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The Institutionalization of a Gender Approach in the Ministries of Labor of the Americas

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1. Introduction

As one of the actions envisaged for the 2007-2009 period, the XV Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML) has entrusted its Technical Secretariat with carrying out a study on the institutionalization of the gender perspective in the region's ministries of labor, one that would include the various types of bureaux, units or commissions dealing with gender issues within each ministry's organizational structure. The study's conceptual framework would reflect the Conference's explicitly declared intent to advance gender equality within the framework of decent work.

The purpose of the study is to give the IACML an hemispheric overview of progress made towards institutionalizing the gender perspective in Labor Ministries in the Americas, by detecting strengths and weaknesses as well as the most remarkable results for the processes involved, in order to define strategic areas of intervention, particularly through the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL).

This study can thus be described as an exercise in systematizing and interpreting the information supplied by Labor Ministries and national mechanisms for the advancement of women in the region. It provides a record of the various types of units dealing with gender issues within each ministry, a selection of good practices, and conclusions, to support the creation, strengthening or reorganization of these units so as to make their existence a guarantee that Labor Ministries across the region integrate the gender perspective into their policies and programs.

i) Description of the Study

This study documents and systematizes the current state of incorporation of the gender perspective into the institutional framework of Labor Ministries in the region. It also identifies the main weaknesses and strengths of gender perspective institutionalization processes on the basis of established criteria including, among the most important, mainstreaming promotion, coordination with institutions and agencies, structural stability, resource availability, characteristic features of implemented programs.

Based on that analysis, recommendations are set forth for strengthening the incorporation of the gender perspective into Labor Ministries' internal and cross-cutting practices by means of actions designed as institution building efforts. The same approach is used to highlight the best practices identified with regard to promoting horizontal cooperation among the various countries.

ii) Methodology

The research for this study was performed by combining different information compilation techniques to perform the following actions:

- a) Design a data sheet/questionnaire for collecting the required information, sent by the OAS Department of Social Development and Employment to all Labor Ministries in the region.
- b) Design the data sheet/questionnaire sent to national mechanisms for the advancement of women
- c) Personally interview key informers in a number of countries to round out the information received through the fact sheets/questionnaires
- d) Analyze contents from secondary sources (institutional documents and publications, internal and external evaluations, Web pages, etc.)
- e) Perform a more in-depth analysis of cases likely to be of interest as real life examples of good gender institutionalization practices (desk study analysis and interviews).

The OAS Department of Social Development and Employment sent a letter to all Labor Ministries in the region, requesting them to answer a specially designed information collection questionnaire. Once the answers came in, work began to systematize the information thus provided along research axes identified in the survey design stage as the most significant for purposes of throwing light on the phenomenon under study:

- a) Characteristic features of institutional insertion (existence and origin of a mandate)
- b) Mission
- c) Functions
- d) Economic empowerment
- e) Available resources
- f) Strengths and weaknesses detected
- g) Programs and projects
- h) Training (received and needed).

This information was mapped and used for axis and cross-axis analysis. At the same time, a desk study investigation was performed on a good number of the countries involved, their connections through regional initiatives, and the impact of such connections on each country.

Next, through the Interamerican Commission of Women a complementary questionnaire was sent out to national mechanisms for the advancement of women in the region in order to gather their views about the operation of gender affairs units and round out the information collected from Labor Ministries. The units were requested to inform about their connection with specialized units on gender issues in the ministries of labor, their perception of threats and strengths as relevant to the units' continuing existence, and their recommendations for improving their performance. The information thus collected was systematized and processed together with the one already obtained. This phase of the study made it possible to gain a deeper understanding of these agencies' expectations and views with regard to the needs, strengths and weaknesses of gender mechanisms or units. The information thus systematized has been put into tables showing the situation on an individual country basis.

The data sheets/questionnaires in question were sent to Labor Ministries and national mechanisms for gender equality in all 34 OAS member states. Answers were received from 29 ministries and 17 national mechanisms.

Since the analysis presented here is based on information supplied by the aforementioned institutions, the indicators of gender perspective institutionalization it provides are of a qualitative nature, in that they describe the institutionalization process without also measuring its results.

iii) Structure of the document

This document sums up and contextualizes the information collected in the manner described in the previous section. The initial chapter describes the context in which the gender perspective is being institutionalized in the countries of the Hemisphere, from the standpoint of both the general political and social characteristics of the region, and the factors that have facilitated the institutionalization of the gender perspective in Labor Ministries. It does so within the framework of decent work, of which gender equality is an integral part by definition.

The following chapter discusses the information collected from the above mentioned sources in the following order:

- a) Context: The context in which the gender perspective is being integrated into the Labor Ministries is described by way of a brief introductory reference
- b) Institutional map: A number of synopses are used to present the current situation with regard to the existence of gender bureaux within the ministries of labor.
- c) Organizational analysis of gender bureaux or specialized units, with regard to:
 - i) Structure and functions
 - ii) Place within the ministry's organizational structure
 - iii) Staffing level and budget
 - iv) Portfolio of main programs and projects

- v) Identification of the relevant stakeholders involved in the work of the office or unit, and—more particularly—of the national mechanisms for gender issues.

- d) Institutional analysis: The information compiled is analyzed to detect any gaps and mismatches between the theoretical regulatory and the actual operations of bureaux or specialized units as a way to identify strengths and weaknesses of their institutional insertion, their effectiveness towards mainstreaming the gender perspective, and their impact on labor policies. The sustainability of their institutional insertion is analyzed in terms of resources and strategies. The achievements and impact of the actions undertaken are discussed, along with the effectiveness of intra and interinstitutional coordination with the various actors and involved stakeholders. Gender perspective mainstreaming and other programs are analyzed.

The following chapter presents a proposal designed to respond to training needs, and makes the case that the strategy proposed will advance the institutionalization of the gender perspective in Labor Ministries across the region. The proposal in question is based on the most widely shared weaknesses of specialized gender units or bureaux identified in the study.

The last chapter presents examples of good practices highlighting the ministries' innovation capacity. Different aspects are emphasized that can be a source of inspiration to other countries. Lastly, conclusions are set forth based on the most important findings of the study.

ANSWERS FROM LABOR MINISTRIES AND NATIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN TO THE REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Countries	Ministry of Labor	National Mechanism for the Advancement of Women
Canada	x	
United States	x	x
Mexico	x	x
Argentina	x	x
Bolivia	x	x
Brazil	x	x
Chile	x	x
Colombia	x	x
Ecuador	x	
Guyana		
Paraguay	x	x
Peru	x	
Suriname	x	
Uruguay	x	
Venezuela		x
Antigua and Barbuda	x	x
Bahamas	x	
Barbados	x	
Belize	x	
Costa Rica	x	x
Dominica		
El Salvador	x	x
Granada		x
Guatemala	x	x
Haiti	x	
Honduras	x	x
Jamaica		x
Nicaragua	x	
Panama	x	
Dominican Republic	x	x
Saint Lucia	x	
Saint Kitts & Nevis	x	
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	x	
Trinidad and Tobago	x	
Total	29	17
Response percentage	85.3%	50%

2. The institutional Context

The decent work framework

In 2007 the XV Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML) adopted a number of strategic guidelines for advancing gender equality within the framework of decent work, a concept introduced by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 1999. The concept of decent work is linked to four objectives: promoting labor rights; advancing job opportunities; improving social protection; and strengthening social dialogue. Each of these objectives is cross-cutting and directed at promoting gender equality and overcoming poverty through work and the strengthening of democracy. From that perspective, the decent work concept seeks to enable both men and women to achieve productive employment under conditions of freedom, equality, safety and dignity.

Although over these past few decades the gap between men and women has been reduced in terms of participation in the workforce, when it comes to employment quality the gap has remained and even deepened. In other words, women's access to productive work under conditions of safety and dignity is not a given.

In every country in the region, the wage gap between men and women persists along with a marked level of horizontal segregation of the labor market that concentrates women workers in a few industries, mostly those where wages, productivity and social and financial rewards are lower. Little progress has been found with regard to horizontal segregation of the labor market, with a high percentage of women employed in the lowest paid occupational categories, even though women score higher schooling rates than men at every level, including higher education.

Women's increased participation in the labor market has not been accompanied by commensurate advances towards an equitable distribution of roles, for the vast majority of them maintain their reproductive role within the family. For that reason, the need to reconcile paid work with the performance of their assigned roles tends to make women's entry into the labor market more precarious, more characterized by temporary employment, fewer working hours, greater mobility between employment and unemployment, all of which is conducive to greater lack of social security coverage. The recourse to the decent work framework is indeed an answer to the increasing lack of social security coverage for men and women workers. At the same time, it is necessary to devote special attention to gender equality with regard to women's work and employment.

As the OAS gradually embraced the need to adopt policy guidelines consistent with the creation of decent work in the course of its past several summits and ministerial meetings, its member countries have made a number of commitments to adopt employment creation policies focused not only on creating more jobs but also better, decent work generating jobs. This intent was reaffirmed time and again at the Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML) of the OAS beginning with the XII IACML (Ottawa, 2001), and by the XV IACML of 2007 it had become one of the central issues. At that Conference, the OAS Department of Social Development and Employment (DSDE), acting under the mandate of the XIV IACML, presented a document containing proposals to carry out studies, and foster the sharing of successful practices for integrating the gender perspective into public policies. This document, entitled "Gender Equality for Decent Work: Proposals for Mainstreaming Gender into Labor and Employment Policies within the Framework of the IACML", provides strategic action guidelines to strengthen the inclusion of the gender perspective into the IACML's institutional action and help eliminate gender gaps at work. The guidelines are aligned with the objectives of the 2006-2015 Decent Work Hemispheric Agenda and the mandates of the Summits of the Americas and the Inter-American Conference of Ministers

of Labor¹. Although they are primarily directed at Labor Ministries in the region grouped in the IACML, their implementation will involve workers and employers organizations through the participation of the two advisory bodies of the IACML: namely, the Trade Union Technical Advisory Council (COSATE) and the Business Technical Advisory Committee on Labor Matters (CEATAL).

The strategic guidelines in question provide, firstly, for the creation of High Level Dialogues on Gender and Employment between the Labor Ministries grouped in the IACML and the authorities of women's mechanisms, grouped in the Interamerican Commission of Women (CIM), as a way to reinforce the political commitment in favor of gender equality in the world of work, to develop intersectoral actions putting in practice that commitment, and to facilitate fluid, ongoing communication among the said institutions²; secondly, for an evaluation of all specialized units, offices or bureaux in charge of gender affairs in Labor Ministries; thirdly, for strengthening hemispheric horizontal cooperation—as a way, in particular, to facilitate cooperation on issues related to decent work and gender equality—through the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL); fourthly, for the creation of an hemispheric labor observatory on gender and employment for monitoring gender gaps trends in employment and work.

IACML's efforts to foster decent work incorporation in countries across the Hemisphere correlate with the Interamerican Program on the Promotion of the Human Rights of Women and Gender Equity and Equality (IAP) promoted by the Interamerican Commission of Women (CIM), which has among its specific objectives to achieve women's full and equal access to work and productive resources. The same objective is pursued by the recommendations presented by CIM for mainstreaming gender into the Programs and Policies of Labor Ministries in the Hemisphere, contained in the Follow-Up Plan on the Interamerican Program on Gender and Labor (SEPIA I) for the year 2001, which notably recognize the institutionalization of the gender perspective as instrumental to the promotion of decent work.

