



**Gender Equality at Work**

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**TOWARDS A BETTER SHARING OF PAID AND UNPAID WORK**





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# Foreword

The OECD review of *Gender Equality in Colombia* is the third in a collection of reports focussing on Latin America and Caribbean countries, after previous reviews that focused on Chile and Peru, respectively. It puts gender gaps in labour and educational outcomes in Colombia into a comparative context, and analyses the factors that contribute to unequal outcomes, including the uneven distribution of unpaid work. It discusses how existing policies and programmes in Colombia can contribute to improving gender equality and, in particular, increasing men's participation in unpaid work.

Closing gender gaps in paid and unpaid work responsibilities is not only a moral and social imperative but also a central part of any successful strategy for stronger, more sustainable and more inclusive growth. The COVID-19 crisis and the associated lock-down measures have placed this cause at the top of the policy agenda in countries by showing that without addressing the gender unequal sharing of unpaid work, women will continue to have difficulty catching up with men's labour force participation, earnings and financial security.

The OECD has long championed gender equality. Building on an extensive body of work, the OECD Gender Initiative examines existing barriers to gender equality in education, employment and entrepreneurship. The OECD actively promotes policy measures embedded in the 2013 and 2015 OECD Recommendations on Gender Equality in Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship and Public Life. These include measures to ensure access to good quality education for boys and girls, policies to improve the gender balance in leadership in the public sector and providing fathers and mothers equally with financial incentives to use parental leave and flexible work options.

The flagship 2012 publication *Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now!*, the 2017 report *The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle* and the 2023 report *Joining Forces for Gender Equality* assess policies to promote gender equality in different countries. These reviews have informed novel policy initiatives like *NiñaSTEM PUEDEN*, which the OECD and the Mexican Ministry of Education jointly launched. The OECD's online *Gender Data Portal* has become a leading global source for statistical indicators on female education, employment, entrepreneurship, political participation, and social and economic outcomes. The OECD Development Centre's *Social Institutions and Gender Index* (SIGI) measures discrimination against women in social institutions across 180 countries.

The OECD was also instrumental in defining the target adopted by G20 Leaders at their 2014 Brisbane Summit to reduce the gender gap in labour force participation by 25% in 2025. The OECD continues to work closely with G20 and G7 Presidencies on monitoring progress with reducing gender gaps such as these.

Informed by these initiatives, *Gender Equality in Colombia* puts forward a comprehensive policy strategy for greater gender equality in the country. The first part of the report reviews the evidence on gender gaps in economic and educational outcomes and on the related possible drivers, including gender-based attitudes and the distribution of unpaid work. The second part develops a comprehensive framework of policies to promote an equal distribution of paid and unpaid work between men and women and to increase women's labour income.

The objectives of *Gender Equality in Colombia* align to Goal 5 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals for a better and more sustainable future for all, which contemplates achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. In particular, Goal 5.4 states the importance to “*Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate*”.

# Acknowledgements

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The OECD *Gender Equality in Latin America* project is a horizontal effort involving the OECD Global Relations and Co-operation Directorate and the OECD Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs. José Antonio Ardavín, Head of the Latin America and Caribbean Division, OECD Global Relations and Co-operation Directorate and Alessandro Goglio, Head of Partner Countries, Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, provided co-ordination and support.

The report was prepared by a team composed by Alessandro Goglio (project leader), OECD Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, Sofia Blamey Andrusco and Angela Ciceri, OECD Global Relations and Co-operation Directorate and Melissa Zumaeta, Senior Consultant on Social Protection and Labour Market Policies. Stefano Scarpetta, Director for OECD Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Directorate, Mark Pearson, Deputy Director for OECD Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Directorate, Monika Queisser, Senior Counsellor, Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs and leader of the OECD Horizontal Project on Gender Equality, Andreas Schaal, Director of OECD Global Relations, provided strategic oversight for the project, as well as comments. Lorenzo Pavone, Hyesin Park, Alejandra Maria Meneses and Pierre De Boisséon (OECD Development Centre), Carlos Conde, and Gaëlle Ferrant (OECD Global Relations and Co-operation Directorate) and the Editorial Board of the OECD Global Relations Co-operation Directorate provided helpful comments to the draft report.

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# Executive summary

## Over the past decades, gender equality in Colombia has advanced along several dimensions

Educational attainments have progressed at all levels for women, encouraged by higher returns to education and the prospect of greater labour market inclusion. Today young women out-perform young men in terms of educational attainments: among 25-34 year-olds, the share of tertiary graduates is 35% for women and 27% for men.

## Notwithstanding these achievements, challenges remain

In Colombia, 48% of all women of working age (15-64 years old) were employed in 2021, compared to close to 74% of men. The resulting gender employment gap of 26 percentage points exceeds the OECD average by 12 percentage points. The national figures mask the presence of considerable variations. In some rural areas, the gender gap in labour force participation is more than twice the level of the urban centres. In Caldas, Caquetá, and Huila, for example, the gap measures 29%, which compares to 13% in Bogota. At primary and secondary levels of education, the gap in participation rates between men and women reaches 33 and 20 percentage points, respectively, compared to 7 percentage points at high level of education. These differences reflect the fact that at lower levels of education women are more likely to be employed in the informal labour market. Moreover, when they work for pay, female workers are more likely to earn a low income and less likely to advance to management positions. Furthermore, girls are much less likely to study in the more lucrative science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. The share of male graduates in STEM subjects exceeds the corresponding share of female graduates by almost 20 percentage points.

## Like in all countries, Colombian men and women do not share paid and unpaid work activities equally

Women are less likely to work for pay, and to do so full-time. Instead, they typically spend more hours looking after children, elderly relatives, and relatives with disabilities, and doing housework. On average women in Colombia spend 22 more hours per week on unpaid tasks than men do, well above the OECD average (15 hours). At the same time, Colombian men devote 23 more hours to paid work activities per week than women do, again higher than the OECD average (12 hours).

## Girls and young women are particularly exposed to the risk of falling behind their male peers

The likelihood that a young Colombian becomes a NEET – the acronym for Not in Employment, Education, or Training – is unusually high by international standards. NEET rates of 17% and 37% for young men and women, respectively, imply that the latter are 2.2 times more likely to be NEETs than the former, close to 70% higher than the OECD-wide average (1.3 times) and higher than in Chile, Costa Rica and Peru, the other countries in this review series. Young women with a low level of education are particularly exposed to the risk of becoming NEET since they typically dedicate a disproportionate amount of their time to unpaid domestic activities.

## In Colombia, gender inequalities vary widely across socio economic groups

Gender wage and employment gaps exist across all levels of education but tend to be widest among men and women with low levels of education. Likewise, gender inequalities in the time devoted to unpaid work tend to be widest in rural areas than urban areas since the conditions of access to basic infrastructure, education and childcare services are comparatively poorer in these areas, while the influence of patriarchal and traditional social norms is stronger. Concurring factors that strengthen gender inequalities relate to being native of indigenous populations or being single parents. Colombia's decades-long internal conflict and violence has exacerbated group disparities even further, by displacing a significant part of the population. Women and men were about equally likely to be victims of internal conflict and violence, as well as forced displacement. Since the sudden starting of massive immigration flows from neighbouring Venezuela, domestic and international migratory pressures have tended to overlap.

## Carefully designed and implemented gender equality policies can significantly enhance the well-being of the Colombian population

More than half of the total Colombian population of working age are women. Going forward, rapid population ageing, and a shrinking labour force mean that mobilising this significant talent pool should represent a priority for any Colombian policy strategy to create a more sustainable and inclusive economy and society. Provided that it is carefully designed and implemented, international evidence suggests that achieving a better sharing of paid and unpaid work between men and women requires a comprehensive policy strategy. This involves notably: family policies, including the availability of quality services and facilities for early childcare and elderly care, that help reducing the barriers that stand in the way of a more equitable division of time and responsibilities between partners; tackle gender attitudes and stereotypes at school; and scale up efforts to attract the interest of girls in STEM disciplines. Moreover, fostering the policies that help reduce the gender gap in labour income and free more time that women can dedicate to paid work could lead to significant positive effects on employment and productivity while strengthening the work-life balance. These beneficial effects are more likely to occur if they are combined with continued efforts to rewards poor families for their engagement in their children education and to communicate the benefits of completing studies.

