

Regional Round-up on progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in light of the upcoming 25th anniversary of the platform *Spotlight: Latin America and the Caribbean*



Women of Latin America and the Caribbean marched through the city streets to demand an end to violence against women and girls in Bogota in 2011. Photo credit: UN Women

Highlights of the celebration of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) include review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by the 73rd United Nations (UN) General Assembly; the Sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW64, March 9, 2020) and events curated under the umbrella *Generation Equality: Realizing women's rights for an equal future* led by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women); and the intergovernmental process under the leadership of Mexico and France. In the run up to CSW64, which produced a political declaration on the BPfA, a number of national and regional meetings and conferences on women in the context of Beijing+25 took place in 2019. Some regional meetings occurred at ministerial level where ministers and government officials agreed to specific outputs including political declarations and regional reports.

This Update presents a snapshot of the important elements from the Latin America and the Caribbean region (LAC). Previous Updates focused on Africa, Asia Pacific and

the Arab region. A future update will focus on the European region. Findings from the regional meeting, which drew upon national outputs, will be included in a global summary report prepared by UN Women, contributed to the deliberations of the political declaration on the BPfA at CSW64 in March 2020 and will feed into the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of Beijing+25.

Spotlight: Latin America and the Caribbean and the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

From 28-31 January 2020, with the high level of participation of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)'s 33 member States, 6 associate member States, involving at least three Vice Presidents, women's affairs ministers, senior officials and over 300 civil society organizations, the XIV Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean yielded the *Santiago Commitment*, a 40-plus points document elaborating definitive pathways, principles, policy wedges and actions (to be taken) by which countries can work to accelerate implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action as well as other related regional gender strategies. The successful deliberations occurred under the auspices of ECLAC where delegations gathered to review the successes as well as the challenges to progress on gender equality and the empowerment of women in the region for the period 2014-2019. The Regional Conference also served to review progress towards the *Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda¹ within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030* (adopted in 2016 at the XIII Regional Conference), and identify barriers to the implementation of policies, programmes and measures geared to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. The meeting also welcomed the comprehensive report based on the 27 national reports and survey taken since 2018, entitled, *Regional Report on the review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Latin America and the Caribbean countries, 25 years on* (hereafter, the Regional Report).

As noted in an ECLAC press release, under the rubric of the *Santiago Commitment*, delegates agreed to "taking all necessary measures to accelerate the effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Regional Gender Agenda, strengthening gender institutions and architecture through the prioritization of machineries for the advancement of women and gender mainstreaming at the different levels of the State;... eradicate gender violence; provide universal access to comprehensive health services, including sexual and reproductive health services; foster

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the landmark visionary agenda for the empowerment of women and girls, the Beijing Declaration and Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. 2020 is also the five-year milestone in the adoption of the Sustainable Development Agenda. In recognition of this, the South Centre's Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Gender (SDCCG) Programme is issuing this bi-monthly update on the state of play of discussions on gender and development issues in the context of the BPfA.

women's labor participation in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics; implement policies and programs, with a gender perspective, that contribute to a healthy and active aging process; reduce the wage gap; and increase women's representation in decision-making processes with the goal of achieving a parity democracy."

Achieving these far reaching and comprehensive objectives and actions will be supported by "increasing the allocation of financial, technical and human resources according to national realities, capacities and legislation, gender-responsive budgeting, and monitoring and accountability, with a view to strengthening the implementation of equality policies in the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." Countries also committed themselves to "implementing gender-sensitive countercyclical policies, in order to mitigate the impact of economic crises and recessions on women's lives, and promoting regulatory frameworks and policies to galvanize the economy in key sectors, including the care economy," along with "integrating the gender perspective into national policies on climate change adaptation and mitigation, recognizing its differentiated effects on women, adolescents and girls."

The *Santiago Commitment* recognized that the 27 national reports on the implementation of the 25 years old BPfA and the Montevideo Strategy (Regional Gender Agenda) showed progress in four key areas: (i) progress in the formulation and adoption of laws and regulations that typify femicide or feminicide; (ii) (limited and insufficient progress in) the significant increase in women's participation in the decision-making spheres in the framework of the parity democracy approach enshrined in the Montevideo Strategy; (iii) the installation on the public agenda of the topic of care and unpaid work, as an integral part of social protection systems; and (iv) incorporating the gender approach in the institutional architecture of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the country level.

