

# Santiago Commitment

A regional instrument to respond to the COVID-19 crisis with gender equality



February 2021

In the current context of multiple crises caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the **Santiago Commitment**,<sup>1</sup> adopted by the member States of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) at the fourteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2020,<sup>2</sup> is particularly relevant as a regional tool to address the structural causes of gender inequality and to foster policies to respond to the pandemic in the short, medium and long term. In the Santiago Commitment, the governments of the region agreed to implement gender-sensitive **countercyclical policies** to mitigate the impact of economic crises and recessions on **women's lives** (para. 24), and reaffirmed the need to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action<sup>3</sup> and the Regional Gender Agenda,<sup>4</sup> adopting new commitments on innovative and cutting-edge issues.

<sup>1</sup> Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), "Santiago Commitment", Santiago, January 2020 [online] [https://conferenciamujer.cepal.org/14/sites/crm14/files/20-00087\\_crm.14\\_santiago\\_commitment.pdf](https://conferenciamujer.cepal.org/14/sites/crm14/files/20-00087_crm.14_santiago_commitment.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See [online] <https://conferenciamujer.cepal.org/14/en>.

<sup>3</sup> See [online] Declaración y Plataforma de Acción de Beijing [https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/pfa\\_e\\_final\\_web.pdf?la=en&vs=1203](https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/pfa_e_final_web.pdf?la=en&vs=1203).

<sup>4</sup> See [online] <https://biblioguias.cepal.org/RegionalGenderAgenda/>.

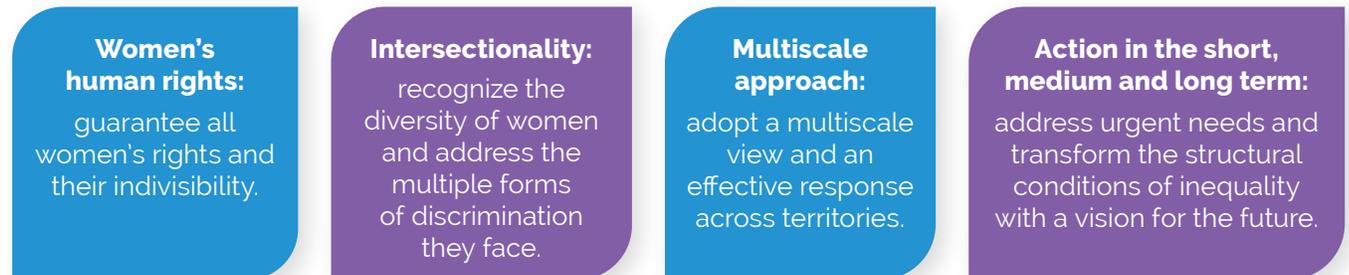
## 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development



## Beijing Platform for Action

## A. Criteria of policies to tackle the COVID-19 crisis

In this context of multiple crises and growing uncertainty, every effort must be made to prevent the current crisis from worsening the structural challenges of gender inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean. Both the Santiago Commitment and the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030<sup>5</sup> contain policy guidelines to ensure a comprehensive response:



*Recognize that women and adolescent girls in all their diversity are often subject to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization throughout their lives, and that it is therefore necessary to respect and appreciate their diversity of situations and conditions and acknowledge that they face barriers to their empowerment and to the exercise of their rights, and that it is necessary to adopt intersectional strategies to address their specific needs, affording particular attention to the feminization of poverty in the region (Santiago Commitment, para. 4)*

## B. Government initiatives to tackle COVID-19 in four key areas

Since the beginning of the crisis, the governments of the region have promoted initiatives to address the gender dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic in line with the Santiago Commitment, as reflected in the gender section of "Measures and actions at the national level" of the COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>6</sup> These measures and actions relate to at least **four key areas relating to women's autonomy and gender equality: gender-based violence against women, the care economy, social protection, and employment and income generation.**



### 1. Gender-based violence against women

Governments in the region have promoted new protocols, contingency plans and measures to guarantee women their right to a life free from violence in the context of the emergency and confinement to control the spread of COVID-19.

<sup>5</sup> See *Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030* (LC/CRM.13/5), Santiago.