# **1** Gender gaps in Colombia: An international and sub-national comparison

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This chapter reviews the evidence on gender gaps in economic and educational outcomes in Colombia. It starts with an overview of gender gaps in educational and labour market outcomes across different dimensions (enrolment and out-of-school rates, skills outcomes, along with labour market participation, gender pay gaps and the interactions between motherhood and access to quality jobs). It then discusses the factors contributing to these gaps (the unbalanced distribution of unpaid care and domestic work, gender-based stereotypes, the role of legal barriers, the access to care facilities, infrastructural barriers, and gender-based violence). In addition to comparing Colombia with OECD and other Latin American countries, the chapter addresses the articulation of gender differences across socio-economic groups. This includes paying attention to urban and rural differences, along with differences across educational attainments, age cohorts, and income.

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More than half of the total Colombian population of working age are women, which implies a sizeable talent pool. Rapid population ageing, and a shrinking labour force mean that mobilising this talent pool, while at the same time strengthening equality and dignity conditions of access to the labour market by all women, represents, and will continue to represent going forward, a priority for any Colombian policy strategy to create a more sustainable and inclusive economy and society.

In recent decades gender gaps in educational and labour market outcomes have shrunk in Colombia. Notwithstanding this important progress, in the country, just as elsewhere in Latin America and all around the world, much remains to be done to narrow gender gaps and ensure the benefits of a more equitable division of paid and unpaid work for family well-being and human capital development (see Box 1.1). Women continue to be less likely to work, and to work full-time hours, for pay. Instead, they typically spend more hours looking after children, elderly relatives, and relatives with disabilities, doing housework, shopping for food, and so on. When they work, they tend to be hired in the informal labour market. Women in Colombia spend 22 more hours per week performing unpaid tasks than men do, significantly above the average of OECD countries (15 hours). At the same time, Colombian men devote 23 more hours to paid work activities per week than women do, which is also much higher than the OECD average (12 hours).

Across the OECD but even in Colombia and Latin America at large, the unequal partition of working hours and the disproportionate amount of domestic tasks carried out by women reflect a broad set of interdependent forces, which relate more intrinsically to the fact of being a woman. For example, despite important educational gains, women continue to make educational choices likely to result in lower labour market earnings than men. Such economic outcomes are influenced, in turn, by a complex set of attitudes and gender stereotypes. In addition, the intersectional character of the drivers is very important, given that gender inequalities vary widely across socio economic groups – between younger and older generations, between urban and rural areas, between indigenous and non-indigenous populations and between couples and single parents. Furthermore, Colombia's decades-long internal conflict and violence has displaced a significant part of the population and women account for about half of total victims of internal conflict and violence, as well as forced displacement.

The youth are particularly exposed to the effects of these interacting forces. In Colombia, the rates of the youth Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEETs) as a percentage of the youth population are significantly higher than observed not only in Chile, Costa Rica and Peru but also the OECD average both among men and women. In addition, the extent of the gap between women and men is significantly wider. Young women are 2.1 times more likely to be NEETs than young men are, which is close to 75% higher than the OECD-wide average (1.4 times) and larger than the gaps observed in Chile, Costa Rica and Peru. Girls from vulnerable households are particularly exposed to the risk of dropping out from school prematurely and becoming NEET since they typically dedicate a disproportionate amount of their time to unpaid domestic activities.

Shedding light on the barriers to a more equal gender distribution of paid and unpaid work in Colombia is the main objective of Chapter 1. The chapter starts with a review of women's challenges seen from a demographic perspective and considering sub-national differences, particularly between rural and urban areas. It then presents gender gaps in educational and labour outcomes, along with a discussion of time-sharing and earning patterns. Finally, it looks at international indicators of well-being and gender gaps that capture the influence of stereotypes and discrimination.

### Box 1.1. The benefits of a more equitable division of paid and unpaid labour between men and women

Individuals working outside the home generally have a higher degree of economic independence from their partners and other family members than those who do not. Unpaid care and domestic work are also valuable, but in general do not garner the same respect as other activities. In countries where women carry out a disproportionately large share of the unpaid work burden, they are also more frequently employed in part-time or vulnerable jobs, which are often poorly paid (Ferrant, Pesando and Nowacka, 2014<sup>[1]</sup>). This is because high unpaid care and domestic work burdens often imply that women cannot find an occupation corresponding to their qualification level on a part-time basis, thus decreasing their job quality and earnings (Connolly and Gregory, 2008<sup>[2]</sup>).

By contrast, an equal division of unpaid work responsibilities can be beneficial to the entire family. Given that a more equal sharing of unpaid work reduces women's overall work hours – in particular regarding namely housework and care of the elderly – it can reduce stress levels (MacDonald, Phipps and Lethbridge, 2005<sup>[3]</sup>). A study of British families suggests that couples in which men do more unpaid care and other housework are less likely to divorce (Sigle-Rushton, 2010<sup>[4]</sup>). The negative effects of an unequal division of unpaid work on marital quality are particularly strong when couples disagree about how egalitarian a marriage should be (Ogolsky, Dennison and Monk, 2014<sup>[5]</sup>). Men who spend more time with their children may have higher life satisfaction, and the children may have better mental and physical health and cognitive development. However, it is unclear whether these differences are driven by confounding factors that these studies do not account for (WHO, 2007<sup>[6]</sup>).

Individuals' well-being may be boosted even more if overall unpaid work hours can be reduced. When an increasing share of the population can access stable utilities (such as running water and electricity) and labour-saving appliances (such as washing machines), and thus need fewer hours for housework, time-poverty diminishes, while choices and well-being increase. In countries with higher levels of pre-capita GDP, the number of hours that need to be devoted to unpaid work tend to decrease, benefitting women in particular (Ferrant and Thim, 2019<sup>[7]</sup>).

In perspective, the increased labour force participation of women will be a key to support the economic expansion of Colombia. The country's population is ageing rapidly as fertility declines and life expectancy increases. According to the *UN World Population Prospects*, in 2019 more than two-thirds of the Colombian population (68.6%) was composed of adults in a working age (between 15 and 64 years). Children under 15 years of age represented between one fifth and one-quarter (22.6%). Older people aged 65 or over accounted for less than one tenth of Colombian inhabitants (8.8%). However, the latter age group is growing at a much faster speed than all younger age groups. It is projected to more than double in the next three decades, up to 21% of the total population in 2050, at which point in time the share of the youth will have shrunk to 15%. Correspondingly, the share of the working age population is likely to decline to 63.9% by 2050.

The benefits of an increasing women labour force participation will go far beyond an accounting "trick" of simply substituting unpaid by paid work. Estimates based on the 2016-17 time-use survey suggests that in Colombia unpaid domestic work contributes 15.3% of a modified GDP measure (ONU Mujeres/DANE/Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>). Analysis of the effects of gender gaps in the labour market on aggregate productivity and income (Cuberes and Teignier, 2016<sup>[9]</sup>) finds evidence of an income loss of close to 18% in Colombia, which compares to an average loss of 15% in the OECD. Across the OECD, a simultaneous closing of gender gaps in labour force participation and working hours may increase potential GDP per capita growth by additional 0.23 percentage points per year, resulting in a 9.2% overall boost to GDP per capita relative what baseline projection estimate for 2060 (OECD, 2023<sup>[10]</sup>). Countries which have substantial gender gaps in labour force participation or working hours could see the strongest boost to annual economic growth. For example, Colombia, Costa Rica and Türkiye may see more than 0.40 percentage points of

additional GDP growth per year – corresponding to economic output between 17 and 20% larger than expected for 2060. Women’s increased participation in the labour market would substitute lower- for higher-added value activities and increase the stock of human capital employed. Since young female university graduates now outnumber their male counterparts, using their human capital fully has become more urgent. Moreover, firm-level research finds that more diverse work teams are more cohesive and innovative, which suggests that bringing more women into the labour market, including into management positions, would strengthen productivity growth.

## Women in Colombia: A snapshot of socio-demographic imbalances

The last census of the Colombian population, *Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda*, allows to obtain an up-to-date portrayal of the demographic structure of the country. Women represent 51% of the total Colombian population of working age, conventionally defined as the population between 15 and 65 years old. However, one key characteristic relates to the increasing longevity of women, as revealed by the fact that women today account for 56% of the total Colombian population aged 65 years and over and represent 53% of the total population starting from age 30 onward. The combination between these two indicators points to a process of “feminisation of ageing”, which will likely accelerate further in the next decades, further reinforcing the over-representation of women in the adult population, particularly the older population (ONU Mujeres/DANE/Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>).