However, the report of the outcome of the meeting from ECLAC highlights many important challenges that remain in implementing the BPfA between now and 2030. The *Regional Progress Report on the Montevideo Strategy* (ECLAC, 2019a) flags these broad and systematic challenges as including: 1) the sheer magnitude of gender inequalities in the region and the limited State capacities available to address the issue; 2) lack of disaggregated data to analyze the issue; 3) the fact that gender inequalities manifest themselves at international, regional, national and subnational levels, and coordination is needed to renew and implement public policy across governance levels; and 4) the need to increase the budgets allotted to gender equality policies. These challenges span implementation policies and process that guarantee women's rights (right to live violence free, sexual and reproductive rights, economic, social and cultural rights, civil and political rights, collective and environmental rights) as well as the conditions for the implementation of equality policies (in terms of institutional architecture, financing, information systems and participation in civil society) as well as the building of synergies between regional and global commitments in the lead up to 2030, end point of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)' agenda.

Delegates to the agreement agreed to work on a broad and rich palette of actions and recommendations to accelerate progress on gender equality and women's empowerment in the region laid out in the *Santiago Commitment**, including to:

- *Strengthen* policies and mechanisms for regulating digital financial technologies at all levels of government and coordination systems in Latin America and the Caribbean, in order to develop standards on records, content and uses of data across countries and to ensure the individual's rights to privacy and to personal data protection, and promote financial and digital education to ensure that women's financial inclusion is informed and fair (para. 23);
- *Implement* gender-sensitive countercyclical policies, in order to mitigate the impact of economic crises and recessions on women's lives and promote regulatory frameworks and policies to galvanize the economy in key sectors, including the care economy (para. 24);
- *Measure* the multiplier effects of boosting the care economy in terms of women's labour market participation –including work associated with the traditional knowledge, art and culture of indigenous, Afrodescendent, grassroots and rural women–, well-being, redistribution, economic growth and the macroeconomic impact of the care economy (para. 25);
- *Design* comprehensive care systems from a gender, intersectional, intercultural and human rights perspective that foster co-responsibility between men and women, the State, the market, families and the community, and include joined-up policies on time, resources, benefits and universal, good-quality public services to meet the different care needs of the population, as part of social protection systems (para. 26);
- *Promote* the adoption of legislation on labour and taxation in order to operate in a coordinated manner at the regional level, avoiding harmful competition among countries, in order to prevent taxation, wage cutting and gender inequalities being used as adjustment variables to increase exports and attract investment (para. 29)
- *Implement* policies and mechanisms to promote, strengthen and increase production and international trade, with a gender approach, as a pillar of countries' economic development, and pursue programmes to foster the creation of quality employment for women and female-led enterprise in international trade, conducting assessments of the impact on human rights of trade and investment policies and agreements from a gender equality perspective (para. 30);
- *Integrate* the gender perspective into national policies on climate change adaptation and mitigation, recognizing its differentiated effects on women, adoles-

cents and girls, as well as on other groups in vulnerable situations, promote climate action respecting, promoting and considering the respective obligations with regard to gender equality, through strengthened coordination between machineries for the advancement of women and the governing entities of policies on environment, climate change, planning, energy and human rights, among others (para. 33) (*ECLAC and UN Women, 2020).

The details behind these 40-plus-point *hortatory remarks*, actions and proposed measures are discussed in detail in the *Regional Report on the review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Latin America and Caribbean Countries, 25 years on* (ECLAC, 2019b). This report is complemented by a much richer and more elaborated 200-plus page publication entitled, *Women's autonomy in changing economic scenarios* (ECLAC, 2019c).

The *Regional Report* is the analysis of the output of questionnaires sent to member States for the preparation of national reports prepared for Beijing+25 (ECLAC, 2019b), which was structured around the 12 critical areas of the of the platform for action in the region 2014-2019, coupled with a detailed analysis of the institutional framework and linkages between national mechanisms for the advancement of women as well as the challenges facing the implementation of the platform for action at national, regional and international levels, between now and 2030.

From the purview of the *Regional Report* there are clear synergies between the BPfA and the 2030 agenda; for example it is argued that “the contents of the platform is embedded in the SDGs” and that the set of concerns of the BPfA are central to the 2030 Agenda. It is further argued that the 2030 agenda “establishes measures and means of implementation that stress equality between men and women for all 17 goals and hence reinforces the BPfA”. Thus, the BPfA, itself, was partly grounded on and influenced by the region’s Gender Agenda (established since 1977) and the *Regional Programme of Action for the Women of Latin America* (1994). These are also the bedrock of the Montevideo Strategy (adopted 2016).