Thus decent work is at the very centre of the actions that Labor Ministries in the region need to undertake in order to advance the elimination of the most flagrant gender gaps with regard to income, safety, vocational and job training opportunities, trade union participation, social dialogue, gaps that stand in the way of productive work under conditions of freedom, equality, safety and dignity.

From that perspective, the institutionalization of the gender perspective in Labor Ministries through the creation of specialized gender mechanisms or units with a mission to mainstream the gender perspective is instrumental to increasing gender equality in work and employment, and has a crucial role to play as decent work facilitator. Accordingly, specialized gender units take center stage in operationalizing what is, in the words of the United Nations Economic and Social Council *"a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated"*³.

The institutionalization of the gender perspective in Labor Ministries is emerging as a highly effective tool for designing gender equality policies, plans and programs. As a strategy it will make it possible, on one hand, to mainstream the gender perspective by endowing men and women

¹ "Gender Equality for Decent Work: Proposals for Mainstreaming Gender into Labor and Employment Policies within the Framework of the IACML" (Report to the XV CIMT). OAS/Ser.K/XII.15.1TRABAJO/INF.1/077 August 2007

² Ibidem

³ United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), July 1997.

officials of all institutional areas with gender analysis capacities that will become part and parcel of their daily work; and, on the other, to create interinstitutional networks with Labor Ministries at their centers, that will promote a comprehensive approach to gender issues. At the same time, it will provide an appropriate scenario for enlisting the support of the stakeholders involved (workers organizations, trade unions, occupational organizations, employers organizations, government agencies and civil society organizations).

Facilitating factors

The favorable political environment created by the consolidation of democracy in the countries of the Hemisphere, combined with the legacy of the women's movements that emerged with unforeseen force in the 80s, have facilitated the incorporation of the gender perspective into the institutional work of governments in the region. In all countries, mechanisms have been established for the advancement of women, whether they be ministries or women's affairs offices, exhibiting varying degrees of institutionality, and accompanied in many cases by cross-cutting instruments, including Equal Opportunity Plans.

During the 90s, several countries incorporated gender equality objectives into their national plans. Such was the case of Argentina, where the Equal Opportunities for Women in Employment Program (PIOME) was a part of its 1993-1994 Equal Opportunities for Women Plan and a 1997 decree sanctioned the Equal Opportunities between Men and Women in the World of Work Plan, whose objectives are recognized in the Pacto Federal del Trabajo [federal labor agreement] of 1998. In the same decade, Mexico, Peru and Bolivia reported initiatives aimed at integrating gender equality objectives into their national plans, especially in connection with poverty eradication programs⁴. A number of countries in the Caribbean have committed themselves to strategic national development plans, some of which include gender mainstreaming agreements⁵.

On the other hand, women's increased participation in the workforce has been accompanied by changes in many women's perceptions about the manifestations of inequality in the labor market. These changes basically arise as women face the new problems—such as work-life balance difficulties—brought about in relation to their gender condition by their entry into the world of work. In turn, discrimination perceptions have made it possible to consolidate labor demands with a gender content that have found an echo thanks to the institutionalization of the gender issue in all countries in the region through existing mechanisms for the advancement of women. At the same time, as trade unions and employers organizations became more open towards women's greater participation within the framework of this new integrative mindset, these have been able to play a stronger role—albeit still in a restricted way—in social dialogue committees.

This entire process has permeated actors. Little by little, the number of Labor Ministries in the region has increased that, whether by means of agreements with gender equality promotion mechanisms and/or other strategies, have adopted policies aimed at reducing labor market gender gaps.

⁴ *The gender perspective in economic and labor policies. State of the art in Latin America and the Caribbean.* Lieve Daeren. CEPAL/ECLAC Women and Development Unit. Santiago de Chile, February 2001.

⁵ Trinidad and Tobago's Vision 2020; Barbados 2005-2025; Jamaica 2015 and Vision 2030 Jamaica.

The intensity of this process varies from country to country in relation to such institutional factors as the strength of national mechanisms for the advancement of women and of the Labor Ministries themselves, in terms of level of institutionality and available human and financial resources. Context also plays a role, for much depends on the characteristic features of a country's economy and—most importantly—on the political will of the powers to be, and on the allocation of sufficient financial and human resources.

Conditions that have originated mechanisms for the institutionalization of the gender perspective are likewise diverse: in some countries commitments resulting from international conferences have been significant drivers of the creation or improvement of institutional mechanisms by governments.

The existence of regional programs for the promotion of gender equality in their areas devoted to employment and the promotion of women's empowerment has facilitated the process of establishment of gender mechanisms in the Labor Ministries. The importance cannot be overestimated of the existence of the Tripartite Commissions created with the ILO's support, particularly in MERCOSUR countries and Chile, as well as of programs like *Formujer* or *Cumple y Gana* in different countries in the region, as they helped give the initial impulse and then maintain the Labor Ministries' specialized gender units.

The Tripartite Commissions were established in the five South Cone countries and in El Salvador, whether by a governmental decree or directly through the Labor Ministries' work plans. In every case, the Labor Ministry, supported by the respective women's affairs office, convened employers and workers. Together, they represent the government side in the commission. The workers and employers sides are represented by the respective confederations of trade unions and employers organizations.

Even though achievement levels are not uniform among the countries of implementation, Tripartite Commissions are recognized in every country as referents on matters of employment and gender and have helped put new issues on the table of discussion of the public agenda, have facilitated awareness raising and commitment among Labor Ministry authorities with regard to gender issues and the mainstreaming of the gender perspective into plans and programs⁶.

Particularly worth mentioning among regional programs is the *Cumple y Gana: fortalecimiento de los derechos laborales* project, implemented in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic in order to increase compliance with labor rights by disseminating information about each country's labor legislation, and strengthen existing labor inspection and alternative labor conflict resolution systems. The project is sponsored and funded by the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) with support from each country's respective Labor Ministry, and executed in close collaboration with workers and employers organizations. Its development is the joint responsibility of the Foundation for Peace and Democracy, FUNPADEM, a nongovernmental organization, and Abt Associates Inc. of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Cumple y Gana is focused on such aspects as keeping workers and employers better informed about their respective country's labor laws and standards; increasing the effectiveness and reliability of the Labor Ministries' inspection systems with regard to compliance with labor laws and standards. Its objectives also include the use of mediation and conciliation in labor disputes by Labor Ministries as well as by workers, employers and their organizations (Alternative Conflict

⁶ C., Silvia Galilea O. and Leslie Marin. *Informe final de consultoría para evaluar el trabajo de las comisiones tripartitas para la igualdad de oportunidades en el South Cone*. Santiago : ILO, 2002.

Resolution Component (RAC). One central component consists of strengthening mechanisms for the promotion and protection of women's labor rights from the gender perspective.

In 2004, the Ministers of Commerce and Labor of the Central American States and the Dominican Republic signed a joint declaration urging their Deputy Ministers to form a working group entrusted with preparing a report on ways to improve enforcement and observance of labor rights and strengthen labor entities in the region.⁷ The working group, supported by the Inter-American Development Bank, produced a document entitled "Labor Dimension in Central America and the Dominican Republic. Building Progress: Reinforcing Compliance and Strengthening the Capacities", also known as The White Book, which was published in 2005. Its recommendations include the elimination of gender-based discrimination and labor discrimination against indigenous people, immigrant workers, persons infected with HIV and suffering from AIDS and persons with disabilities. It also recommends the creation of a regional equal employment centre "providing training, educational materials, information on best practices ... and programs focused on eliminating employment discrimination concerns"⁸. Each participating country has developed implementation plans for the 2007-2010 period. These compliance efforts, coordinated by each respective Labor Ministry, have facilitated intersectoral and interinstitutional communication.

FORMUJER is a transnational initiative, "into which the capacities and resources of three Latin American entities and two international agencies converge, the former representing the various modes of organization of regional vocational training, the latter dedicated to promoting and supporting economic and social development policies"⁹. The program started in 1998 and has been jointly financed by the Interamerican Development Bank. CINTERFOR/ILO has been in charge of its regional coordination and technical and methodological monitoring, while the running of its National Pilot Projects has been assigned to the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Human Resources Training of Argentina, the INFOCAL Foundation of Bolivia and the INA (National Training Institute) of Costa Rica through their National Executive Units.

According to its basic document, "The ultimate purpose of the FORMUJER program is to give support to the female contribution to development, and help to alleviate poverty by improving and increasing the productivity and employment opportunities of low-income women in the region"¹⁰. Its action has focused on boosting the quality, relevance and gender equity of technical and vocational education in the region, so as to bring about favorable conditions for equal participation by women in technical-vocational training. The institutionalization of the gender perspective is mentioned among its achievements.

An important role was played by the project entitled "Incorporation of the Gender Dimension into Public Policies and Programs for Poverty Eradication and Employment Generation in Latin America", (GPE) initiated in 2002 by the ILO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean in order to stimulate action against poverty at the national and regional levels. GPE's contribution is in the area of building the institutional capacities of social actors (trade unions, employers organizations and civil society organizations), as well as of the Labor Ministries. It has been implemented in Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina and Paraguay and its activities have focused primarily on promoting gender equality in public policies and programs for employment, productive development and combat against poverty; on building the institutional capacities of ILO constituents by means of education, training and awareness raising activities; and on developing a knowledge base aimed at

⁷ *White Book: Labor Dimension in Central America and the Dominican Republic. Building Progress: Reinforcing Compliance and Strengthening the Capacities.*

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ www.cinterfor.org.uy

¹⁰ *Un modelo de políticas de formación para diversos ámbitos de intervención y múltiples actores. El Programa Formujer*

advancing gender equality in employment generation, productive development and poverty fighting policies.

The above mentioned factors have helped lay the foundations for the institutionalization of the gender perspective in Labor Ministries; nevertheless, whether the ground gained is maintained will depend on structural, institutional and cultural factors as much as on women's position and prominence in society. Another factor to be considered are the alliances that gender institutionalization mechanisms will be able to establish with national mechanisms for the advancement of women so as to be able to work in coordination, thus strengthening not only the incorporation of gender into labor programs but also the institutionality of gender itself¹¹.

¹¹ Guzmán, Virginia. *"The Institutionality of Gender in the State: New Analytical Perspectives"*. CEPAL/ECLAC Women and Development Unit, Serie Mujer y Desarrollo. Santiago de Chile, March 2001.

3. The characteristic features of gender perspective institutionalization

A considerable number of countries in the region have made the efforts required to create and maintain specialized gender mechanisms or units within their Labor Ministries. This chapter discusses the state of the art of this process on the basis of the information received from the sources themselves. Indeed, once processed, this information has provided an hemispheric overview of country-specific traits as well as of elements common to different countries. What follows is a description of our main findings:

a) In the majority of Labor Ministries in the region mechanisms have been created for the institutionalization of the gender perspective.