The decomposition of the aggregate figures shows that the age structure of the Colombian population is very heterogeneous. It varies significantly across socio-economic groups, particularly between urban and rural areas. Irrespective of age group, women in rural areas account for almost half of the total population (about 48%, on average). Moreover, the population of rural women is more concentrated than the urban population in the younger age groups. At one extreme, the departments with the youngest female population are predominantly rural: Vaupés, where the median age of women is 22.4 years old, Vichada (23.5), Guainía (23.6), Amazonas (25.6) and La Guajira (26.9). At the other end of the spectrum, female populations highest in age are in the departments of Risaralda (with a median age of 37.0 years), Caldas (37.8) and Quindío (38.1), which are characterised by a higher urban population density. At 35.7 years old, the median age of the female population in Bogotá is somewhat higher than the national median (34.1). Overall, in Colombia the median age of the rural women’s population is about 31.3 years old, some three and a half years less than the corresponding figure in urban areas (34.9 years).

In all departments of Colombia, life expectancy is higher for women than it is for men. Yet, and again, the longevity of Colombian women is far from being uniformly distributed across departments. In the urban departments women’s life expectancy is much longer than in rural areas. For example, being born a woman in Bogotá, the department characterised by the highest level of longevity, means a life expectancy 15 years longer than in Vaupés, where it is the lowest.

As one mirror image of these differences, the age structure of the Colombian population also varies according to ethnicity. This reflects the fact that being born a woman (or a man) in a rural department often goes hand-in-hand with being born a woman (or a man) of ethnic origin. Accordingly, the women (and men) who self-identify as belonging to an ethnic group are on average younger than those who declare that they do not belong to any ethnic group population. For example, the youngest ethnic group comprises the individuals who self-identify themselves as belonging to the indigenous population, which makes for about 4.5% of the overall Colombian population.

The reasons behind the above strong demographic imbalances between urban and rural women in Colombia are multiple and complex (World Bank Group, 2019<sup>[11]</sup>). One major contributing factor is to be found in the fact that conditions of access to basic infrastructure, education and healthcare services are comparatively poorer in the rural areas, a situation further compounded by differences of access to land

property and land uses between men and women. Another concurring factor relates to the stronger prevalence of patriarchal social norms in these areas. Acting in combination, these forces explain the higher fertility of women in rural areas – particularly those belonging to ethnic groups – who more likely encounter obstacles in the exercise of sexual and reproductive rights.

One additional reason that stands out is Colombia's decades-long conflict, of which the worst effects have been suffered by the rural populations (World Bank Group, 2019<sup>[11]</sup>). According to the *Registro Único de Víctimas* (RUV, Single Register of Victims, which commenced in 1985), by the end of 2020 internal conflict and violence had resulted in a cumulative figure of more than 9 million people being victims of situations of violence. Out of this total, about 90% suffered forced displacement in 2020, with women accounting for about half of total victims of internal conflict and violence, as well as forced displacement (Unidad de víctimas, 2022<sup>[12]</sup>).

Since the sudden starting of massive immigration flows from neighbouring Venezuela, internal domestic and international migratory pressures have tended to overlap. The 2020 Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) highlights that, at the end of 2020, Colombia registered the highest number of displaced people globally, with the northeast regions on the border with Venezuela, the Pacific coast bordering Panama and the northwest, the areas most impacted by mass displacement (UNHCR, 2021<sup>[13]</sup>).

The data also reveals that the trend of internal domestic migration with respect to age is consistent with the international one. In both cases, recent movements concentrate on the ages of entry into the labour market, which also closely match closely reproductive ages. Similarly, there is a greater presence of children under 14, an outcome of family reunifications.

## Gender gaps in key economic outcomes

### Education

There is an extensive body of research focussing on the importance of education for individuals and society: individuals with higher levels of education typically have a higher probability of being employed, earning a higher income (OECD, 2019<sup>[14]</sup>) and being healthier (Conti, Heckman and Urzua, 2010<sup>[15]</sup>; Dávila-Cervantes and Agudelo-Botero, 2019<sup>[16]</sup>). At societal level, the return on the investment in education mainly reflects the enhanced contribution to aggregate productivity growth generated by a more educated labour force (Mincer, 1984<sup>[17]</sup>).

In the case of women, these benefits are even greater, reflecting the double effect of education on women's earning opportunities: On top of increasing skills, productivity and income opportunities (Woodhall, 1973<sup>[18]</sup>; Montenegro and Patrinos, 2014<sup>[19]</sup>) education contributes to reducing the gap in earning between men and women that is attributable to discrimination (Dougherty, 2005<sup>[20]</sup>). Additional gains materialise from the decrease of child mortality and unwanted pregnancies. Importantly, inter-generational redistribution will improve, since the increased education of mothers typically leads to an improvement in the health and educational outcomes of children, even after taking into account the father's education and household income (Schultz, 1993<sup>[21]</sup>). Furthermore, by making women feel more empowered to speak out to affirm their needs, rights and aspirations, higher returns of education increase their bargaining power within the household (Heath and Jayachandran, 2017<sup>[22]</sup>).

Evidence for Colombia corroborates these patterns by showing that the gender wage gap narrows as the level of women's education increases. Women with primary education earn 35% less than men with the same level of education, while women with tertiary education earn 19% less than their male peers (ONU Mujeres/DANE/Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>). National data also shows that there is a relation between educational level and birth control. At age 35, 28% of women with higher



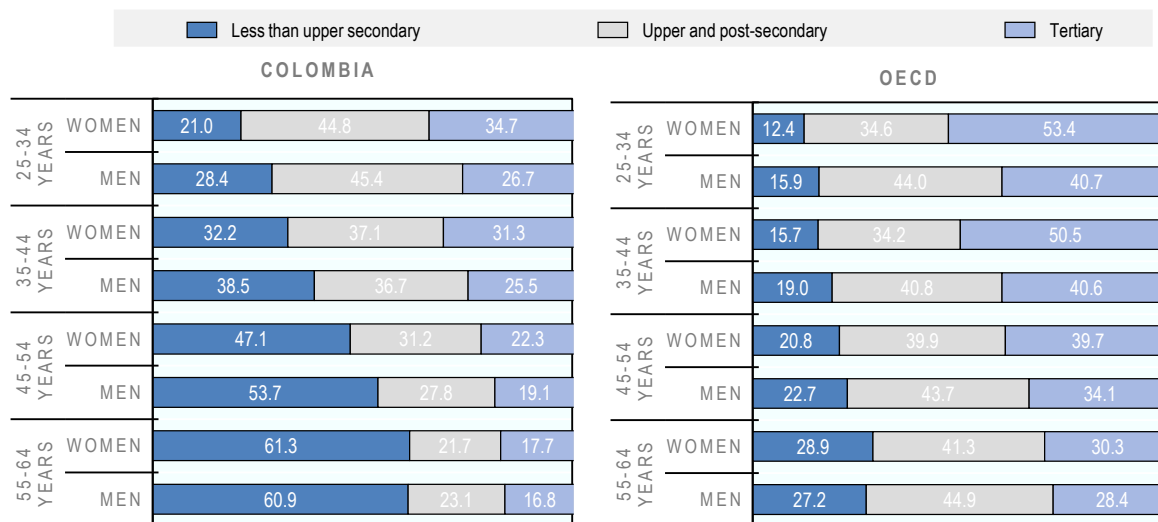
levels of education have not become mothers, compared to 14% of women with middle level education and 9% of those with lower levels of education (ONU Mujeres/DANE/Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>). This also suggests an inverse relation between motherhood and education achievements, namely being a mother at an early age reduces the chances to continue studying and obtaining a higher degree.

Following a pattern common to other countries in Latin America (OECD, 2021<sup>[23]</sup>), educational attainments in Colombia have improved strongly from one cohort to the next, with particularly large gains among women. In 2021, around 61% of men and women aged 55 to 64 years had less than an upper secondary degree (Figure 1.1). Among young adults who went to school three decades later, the same share drops to about 28% for men and 21% for women. Concomitantly, the share of high-school achievers (those having completed an upper and post-secondary education curriculum) increases by close to 22% among men and women. The share of tertiary graduates increases by 10% for men and 17% for women in the 25-34 age bracket, compared to the 55-64 age group.

As a result, young women have started to out-perform young men in terms of educational attainments. Among 25-34 year-olds, the share of tertiary graduates is higher for women than men (35% compared to 27%). Despite these gains, there remains significant scope for further improvements to close the gap with the average of the OECD countries, where the shares of women and men with tertiary education equal 53% and 41%, respectively, for the same age group.