In identifying the progress made in Latin America and the Caribbean with regard to the 12 critical areas of the BPfA, the *Regional Report* focused on the following key areas:

- *Women and poverty & women and the economy.* It identified that obstacles exist in terms of women’s exclusion from the formal financial systems. These obstacles and barriers include lack of information, gender biases and discriminatory attitudes in the financial system, obstacles in launching women-owned enterprises, weakness of and lack of gender sensitive and gender responsive approach to vocational training, unequal distribution of unpaid work, and persistent and pervasive gender-wage gaps. Progress on gender equality and women’s empowerment cited in the document includes “significant progress” with regard to “policies to combat poverty and foster wom-

en’s economic autonomy”, including “a number of vocational training initiatives”, such as to train women in farming to use information technology, mechanisms to promote women led-businesses and gender sensitive business development programmes, employment training programmes, policies governing working conditions and access to employment that are favorable to women, including, in some countries, equal pay and decent work regulations and anti-sexual harassment in the work place.

- *Women and health.* Initiatives to enhance and promote the right to health of women and girls, 2014-2019. In this context, the report flags: gender mainstreaming in health institutions and systems, access to sexual and reproductive health services, gender oriented health policies
- *Violence against women.* According to the *Regional Report*, femicide was reported to be “one of the greatest concerns raised” in national reports. Measures are being instituted by governments in the region to prevent, reduce and punish gender-based violence such as laws against violence against women, criminalization of femicide and protocol and frameworks for action to address violence. Examples: the Inter-institutional Protocol and Critical Route for the Care and Protection of Victims within the Framework of Law no. 348 and the Minimum Guidelines for the Investigation of Gender-based Offences against Women’s Lives-Femicide in the Plurilateral State of Bolivia (2016), the Gender Violence Observatory (Costa Rica) and direct services for women victims of violence (ECLAC, 2019b).
- *Women in power and decision making.* The *Regional Report* states that the “representation of women has made positive progress in the region.” For example, at the time the report was published, there were women in the highest executive positions in at least six, mainly Caribbean, countries in the region. There was no female Head of State in Latin America. Interestingly, there has been increasing growth in women in the ministerial cabinet (up from 23.9% (2014) to 28.5% (2018), but this growth has tended to remain stagnant in the Caribbean, barely moving from 19.2% to 19.4% over the same period (ECLAC, 2019b, p. 23)). At the same time, it should be noted that women tend to hold ministerial portfolios in social and cultural ministries. Thus, more needs to be done.
- *Women and armed conflict.* In the area of peace and security, specifically, prevention of violence, increased participation and representation, promotion and protection of rights, governments in the region are very proactive. In this context, the *Regional Report* show-cased countries in the region who have initiated processes in conformity with UN Security Council Resolution 1325, including the establishment of a national action plan (Brazil), the peace process with the FARC (Colombia), and a national committee for the

implementation of Res. 1325 (El Salvador). Some countries in the region have integrated or included provisions on migrant women. Many of them as well as others, are also abiding by the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol (Palermo Protocol, 2003) and are addressing the issue of human trafficking and smuggling, including in the virtual economy (ECLAC, 2019b, pp. 26-27).

- *Women and the environment.* The *Regional Report* notes that many countries in the Latin America and Caribbean region are integrating “or mainstreaming gender in the framework of national climate change and environmental policies, strategies and plans”, (ECLAC, 2019b, p. 28). This is especially so with regard to sectors such as agriculture, forests, rural development, wetlands and natural resources, and thematic areas such as adaptation, biodiversity, forest protection (including national REDD+ strategy), cities and infrastructures.
- *Institutional mechanism for the advancement of women.* The *Regional Report* argues that evidence show that the machineries for the advancement of women have not been systematically included in all areas and levels of government and in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of public policies. It further cited a UN Women 2018 publication that “these mechanisms are often poorly resourced and lack the mandate, influence, institutional hierarchy and capacity to hold other government agencies to account” (UN Women, 2018 cited in ECLAC, 2019b, p. 31). According to the Report, only about 50% of these machineries are high level (or ministerial status), 25% are classified as intermediate level (possibly attached to office of the Head of State, but not with cabinet status) and 20% (and 83.3% in the Caribbean) are classified as low level (reporting to a ministry or vice-ministry). Hence, there is much work to be done in raising the profile, structural relationship and influence of gender machineries who are working to address gender inequality and women’s economic and social empowerment. UN Women reports that there has been some progress in integrating gender perspective in national and subnational budgets but much more work needs to be undertaken in this regard (UN Women, 2018 and ECLAC, 2019, p. 32).