<sup>6</sup> See the gender section of "Measures and actions at the national level" of the COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://www.cepal.org/en/topics/covid-19>. The information comes from official government sources, in particular from ministries for women's affairs and machineries for the advancement of women in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as from other public entities, and is available on official government websites. The Observatory is updated regularly, and governments can report on additional measures that are not reflected in the Observatory to raise awareness.

*Promote the enactment and implementation of legislation, multisectoral policies, comprehensive action plans [...] to prevent, address, punish and eliminate different forms of gender-based violence and discrimination against women, adolescents and girls, including those with disabilities, in its [...] different types and manifestations [...] as well as forms of violence facilitated by technology (Santiago Commitment, para. 6)*

### (a) Strengthening of services and expansion of the channels of assistance for women in situations of violence

Since the beginning of the pandemic, several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have implemented **protocols and contingency plans to support women in situations of violence**.<sup>7</sup> The Ministry for Women of Paraguay developed a protocol for the prevention of gender-based violence against women and support for women victims or survivors of violence in light of the COVID-19 emergency, and Chile implemented a coronavirus contingency plan to ensure the continuity of assistance, protection and reparation targeting women who are or who risk becoming victims of violence. In Ecuador, the Inter-agency protocol for communication and care in cases of gender-based and domestic violence during the COVID-19 health emergency coordinates the actions of six entities of the executive branch and entities of the judiciary in response to the emergency and sets out the procedure to be followed in relation to the various services provided by public institutions.

In countries such as Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Peru, services to address gender-based violence have been declared **essential** to ensure they continue to function during the emergency. In other countries, a number of measures have been implemented to strengthen or ensure the continuity of counselling and services for women in situations of violence.<sup>8</sup> In Argentina and Colombia, additional shelters were provided for persons in situations of gender-based violence who had to leave their homes in the context of confinement. Jamaica opened the first national shelters for women victims of gender-based violence and their children. Some countries have established protocols and training for police personnel in dealing with acts of violence occurring in the context of the COVID-19 health emergency.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, channels of communication, assistance and reporting have been expanded through email, chat, instant messaging applications and mobile applications.<sup>10</sup> Some countries, such as Argentina, Chile, Colombia and the Dominican Republic, have created new channels of communication through pharmacies, supermarkets or gas stations, where women in situations of risk or of violence can contact services that provide assistance and facilitate the reporting of cases. In Peru and Paraguay, advertisements with prevention messages are disseminated in supermarkets and pharmacies, and in Chile and Brazil, graphic pieces are displayed in buildings and condominiums with the aim of raising awareness in communities about the prevention of violence against women.

<sup>7</sup> The countries that have implemented protocols and contingency plans to support women in situations of violence include: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador and Paraguay.

<sup>8</sup> See the measures taken by Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis and Suriname in the gender section of "Measures and actions at the national level" of the COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://www.cepal.org/en/topics/covid-19>.

<sup>9</sup> In Argentina, the National Public Prosecutor's Office, the Public Defence Service, the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, the Ministry for Women, Gender and Diversity and the Ministry of Security have developed an intervention protocol that establishes guidelines for police personnel to address cases of violence and includes police intervention from a gender perspective. In Honduras, representatives of the national police force have received training focused on human rights issues and on providing care for women victims of domestic violence.

<sup>10</sup> See the measures taken by Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Guyana, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Suriname (Ibid.).

Most countries in the region have **continued to expand prevention and counselling hotlines** for women in situations of violence through social networks, radio, television and other public media.<sup>11</sup> In addition, **campaigns have been disseminated** via social networks and the media for the prevention of gender-based violence against women and the encouragement of violence-free coexistence in families during confinement. In countries such as Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Dominica, Guyana and Panama, information campaigns have been launched on available services and guidance to tackle situations of violence against women.<sup>12</sup>

In Uruguay, messages on gender-based and generation-based violence were disseminated on the educational platform of the Basic Educational Computing Connectivity Programme for Online Learning (Plan CEIBAL), which is accessible to primary and secondary school teachers and students, and a guide on steps to take in situations of violence detected during the health emergency was made available, along with links to services to address violence and a hotline. In Chile, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Gender Equity, in partnership with the private sector, disseminated information in companies on types of violence and warning signs to detect it, particularly in teleworking situations during the quarantine period. In Panama, partnerships were established with telephone companies to publicize the hotline of the National Institute for Women (INAMU) through text messages to mobile phones. In El Salvador, recommendations were made for the dissemination of messages free of stereotypes and discrimination against women in the media, and in Suriname, television campaigns have been broadcast to raise awareness of the prevention of domestic violence and violence against women in the context of the pandemic.