The first difference detected among the countries consulted is the one between those that have created some sort of mechanism or unit for gender mainstreaming within their respective ministries and those that stated not having done so in their answers. The information collected shows that out of 34 countries consulted, 29 provided answers, and that 23 of those have such a mechanism in place (Table 1).

In fact, most ministries in the region have—in a variety of forms—such units in place: 16 (Canada, United States, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic) have a gender affairs bureau or specialized unit; two (Peru and Suriname) have a focal point; in Uruguay, the function is provided in the form of an advisory service; Chile has a ministry gender affairs officer; in Honduras, the unit is in process of creation; in Bolivia, it is defined as the Ministry of Labor's Fundamental Rights Unit.

Among the drivers of such proliferation, the political will of governments—in many cases, the highest institutional authority (Minister of Labor)—is particularly worth mentioning. Another important driver is the need to comply with international commitments assumed by the region's national governments regarding the institutionalization of the gender perspective.

Differences were detected among units with regard to structure, for some (the majority) are offices dedicated to women's or gender affairs, whilst others serve a broader constituency, including, in particular, such vulnerable groups as children, the young, persons with disabilities or indigenous peoples (Mexico, Ecuador, Haiti).

Table 1.
Specialized Gender Units existing within Ministries of Labor in the Region

Country	Has one	Name	Date of creation	Type of mechanism
Canada	x	Gender Based Analysis (GBA) Unit	1945 ¹²	Bureau or specialized unit for gender affairs
United States	x	Women's Bureau	1920	Bureau or specialized unit for gender affairs
Mexico	x	Dirección General para la Igualdad Laboral (Directorate General for Labor Equality)	1997	Bureau or specialized unit for gender affairs
Argentina	x	Coordinación de Equidad de Género e Igualdad de Oportunidades en el Trabajo (Coordinating Unit for Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities at Work)	2007	Bureau or specialized unit for gender affairs
Bolivia	x	Área de Género (Gender Area)	2007	Part of the Ministry of Labor's Fundamental Rights Unit
Brazil	x	Subcomissão de Genero (Subcomisión de Género) (Subcommission for Gender Affairs)	2008	Bureau or specialized unit for gender affairs
Chile	x	Encargada Ministerial de Género (Ministry Gender Affairs Officer)	1994 2002 2006	Ministry Officer in charge of coordinating a sectoral committee with Ministry officials in charge of related services
Colombia	x	Grupo de Equidad de Género (Gender Equality Group)	2003	Bureau or specialized unit for gender affairs
Ecuador	x	Unidad de Género y Juventud (Gender and Youth Unit)	2007	Bureau or specialized unit for gender affairs
Guyana	NA			
Paraguay	x	Dirección de Promoción Social de la Mujer Trabajadora (Women Workers' Social Promotion Directorate)	1971	Bureau or specialized unit for gender affairs
Peru	x	Representante Sectorial ante la Comisión Multisectorial del Ministerio de la Mujer y Desarrollo Social (Sectoral Representative of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development before the Multisectoral Commission)		Focal point
Uruguay	x	Asesoría en Género (Advisory Service on Gender Issues)	2006	Advisory service
Venezuela	NA			
Antigua and Barbuda	x	Directorate of Gender Affairs	1980	Bureau or specialized unit for gender affairs
Bahamas	x	Bureau of Women's Affairs	1981	Bureau or specialized unit for gender affairs

¹² 1945 was the year of creation of HRDC's "Women's Bureau", later replaced by the Gender Analysis & Policy (GAP) Directorate in 2001. In 2007, following the creation of a new department (HRSDC), the office moved to its current location.

Table 1.
Specialized Gender Units existing within Ministries of Labor in the Region

Country	Has one	Name	Date of creation	Type of mechanism
Barbados	/			
Belize	/			
Costa Rica	x	Unidad de Equidad de Género (Gender Equality Unit)	2000	Bureau or specialized unit for gender affairs
Dominica	NA			
El Salvador	x	Unidad Especial de Género y Prevención de Actos Laborales Discriminatorios (Special Unit for Gender Affairs and the Prevention of Discriminatory Labor Actions)	2005	Bureau or specialized unit for gender affairs
Granada	NA			
Guatemala	x	Unidad de la Mujer Trabajadora (Working Women's Unit)	1994	Bureau or specialized unit for gender affairs
Haiti	x	Service Femme et Enfant (Servicio Mujer and Niño - Ministerio de Asuntos Sociales) (Women's and Children's Service – Ministry of Social Affairs)		Service embedded in the Regional Offices
Honduras	x	Programa Mujer Trabajadora/Unidad Equidad de Género (<i>Mujer Trabajadora</i> program/Gender Equality Unit)	In process of creation	The Unit is in process of creation
Jamaica	NA			
Nicaragua	x	Oficina de Igualdad y No Discriminación en el Empleo (Office for Equality and Non-Discrimination in Employment)	2007	Bureau or specialized unit for gender affairs
Panama	x	Comisión de Género y Trabajo (Commission on Gender and Labor)	2007	Bureau or specialized unit for gender affairs
Dominican Republic	x	Departamento de la Igualdad y no Discriminación (Department for Equality and Non-Discrimination)	2005	Bureau or specialized unit for gender affairs
Saint Lucia	/			
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	/	-		
Suriname	x	Not Applicable	2000	Focal point
Saint Kitts	/	-		
Trinidad and Tobago	/	-		
X has one	23			
/ answered, has none	6			
N/A No Answer	5			

North American countries were the first to establish units dedicated to improving women's condition in the workplace. The United States has had in place since 1920 a unit with a mandate to "formulate standards and policies to promote the welfare of wage-earning women, improve their working conditions, increase their efficiency, and advance their opportunities for profitable employment." In Canada, the Women's Affairs Office created in 1945 as part of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), has undergone many changes since, evolving into the present Gender Based Analysis (GBA) Unit. In Mexico, the Directorate General for Labor Equality for Women and Children is one of three directorates making up the area of the Directorate General for Labor Equality since 1997.

In South America, specialized gender units in Labor Ministries are a more recent creation. Paraguay has the oldest, with 1971 as the stated year of establishment¹³. In Chile, it was established in 1994¹⁴, has changed form a number of times, and in 2006 it took the form of a Ministry Gender Affairs Officer. Next in order of seniority are the units of Suriname (2000), which has in place a focal point for labor-related gender issues, and Colombia, which created the Gender Equality Group in 2003.

Although Uruguay has had an Advisory Service on Gender Issues since 2006, it reports that this unit is still being established, since the Ministry is in the process of closing an interinstitutional agreement with the National Women's Institute (INAMU) to implement PTG, its program for mainstreaming gender into public policy. PTG includes training in preparation and development of gender mainstreaming strategies, monitoring and evaluation of work plans. From 1997 onwards, the Tripartite Commission for the Equality of Opportunities and Treatment at Work has been acting as consultant to the Ministry of Labor and Social Security with regard to gender equality.

Peru has chosen to create a focal point, i.e. the Sectoral Representative of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development before the Multisectoral Commission. Its Ministry of Labor sits on the Multisectoral Commission established by ministerial resolution and responsible for following up the Plan for Equality of Opportunities between Women and Men 2006-2010. Within this framework, the Ministry's representative takes care of internal coordination with the different offices within the sector in order to monitor compliance with the commitments undertaken under the Plan.

The year 2007 saw the creation of the Gender and Youth Unit in Ecuador by a ministerial resolution, of the Coordinating Unit for Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities at Work in Argentina, and of the Gender Area in Bolivia by a Joint Resolution of two ministries (Ministry of Labor and Ministry of Treasury). In Brazil (2008), gender units are being reformulated through a Coordinating Unit for Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities at Work and the Subcommission for Gender Affairs, respectively.

¹³ In 1995, notwithstanding the fact that *Ministerio de Justicia y Trabajo* [ministry of justice and labor] of Paraguay has had a *Dirección de Promoción Social de la Mujer Trabajadora* [women workers' social promotion directorate] since 1971, the *Grupo de Enlace Tripartito* [tripartite liaison group] was established to respond to the challenge of inequality in employment between women and men. Based on this experience, the *Comisión Tripartita para Examinar y Promover la Igualdad de la Participación de la Mujer en el Trabajo* [national tripartite commission to examine and promote the labor participation of women] was established by *Resolución* No. 342 of the Ministry of Justice and Labor. It is through participation in these bodies and agencies—as well as through the preparation and implementation of the First National Equal Opportunities Plan by *Secretaría de la Mujer de la Presidencia de la República* [woman's secretariat to the President] (1977)—that this unit reaffirms its gender content.

¹⁴ Chile has had a specialized gender unit in place since 1994 through the political will of its Ministers of Labor. In 2002, the Management Improvement Program came into effect by mandate of *Ministerio de Hacienda* [ministry of finance] within the framework of the government's Modernization of the State Strategy. In 2006 a *Servicio Nacional de la Mujer* [the national women's service] official note to all ministries created the role of *Encargada Ministerial de Género* [ministry gender affairs officer].

Among Central American countries, Guatemala has had its Working Women's Unit since 1994, whilst in Costa Rica's Gender Equality Unit took up duties in 2000. The year 2005 saw the creation of the Department for Equality and Non-Discrimination in the Dominican Republic, and of the Special Unit for Gender Affairs and the Prevention of Discriminatory Labor Actions in El Salvador. Nicaragua and Panama created their own gender affairs units in 2007 by establishing, respectively, the Office for Equality and Non-Discrimination in Employment and the Commission on Gender and Labor.

In the Caribbean¹⁵, 11 out of 14 countries answered the questionnaire. Overall, four have gender affairs units in place in the Ministry of Labor, seven filled in the questionnaire and reported not having such units, three did not answer the questionnaire, as a result of which the relevant information was sought by querying the ministries' Web pages in the cases of Granada and Guyana and by interviewing Labor Ministry officials in the case of Jamaica¹⁶. Antigua & Barbuda and Bahamas, two countries where gender units exist, report having had in place specialized gender units for gender affairs—the Directorate of Gender Affairs and the Bureau of Woman's Affairs, respectively—since the 80s.

Interestingly, however, Trinidad and Tobago reported that, in spite of lacking a specialized gender unit, the Ministry of Labor does recognize the gender issue as one of the most important to the institution. Many Ministry officials have been trained in gender mainstreaming which, as a result, is incorporated into the development and execution of all programs and projects undertaken by the Ministry. By ensuring the incorporation of this dimension, its Research and Planning Unit plays in fact the role of a specialized gender unit, which—they add—they have so far been unable to create due to lack of resources.

According to information collected on this issue with a broader geographical scope and referred to the 90s¹⁷, in the second half of that decade specialized gender units were in place within the Labor Ministries of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Mexico and Paraguay. It is surprising that some countries answered "No" to the specific question whether in the past they had had units similar to the current one. One possible explanation is that those units disappeared, were restructured or renamed after a change in government, and their existence was not recognized. This is an interesting point worth analyzing as an indicator of stability, for it would seem that these units are highly sensitive to changes in ministerial or governmental authorities.

b) A high percentage of specialized gender units have been created by legal mandate

Interestingly, in nearly all countries specialized gender units were created by an act of legislation or by an executive order—an indication of progress in the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming in labor matters (Table 2).