**Figure 1.1. Women attain more tertiary degrees than men**

Percentage distribution of educational attainment by sex and age, 2021 or last year available



Note: The statistics are for 2021 for both Colombia and the OECD. For more information, please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under <https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/>.

Source: OECD Education at a Glance.

StatLink  <https://stat.link/bn4g2x>

In Colombia enrolment rates for both girls and boys in the age of primary education equals 93%, the outcome of years of significant progress toward achieving universal primary education. However, enrolment rates decline strongly with age regardless of gender, although at 48% the enrolment rate in upper secondary education is 10 percentage points higher for girls than boys (Figure 1.2). Colombia's

enrolment rates in upper secondary education are relatively low in the international comparison, both relative to the other Latin American countries and the OECD.

The factors that explain the inverse relation between age and enrolment rates in Colombia include the out-of-school activities that children perform. In Colombia, girls in the age bracket between 10 and 17 years old allocate three hours daily to household chores and care activities, compared to two hours for boys (ONU Mujeres/DANE/Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>). For the 15-17 year age group, the gap of caring time increases from one hour to about one-hour and a half daily, which suggests not only that the unequal distribution of non-remunerated activities reinforces with age, but also starts from an early age. Longitudinal survey analysis by the *Universidad de los Andes – ELCA, Encuesta Longitudinal Colombiana de la Universidad de los Andes* – finds that although the probability of helping at home is similar for boys and girls, the number of hours worked is higher for girls. Moreover, the extent of the gap in the time spent on household chores is wider in rural areas than urban areas (Universidad De Los Andes, 2018<sup>[24]</sup>).

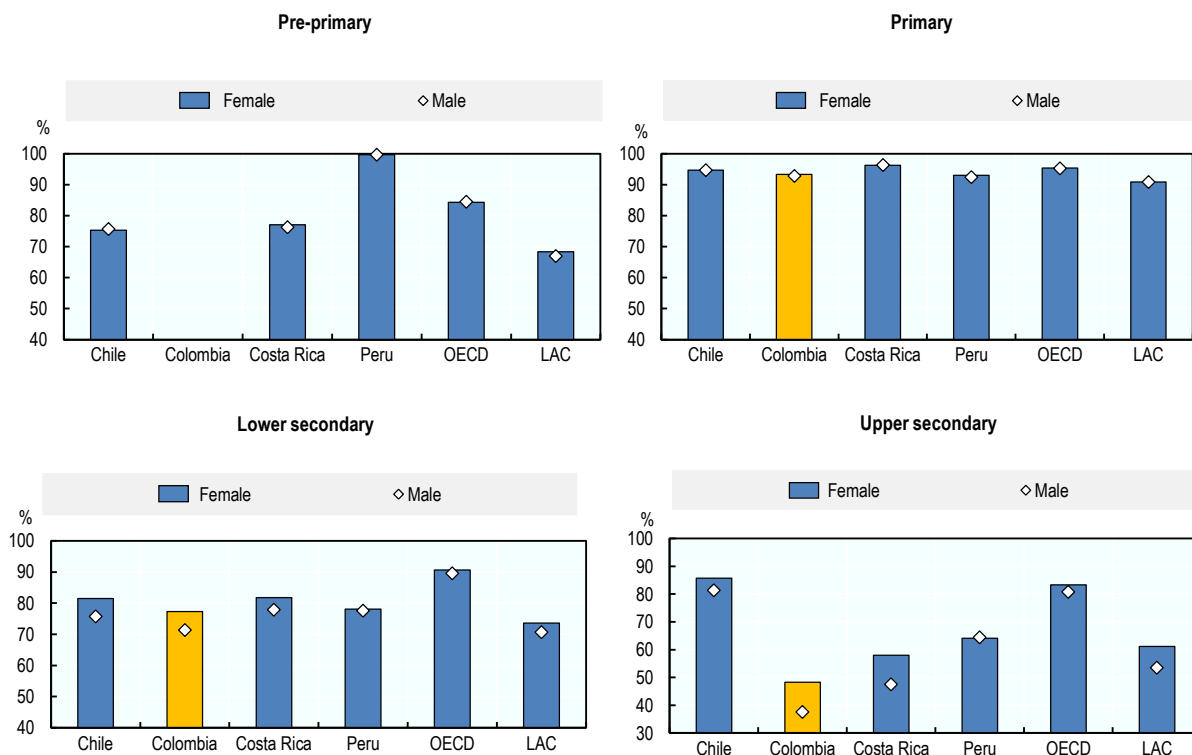
International analysis that also includes Colombia among the sample countries, confirms that, although school attendance declines for both girls and boys as the time spent on household chores increases, for girls it falls at a faster speed. Specifically, in the interval between 14 and 28 hours of domestic work per week, the fall of girls' school attendance ranges between 70% and 90%, whereas school attendance declines by half as much for boys (ILO, 2009<sup>[25]</sup>).

Furthermore, recent analysis of Colombia by the World Bank depicts the presence of a strong rural-urban divide (World Bank Group, 2019<sup>[11]</sup>). Namely, more than half of women between 13 and 24 years old do not attend any educational institution in rural areas, compared to around 37% of women in urban areas. Even when rural girls stay at school, education achievements tend to be sub-standard, especially in mathematics. A study based on 20 countries concluded that work after school, whether paid or unpaid work negatively affects maths scores of girls and boys, even when family resources and school effects are taken into account (Post and Pong, 2009<sup>[26]</sup>). This reflects the fact that working students tend to be clustered in low performing schools. Full-time students who are free of work obligations also attend similar schools but of a higher quality.

Teenage pregnancy plays an important role in explaining girls' premature departures from education. By age 18, one in six adolescents has had at least one child in Colombia, and three-quarters among 15-19 year-old mothers have already left the school system (ONU Mujeres/DANE/Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>). It should be mentioned that, although the figures for Colombia broadly aligns to the average of Latin America, the region taken as a whole is second only to the Sub-Saharan African region (PAHO, UNFPA and UNICEF, 2017<sup>[27]</sup>). Beyond the special care demands that come with the birth of a child, pregnant girls and teenage mothers are additionally restrained from continuing their studies because of discriminatory practices. Unlike girls and young women in Colombia's cities, those in rural areas are more likely to cite child pregnancy or marriage as the main reason for not attending school or a university programme (World Bank Group, 2019<sup>[11]</sup>). Four in ten young women living in rural areas are not in education, employment or training.

**Figure 1.2. Women are more frequently enrolled in upper secondary education than men, but far less than their peers in LAC and OECD countries**

Net enrolment rates, 2018 or latest



Note: Data for Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru refer to 2018, otherwise 2017 except primary Peru (2015). The Latin American average refers to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay where available. For more information please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under <https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/>.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database, "Net enrolment rate", <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>.

StatLink  <https://stat.link/hrujnk>

In Colombia, the rate of out-of-school children increases considerably with age and across education levels (Figure 1.3). In addition, the aggregate number masks important differences between ethnicities, income groups, and locations. For the group of 6 to 11-year-olds, for example, the rate of school attendance among children who belong to families that self-recognise themselves as indigenous is 74%, compared to 92% among children from families that do not belong to any ethnic group (based on the criterion of ethnic self-recognition). For the group of 12-18 year-olds, the rate falls to 55% for indigenous children, compared to 74% for other children. These patterns highlight the presence of a persistent gap – of approximately 20 percentage points – in school attendance between indigenous children and other children (Freire et al., 2015<sub>[28]</sub>).