*Promote the elimination of legal and institutional obstacles in order to ensure women's effective access to prompt and expeditious justice and to end impunity, and ensure reparation and essential services in cases of violence, especially in the case of sexual violence (Santiago Commitment, para. 8)*

#### **(b) Access to justice: extension of precautionary measures, mobility permits and use of technological media**

In countries such as Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, machineries for the advancement of women requested the judiciary to extend precautionary and protective measures for women in situations of violence which were set to expire during the COVID-19 emergency period. In Uruguay, the judiciary urged magistrates to be especially diligent in monitoring protection measures. In Argentina, provision was made for the automatic extension for 60 days of judicial protection measures for victims of violence, and most provinces have granted the request for as long as physical, preventive and mandatory isolation lasts, thus guaranteeing the protection of women's rights.

The judiciary also extended protection measures in Brazil, Guatemala and Peru. In Peru, **these measures can be implemented through technological means**. In Ecuador, Guatemala and Honduras, continuity of assistance was established in specialized or competent courts dealing with violence. In Guatemala, in particular, the various courts conducted hearings virtually in order to avoid exposure to the virus. However, the gender digital divide may limit women's access to hearings conducted using technological media.

<sup>11</sup> Countries that have established violence hotlines include: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Puerto Rico, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay (Ibid.).

<sup>12</sup> Various countries have implemented information campaigns for the prevention of gender-based violence in the context of the pandemic. The gender section of "Measures and actions at the national level" of the COVID-19 Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean includes steps taken in the following countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Belize, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

In Colombia, measures were taken to guarantee the uninterrupted provision of services by the Comisarias de Familia<sup>13</sup> under the state of economic, social and ecological emergency. In Mexico, some Women's Justice Centres remain operational during the health emergency. In Nicaragua, police personnel responsible for women's affairs and the Public Prosecutor's Office continue to work on and investigate cases of violence against women in the context of the health crisis. In El Salvador, the Supreme Court of Justice set up a toll-free hotline specializing in gender violence and violence against children, adolescents and older persons, with a connection that allowed the hotline operator to contact the judicial headquarters directly, depending on the location and type of request, which facilitated access to justice. In Colombia, the Office of the Attorney General established an internal protocol for prosecutors to ensure investigations were swift and efficient. This protocol included receiving reports through the 122 hotline, the "ADenunciar" application or by email.<sup>14</sup>

In Argentina<sup>15</sup> and Costa Rica,<sup>16</sup> an exception to the restriction on movement was established for persons who left their homes to report acts of violence or to seek assistance or protection in situations of violence.



## 2. The care economy

Governments in the region are implementing measures for the provision of care, mainly for children, older persons and persons with disabilities. Actions have also been taken to meet the needs of caregivers, whether paid—for example, domestic workers—or unpaid. Awareness-raising campaigns were launched about women's increased burden of unpaid work in the context of confinement and on the importance of fostering co-responsibility for care in households.

*Design comprehensive care systems from a gender, intersectional, intercultural and human rights perspective that foster co-responsibility between men and women, the State, the market, families and the community, and include joined-up policies on time, resources, benefits and universal, good-quality public services to meet the different care needs of the population, as part of social protection systems (Santiago Commitment, para. 26)*

### (a) Care services

In Costa Rica, care services for children were maintained in the context of the COVID-19 emergency. In Mexico, nurseries and day-care centres for children, and nursing homes and care centres for older persons, which are considered essential activities during the health emergency, continue to operate. In Argentina, additional resources were allocated for homes and programmes for persons with disabilities, and in Cuba, care is guaranteed for the primary school-age children of health-care workers. In Mexico, there are support networks for monitoring the emotional well-being and health of older women in the context of the National Healthy Distance initiative, and in Buenos Aires a programme was implemented in which volunteers provided support to older persons in preventive and mandatory isolation by providing telephone assistance, shopping in pharmacies and local shops, paying for services, walking pets and helping to use digital applications.