¹⁵ The information provided here about the Caribbean is based a document prepared by consultant Leith L. Dunn "*Institutionalization of Gender Mainstreaming in the Ministries of Labor in the Caribbean*", at the request of the OAS Department of Social Development and Employment as a part of this research.

¹⁶ These inquiries found that no specialized gender units existed in the Labor Ministries of these countries.

¹⁷ *The gender perspective in economic and labor policies. State of the art in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Lieve Daeren. CEPAL/ECLAC Women and Development Unit. ECLAC-GTZ project "Institutionalization of gender policies within ECLAC and sectoral ministries. Santiago de Chile, February 2001.

Table 2
Mechanisms for the Institutionalization of the Gender Perspective in Labor Ministries in the Region, Classified according to Origin of the Mandate

Countries	Origin of the creation mandate
Canada	Federal Gender Equality Plan 1995 ¹⁸ and la Gender Equality Agenda (2000)
United States	Legislation
Mexico	Legislation Executive Order
Argentina	Executive Order
Bolivia	Political will and mandate of the Minister of Labor.
Brazil	NA
Chile	Legislation
Colombia	Legislation
Ecuador	Ministerial resolution
Paraguay	Legislation Agreement International commitments
Peru	Legislation International commitments
Uruguay	Legislation
Antigua and Barbuda	Executive Order International commitments
Bahamas	Executive Order International commitments
Costa Rica	Legislation
El Salvador	Legislation International commitments
Guatemala	Legislation International commitments
Honduras	Legislation Executive Order Agreement International commitment
Nicaragua	Legislation Executive Order Agreement International commitments
Panama	Agreement between the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Labor and Labor Development
Dominican Republic	Executive Order
Suriname	Resolution

¹⁸ The Plan was presented by Canada at the Beijing Conference. It created and formalized a systematic approach to gender mainstreaming. In turn, the Gender Equality Agenda 2000 mainstreamed GBA through the federal departments of the Government of Canada.

This fact seems to indicate that gender affairs units or offices for the institutionalization of this perspective in Labor Ministries have a degree of stability beyond the original impulse that led to their creation. Resolutions adopted at international conferences—which many countries mention as the origin of the creation mandate—have also put significant pressure on the governments of several countries in the region to generate the institutional mechanisms for the institutionalization of the gender perspective in the sphere of labor. In several countries, in fact, the very definition of the specialized gender unit's mission derives directly from international mandates.

c) Many gender affairs units appear to rank high within the hierarchy of the Ministry

Being strategically placed within the Ministry's institutional structure to promote gender policy mainstreaming is of fundamental importance to the achievement of such units' objectives. The respondent countries' answers regarding the position of their gender affairs units or focal points (Table 3) establish that they tend to concentrate in the higher ranks of the hierarchy (reporting to the Labor Minister or Secretary, or Subsecretary/or Deputy Minister). This is extremely important from the standpoint of ability to have access to the Ministry's decision-making authorities and permeate their action with a gender perspective.

That said, it is necessary to clarify whether this position within the Ministry's hierarchy actually ensures them sufficient backing from the decision-making authorities to influence other areas within the Ministry. An analysis of the budgets of specialized gender units revealed that they are, generally speaking, quite small, a telling indication that that their high rank within the organizational structure of the Ministry is a matter of form, serving the purpose of complying with international agreements, rather than a sign of high policy priority.

A search for specialized gender units in the Web pages of their respective ministries revealed that, with a very few exceptions, these units are neither shown in organizational charts nor otherwise highlighted. This invisibility may confirm the previous observation about the merely formal nature of their current role.

TABLE 3.
Mechanisms for the Institutionalization of the Gender Perspective in Labor Ministries in the Region, Classified according to Hierarchical Position

Countries	Hierarchical position
Canada	Minister of Labor and Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development
United States	Office of the Secretary of Labor. The Director reports to the Secretary
Mexico	Subsecretariat for Social Inclusion, reports to the Secretary of Labor and Social Security
Argentina	Office of the Minister of Labor, reports to the Head of Cabinet
Bolivia	Part of the Fundamental Rights Unit, reports to the Minister of Labor's Office.
Brazil	Consultant to the Minister. Reports to the Executive Secretariat of the Ministry of Labor and Employment
Chile	Study Department, reports to the Minister's Cabinet
Colombia	Social Promotion Directorate
Ecuador	Minister's Office
Paraguay	Reports to the Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Security
Peru	N/A
Uruguay	National Employment Directorate
Antigua and Barbuda	Minister through a Permanent Secretariat
Bahamas	Ministry of Labor and Social Development
Costa Rica	Technically, reports to the Minister's Office. Administratively, reports to <i>Oficina Mayor</i>
El Salvador	Directorate General for Labor Inspection
Guatemala	Social Security Directorate
Honduras	Directorate General for Social Security / <i>Mujer Trabajadora</i> program
Nicaragua	Labor Minister's Office
Panama	Directorate General for Employment
Dominican Republic	Subsecretariat of Labor
Suriname	Minister of Labor

d) The mission statement of specialized gender units does not put them explicitly in charge of institutionalizing the gender perspective in Labor Ministries

The respondent countries had been requested to inform about the institutional mission of their specialized gender units. We found that in only four (Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica and Panama) does their mission specifically include the role of agency in charge of mainstreaming the gender issues in Labor Ministries.

In general, we found a variety of approximations to the concept of providing coordination and support to the development of gender issues (Canada, Mexico, Bolivia, Brazil, Suriname, Bahamas) or very broad statements about improving conditions for working women. This is a far from irrelevant point. The mission of specialized gender units is the axis of their action, and yet in most countries the very reason for their existence is not expressly stated.

TABLE 4
Mechanisms for the Institutionalization of the Gender Perspective in Labor Ministries in the Region, Classified according to Mission Definition

Countries	Mission
Canada	Support and coordinate the work of Human Resources Development (HRDC) with regard to gender issues
United States	Improve the status of wage-earning women, improve their working conditions, increase their efficiency and advance their opportunities for profitable employment
Mexico	Coordinate, promote and disseminate information about actions aimed at fostering decent work, avoiding discrimination and ensuring equality of opportunities in the labor market; propose and support the updating of the legal framework in the labor area, with a gender perspective and for the benefit of persons at risk or in situations of vulnerability.
Argentina	Mainstream the gender perspective into every policy, program and action of the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security.
Bolivia	Support, coordinate and facilitate the Fundamental Rights Unit's activities addressing gender issues. To take steps towards policies and actions aimed at promoting gender equality in labor relations.
Brazil	Comply with the third item of the set of 8 UN objectives, namely "Promote gender equality and women's empowerment" and reduce inequalities in the world of work. This Subcommission's task consists of accompanying the activities performed by regional Commissions to orient, monitor and promote the reduction of inequalities.
Chile	Promote, monitor and follow up on the sectoral incorporation of gender considerations into institutions and their partners, by defining and implementing ministerial commitments on gender ¹⁹ .
Colombia	Promote the mainstreaming of the gender perspective across the Ministry. Exercise oversight to ensure compliance with the Social Protection Policy for Ethnic Groups.
Ecuador	NA
Paraguay	Promote comprehensive education and training for working women, and exercise oversight to ensure compliance with women's labor regulations.
Peru	NA
Uruguay	Provide employment and vocational training programs and policies with advice on gender issues
Antigua and Barbuda	Promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Antigua and Barbuda
Bahamas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitor gender and development issues ▪ Coordinate and take active part in initiatives aimed at creating gender awareness in general and specifically awareness of laws and policies with an impact on women's condition ▪ Coordinate the work of the National Women's Advisory Council ▪ Work in partnership with local NGOs locales
Costa Rica	Mainstream the gender perspective into the Ministry of Labor's work by promoting, orienting and monitoring the institutional change processes required to provide services on the basis of equity and to ensure equality of opportunities in internal labor relations
El Salvador	
Guatemala	Enhance, promote and protect the rights of Guatemalan working women
Haiti	NA
Honduras	Help develop Honduran society by providing orientation on, promoting and defending labor rights with a gender equality perspective, so as to generate equality of opportunities between men and women in line with domestic and international legislation.
Nicaragua	Within the context of a new labor culture, give impulse to observance and enforcement of the equal right principle. Objective: take ownership of the issue of equality and non-discrimination in the Labor Agenda, based on the

¹⁹ This definition was contributed by *Servicio Nacional de la Mujer*.

TABLE 4	
Mechanisms for the Institutionalization of the Gender Perspective in Labor Ministries in the Region, Classified according to Mission Definition	
	principles of Equality, Equity, Non-Discrimination and Gender.
Panama	Promote the gender perspective inside and outside the Ministry, within the framework of enforcement of the gender regulations contained in the Equality of Opportunities for Women Act, <i>Ley</i> n. 4, of 29 January 1999.
Dominican Republic	Exercise oversight to ensure equality and non-discrimination in employment
Suriname	Coordination and supervision of gender issues

e) No proportion between the tasks assigned to specialized gender units and the human and financial resources made available to them

The amount of financial resources allocated to public programs, actions and mechanisms destined for gender equality improvement is a highly significant indicator of the degree of institutionality of the gender perspective in public policies.

When investigating the degree to which the gender perspective is mainstreamed into labor policies, it is convenient to know the amounts allocated to specialized gender units, as well as the percentage of their total budgets devoted to implementing policies or programs destined for increasing gender equality indices in the labor sphere.

For that reason, the data sheet/questionnaire sent to each Labor Ministry included a question whether such unit had its own budget, the amount of resources assigned to it and the percentage it represented of the Ministry's total budget. Very few countries answered that part of the questionnaire, and none at all provided all the information requested.

Scarcity of resources is a cross-cutting feature in the vast majority of specialized gender units. Twelve countries stated they have budgets of their own; however, very few provided any specifics about the size of those budgets.

In general, their human resources endowments are restricted²⁰—in many cases consisting of one professional plus administrative support—and assigned on a part time basis, since these resources share other functions in other Ministry units. This state of affairs evinces serious staffing deficiencies in specialized gender units, but is all the more alarming when such meager resources are compared with the huge number of functions these units are called upon to perform according to the information provided in the survey. It is important to consider it both in terms of the units' medium-term survival prospects, and as the starting point of a reflection about the characteristics of women's work in the Labor Ministries' specialized gender units themselves. It is worth noting, in this regard, that one constant present in answers about the strengths detected is "a hard-working, devoted staff".

This state of affairs also highlights the fact that, in some countries, the support received by gender affairs units in mainstreaming the gender perspective is given largely as a matter of form, probably because of the pressure arising from international commitments (as shown by 2, this factor is mentioned by a high number of countries among the originating causes of the specialized gender

²⁰ With the sole exception of the United States, where the Women's Bureau is 60 people strong.

units). When it comes to endowing them with the resources necessary to operate and meet their objectives, however, the true priorities of the Labor Ministry are revealed.

In Central American and Caribbean countries, although resources are scarce, international cooperation was found to be helping fund the activities of specialized gender units. The *Cumple y Gana* project is mentioned as a funding source by El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic; likewise for the *Agenda para las Mujeres* initiative in Panama. The ILO's support is mentioned both by countries in the South (although with a stronger emphasis on technical assistance), and by Haiti and Nicaragua.

f) The specialized units created to institutionalize the gender perspective in Labor Ministries have developed a wide network with other agencies.

