), as well as less skilled and older women. While 70% of skilled women participate in the region, only 50% of the unskilled do; similarly, less than 48% of poor women participate in the labour force, almost 22 percentage points less than those in the middle class (rates are for 18-64 year olds; CEDLAS and World Bank, 2015). Participation tends to be higher for

women aged 25 to 54 (67%), and lower for older (43%) and younger women (53%). In addition, 26% of all women aged 15 to 24 are not in education, employment or training, a phenomenon that affects women more than men (13%). If the aim of 'leaving no one behind' is to be achieved, special attention needs to be given to the needs of these groups of women.

Participation in the labour market may increase the ability of women to make choices in the domestic sphere (Golla et al., 2011), to negotiate within a household, take control of their resources and profits, and to learn new skills and build new networks (Morton et al., 2014). In this way, being employed increases women's economic empowerment as well (Kabeer, 2012), making it a virtuous cycle. This links directly to Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'; it also links to targets related to Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth) and 10 (reduced inequalities).

This is a summary of a forthcoming research paper, part of the series 'Starting Strong: the first 1000 days of the SDGs', that will identify key actions toward addressing the unfinished business of the MDGs and how to reach those who are furthest behind in relation to the new SDGs.

The 'Starting Strong' series is a collaborative partnership to initiate a wider conversation around priority actions for the first three years of the SDGs – just over 1000 days – with relevant stakeholders with a regional focus.

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Eating maize whilst overlooking Quito - Diego Delso

As part of the report summarised here, the following activities were taken to identify critical issues that affect women's participation in the labour force under favourable conditions:

1. A review of current policy and academic literature.
2. A review and analysis of data from SEDLAC (CEDLAS and World Bank, 2015), the World Development Indicators and Key Indicators of the Labour Market (ILO); from several waves of the World Values Survey (World Values Survey Association, 2015) and the Latinobarometro Survey (Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2015) and from the STEP Skills Measurement Program (World Bank).
3. Analysis of a set of papers and additional qualitative data that were generated as part of the project 'Enhancing women's economic empowerment through better policies in Latin America', a joint initiative coordinated by CIEDUR and CEDLAS, with support of IDRC.

Main research findings

Regulatory frameworks identified in Latin American countries, at least as stated in legal codes, do not impede gender equality in the labour force, particularly regarding earnings equality and preventing discrimination within the workplace. However, some labour regulations tend to reduce the flexibility needed to balance employment with household responsibilities. In addition, workplace protection for women (such as maternity leave without equivalent paternity leave) increases the cost to employers of hiring younger women relative to men. Ironically, in countries with higher levels of formality, more women perceive difficulties related to a lack of flexibility of schedule and discrimination in the workplace for women in fertile age or with children.

Insufficient education and training as well as time constraints are the main difficulties women face to join the labor market.

Cultural norms and beliefs intervene in labor market decisions and outcomes:

- Traditional gender roles pose women as responsible for household work, including childcare and caring for the elderly, which impose time restrictions. Women spend between 1.7 and 10 weeks more per year than men in unpaid in care activities (Samman et al., 2016).
- Norms influence career and occupation choices for women resulting in reduced participation in certain types of job, which are usually better paid (Blau and Kahn, 2016). For example, women's involvement in the field of science, technology, engineering and mathematics has been traditionally very low; in El Salvador, of all individuals holding a degree in engineering, only 7.7% were women. On the other hand, women represented 82.3% of those with degrees

in health sciences, and 88.9% of those with certificates related to office jobs, as estimated using data of the STEP Skills Measurement Program, (World Bank, 2014).