<sup>13</sup> Subnational agencies with multidisciplinary teams to address domestic violence and violence against women.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Resolution 15/2020 APN-MMGYD of 4 April 2020 established, in accordance with article 6, paragraph 6 of Decree 297/2020, that all situations in which women or LGTTBI persons, alone or with their children, leave their homes to file criminal complaints regarding acts of violence or to seek help, assistance or protection owing to the situation of violence they are experiencing, shall be considered cases of force majeure (art. 1).

<sup>16</sup> Executive Decree No. 42293-S of 11 April 2020 exempts from the application of the fines corresponding to paragraph 365 of the General Health Act those persons who, by virtue of a state of necessity, for example in cases of domestic violence, must leave their place of isolation, and any others to be assessed by the competent authority (art. 10).

### (b) Travel permits

In Argentina, Colombia, El Salvador and Peru, an exception to the restriction on movement was established for persons who care for and provide assistance to dependent persons such as children and adolescents, older persons and persons with disabilities.

### (c) Leave for caregivers

Some countries have established special measures for children's caregivers. In Cuba, wages are guaranteed for employed persons who are caregivers of children whose classes have been suspended (in primary, special and kindergarten education institutions). In Argentina, the absence from work of parents or caregivers of children or adolescents is considered justified while face-to-face classes are suspended. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security exceptionally established new regulations to grant special leave with pay for the parents or guardians of children up to five years of age. At the beginning of the pandemic, in Trinidad and Tobago, the authorities created incentives to explore alternatives to in-person work such as telework, flexible hours and other care arrangements, and recommended that employed parents without access to childcare support during school closures be allowed to stay home (provisions of the Pandemic Leave).<sup>17</sup>

*Promote measures, policies and programmes for the full engagement of boys, young men and men as strategic allies in achieving gender equality [...] and foster policies for the equal sharing of domestic and care work between men and women (Santiago Commitment, para. 27)*

### (d) Campaigns about co-responsibility for care

In Argentina, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico and Peru, messages are being disseminated through social networks about the excessive burden of unpaid work and care work shouldered mainly by women and the need to encourage greater involvement of men in domestic and care work in households in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Adopt measures to ensure the promotion and effective protection of the human rights of all domestic workers, as established in Convention No. 189 of the International Labour Organization (Santiago Commitment, para. 15)*

### (e) The rights of domestic workers

In Argentina and Ecuador, domestic workers are included in the target population for emergency cash transfers during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Argentina, domestic workers (whether formal workers or not) were included among the beneficiaries of the Emergency Family Income programme and in Ecuador, domestic workers were included among the recipients of the Family Protection Voucher. In Peru, measures have been put in place to guarantee the protection of the social and labour rights of domestic workers. In countries such as Argentina, Costa Rica, Ecuador and the Plurinational State of Bolivia, campaigns have been disseminated through social networks to raise awareness of the need to respect the labour rights of paid domestic workers in the context of the pandemic. In Barbados, the Ministry of Health and Wellness established guidelines to reduce the risk of exposure of domestic workers to COVID-19.

<sup>17</sup> See [online] [https://www.finance.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID\\_19\\_Media\\_Conference\\_MOLSED\\_Opening\\_Remarks\\_March\\_15.pdf](https://www.finance.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID_19_Media_Conference_MOLSED_Opening_Remarks_March_15.pdf).



### 3. Social protection

In light of the COVID-19 crisis, several governments in Latin America and the Caribbean have expanded the coverage of existing programmes or created new social protection instruments, such as cash transfers and the provision of food or basic necessities, which benefit women living in poverty, women in single-parent households, pregnant women, nursing mothers or women with dependents.