The formation of networks is a component that makes it possible to approach the institutionalization of the gender perspective as a multi-player endeavor and avoid confining this issue to a group or team within the Ministry. In general, the only effective approach to gender issues is comprehensive, for any other would frustrate the whole point of institutionalizing the gender perspective, which is to influence an institution's policies, programs, projects and, in general, activities.

It is important to note, in this regard, that all units without distinction and in all geographical areas are strongly engaged in interinstitutional coordination on labor issues. First and foremost, as was to be expected, is the connection with national mechanisms on gender issues (19 countries), with which an interinstitutional agreement appears to be the prevailing form of relationship. Joint activities undertaken by the two institutions appear to focus on joint study, training and dissemination. In many of the respondent countries, these institutions have been strongly involved in the creation of specialized gender units in the labor sphere.

Particularly worth mentioning in this regard is the support given by INAM in Honduras to the establishment of the gender unit within the country's Secretariat for Labor and Social Security (STSS), achieved by restructuring its Working Women's Program as a gender unit. For that purpose, INAM prepared a study entitled "Propuesta técnica para institucionalizar la equidad de género en la STSS" (technical proposal to institutionalize gender equality in the Secretariat for Labor and Social Security) within the framework of the II Plan for Gender Equality and Equity in Honduras 2008-2015. A second phase is envisaged, where a study will be prepared under the title "Plan de implementación de la propuesta técnica básica para la transversalización de género en la STSS" (plan for implementing the basic technical proposal for gender mainstreaming in the STSS).

It is highly relevant to point out that all women's advancement mechanisms that answered the complementary information questionnaire defined the performance of the Labor Ministries' specialized gender units as good or very good.

Maintaining relations with other offices in the government apparatus (15 countries), with international agencies (17 countries) and civil society organizations (15 countries) is another important activity of specialized gender units. Less intense, though also significant, is interaction with workers organizations (14 countries) and employers organizations (12 countries).

Regarding coordination with other offices within the Ministry, only three countries stated that none exists. This is an indicator of the cross-cutting role plaid by specialized gender units in their

respective Labor Ministries, as they provide support and guidelines for the incorporation of the gender perspective in all areas of the institution, and it suggests that most countries analyzed adhere to one of the principles of mainstreaming.

TABLE 5
Mechanisms for the Institutionalization of the Gender Perspective in Labor Ministries in the Region,
Classified according to Interinstitutional Connections

Countries	Other units within the Ministry	National mechanism for gender issues	Other units within the government apparatus	Employers	Workers	Civil society organizations	the Media	International agencies
Canada	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	-
United States	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mexico	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Argentina	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Bolivia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Brazil	-	X	X	X	X	X	-	X
Chile	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Colombia	X	X	X	-	X	X	X	X
Ecuador	X	-	X	-	-	X	-	X
Paraguay	-	X	X	X	X	X	-	X
Peru	-	X	-	-	-	-	-	X
Uruguay	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Antigua and Barbuda	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Bahamas	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Costa Rica	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
El Salvador	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Guatemala	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Haiti	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Honduras	X	X	-	-	-	-	-	-
Nicaragua	X	X	X	-	X	X	X	X
Panama	X	X	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dominican Republic	X	X	-	-	-	-	-	X
Suriname	X	X	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	18	19	15	12	14	15	12	17

g) Specialized gender units engage in a broad spectrum of activities.

The respondent countries report a very broad range of internal and external activities. Particularly worth highlighting among internal activities are awareness raising, training, holding workshops and events. This trend is evidence that the units are performing a gender education and training role with regard to the Ministry's personnel as an initial phase of the gender perspective institutionalization process. Indeed, it is important to bring down resistances and natural barriers to enable Ministry officials of both genders to adopt a new approach to their daily work, one that is more difficult, and requires more effort. What specialized gender units are doing in this area is therefore a worthwhile effort. That said, it would appear that these activities, although undoubtedly an important part of any mainstreaming strategy, are overdimensioned in relation to other activities that gender work teams are also called upon to perform; or, rather, that coordination with internal and external units takes place mostly in the form of awareness raising, training and dissemination of information on gender matters. Few countries report proposals for new legislation or regulatory revision (United States, Bolivia, Suriname, Costa Rica); or preparation of gender policy guidelines for the Ministry (Colombia, Argentina, United States, Bolivia, Panama), which are in fact also tasks inherent to gender perspective mainstreaming.

External activities also evidence strong dedication to dissemination and training. The broad range of activities centered around interinstitutional partnerships on gender issues should also be emphasized.

Table 6
Internal and External Activities of the Labor Ministries' Specialized Gender Units

Countries	Internal activities	External activities
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training - Workshops, events - Network coordination (sharing best practices, sharing information) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participating in interdepartmental committees on gender equality indicators - Gender analysis - Preparing special initiatives (CEDAW, UNCSW)
United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legislative proposals - Regulations - Testimonials and/or reports on women workers - Participation in intra-department teams - Collaboration in support of projects pursuing common goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Projects, workshops and training initiatives aimed at improving the lot of women workers - Improve their working conditions - Increase their efficiency - Advance their opportunities for better jobs
Mexico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fora - Workshops - Conferences - Working groups - Events - Meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awareness raising workshops - Dissemination campaigns
Argentina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation of proposals for incorporating the concept of gender equity and equality into programs and actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workshops and awareness raising activities with nongovernmental agencies, trade unions and businesses
Bolivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender awareness raising courses, workshops and events. - Coordination with Directorates General and Units on gender issues - Participation in the preparation of the Annual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Courses, seminars and workshop on labor rights, gender-based discrimination, and women workers' proposals - Regulatory revision workshop on micro and small businesses, and proposal with a

Table 6
Internal and External Activities of the Labor Ministries' Specialized Gender Units

Countries	Internal activities	External activities
	Operational Program, with insertion of gender activities in coordination with the Ministry's Directorates General - Meetings with officials to address specific gender-related cases or issues, and coordination of joint activities, including seminars, courses and workshops.	gender equality content.
Brazil	- No internal activities	- Seminars - Conferences
Chile	- Training, dissemination, seminars and publications.	- Publications, workshops, seminars under agreements with other organizations or at their request
Colombia	- Preparation of gender policy guidelines for the Ministry of Social Protection. - Design and implementation of a training activity for Ministry officials on the gender perspective and its meaning - Systematization of information on the gender perspective content of policies, programs and projects since the creation of the Ministry of Social Protection.	- Dissemination and interinstitutional coordination with the Presidential Advisory Board on Gender Equality
Ecuador	- Gender awareness raising workshops	- Working groups on gender and employment Publications - Work meetings institutions specialized in gender issues
Paraguay	- Training courses, workshops, seminars, fora	- Training courses, workshops, seminars, fora
Peru	- NA	- NA
Uruguay	- NA	- NA
Antigua and Barbuda	- Training and education workshops - Gender equality promotion seminars - Programs and projects	- Training and education workshops - Gender equality promotion seminars - Programs and projects
Bahamas	- NA	- Joint programs with the legal, health, education and social development sectors
Costa Rica	- Talks - Process analysis meetings - Awareness raising workshops - Internal advisory service - Preparation of reports or technical criteria	- Workshops and talks - Participation in interinstitutional commissions - Work with companies to promote good labor practices with gender equality - Preparation of proposal for changes in labor legislation.
El Salvador	- None	- Public fora for workers and employers - Awareness raising workshops for workers to disseminate knowledge of labor rights.
Guatemala	- Awareness raising on gender perspective	- Workshops - Seminars

Table 6
Internal and External Activities of the Labor Ministries' Specialized Gender Units

Countries	Internal activities	External activities
		- Preparation of plan
Haiti	- NA	- NA
Honduras	Awareness raising workshops on gender issues	- Non-discrimination workshops for employers and workers
Nicaragua	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awareness raising seminars and training on <i>Ley 202</i> - Disability regulations and policies in Nicaragua - <i>Ley 238</i> - Law for the promotion, protection and defense of human rights before SIDA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meetings - Working committee - Promotion of the office and dissemination of its work - Labor rights training for women - Dissemination and promotion of <i>Ley 202</i> and <i>Ley 238</i> - Institutional network for equality and non-discrimination in employment
Panama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender awareness raising - Courses on the preparation of public budgets with a gender perspective - Production of statistics with a gender perspective - Gender mainstreaming in development projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training workshops with trade unions - Domestic work forum
Dominican Republic	- Training in the form of courses and awareness raising workshops for local representatives, inspectors and supervisors, in addition to the employment department	- Awareness raising workshops for workers and employers
Suriname	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training courses - Legislation with a gender perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender training and mainstreaming - Cost analysis and budgeting - Evaluation workshops

h) The programs under implementation are not in line with the objectives inherent to gender perspective mainstreaming in Labor Ministries

The characteristic features evinced by the activities thus reported show that the programs carried out by specialized gender have a marked bias towards training, awareness raising, dissemination and employment creation in favor of women different sectors, or vulnerable groups in general. The large majority of these activities consist of outright execution of programs aimed at improving the living conditions of women.

Activities also include programs with broadly defined—and, therefore, difficult to achieve—objectives, such as “eliminating discrimination against women at work” or “establishing a national gender policy”. Only a few countries have stated actions addressing issues inherent to gender institutionalization within the Labor Ministries—such as helping to overcome gender gaps in employment or developing actions aimed at deepening gender mainstreaming within the Ministry—as objectives of their programs.

Only a handful of programs under way have a content in line with the specialized gender unit's objectives. We can mention a few: in Argentina, inclusion of gender clauses in collective bargaining processes; a manual for trade union women officers; Bolivia: gender equality in labor relations; a few in Brazil; in Paraguay: a few through the Tripartite Commission; in Costa Rica: a few. The rest of the programs described reflect a concept of woman and work, rather than seek to mainstream the gender perspective in the Labor Ministries.

This is the question that elicited the highest number of non-answers. It is important to clarify whether that was due to difficulties in answering it, or to the fact that specialized gender units are not engaged in any programs in that area. More in-depth study is definitely required.

i) Training needs are heterogeneous

The answers received with regard to training show that, with the exception of three countries (Brazil, Chile and Costa Rica)²¹, most people working in specialized gender units have received training in general, and gender training in particular, over a broad spectrum ranging from a university education to basic gender education courses.

It is interesting to note that in several cases the training needs expressed refer to topics on which training has already been provided. These may well be contradictory observations, but the only way to get a clearer picture of the real situation would be by considering the actual characteristics of the training received so far and ascertaining the turnover rate of specialized gender units personnel, which may result in a perception of lack of training.

Lack of training has been reported by the respondent countries in strategic planning with a gender perspective, gender indicator construction or budgeting with a gender perspective. Clearly these are initial training needs that must be met.

Interestingly, training demand focuses on activities that would make it possible to improve the specialized gender units' performance of current tasks, which, as previously discussed in this report, have mostly to do with dissemination by means of workshops and seminars. This indicates that no transition is envisaged for the short or medium term from awareness raising, training or dissemination to more strategic functions with a greater impact on the Ministry's areas, and even in the macroeconomic sphere, a territory hardly touched—so far—by gender analysis.