In the final analysis the state of play of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action since 1995 has been a steady on-going progress “in the recognition of the rights and autonomy of women and in the reduction of gender inequalities in Latin America and the Caribbean,” though “advances in the different dimensions of women’s autonomy have been slow and uneven” and inconsistent. Taking the long view to 2030, the prospects for full implementation face many challenges, barriers and obstacles, notwithstanding the strong commitment and integration of the Montevideo Strategy for the Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework and the apparent willingness of key decision makers, civil

society and other stakeholders to exploit as much as possible the synergies between the Regional Gender Agenda and the 2030 Agenda (ECLAC, 2019b, p. 41). Key challenges to implementing the BPfA in Latin America and the Caribbean are at least threefold: the challenges of guaranteeing women’s rights flagged in the platform, challenges relating to conditions for the implementation of equality policies and challenges around exploiting the synergies between regional and global commitments. Elaboration of these is outlined in the table in the next pages.

Previous Beijing+25 Updates:

No. 1, 13 March 2020—Political Declaration on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women

No. 2, 30 March 2020—Regional Round-up on progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in light of the upcoming 25th anniversary of the platform. Spotlight: Africa

No. 3, 21 April 2020—Regional Round-up on progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in light of the upcoming 25th anniversary of the platform. Spotlight: Asia-Pacific

No. 4, 20 May 2020— Regional Round-up on progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in light of the upcoming 25th anniversary of the platform. Spotlight: Arab Region

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Table: Challenges with specific barriers and obstacles to full implementation of the BPfA to 2030 (Based on information in ECLAC, 2019b, pp .41-46)

Area of challenges to implementation of BPfA	Challenges and specific obstacles & barriers	Potential way forward
<p>Guaranteeing women’s rights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Freedom from violence and discrimination ii) Sexual and reproductive rights iii) Economic, social and cultural rights iv) Civil and political rights v) Collective & environmental rights 	<p><u>Freedom from violence and discrimination</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to justice • Mechanisms for prevention, care & protection for victims • Femicide <p><u>Sexual and reproductive rights</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of laws • Access to services • Obstetric violence <p><u>Economic, social and cultural rights</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistence of gender based labor market segregation • Precarity of work • Informal work • Increase in poverty • Feminization of poverty • Inadequate social protection • Overburden of unpaid work • Digital and financial inclusion <p><u>Civil and political rights</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of parity in parliament • Access to decision making position in public and private institutions • Gender identity • Murders of environmental leaders and human rights defenders <p><u>Collective & environmental rights</u> Lack of systematic integration of gender into environmental and climate change policies, programmes and plans</p>	<p>Many countries have adopted ‘overarching strategies for the elimination of gender-based violence (GBV)’ (e.g., national policies or plans, laws on violence against women).</p> <p>Some governments have guaranteed sexual and reproductive rights in terms of access to such services.</p> <p>Some countries have ‘active employment policies’ for women. Countries are in the process of designing a comprehensive care system in the social protection matrix. Some are encouraging fair social organization of care, co-responsibility and equality (e.g. parental leave for men and women). State investment to guarantee care services Initiatives to narrow gender gaps in access to financial services Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and women programmes</p> <p>More focus on increasing women in parliaments etc Gender identity laws</p> <p>Some governments now integrating gender into sustainable development, climate change, and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes</p>

Endnote:

¹ The Montevideo Strategy is a “political-technical instrument that seeks to bridge the gap between de jure and de facto equality, by strengthening public policies that guarantee women’s autonomy” (ECLAC, 2019b, p. 7).

<p>Conditions for the implementation of equality policies in the region These conditions are with four implementation pillars identified in the Montevideo Strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Institutional architecture ii) Financing iii) Information systems iv) Participation of civil society 	<p><u>Institutional architecture:</u> The nature and degree of the structural integration of gender machineries into national and sub-national hierarchy; and issues around intersectionality and interculturalism & gender perspective into public programmes and policies</p> <p><u>Financing challenges include:</u> Lack of sufficient resources, and limitations on gender perspectives into budgets & planning, etc. Impact of fiscal consolidation policies on spending</p> <p><u>Information systems challenges include:</u> Lack of gender mainstreaming across national statistical system</p> <p><u>Participation of civil society:</u> Need to strengthen women’s organizations</p>	<p>Some countries are strengthening gender systems.</p> <p>Countries in the region are concerned that “fiscal consolidation policies... (could adversely impact resources) for gender policies and institutional architecture”. At the same time, some governments are including gender perspective in budgetary measures, which may enable the setting aside of financial resources for investing in actions to promote gender equality as well as monitor budget allocations to that effect.</p> <p>Progress on the production of information and recognition of need to build capacity in this area</p> <p>Increasing recognition of the important role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in influencing and monitoring public policy in this area</p>
<p>Synergies between regional and global commitments</p>	<p>SDGs & 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Regional Gender Agenda Positives: the lead for the implementation and coordination of these instruments is the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean</p> <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) access to information and data on the situation of women and girls 2) coordination between statistical entities 	<p>Gender statistics is now a top priority line of work of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC.</p>

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