#### (a) Cash transfers

Most governments in Latin America and the Caribbean have encouraged the creation of transfers or have expanded the coverage or amounts of existing transfers to address the crisis caused by the pandemic.<sup>18</sup> The amounts of the transfers, as well as the eligibility criteria and the duration of the measures, differ from one country to the next. In several countries, although the benefit is granted to the family or the household, priority is given to women with regard to payment, on the assumption that they are better and more efficient in terms of using the money for the well-being of all members of the household. It is important to note that prioritizing women in the payment of transfers is not necessarily based on the assertion of women's rights.

In some countries, new temporary transfers were established for women living in poverty, women in single-parent households, and women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or caring for dependents. In Costa Rica, an exceptional subsidy was created for households headed by women living in poverty and with older persons, children or persons with disabilities who were not in employment prior to the COVID-19 emergency. In Guatemala, the Bono Familia fund was established to support households affected by COVID-19. The programme prioritized people living in poverty, single mothers and single-parent households. In Brazil, an emergency aid voucher was granted for a limited time to informal workers, the unemployed, people with low-income microenterprises and persons affected by a decline in labour activity because of COVID-19. Women in single-parent households received double the amount.

Meanwhile, some countries provide transfers which mainly benefit women, although they are not the explicit target. One example is the Solidarity Income in Colombia, of which 57% of the beneficiary population in the first stage were women.<sup>19</sup> In Chile, according to data updated at 31 August 2020, more than 55% of the beneficiaries of the four Emergency Family Income payments were women, and nearly 60% of the households benefiting from the payments were headed by a woman.<sup>20</sup> In Costa Rica, as of 8 December 2020 53.9% of vouchers under the Proteger programme were granted to women.<sup>21</sup>

With regard to the expansion of existing transfers, Argentina fostered various measures that explicitly target women who receive the Universal Child Allowance and the Pregnancy Social Protection Allowance. In addition to increasing the amount of the transfer and of the AlimentAR card, companies providing energy, water, telephone and Internet services were prohibited from suspending or terminating the respective services in case of default or non-payment from March–December 2020. In Paraguay, about 80% of those benefiting from the Tekoporã Programme are women. In the context of the pandemic, an additional payment

<sup>18</sup> According to the web page on Social Development and COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean of the ECLAC Observatory on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, the countries that have implemented or created transfers (not necessarily aimed at women) are Argentina, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay (see [online] <https://dds.cepal.org/observatorio/socialcovid19/en/>).

<sup>19</sup> Overview of the first stage (see [online] <https://ingresosolidario.dnp.gov.co/#Interes>).

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Social Development and Family, *Preinforme Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia, 2020* [online] [http://www.desarrollosocialyfamilia.gob.cl/storage/docs/2020.09.30\\_PREINFORME\\_INGRESO\\_FAMILIAR\\_DE\\_EMERGENCIA.pdf](http://www.desarrollosocialyfamilia.gob.cl/storage/docs/2020.09.30_PREINFORME_INGRESO_FAMILIAR_DE_EMERGENCIA.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Security and others, *Octavo Informe Mensual de Seguimiento a la Ejecución del Bono Proteger, 2020* [online] [http://www.mtss.go.cr/elministerio/despacho/covid-19-mtss/plan\\_proteger/archivos/octavo\\_informe\\_proteger.pdf](http://www.mtss.go.cr/elministerio/despacho/covid-19-mtss/plan_proteger/archivos/octavo_informe_proteger.pdf).

and a specific transfer has been included for pregnant women.<sup>22</sup> In Uruguay, the amount of the Plan de Equidad family allowance aimed at supplementing the income of households with dependent children was doubled. This income is paid in two equal instalments and was doubled on four occasions between April and December 2020. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Parto Humanizado and Lactancia Materna vouchers for women during pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period were continued.

### (b) In-kind transfers

Various governments in Latin America and the Caribbean have ensured the delivery of food and basic supplies in the context of the health emergency.<sup>23</sup> In some cases the in-kind transfers include basic necessities for women. In El Salvador, authorities distributed food and medicine kits, multipurpose cards for women and emergency kits for women including menstrual hygiene products. These supplies and basic products were delivered to different groups of women, for example those in situations of violence, displaced women, women deported and returned from the United States to El Salvador and incarcerated women. In the Dominican Republic, feminine hygiene products were included in the basic package of essential products provided through the *Quédate en Casa* programme. Similarly, in Saint Lucia, as part of the Economic Recovery and Resilience Plan, COVID-19 personal care and hygiene packages were distributed to people in vulnerable situations, and included sanitary towels for women. In Chile, the second phase of the Food for Chile programme, which distributes basic necessities to citizens affected by the health crisis, included menstrual hygiene products and condoms.