This is a major challenge that needs to be met, for the provision of training in the issues that should be—rather than are—part and parcel of the gender affairs units' daily work could help direct their actions towards strengthening the institutionalization of the gender perspective in their respective institutions.

²¹ Chile stated that, since the people performing the functions specific to its gender unit are selected on the basis of their gender competency, it received no training.

j) Specialized gender units perceive the political will of their respective governments and ministerial authorities as key drivers in their creation and continued existence.

Labor Ministry representatives were asked about the causes that led to the creation and continued existence of their respective specialized gender units. With respect to both, political will and international commitments assumed by their respective governments were mentioned as important factors.

With regard to threats to the units' existence, political will (in this case, the lack thereof) was mentioned as a constant, on a par with lack of resources (financial and human). Internal resistances to gender issues and lack of training are also mentioned although by far fewer answers (2). The same perceptions were found in answers given by the national mechanisms for the advancement of women.

With respect to weaknesses and strengths, political will stands out again, although less than scarcity of resources in the case of weaknesses and, with regard to strengths, as much as human resources training and the existence of interinstitutional coordination.

The continued existence of specialized gender units is perceived as highly dependent on the political will of their respective governments. The same perception is expressed by those national mechanisms for the advancement of women that answered the complementary questionnaire.

Table 7
Most Important Factors in the Creation and Stability of Specialized Gender Units

Factors	Creation	Continued existence	Threat	Strength	Weakness
Political will (absence or presence)	5	4	6	5	4
Scarcity of resources			9		9
Existence of international commitments	6	4		1	
Internal resistances			2		1
Training (absence or presence)			1	4	
Good interinstitutional coordination				3	

The answers reveal that the specialized gender units' existence is perceived as fragile, in that it is strongly dependent on political will. The absence of political will is mentioned as a threat to the existence of the units, as well as among their weaknesses. Its presence is considered as strength. This finding confirms the need to promote institutionally stronger specialized gender units by revising the mandates their existence is based upon, and their hierarchical position within the respective Ministry, in order to ensure that their existence is no longer dependent on the juncture of political circumstances and the sole will of the powers to be.

Scarcity of human and financial resources—probably a consequence of the fragility of the political will that created the units—is another issue that needs to be addressed. It is necessary to elicit from the Labor Ministries' highest authorities a commitment that goes well beyond form that is based on conviction of the impact that mainstreaming gender equality across the work of the Ministry produces on society and on the decent work challenge.

4. Training Proposal for the Institutional Strengthening of Specialized Gender Units within Labor Ministries

Based on the results obtained by systematizing the information provided by the respondent countries on the progress of mainstreaming the gender perspective in their Labor Ministries to promote its institutionalization, a training plan should be developed for specialized gender units staff with a focus on the institutional strengthening of the units in question. The plan should be premised on the assumption that changing the institutional positioning of such units and mainstreaming their work call for a redefinition of their mission and of the methods to be applied in order to develop the skills and competencies required to fulfill it.

Ideally, the training plan and its implementation should be the object of a training manual for mainstreaming the gender perspective in the sphere of labor (or labor ministries). The manual should include a trainers' training methodology, so that it could be used periodically by those in charge of specialized gender units to train not only new staff members, but also other key Ministry officials.

With regard to operation, the following general guidelines are recommended for the training plan:

- a) Each country should be treated individually, and criteria should be defined to create groups of countries. This approach is necessary given the distances detected in gender perspective mainstreaming.
- b) The overall objective should be to ensure that all specialized gender units in the region meet a minimum performance standard.
- c) Internships should be implemented in countries where the best results have been achieved with regard to insertion in the organizational structure, in order to share the good practices deemed appropriate with countries demanding horizontal cooperation.

There are at least three basic subjects in which it is important to train specialized gender units in order to make them institutionally stronger and able to rise to the mainstreaming challenge. Although these subjects could be treated as management tools, the concepts of gender should be mainstreamed into each of them, but always in association with the treatment of gender gaps in the labor market.

The training methodology should be participative, problem-solving oriented. It should use case studies and a hands-on, learn-by-doing approach.

The subjects proposed are:

1. Strategic planning with a gender perspective. The objective is to strengthen a unit's ability to detect its mission, and from there to plan and monitor the cross-cutting treatment of the different labor issues within the respective Labor Ministry.
2. Gender analysis. The objective is to enable a unit to recognize the gender implications and impact of each individual policy or program, and to perform an effective technical role in the various areas of the institution.
3. Gender indicator construction. The objective is to enable a unit to monitor the gender goals and objectives identified for each country.

Description of the subjects

SUBJECT 1 - Participative strategic planning with a gender perspective

Module I: Problem analysis with a gender perspective.

Deliver problem identification tools incorporating gender analysis.

After this Module, participants should be able to identify a problem, viewed in terms of its different impact on men and women.

Participants should know and apply methodological tools to identify a problem at its various levels, drawing a clear distinction between a problem and its underlying structural cause.

Module II: Analysis of involved stakeholders with a gender perspective.

Analyze each group of stakeholders involved in a problem, and the different ways the same problem affects men and women.

After this Module, participants should be able to use stakeholder analysis tools to clearly identify each group—subdivided into men and women—of involved stakeholders, the way each group perceives the problem in question and the different resources that each group of involved stakeholders is able to deploy in order to solve the problem.

Module III: Identification of vision, mission, and strategic objectives with a gender perspective.

After this Module, participants should be able to formulate a vision, mission and strategic objectives, using the methodological tools of participative planning.

Module IV: Operationalization of planning with a gender perspective.

After this Module, participants should know and be able to formulate indicators for evaluating the level of achievement of stated objectives, and to apply gender analysis to the formulation process in order to obtain distinct measures of results and impact for men and women.

SUBJECT 2 - Gender analysis

Module I. Assessment with a gender perspective.

After this Module, participants should be able to:

- Use diagnostic information, statistics broken down by sex to perform labor market assessments with due consideration of cultural, economic, political, legal, socioeconomic, demographic, geographical, and other factors that may affect gender equality between working men and women
- Identify gender gaps existing between men and women in the labor market

- Identify individuals, groups or institutions that may influence or be affected by decent work and equal opportunities oriented programs or projects
- Clearly identify the interests and roles of each group of involved stakeholders
- Identify women's practical needs and gender strategies and the extent to which the objectives meet those needs.

Module II. Analyze the results sought by programs and projects with a gender perspective.

After this Module, participants should be able to

- Consciously choose results that do away with the barriers placed by society or that improve unfair situations currently existing between men and women in the labor market
- Contemplate the possibility that it may be necessary to identify multiple results in order to take into account the effects of gender and/or other aspects of diversity when implementing decent work promotion policies
- Analyze the results expected by the government and other involved stakeholders as guarantee of decent work and equal opportunities between men and women
- Where results for women and men are not the same, give the same consideration to both: results for women must not be a footnote in an official policy.

Module III. Construction of indicators with a gender perspective.

After this Module, participants should be able to:

- Know the attributes that characterize a good indicator of results, processes and impact.
- Identify each of the aspects to be considered when formulating indicators with a gender perspective.
- Know how to formulate results indicators with a gender perspective.

SUBJECT 3 - Construction of Indicators

Although Subject 3 includes indicators, it is felt advisable to also dedicate a specific course to them given how important indicator follow-up, monitoring, and evaluation are to the work of specialized gender units.

Module I. Assessment for an adequate definition of results

After this Module, participants should be able to:

- Use diagnostic information, statistics broken down by sex to perform labor market assessments
- Consider cultural, economic, political, legal, socioeconomic, demographic, geographical, and other factors that may affect gender equality between working men and women
- Identify gender gaps existing between men and women in the labor market.

Module II. Analysis of existing gender indicators

After this Module, participants should be able to:

- Analyze existing international labor market and gender indicators. (Millennium Goals, ILO, Beijing, ECLAC, etc.)
- Analyze existing national plan and equal employment opportunities indicators.

Module III. Formulation of gender indicators

After this Module, participants should be able to:

- Identify actions likely to have a favorable impact on women's job participation and formulate indicators with a gender perspective
- Identify actions likely to contribute to decent work and formulate results indicators with a gender perspective.

5. Examples of good practices in mainstreaming the gender perspective of Labor Ministries in the region

ARGENTINA

The Coordinating Unit for Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities at Work: A good practice in taking ownership of the gender mainstreaming concept

The Coordinating Unit for Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities at Work (CEGIOT), established in September 2007, has as its primary objective to mainstream gender policy into all policies, programs and actions of the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security (MTEySS). Its creation marks the beginning of a new phase for gender policies in Argentina, since its remit goes beyond the design and implementation of actions focused on women, and its efforts are aimed at including the gender perspective into the very design of regulations or active policies in order to address the differences existing in the labor sphere.

Its mission is to mainstream the gender perspective into all policies, programs and actions of the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security. Accordingly, it works *"jointly with all Ministry areas, at both the central and local levels, to help define areas of intervention, fostering the incorporation of the equity and equality perspective into the actions to be implemented and developing proposals for joint evaluation with each area responsible for the results, goals and impact achieved from the standpoint of gender relations."*²²

Its objectives cover the entire circuit that makes for effective institutionalization of the gender perspective through cross-cutting actions within MTEySS. They include:

- Insert the gender and equal opportunities perspective into all definitions and political actions of the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security, by designing **proposals for action with regard to each ministerial problem being addressed**
- Design special operative tools for mainstreaming the gender perspective, and develop mechanisms for **monitoring and following up the Ministry's policies**.
- Articulate actions with other governmental areas and agencies, civil society organizations and community-based organizations, fostering the **establishment of intersectoral platforms and networks enabling the promotion of decent work**.
- Generate **education, awareness raising and training actions** that make it possible to disseminate proposals and implement action.

The following projects are being developed:

- Preparation of a menu of clauses to orient collective bargaining, in order to promote women's participation in the negotiation process and the incorporation of the gender perspective into collective agreements.

²² *Equidad de Género. Políticas y Plan de Acción*. Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social. Coordinación de Equidad de Género e Igualdad de Oportunidades.

- Preparation of a trade union training manual for men and women union officers, with contents associated to the knowledge and protection of labor rights with a gender perspective. Its objective is to promote gender education among trade union officers and negotiators in order to help incorporate the gender perspective into the negotiation.

Main actions proposed for the 2008/2009 two-year period:

- Development of a conceptual framework with indicators for the design and follow-up of employment and training programs
- Follow-up of socio-labor indicators broken down by sex for purposes of evaluating differential situations existing between women and men
- Design and implement a gender and labor education proposal aimed at promoting, strengthening and incorporating the gender perspective into training activities developed by trade unions, business enterprises, employers organizations and civil society organizations
- Promote the inclusion of clauses promoting equality and equity between men and women in collective labor agreements
- Enter into agreements with universities and research institutions for the carrying out of studies on the differential entry of men and women into the labor market
- Promote equality plans and awareness raising campaigns aimed at businesses
- Per region and per sector of activity, select cases for purposes of analysis, evaluation and preparation of participative proposals aimed at promoting gender equity and equality in relevant aspects of the labor situation within the given sector: education, new profiles, working conditions, collective bargaining, trade union participation
- Identify potential sources of employment as a way to promote the entry into the labor market of women in situations of vulnerability and without easy access to the labor market; establish a system to ensure follow-up of the institutional framework ensuring women's effective entry.