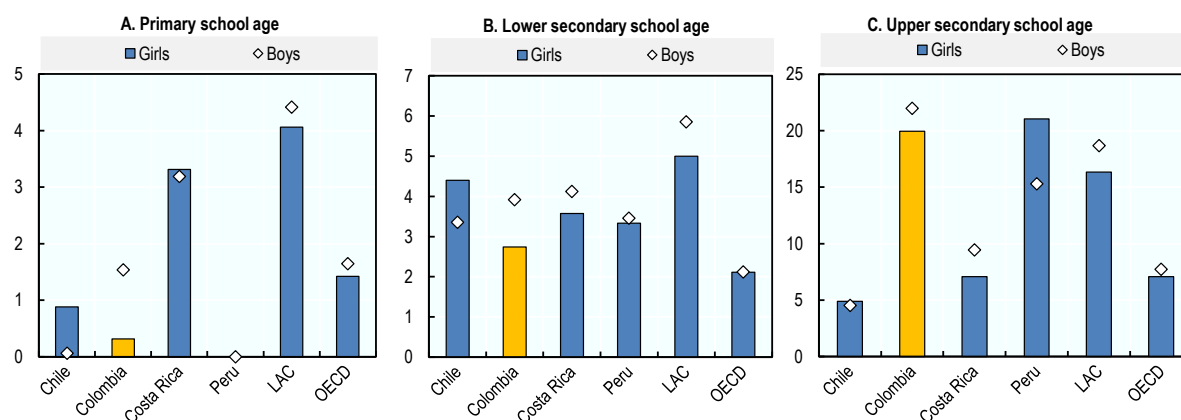
The percentage share of indigenous youth leaving education without completing upper secondary school approximates 45 points (World Bank, 2021<sub>[29]</sub>), almost twice the country's average. Rural children receive on average five and a half years of education, compared to more than 9 years for children from urban areas. In rural areas, the illiteracy rate among children over 15 years old exceeds 12%, which is almost four times higher than in the urban areas (3.3%) (USAID, 2020<sub>[30]</sub>).

The stark divide between the department of Guainía and the district of Bogotá illustrates well the importance of the interplay between, on the one hand, ethnicity and rurality, and, on the other hand,

education achievements. Guainía, whose population is largely rural and from indigenous communities (about 10% of the total), has a drop-out rate ten times higher than that of Bogota, whose population is mainly urban, while the indigenous population counts for a fairly small proportion of the total population (approximately 2%) (LEE, 2020<sup>[31]</sup>). Frequently reported reasons why children in Guainía drop out of school include language differences, a particularly important barrier among children of indigenous communities, and lack of security, the latter being particularly important in neighbourhoods controlled by gangs. In addition, the rural areas appear penalised by problems of long commuting, the lack of infrastructure and/or quality support programmes targeting the families but also, in a number of cases, the lack of parental support (Universidad De Los Andes, 2018<sup>[24]</sup>).


**Figure 1.3. The out-of-school rate is lower for girls than boys across age groups, but it increases significantly with school age**

Rate of out-of-school children by age group (% of children in age group), 2019/20 or latest available



Note: The Latin American average refers to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay where available. For more information please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under <https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/>.

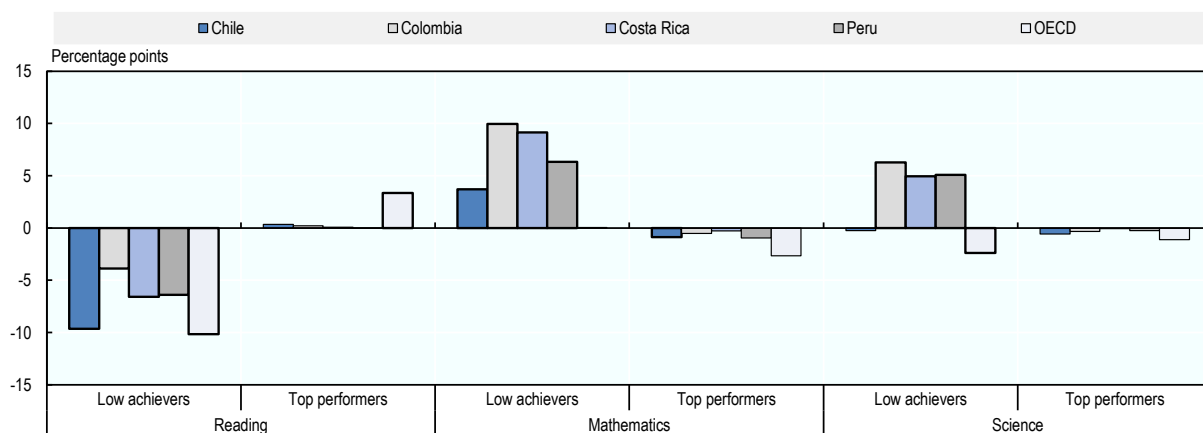
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database, <http://data.uis.unesco.org>.

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The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) allows to draw a gendered perspective of education achievements of teenagers. In Colombia, there are more boys than girls among "low achievers", in the subject of reading (Figure 1.4). Conversely, girls are more numerous among maths and science "low achievers". These results broadly align with the evidence of the Latin American and OECD countries, although in Colombia the gender gap in mathematics and science is much wider (OECD, 2018<sup>[32]</sup>).


## Figure 1.4. There are gender differences in the share of low, but not of top, performers in the PISA study in Colombia

Difference in the share of low achievers and top performers by subject (girls – boys), 2018



Note: For more information please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under <https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/>.

Source: OECD (2019)<sup>[33]</sup>, “Annex B1.7 Results (tables): Girls’ and boys’ performance in PISA” in *PISA 2018 Results (Volume II): Where All Students Can Succeed*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b5fd1b8f-en>.

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Specific work on Colombia, using information derived from the national test Saber 11, underscores the presence of a statistically significant gender gap, which reflects boys’ higher global scores in math, and science (Abadía and Bernal, 2017<sup>[34]</sup>). In addition, sizeable gaps between boys and girls are observed among students with higher scores. Although girls score slightly higher than boys in reading, the difference diminishes along the distribution, which implies that it favours boys in the uppermost quintile (top 20%).

The regional decomposition of gender gaps reveals that girls have lower global scores in every region, with Arauca, Quindío, Caldas, Meta, and Bogotá the five regions with the largest gaps. Likewise, in regions where the advantage of girls in reading is comparatively less pronounced, the disadvantages of girls in math and science girls are most pronounced. The same work finds the presence of persistent academic gaps between boys and girls even after adjusting for observable personal, family, and school characteristics. This points, in turn, to the relevant role that unobserved factors play in explaining the gender academic gap, particularly the impact of pervasive attitudes and gendered differences within Colombian society.

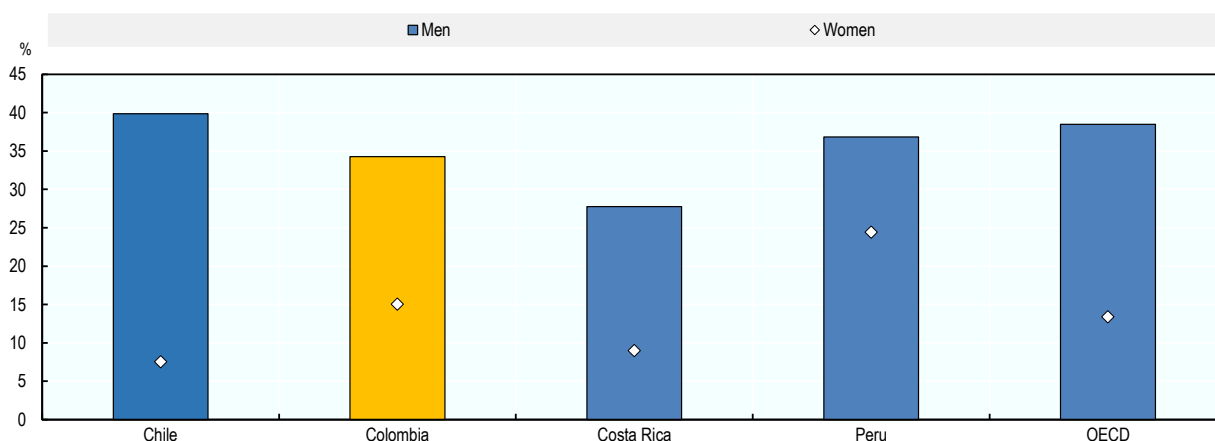
Knowledge and proficiency gaps are relevant predictors of later education and occupation choices. For example, the evidence of a lower academic performance of girls in subjects such as science and math, using the international PISA test and the national test Saber 11, suggests that girls will continue experiencing limited access to higher education in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines. Gender gaps in STEM areas represent a worldwide problem, despite these disciplines generating higher returns to education and higher employability levels. In Colombia, the available figures show that the share of male graduates in STEM subjects exceeds the corresponding share of female graduates by about 19 percentage points, which is somewhat lower than the average of OECD countries (25 percentage points). In comparison with regional countries, the extent of the gender gap in STEM disciplines is significantly smaller than in Chile, albeit much larger than, for example, Peru (Figure 1.5).