In Antigua and Barbuda, the COVID-19 Emergency Food Assistance Programme distributes food packages and essential medicines to vulnerable populations, especially older persons living alone, single-parent households, persons with disabilities, and unemployed persons with dependent children. In Saint Kitts and Nevis, care and food packages have been provided to different groups, including teenage mothers, women in single-parent households and older persons, and the Ministry of Agriculture has distributed free seeds to farmers and people growing food in their backyards, most of whom are women.



## 4. Employment and income generation

Several governments in the region have implemented measures to protect the employment and income of women working in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to mitigate the economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis.

### (a) Employment protection and access to credit

In countries such as Argentina, Mexico and the Plurinational State of Bolivia, workers who belong to a risk group defined by the national health authority, including pregnant or breastfeeding women, are allowed to work from home while receiving their wages.

In Costa Rica, the temporary reduction of working hours and the resulting decrease in wages does not apply to pregnant or breastfeeding workers. In Mexico, the incorporation of a gender perspective into the conditions established by businesses for remote work is encouraged.

<sup>22</sup> See [online] <https://www.presidencia.gov.py/articulo/38056-pago-adicional-de-tekopor-beneficiara-a-165-mil-familias-e-inyectaramas-de-gs-31-mil-millones-a-la-economia.html#.YBgrSehKjIV>.

<sup>23</sup> According to the web page on Social Development and COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean of the ECLAC Observatory on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, the countries that have implemented programmes for the distribution of food or basic goods (not necessarily aimed at women) are Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Belize, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Uruguay (see [online] <https://dds.cepal.org/observatorio/socialcovid19/en/>).

In Argentina and Costa Rica, a temporary basic income is provided to the unemployed and to informal workers, as well as to workers whose income has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, in Argentina, women and LGBTI+ persons in situations of gender-based violence have been incorporated into sheltered employment programmes, while in Mexico, women in situations of violence have been given priority access to credit programmes. In Mexico, the Crédito Solidario a la Palabra programme, which was originally aimed at informal workers, was expanded to include domestic workers.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, some governments have fostered measures related to employment in sectors with a high proportion of women. For example, in several Caribbean countries, measures have been implemented to support employment in the tourism sector to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.<sup>25</sup> In Grenada, workers in the hotel sector received 40% of their wages for three months. In Argentina and Cuba, monetary stimulus was provided to health workers in the context of the pandemic.

*Foster financial systems that enable women, especially those with fewer resources, to access and use a diversified range of good-quality, affordable savings and credit products and services [...], provide technical support for strengthening women's productive enterprises (Santiago Commitment, para. 22)*

#### **(b) Support for women in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs)**

In countries such as Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica and Guatemala, new lines of financing aimed at women in MSMEs have been expanded or created. In Colombia, for example, the Mujer Emprende fund<sup>26</sup> was included in the Entrepreneurship Act in order to exclusively foster, finance and support efforts and initiatives for the formalization and strengthening of women's businesses. In addition, through this initiative, differentiating criteria were established to encourage the participation of women's enterprises and businesses in the Colombian public procurement system.

*Promote the development of a digital market in Latin America and the Caribbean [...], strengthening women's capacities and their full participation in the digital ecosystem in the region (Santiago Commitment, para. 21).*

In Chile, Colombia and Costa Rica, virtual training programmes have been developed for women-led businesses in order to improve their skills in the management of their enterprises in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to promote e-commerce, digital marketing and business promotion. In Peru, the Ministry for Women and Vulnerable Groups has strengthened the skills of women leaders of MSMEs and business associations, through regional networks of women entrepreneurs and businesswomen, in order to encourage their participation in national economic reactivation in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, some countries have promoted measures to support the marketing of products from businesses owned by women. For example, in Chile, the virtual platform Mercado Mujer Online was launched to promote the sales of women's businesses. Similarly, in Paraguay, the marketing of the products of microenterprises owned by women is promoted through home delivery in the context of the emergency.