CHILE

The Management Improvement Program (PMG) as a mainstreaming strategy

The Management Improvement Program (PMG) is a budgeting tool created in 1998 in the context of its modernization of public management strategy. It is promoted by the Directorate of the Budget, which is a unit of the Ministry of Treasury. It has been designed as an incentive mechanism for rewarding institutional performance by means of remuneration increases²³.

Up until the year 2001, the PMG program included the areas of Human Resources, User Service, Management Planning/Control, Internal Audit, Decentralization and Financial Management. This year, following a negotiation by the National Women's Service with the Budget Directorate, the PMG program finally became a part of the Gender Equity System as a way to incorporate the gender perspective into the day-to-day actions and functions of public institutions.

The Gender Perspective System is comprised of 4 stages designed to gradually incorporate the gender perspective into goods and services supply processes. Its 2009 modification consists of explicitly including among its objectives a linkage to the requirements of the Gender Agenda that each Ministry has undertaken to comply with before the Equity Council, and the ministerial commitments arising as a result.

Objective:

Incorporate the gender perspective into the institution's products.

Results expected:

- That public institutions plan with due consideration of men's and women's different needs
- That institutions are able to reorient resources to reduce existing gaps between men and women
- That civil servants incorporate this approach into their customary practices

Each public service must comply with the following stages of implementation of the gender PMG:

Stage 1:

- Perform an assessment of its strategic products from a gender perspective.
- Have an information system in place for the registration of its customers/users/beneficiaries, differentiated by sex.

Stage 2:

- Prepare a work plan and program for incorporating the gender perspective into the delivery of its products
- Design the logic of the information system and prepare the work program for its implementation.

²³ Compliance with the management objectives set out in an annual PMG will entitle one or more officials of the respective institution to a pay raise in the following year. The raise in question will amount to 7.6% if the respective institution has achieved a compliance rate no lower than 90% of the annual target; to 3.8% if compliance is no lower than 75% and lower than 90%, and 0% if compliance is lower than 75%.

Stage 3:

- Implement the gender perspective in the delivery of its products (new or old as the case may be) and in the information system.
- Design a follow-up program

Stage 4:

- Ensure dissemination to customers/users/ beneficiaries and their officers.
- Report results of implementation and lessons learned.

This mechanism has made it possible to begin mainstreaming gender equality in the Chilean government, since the PMG system has been implemented in all public services across the country. Once incorporated into it, the gender perspective has become a part of each institution's budgeting cycle, and thus mainstreamed into its management control system via its link to the budgeting system.

It is important to point out that the requirement for public services to incorporate the gender perspective through the PMG program comes from the Budget Directorate, one of the country's primary public policy makers through its control of the public budget. The relevance of the power of the purse hardly needs to be emphasized. Furthermore, the existing institutional mechanism for gender, i.e. the National Women's Service, has been strengthened as a result, and important partnerships have been established with a number of public agencies, the Budget Directorate included²⁴.

The strategic objectives of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security

1. Foster women's entry into the workforce by way of good jobs guaranteeing decent work.
 - Significantly advance the promotion of women's access to the labor market by developing labor intermediation actions and initiatives to give preferential access to the Hiring Incentive Program
 - Increase and improve the employability of women heading households as priority users
 - Re-establish the public opinion debate about the equal pay bill through a communication campaign and dissemination events
 - Perform a gender-based evaluation of the code of good labor practices (CBPL), analyzing the impact of CBPL plans on gender gap reduction along the 7 guidelines comprising the instrument in question.
2. Exercise oversight to ensure regulatory compliance with regard to women's work through the incorporation of gender issues into inspection processes, and the implementation of the fundamental rights protection procedure.
 - Raise to 18% of the total the number of Program-mandated inspections by administrative initiative required to be carried out in female-dominated sectors, and to include gender issues.

²⁴ Guerrero C. Elizabeth. Transversalización de la perspectiva de género en Chile: En la búsqueda de la equidad. July 2005

3. Foster and strengthen women's leadership

- Strengthen women union leaders' participation in the national trade union training system to be implemented in 2009, and include gender-related subjects into its curricular grid, especially in the school mode
- Establish and implement minimum participation quotas (20%) for women leaders in social dialogue bodies, and incorporate gender priorities into social dialogue agendas (committees). Provide women with technical support in social dialogue bodies to ensure the quality of their participation
- Training by the Labor Directorate of between 15% and 30 % of all women leaders of unions of wage-earning workers in each region.

4. Improve the working conditions of women domestic workers

- Within the framework of MINTRAB's Working Committee, disseminate information about the benefits of the Social Security Reform for women domestic workers and about such specific measures as the minimum taxable income for women domestic workers.
- Maintain a Ministerial social dialogue committee with women domestic workers to analyze progress in this sector and establish a joint work agenda centered on formalizing labor relations, and training.

COSTA RICA

Gender Equality Unit A good sectoral work practice

Since its creation in 1998, the mission of the National Women's Institute (INAMU) has included promoting the creation and coordination of ministerial, sectoral and municipal offices of women's affairs, a job that the National Center for the Development of Women and the Family (CMF) had been performing since 1994. The units in question are responsible for exercising oversight to ensure compliance with governmental gender equality policies in the public administration.

INAMU has focused on strengthening and consolidating these units to enable them to provide guidance and advice in support of the processes under way to implant gender equality policies across the Government. To carry out this task, INAMU has created the Public Policy Management for Gender Equality Area, "in charge of promoting, advising and accompanying the processes of formulation, enforcement, follow-up and evaluation of public policies fostering gender equality in governmental bodies".

Sectoral Gender Equality Units have the mission of promoting, orienting, strengthening and monitoring change processes in the institutional culture that call for equity in the rendering of services and equality of opportunities and rights in internal labor relations.

In the labor sphere, the Labor Ministry's Gender Equality Unit has its legal basis in *Decreto [decree] No. 29221-MTSS*, published in the official gazette *La Gaceta* No.6 of January 2001, pursuant to which "it is its mission to help promote, improve and enforce labor legislation aimed at minimizing inequalities at work between men and women, particularly those regulations that are designed to define and harmonize relations between employers and women workers". The Unit reports directly to the Minister of Labor. Its purpose is "to advise, train, control and provide technical assistance for the implementation and evaluation of the National Gender Equality at Work Plan".

The Unit works along three axes:

1) Institutionalization of public mechanisms for equality and equity in the labor sphere

Within the framework of the agreement between INAMU and the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MTSS) approved in December 2000, INAMU has provided the Ministry's Gender Equality Unit with direct support and advice for the implementation of the "Action Plan for Gender Equality and Equity 2003-2006", which envisages:

- a) institutionalizing and strengthening the Gender Equality Unit
- b) promoting women's labor rights
- c) mainstreaming the gender perspective into the work of the MTSS.

2) Building institutional capacities for gender equality and equity

INAMU has provided the Gender Equality Unit of MTSS with systematic assistance in building its advisory capacities with regard to mainstreaming the gender perspective in the Ministry's units.

3) Promoting the National Employment Information, Orientation and Intermediation System

In 2005, in its capacity as Technical Secretariat of the National Employment Information, Orientation and Intermediation System, INAMU assisted the Director of Employment in modifying the decree that created the System.

INAMU provides the Gender Equality Unit of MTSS with systematic assistance in building its advisory capacities with regard to mainstreaming the gender perspective in the Ministry's units, and to supporting the gender awareness raising and training processes promoted by the unit in question with other Ministry offices. Currently the Unit is receiving assistance from the ILO and INAMU in formulating an institutional gender equality and equity policy.

The programs currently under way by the Gender Equality Unit show contents that increase gender perspective mainstreaming within the MTSS, particularly so with regard to tasks relevant to internal institutional positioning, namely:

Internal training in men's issues. The objective is to raise the awareness of men and women serving the Ministry about the construction of maleness and its impact on interpersonal labor relations; breaking the institutional stereotype according to which the concept of gender only includes the woman component.

External training in women's labor rights so that they know their labor rights and are able to exercise them in an informed manner.

Certification of employment in activities traditionally performed by women. The objective of this project is to create input material justifying the importance of certification in the case of activities traditionally performed by women.

Promotion of good practices with gender equality. The objective is to promote the implementation of good practices with gender equality among employers.

HONDURAS

Strategic Gender Equality Plan of the Honduras Labor Secretariat²⁵

The preparation of a Strategic Gender Equality Plan by the Secretariat of Labor and Social Security (PEG) of Honduras is aimed at mainstreaming the gender perspective in all PEG directorates by developing activities promoting gender equality across the Secretariat within the context of an institutional strengthening and modernization process.

The Gender Equality Unit will resume the efforts the Secretariat had been making through the Working Women's Program created to help women's access to work under equal labor and legal conditions, with full enjoyment of their rights. Those same concepts guided the preparation and implementation of the Strategic Institutional Plan for Gender Equality promoted by the STSS to introduce the gender perspective into all its actions.

To the Secretariat, adopting the gender mainstreaming strategy implies placing gender criteria at the heart of its activity, which requires stepping up efforts to make the transition from conceiving of the gender perspective as something additional to the institution's other functions to converting it into a variable enhancing the Secretariat's institutional performance and the quality of the services it renders to the population at large, and to women workers in particular.

1) The object of the PEG plan

Contribute to the development of Honduran society by applying a gender equality approach to the guide, promotion and defense of labor rights, and generation of equal opportunities between men and women in accordance with national and international legislation.

2) Strategy for the execution of the PEG plan

a) Strengthen the institutional mechanisms available to the STSS to implement the PEG plan

Execution of the Strategic Gender Equality Plan requires promoting a strategy linking and making the best of institutional mechanisms, procedures and processes existing in the Secretariat's administrative and substantive areas.

Currently the Secretariat has in place two institutional mechanisms which help develop the functions and monitor the work of the *Mujer Trabajadora* program: a) the Directorate of Social Security, exercising the political and administrative control of the program; b) the *Mujer Trabajadora* program itself, exercising technical and operational control. Implementing the strategy proposed requires, first of all, transforming the *Mujer Trabajadora* program into a Gender Equality Unit within the Directorate of Social Security.

In addition to the above, two mechanisms will be created. The first will be the PEG Extended Gender Commission, which will contribute recommendations and suggestions regarding

²⁵ *Presentación del Plan Estratégico de Equidad de Género de la Secretaría de Trabajo de Honduras.* Secretaría de Trabajo y Seguridad Social de Honduras.

implementation follow-up and evaluation of the PEG Plan. The commission will be chaired by the STSS, and include representatives from INAM and other institutions involved in gender-related labor issues. It will be an official body which will hold both regular and extraordinary meetings, and will be subject to regulations known to all participating institutions. The second mechanism will consist of the Secretariat's Gender Equality Commission, as the body bearing political and strategic responsibility for implementing the PEG plan, which will be made up of representatives of all STSS directorates.

b) Institutional procedures existing within the STSS

Implementing the Secretariat's Strategic Gender Equality Plan will require close coordination with the PNED plan, which in turn will make it necessary to implement a strategy integrating and putting to use all processes developed by the Secretariat's different offices, giving priority to those where the introduction of the gender perspective will influence the Secretariat's core activities, namely the Directorate General of Labor, the Directorate General of Employment, the Inspectorate General of Labor, the Directorate General of Social Security, the Directorate General of Wages, *Procuraduría General del Trabajo*, the Planning and Management Evaluation, Human Resources and Budget departments.