A survey of public policies and programmes designed to reduce barriers to labour market participation indicated that:

- There are more active labour market policies and entrepreneurship and self-employment programmes in the region than those related to care support or advocacy to change cultural norms in the workplace, households and society.
- The types of policy and programme currently implemented are varied. These usually target both men and women, with some giving priority to the latter.
- Countries with policies and programmes that tackle more than one restriction faced by participants tend to be more successful. For example, a programme that helps young people complete their formal education may provide labour intermediation together with job-specific skill training, or provide opportunities to gain experience through internships or participation in public works; or a vocational training programme may include business training, access to credit or other resources, and even guidance to comply with regulations and to register the business.
- Programmes are implemented by a range of actors: public institutions, local and international NGOs and private sector, usually operating independently. When different program implementers coordinate with each other the services they offer, they avoid duplication of efforts and they are more effective in increasing participants' capacities.

Early actions for the first 1,000 days

Immediate actions (first year)

Advocate changing social norms. The launch of the new SDGs has generated a high level of awareness around the issue of women's economic empowerment; this momentum should be leverage. Civil society organizations can carry out the following actions:

- Generate advocacy campaigns to:
 - Promote shared responsibility at home between women and men.
 - Promote women's agency; change traditional gender roles, including career and occupation choices; and identify and showcase global and local role models
 - Increase awareness to reduce early marriage and cohabitating, especially among rural and vulnerable populations.
- Direct advocacy efforts to men; promote men's caregiving and active fatherhood to encourage equitable gender roles.
- Involve a wide variety of actors in promoting and funding these campaigns: for example, international

bodies, such as UN Women, local and international NGOs, think tanks and policy research institutions, business associations, women's associations, advertising industry and the media.

Expand efforts to promote good labour practices that favour equality and balance between work and family. Private sector organisations, including those related to corporate social responsibility, can carry out the following actions:

- Promote certification of public or private organisations that observe good practices (i.e. through Gender Equality Certifications).
- Expand awareness of initiatives such as the UN Global Compact.
- Engage international organisations to support private sector efforts.

Expand programmes and policies to reduce constraints on women's time, especially those related to caregiving. National and local governments, should provide regulation and supervision, as well as the required subsidies and incentives to providers; individuals, local NGOs or community organisations should complement public providers to expand services:

- Progress rapidly to universal access to early childhood care and education. Increase the availability of childcare facilities including community based initiatives. Provide incentives to the creation of new centres and the expansion of existent ones.
- Provide incentives to expand care support for the elderly and disabled through home assistance, day centres, and long stay centres.
- Ensure early education and care programmes are designed taking into consideration the needs of caregivers (adapting schedules, for example).
- Subsidise vulnerable population to facilitate access and enrollment to care support; subsidies should be given directly to families to cover cost of care, including transportation costs.

Mid-term actions (second year)

Reduce barriers to labour market participation, especially through active labour market interventions. Public sector,

local and international NGOs, and private providers should take the following actions:

- Design programmes or set of programmes to tackle more than one restriction faced by participants; this requires knowledge of the capacities and limitations of participants in order to assist them most effectively.
- Incorporate into programmes elements to promote women's agency, self-esteem and rights (human and labour related).
- Provide mentoring opportunities and encourage networking in employability and entrepreneurship programmes.
- Ensure coordination among programme implementers to avoid duplication of efforts and to achieve greater synergies.
- Prioritize and give incentives for participation to vulnerable groups; provide them with subsidies to cover service costs as well as transportation costs.
- Monitor and evaluate programs and their impact from the start. Make necessary changes and corrections if necessary.

Long-term actions (third year)

Revise laws and regulatory frameworks that impose restrictions to women's participation in the labor market. Local and national governments should take the following actions:

- Identify and modify elements that reduce flexibility in the labor market.
- Identify and modify elements that increase costs of hiring women in relation to hiring men.

Ensure that women (and men) have access to quality education to at least high school but preferably up to technical, vocational or tertiary levels, so they can access better jobs. National and local governments should:

- Expand social protection programs to secondary education for those currently enrolled, providing incentives to remain in school and graduate
- Protection programs should include especial provisions for youth who are not in employment, education or training.
- For those already out of the education system, promote the use of with distance or online education programs to ensure that women and men, increase their competencies.

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