An analysis of gender gaps in Colombia's higher education programmes in engineering shows that little more than one-third (36%) of all students holding an undergraduate certificate in this field of studies were women in 2018 (Hamid Betancur and Torres-Madronero, 2021<sup>[35]</sup>). A similar percentage is observable for master and doctoral programmes, with the evidence available also pointing to little progress since 2001. The gender gap in engineering is found to be wider in some areas, such as Bogotá, for example, although it varies depending upon the specific field of specialisation. For example, women represent more than 50% of students in programmes such as administrative, environmental, biomedical, chemical, agro-industrial, food, and industrial engineering. By contrast, they are drastically underrepresented in careers such as mechanics, electricity, electronics, and telecommunications, where they are less than 20%. The authors conclude that wide differences in representation harm the policies to promote "Industry 4.0" sectors, which encompass the transformative activities of the future and have a strong accent on competencies in interconnectivity, automation, machine learning, and real-time data.

Several factors explain observed performance differences between girls and boys in quantitative subjects, and the weak orientation of women towards STEM occupations. Some refer to the influence of entrenched biases in attitudes and beliefs about the roles that men and women play in Colombian society, particularly given the fact that, for a start, score differences in maths tests are negligible among small children (Kahn and Ginther, 2018<sup>[36]</sup>). Reflecting these biases, Colombian girls start developing a perception that scientific careers are a prerogative of boys from an early age, which tilts their preferences towards academic disciplines in the sphere of humanities (Nollenberger, Rodríguez-Planas and Sevilla, 2016<sup>[37]</sup>). Chapter 2 discusses how gender-sensitive education can help to reduce the influence of gender stereotypes in education.

**Figure 1.5. Women in Colombia are under-represented among STEM graduates, with a gender gap similar to the OECD**

Share of graduates in STEM subjects (% graduates of same gender), 2020 or last year available



Note: All tertiary levels combined. STEM subjects include natural sciences, mathematics, statistics, information and communication technologies, engineering, manufacturing and construction. For more information please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under <https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/>.

Source: *OECD Education at a Glance* and for Peru (2017): UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database (UNESCO Institute for Statistics).

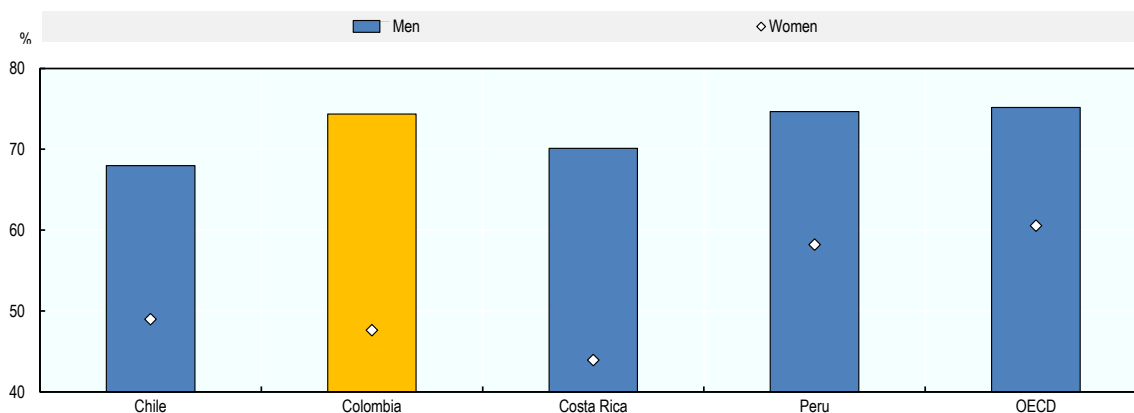
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## Employment

In Colombia, 48% of women of working age (15-64 years old) were employed in 2021, compared to 74% of men (Figure 1.6). The resulting employment gender gap of 26 percentage points is similar to that of Costa Rica, although higher than seen in Chile and Peru. It also exceeds the OECD average by 12 percentage points.

**Figure 1.6. The employment rate of women is significantly lower than that of men**

Employment-to-population ratio (% 15-64 year-olds), 2021 or latest available



Note: Data for Peru refer to 2020. For more information please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under <https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/>.

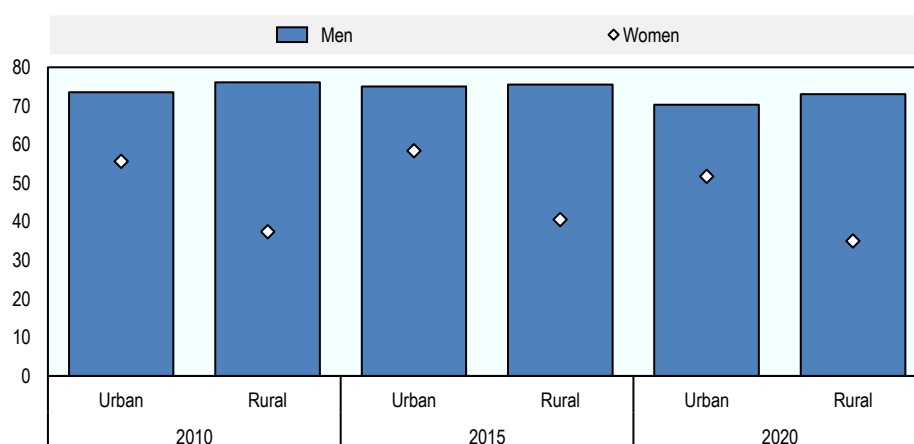
Source: OECD Employment Database, <https://www.oecd.org/employment/emp/onlineoecdemploymentdatabase.htm>, and ILOSTAT, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/>.

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Available analysis highlights the presence of considerable variations by socio-economic groups. For example, recent work by the *Gender, Justice and Security Hub* finds that the gender gap in labour force participation varies depending upon the level of education (The Gender, Justice and Security Hub, 2020<sup>[38]</sup>). Women with a high level of education have a participation rate 7 percentage points lower than men with the same level of education. When measured at primary and secondary levels, the gap in participation widens significantly to 33 and 20 percentage points, respectively. These differences reflect the fact that at lower levels of education women are more likely to be employed in the informal labour market. The same analysis shows that participation is lower for individuals from poor households and particularly women. In the lowest decile of income, men's participation rate is 60%, while women's participation rate is 41%.

These patterns have a strong regional connotation. During the 2010s, the share of women of working age who lived in urban areas and participated in the labour market ranged from between 56% (2010) and 58% (2015), before declining to 52% in 2020 (reflecting the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, see Figure 1.7). Over the same period, the figures for the rural areas were 37% (2010), 41% (2015) and 35% (2020). By contrast, participation rates were significantly more stable for men in both rural and urban areas, and persistently above 70%. In some rural areas, the gender gap in labour force participation is more than twice the level of the urban centres. For example, in Caldas, Caqueta and Huila, the gap measures 29%, more than twice the level in Bogota (13%) (ONU Mujeres/DANE/Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>). Sizeable regional differences in participation mirror, in turn, existing regional differences in educational outcomes.

Figure 1.7. Labour force participation of men and women in rural and urban areas



Source. DANE; Gran Encuesta Integrada de Hogares (GEIH) 2010, 2015, 2020. Consultada en marzo 2022. <https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/mercado-laboral/segun-sexo/mercado-laboral-historicos>.

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As elsewhere in the world, one important factor that pushes many women in Colombia to withdraw (at least temporarily) from the labour force is motherhood. Figures provided by the national statistical office suggest a negative correlation between number of children and the employment rate of women. While 74% of women with no children are employed, the rate falls to 72% of women with one child, to 70% of those with two children, and 65% for women with three or more children. In rural areas, the employment rate of women with one or more child is 18 percentage points lower than observed for women without children (ONU Mujeres/DANE/Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>).

Recent cross country assessment of the links between motherhood and the labour market outcomes in four Latin American countries – Chile, Mexico, Peru and Honduras – finds that motherhood lowers women's labour supply, while at the same time shifting occupational choices towards more flexible jobs, such as part-time jobs, self-employment, and informal work arrangements (Berniell et al., 2021<sup>[39]</sup>). The authors underline that, although these effects occur right after childbirth, they tend to persist in the medium and longer term. Given that fathers' labour outcomes remain unaffected, these findings reveal that motherhood triggers the polarisation of labour markets, with higher quality jobs more likely to be a prerogative of men while women are more likely to work in low quality occupations.