The Annual Operating Plans (POA) of the various STSS directorates need to contemplate the gender activities of each unit, department or directorate involved according to the Plan. Planners need to make sure that these activities are budgeted for either by way of funding or through the designation of an institutional counterpart, to provide them with the resources necessary to achieve concrete results in the given year.

c) Interinstitutional and sectoral coordination processes

To implement the PEG Plan, agreements and partnerships need to be put in place with other governmental and nongovernmental institutions involved in the labor sphere and identified as critical to the Plan's success. These include, among others, INAM, the National Vocational Training Institute (INFOP), the Honduran National Business Council (COHEP), general workers' unions, academic institutions, women's agencies and civil society organizations working to defend labor rights. Close collaboration with the Economic and Social Council (CES) is equally important.

3) Areas of intervention

The characteristics of the interventions to be carried out have made it possible to identify the four areas of activity of PEG 2009-2013, where guidelines and strategic actions have been grouped as follows:

a) Training and Institutional Studies Area

Promote measures in different ambits to strengthen educational processes among STSS personnel, to endow them with the theoretical and practical knowledge required to operationalize the gender equality approach in their work.

b) Institutional Strengthening Area

Establish the political and institutional position and technical capacity of the institutional mechanisms specialized in gender issues (Gender Equality Commission and Gender Equality Unit), by means including regulatory and budgetary measures and institutional reforms, so as to formally guaranteeing gender institutions the hierarchical and functional rank they need to fulfill their responsibilities regarding implementation of the Plan.

c) Training and Labor Advocacy Area

Act on the basis of a recognition of the importance that employers and workers develop training and advocacy processes to be able to influence legislation and international agreements in favor of labor rights protection. It is equally important to influence proposals of reforms of the Labor Code to ensure equality of employment access opportunities and compliance with labor rights.

d) Dissemination and Communication Area

By means of information dissemination and coordination of efforts with other institutions, bring to the fore of public awareness and eliminate the gap between women and men. Join efforts with various labor actors to ensure the full exercise and knowledge of labor rights and the elimination of discriminatory conditions and sexist forms of labor segregation.

4) Monitoring, follow-up and evaluation

In parallel to the implementation of the PEG 2009-2013 plan, it is necessary to establish an institutional system for monitoring, following up and evaluating compliance with same, in order to foster transparency in accounting for, and self-evaluation of, actions and activities carried out within the framework of the Plan. This process will receive political and technical support from the established institutional mechanisms.

6. Conclusions

- 1) Significantly, a high number of countries have specialized gender mechanisms or units in place within their Labor Ministries. However, regional differences exist, with the Caribbean exhibiting a rather lower rate of presence of such units. In fact it is fair to say that; in general, most countries in this subregion have made very limited progress towards the institutionalization of the gender perspective²⁶. The recent creation or reformulation of gender affairs units in various countries (Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Honduras) should also be emphasized.
- 2) The form taken by gender affairs unit varies—in most cases, it is that of specialized gender unit—and their creation was largely inspired by the need to meet international commitments and comply with domestic legislation. Nevertheless, a strong dependence is perceived, with regard to both creation and continued existence, on the political will of national and/or ministerial authorities.
- 3) With regard to the objectives pursued by the units, as stated in their mission and in their programs, a group of countries stands out that gives preference to acting in support of women's improvement of their living conditions rather than to triggering cross-cutting actions challenging policies, programs and projects of their respective ministries reflecting a gender system characterized by strong vertical and horizontal segmentation of the labor market and significant barriers in terms of entry and wages. The answers received do not evince attempts, for instance, to incorporate gender equality into employment plans.
- 4) Few countries have approached the task of mainstreaming the gender perspective within their ministries using avenues that would lead to technically supporting the incorporation of the gender perspective by the ministry's units into their labor policies, programs and projects. Tellingly, only a few countries explicitly make gender perspective mainstreaming a part of their gender affairs units' mission; in general, the focus is on protecting women's rights rather than institutionalizing gender issues in Labor Ministries. This choice is consistent with the programs developed by gender affairs units, in the majority of which the tendency prevails to carry out women-targeted projects fostering production, entrepreneurship and other activities.
- 5) It is important to keep in mind there can be no talk of effective gender mainstreaming until the Ministry of Labor prepares a project with a gender perspective, funded through the Ministry's budget, providing for the allocation of financial resources to programs and actions aimed at improving gender equality. Indeed, this is a significant indicator for purposes of measuring the institutionalization of the gender perspective. That was the reason why the survey included a question about the share of the Ministry's expenditure devoted to gender programs. Unfortunately, the countries that answered that question were too few to make comparisons possible and establish any relation between achievement levels and budget size.
- 6) Political will has been a fundamental factor in the establishment of specialized gender units or mechanisms facilitating the institutionalization of the gender perspective within the ministries. However, the same political that brought those units into being should be used to ensure their insertion in a key area of the ministry's organizational and programmatic structure. From the

²⁶ The information provided here about the Caribbean is based a document prepared by consultant Leith L. Dunn "*Institutionalization of Gender Mainstreaming in the Ministries of Labor in the Caribbean*", at the request of the OAS Department of Social Development and Employment as a part of this research.

organizational standpoint, it is of the first importance for the unit to hold an adequate hierarchical position, failing which it may well become a redoubt, without any power to influence policies and programs. It is equally important to ensure that the hierarchical position in question be real and not merely a matter of form. Accordingly, it is important that the ministry's organizational chart make it evident that cross-cutting goals must be shared by all ministry units with the specialized gender unit's collaboration and technical support.

- 7) As a preliminary indicator, for the purposes of this study, of the presence of gender affairs units within the organizational structure of the Labor Ministries, a search was made for specialized gender units or mechanisms in each Ministry's the Web page. In only two countries did such units appear. One of the pages contained a link to the gender equality section. However, the link led to the Tripartite Commission for the Equality of Opportunities rather than to the gender unit—which in fact exists. A more intensive search would have probably yielded better results, but the very difficulty in finding the right link shows how invisible these units are within the ministries' organizational structure.
- 8) In many cases, incorporating the gender perspective into the organizational structure of a Ministry will require revising its specialized gender unit's originating mandate and looking for the approach best suited to reality in each country with a view to ensuring the unit's permanence.
- 9) The above goes hand in hand with committing human resources under the same conditions as those prevailing in all other Ministry offices regarding salary, office space, working hours, qualification requirements. As already pointed out in previous paragraphs, many ministries appear to make it a practice to man their gender affairs units with insufficient staff, who accordingly find themselves coping them multiple tasks with scarce resources, motivated fundamentally by their commitment to gender issues. Quite paradoxically, the very characteristic features that impair the value of women's work are reproduced here by appealing to their call to serve precisely in a unit whose mission it is to enhance the value of women's work by freeing it from traditional discriminatory practices. In a large portion of answers received from the respondent countries grand objectives appears side by side with scarcity of resources.
- 10) The information received does not shed much light on the responsibilities of individuals designated as focal points or pertaining to specialized gender units. In fact, the profiles, responsibilities, resources and recognition mechanisms of those who perform other functions than that of focal point or the like should also be clearly defined. In order to enjoy recognition, authority and influence over other ministerial offices, gender affairs units need the political recognition of ministerial authorities. They need to be staffed with duly qualified professionals, working on a full-time basis and supported by adequate resources.
- 11) Scarcity of resources has been mentioned by the specialized units and by the national mechanisms for the advancement of women alike as one of the main threats to the units' permanence. This is a critical point in that it is connected to the political will underlying the creation of these units. It stands to reason that any formulation of public policies effectively considering the differential impact on women and men, focused on a more efficient and equitable use of national resources, and making effective use of the labor supply must be accompanied by the governmental allocation of funds commensurate with the requirements of such a task. We recommend that Labor Ministries make it an institutionalized practice to analyze the incidence of the benefits flowing from public expenditure from a gender perspective.
- 12) A strong connection exists among national mechanisms for gender issues in the region. In order to expand the knowledge of this highly relevant aspect, these were sent a

complementary questionnaire aimed at rounding out the information already collected and preparing an assessment of the gender content of actions and the institutionality of gender affairs units within the Labor Ministries. In general terms, the answers received reflect a consensus on the same strengths and weaknesses as those mentioned by specialized gender units, particularly with regard to scarcity of resources. Recommendations focus on strengthening intersectoral coordination, particularly with national mechanisms for gender issues, and on the need for more training in gender issues to facilitate the performance of the assigned role.

The creation within the Labor Ministries of gender affairs units connected in turn to several intersectoral committees appears to indicate that sectoral and intersectoral structures reinforce one another. It might be said that the existence of gender affairs units has facilitated the creation of intersectoral committees and commissions.

- 13) One of the functions that specialized gender units are called upon to perform is training and raising the awareness of ministry officials of both genders, and other actors in order to generate a channel for information sharing and communication with regard to the advantages of incorporating the gender perspective into policies, programs and projects. A strong tendency was found among specialized gender units to dedicate their resources to this type of activities. In fact, training activities should begin with revising gender mainstreaming contents so that it becomes a tool for the institutionalization of the gender perspective within the Labor Ministries. This requires a revision of procedures and cooperation mechanisms, and coordinated work among different institutions and departments.
- 14) A more in-depth approach to gender issues education is all the more necessary in the light of the fact that gender affairs units must not only legitimize their agenda, but also be ready to recognize any new gender problems and inequities in the labor sphere produced by changing social dynamics. To be able to influence policy formulation, they have to produce knowledge, to change the way information is produced in the ministries. They have to legitimize themselves as recognized interlocutors before the Ministry's other offices and also before their interinstitutional counterparts and actors in the labor sphere. Therefore, training and education are issues of relevance to the good operation of the units.

Even though many of the respondent countries have received training in gender issues, a strong demand exists to expand the work teams' expertise. To ensure that the activities of specialized gender units are indeed cross-cutting, it is necessary to design short, medium and long-term training plans focused on objectives that respond to that demand. Accordingly, it will be necessary to clearly establish what form of training will be delivered through RIAL. By the same token, training will need to include areas devoted to educating specialized gender units members who will be engaged in promoting the acquisition of greater influence on the gender perspective institutionalization process by developing competencies among Ministry personnel that will facilitate gender perspective mainstreaming.

Disparities with regard to level of development and operation of specialized gender units make it necessary to establish different levels of training. The needs of a group of countries will have to be met through horizontal cooperation between countries, to learn the best gender perspective institutionalization practices on a hands-on basis. Another group will need education on basic concepts of gender, strategic planning with a gender perspective, gender analysis. A critical need apparently shared by all countries, although not mentioned very often, is the development of gender indicators. These are tools to guide actions and make monitoring possible of progress on the subjects proposed, of key importance to good mainstreaming of the gender perspective.

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