<sup>24</sup> These loans for domestic workers and self-employed workers amount to 25,000 Mexican pesos, to be repaid in three years, including a three-month grace period (meaning repayment in monthly instalments from the fourth month onward). According to the report "Perspectiva de género en la respuesta a la pandemia del COVID-19" published on 22 October 2020 by the National Women's Institute of Mexico, the goal is to reach 22,300 domestic workers (see [online] [https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/document/files/mex\\_inmujeres\\_perspectiva\\_de\\_genero\\_en\\_la\\_respuesta\\_a\\_la\\_pandemia\\_del\\_covid-19\\_201022.pdf](https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/document/files/mex_inmujeres_perspectiva_de_genero_en_la_respuesta_a_la_pandemia_del_covid-19_201022.pdf)).

<sup>25</sup> See the measures carried out in the Bahamas, Belize, Grenada and Jamaica. Women represent around 61% of workers in the accommodation and food services sector in the Caribbean.

<sup>26</sup> The Mujer Emprende fund was created during the economic, social and ecological state of emergency under Decree No. 810.

### Some initiatives for a recovery with equality

Some countries have begun to implement gender-sensitive recovery measures, with women considered key to the crisis response. In Colombia, a Presidential Directive<sup>27</sup> instructed ministries to include programmes to guarantee the creation of employment for Colombian women, especially rural women and women heads of household, given the greater impact of this crisis on these women. The four priority areas are: commitment to the creation of employment, commitment to clean and sustainable growth, commitment to the poorest and most vulnerable in society, and commitment to rural areas and peace with legality.

In Chile, companies hiring women, young people and persons with disabilities receive a larger hiring subsidy under the employment subsidy plan.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the programme to support reactivation (PAR-Impulsa) has launched calls for subsidies for MSMEs led by women to reactivate, reconvert or digitalize their businesses.

In Costa Rica, the campaign #JuntasConstruimosElFuturo was launched, which seeks to overcome sexist stereotypes and encourage the hiring of women in jobs traditionally reserved for men, for example in the construction sector. The Ministry of Women's Affairs and Gender Equity of Chile set up a working group on women and construction, a public-private partnership in collaboration with the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Development and Tourism, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, with the aim of reintegrating women into the labour market by involving them in the reactivation of the construction sector. This working group has given rise to actions focused on improving the conditions for hiring women and gender-sensitive bidding processes, in addition to fostering good inclusive practices, increasing training opportunities and shedding light on available jobs in the sector. In the same vein, Argentina launched a public works plan with a gender perspective that includes the construction of territorial centres for gender and diversity policies, and the prioritization of smaller work projects led by women's groups within the framework of the Argentina Hace plan, among other efforts to increase employment opportunities for women in public works.

In Ecuador, the National Council for Gender Equality developed recommendations to promote strategic actions with a gender perspective once the COVID-19 state of emergency has ended, to be implemented by public sector institutions in 2020–2021. The actions focus on eight key pillars: (i) poverty alleviation and production, (ii) employment sustainability, (iii) care and unpaid work, (iv) education and access to information and communications technologies (ICTs), (v) gender-based violence, (vi) health, sexual and reproductive rights, (vii) participation and (viii) communication.

<sup>27</sup> Presidential Directive No. 11 "Compromiso por Colombia: medidas para atender el grave impacto económico del COVID-19 sobre las mujeres", of 13 October 2020.

<sup>28</sup> The hiring subsidy is equivalent to 50% of gross taxable wages, with a cap of 250,000 Chilean pesos per month for each new worker hired. For companies hiring women, young people or persons with disabilities, the subsidy is equivalent to 60% of gross wages, with a cap of 270,000 Chilean pesos per month.

## C. Recommendations for a comprehensive response from a gender perspective in the short, medium and long term

The measures and actions promoted by governments have made it possible to contain and address some of the most adverse effects of the COVID-19 crisis in key areas for the autonomy of women in the region. However, in order to prevent the worsening of the structural challenges of gender inequality and to encourage a sustainable recovery with equality, it is necessary to foster public policies that coordinate measures for transformative action in the short, medium and long term, in line with the Santiago Commitment and the Montevideo Strategy. These measures must take into account women in all their diversity, considering the multiple and interrelated forms of discrimination and marginalization they face, and help close inequality gaps.