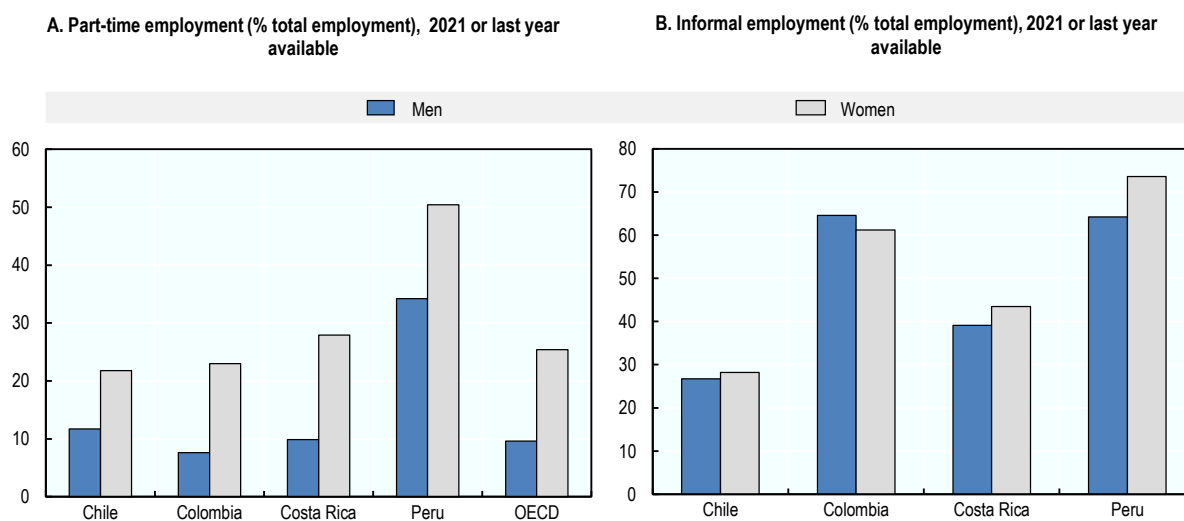
Mirroring the impact on employment rates, motherhood negatively affects women's wages. A study shows that mothers in Latin America earn on average 13% less than women with no children. Such a difference widens to 21% when the children are under the age of five. Each additional child translates into an increase of the probability to experience a loss in wage (Botello, H. A., & López Alba, A, 2014<sup>[40]</sup>).

Analysis for Colombia has focussed on the effects on the labour participation of young mothers induced by two subsequent rounds of legislative changes to extend maternity leave (Uribe, Vargas and Bustamante, 2019<sup>[41]</sup>; Mojica Urueña et al., 2021<sup>[42]</sup>). The first regulatory change, which dates back to 2011, brought the leave period from 12 to 14 weeks, while the second, introduced in 2017, extended the leave further, from 14 to 18 weeks. This analysis finds that, while welcome, the extensions of the maternity leave have also had unintended effects on female labour participation by exacerbating the risk of young women of childbearing age to become inactive, or else become self-employed, or even transiting to a job in the informal sector. According to the authors these unintentional outcomes highlight the need for accompanying awareness raising actions to tackle the cultural perceptions on parenting and measures to support the uptake of parental leave by fathers. Chapter 2 of this report includes a detailed discussion of these policies.




As noted above, when they are employed women are more likely to be hired in low quality jobs, for example, part-time employment is relatively more widespread among women than men (Figure 1.8). Like other countries in the region and the OECD average, about two in ten women who are employed in Colombia work part-time – compared to one in ten for men. Additionally, many Colombian women work informally. For the working population, the share of informal workers equals about 65% for both men and women. In rural areas the share of informal workers is 82%, which is close to 30 percentage points higher than in the urban areas (53%) (ONU Mujeres/DANE/Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>). Such conditions expose women to particularly high risks of vulnerability, as the shocks brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, for example.

**Figure 1.8. A higher share of female employees in Colombia work part-time**



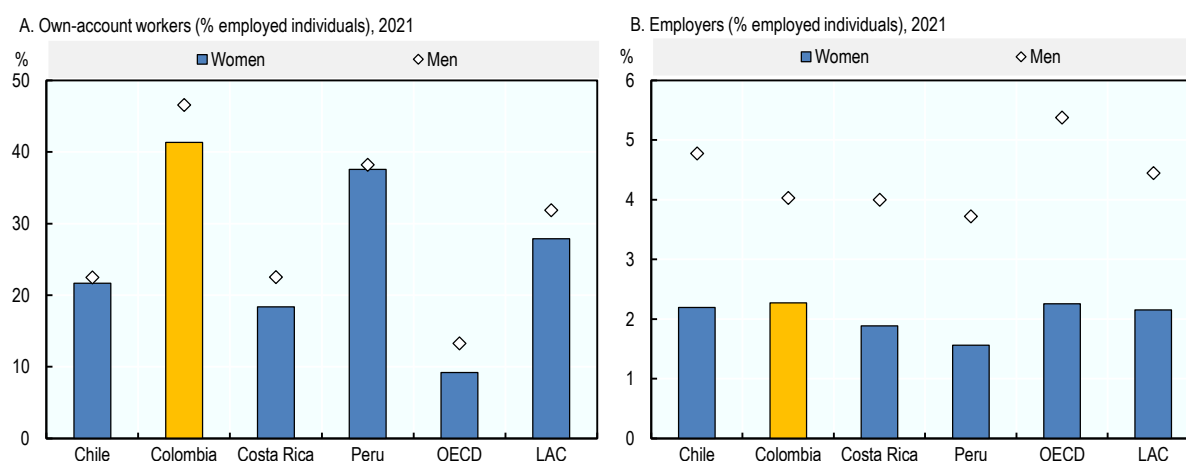
Note: Panel A: Data for Peru refer to 2020. For more information please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under <https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/>.

Source: Panel A: OECD Employment Database, <https://www.oecd.org/employment/emp/onlineoecdemploymentdatabase.htm>, and Panel B: ILO Stat (SDG indicator 8.3.1 – Proportion of informal employment in total employment by sex and sector (%), <https://ilostat.ilo.org>.

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Micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs) represent an important part of the Colombian economy. In 2017, MSMEs generated 80% of employment, represented 90% of the country's business sector and contributed 40% of GDP (OECD, 2019<sup>[43]</sup>). In Colombia, the share of own-account workers is significantly higher than the regional average both among women and men – by as many as 14 percentage points. However, as in many countries around the world, the rate of own-account workers is lower for women than for men – although, at 5 percentage points, the difference is not out of line with the average of Latin American countries (Figure 1.9).

Figure 1.9. A smaller share of female workers are employers



Note: The Latin American region average refers to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay where available. For more information please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under <https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/>.

Source: ILO Stat Employment by sex and status in employment – ILO modelled estimates, November 2022.

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The Women's Advancement Outcome of the Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs provides a metric indicator of women's economic progress, obtained after weighting various positions as business leaders, professionals, entrepreneurs and labour force participants, across a sample of 65 economies. The latest assessment ranks Colombia second in the indicator (Mastercard, 2022<sup>[44]</sup>). Meanwhile, successive Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) reports have praised Colombia for its population's positive attitude towards entrepreneurship and the level of confidence that Colombians show in their abilities to start and run a business (Stevenson, Varela and Moreno, 2013<sup>[45]</sup>; Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2019<sup>[46]</sup>).

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor regularly produces a Total Early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) indicator, which measures the percentage share of the adult population (18 to 64 years) in the process of starting (or who have just started) a business. In 2022, the Colombian TEA declined significantly from the previous year, a change largely attributable to the lagging effect of COVID-19 on Colombia's new entrepreneurial activities. Nevertheless, Colombia's women-to-men ratio of the TEA continues to exceed 80%, corresponding to the 16th highest among the 50 economies that participated in the review, and the 4th highest in the group of economies with similar levels of GDP per capita that comprises Colombia (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2022<sup>[47]</sup>).

Although Panel A of Figure 1.9 does not show a significant gender gap for the group of own-account workers, Panel B reveals that male own-account workers employ twice more than female own-account workers. The explanation behind this is to be found in the fact that women's businesses are more likely to be informal and to take the judicial form of natural persons whose businesses are individually-owned, rather than having a corporate structure. These microenterprises are often created out of necessity and remain carried out individually, offering limited opportunities for further job creation.