### (i) Reverse the trend of deepening poverty and precarious living conditions of women in the region as a result of the COVID-19 crisis

Women are being affected by increasing poverty, unemployment and the closure of businesses, mainly SMEs. It is necessary to strengthen and extend over time measures that soften and offset the loss of employment and decline in income of women, especially those in single-parent households. In addition to pushing for an emergency basic income, it is necessary to expand the coverage of employment programmes and social protection instruments to support women in different situations, including women working in precarious jobs, women who are in situations of human mobility, informal workers and domestic workers, women with no income of their own, women living in poor households and women with dependents. It is also important to ensure that access to transfers does not depend on migratory status and to avoid conditionalities that would result in an excessive burden of care work for women or the worsening of gender inequalities.

### (ii) Strengthen prevention and care for women in situations of gender-based violence in the context of the pandemic

While most countries have taken action to address the escalation of gender-based violence against women and girls, confinement and physical distancing measures and restrictions on mobility have increased women's isolation from their support networks and created additional barriers to accessing services to address violence. In the short term, it is urgent to strengthen prevention through policies of zero tolerance towards gender-based violence against women, to respond in a timely and expeditious manner to women in situations of violence and to ensure access to the justice system, including for women in situations of human mobility. In addition, there is a need to expand financial resources allocated to comprehensive services to address gender-based violence and to compile data to improve services and programmes.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> ECLAC, *Addressing violence against women and girls during and after the COVID-19 pandemic requires FINANCING, RESPONSES, PREVENTION AND DATA COMPILATION*, Santiago, November 2020 [online] [https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/46425/1/S2000874\\_en.pdf](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/46425/1/S2000874_en.pdf).

(iii)

**Promote fiscal stimulus packages**

There is a need for fiscal stimulus packages that reinforce funding for key policies for women in the context of the pandemic and that promote affirmative measures for women's participation in the sectors that drive economic recovery. Priority must be given to funding for services for the prevention of gender-based violence against women, care and health services, including sexual and reproductive health. In addition, fiscal stimulus packages must include gender equality criteria to protect the income and employment of women affected by the crisis, and promote their participation in strategic sectors for sustainable recovery with gender equality.

(iv)

**Promote women's participation in recovery plans**

Strengthening the participation of women, in all their diversity, in leadership roles and in decision-making spaces is essential for transformative socioeconomic recovery and conflict prevention and resolution. In this context, States must promote measures to prevent and eradicate violence against women in the public sphere, guaranteeing plural and diverse spaces for participation.

(v)

**(v) Transform the sexual division of labour**

Pressure on health systems and confinement measures have resulted in a heavier burden of unpaid and care work for women in their households. Moreover, official figures from the countries show a marked decline in women's participation in the labour market.<sup>30</sup> The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic should be used as an opportunity to advance in the transformation of patriarchal patterns that crystallize the current sexual division of labour ("male provider" and "female caregiver"). In addition, it is necessary to advance in the recognition of the central role of care for the sustainability of life, the functioning of economies and economic recovery with gender equality. In the medium term, therefore, progress must be made in transforming labour markets and achieving greater co-responsibility for care between the State, the market, communities and between men and women. As established in the Santiago Commitment, comprehensive care systems must be designed from a gender, intersectional, intercultural and human rights perspective.

The COVID-19 crisis highlights the weakening of the dominant development model and the need to reorient economies towards the goals of sustainability and equality. Therefore, in line with what was agreed in the Montevideo Strategy and the Santiago Commitment, the culture of privilege and patriarchal cultural patterns must be overcome and progress must be made in building a culture of rights and recognition of diversity, along with a care society, in order to achieve substantive equality.

<sup>30</sup> ECLAC, *Preliminary Overview of the Economies of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2020* (LC/PUB.2020/17-P), Santiago, 2020 and "The economic autonomy of women in a sustainable recovery with equality", *Special Report COVID-19*, No. 9, Santiago, 10 February 2021.