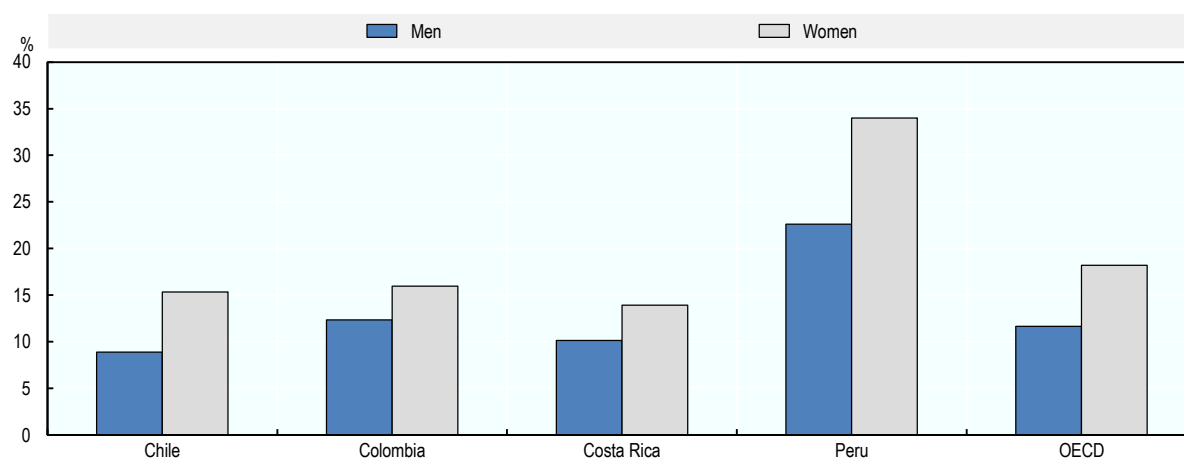
The factors that typically trigger the creation of a small business may be less prevalent or accessible to women's small businesses. These include the lack of access to external resources, such as free labour from family members, and to networks. For Colombia, work on women's businesses in Bucaramanga finds that successful male entrepreneurs are far more likely than women to mention the support provided by the family as a key factor of success (Powers and Magnoni, 2013<sup>[48]</sup>).

The drivers of a small business also reflect personal characteristics and motivations, such as the opportunity to organise working times more flexibly, or the capacity to respond to a new entrepreneurial opportunity, rather than out of necessity. A recent survey among entrepreneurs of Pacific Alliance countries, which also reviewed Colombia, enquired about the motivations of these entrepreneurs to create their own business. The answer “more flexible hours” received the highest score among women. By contrast, the answer “I developed a product or service” gathered the fewest female responses and the most male responses. Additionally, the survey results show that women’s businesses are over-represented in sectors such as domestic services (69%) and under-represented in sectors such as financial services (12%) (OEAP, 2018<sup>[49]</sup>). Women’s businesses grow more slowly in terms of assets than men’s and tend to concentrate in the least profitable sectors.

Women’s employment in Colombia is higher in activities that are generally associated with relatively low labour earnings. Analysis carried out by the *Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística* (DANE, Colombian National Statistical Office) finds that in 2019, two branches combined accounted for 65.1% of employed women and 34.5% of employed men, respectively: i) Commerce, hotels, restaurants and ii) Social and personal communal services (Daniel et al., 2020<sup>[50]</sup>). Labour market segregation by gender is persistent, i.e. observable both horizontally (across areas of activity in which women appear to be over-represented) and vertically (in terms of occupational position and lack of access to managerial positions). At the same time, women are over-represented in positions as domestic workers (94.1%) and unpaid family workers (63.3%). These figures are reflected in the gender distribution of earning patterns, which shows that in Colombia, women working full time are around 1.3 times more likely than men to earn less than two-thirds of the median wage (Figure 1.10).

**Figure 1.10. In Colombia, as elsewhere, women are more likely to be low paid**

Share of full-time workers earning less than two-thirds of the median wage, 2021 or latest year available



Note: Data refer to 2020 for Chile, 2018 for Peru, otherwise 2021. For more information please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under <https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/>.

Source: OECD LFS – Decile ratios of gross earnings – Incidence of low pay, and own calculations based on the 2018 annual ENAHO (INE, 2019).

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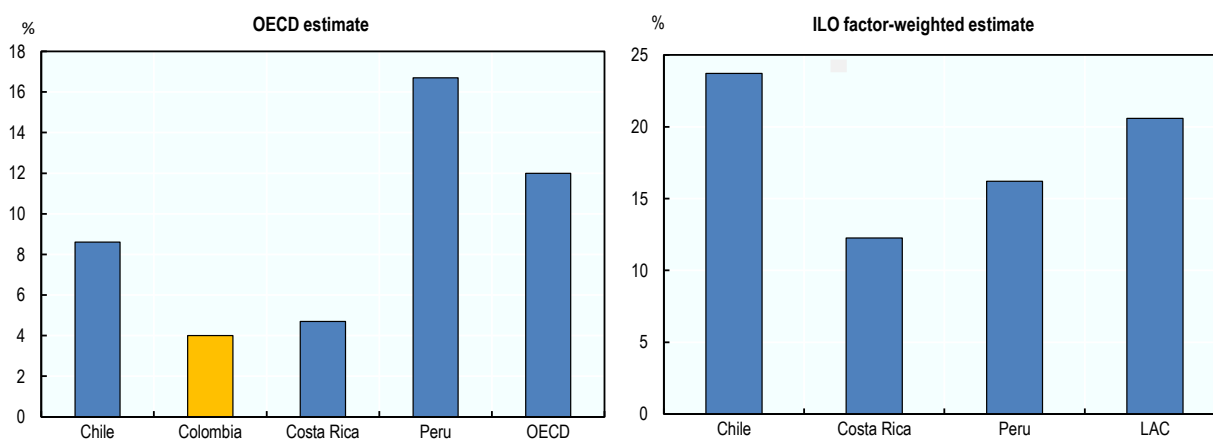
Using figures of the median monthly wages of men and women working full time, women in Colombia earn 4% less than men, which makes for a relatively low gap in comparison with other countries in the Latin America region: Chile (8.6%), Costa Rica (4.7%), and Peru (16.7%) (Figure 1.11). It is also three times lower than that of the OECD average (12%). However, Colombia’s gender wage gap should be interpreted

with caution due to the presence of selection effects around the type (and number) of women who enter and remain in work, which may create a bias towards a relatively low aggregate gap (OECD, 2017<sup>[51]</sup>). In addition, the choice of the focus on full-time employees entails trade-offs. While it allows to concentrate on a relatively homogenous sub-sample of workers, only 39% of the population and 38% of employed women work in these conditions in Colombia (Daniel et al., 2020<sup>[50]</sup>).

More granular analysis of gender wage differences across groups of the Colombian population by the DANE suggests that the size of the gap affects certain groups of women more than others (Daniel et al., 2020<sup>[50]</sup>). For example, the level of the gender wage gap is significantly higher in rural areas, among women with children and women who identify as indigenous. Self-employed women and women employed in the informal sector also experience a relatively sizeable wage gap. With regards to sectors of activity, wage gaps in favour of men tend to be wider in the sectors characterised by the highest incidence of female labour, as is the case in service sectors (community services, social and personal, tourism and commerce, hotels and restaurants). Gaps are also observable at all levels of responsibilities, including managerial ones, although less so among the population working 40 or more hours, in the more highly masculinised branches of activity and in the higher income centile (Daniel et al., 2020<sup>[50]</sup>).

**Figure 1.11. Using the OECD definition, the gender pay gap in Colombia is rather low**

Gender pay gap, 2020 or latest year available



Note: The OECD pay gap is equal to the difference in the median monthly wages of male and female full-time employees. The ILO factor-adjusted pay gap is based on hourly wages and includes both part- and full-time dependent workers. It is equal to a population-size weighted sum of the gender pay gap for different subgroups defined by four education and age groups each, full- and part-time work status and private versus public sector employment. For more information please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under <https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/>.

Source: "Gender wage gap", OECD Employment Database, <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54751>; own calculations based on the INE (2019), Encuesta Nacional de Hogares; and ILO (2018), Global Wage Report 2018/19: What lies behind gender pay gaps.

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## Drivers of gender gaps in outcomes

Various economic theories explain the underlying causes of gender gaps in economic outcomes. Those that put the accent on human capital factors emphasise the characteristics of the workers and their jobs, particularly the level of education, work experience and skills required to fulfil specific tasks and responsibilities. However, human capital characteristics will hardly be enough to capture the wide range of factors explaining gender gaps, if left alone. As highlighted in the previous sections, although education certainly represents an important factor in explaining female employment outcomes, there are also other

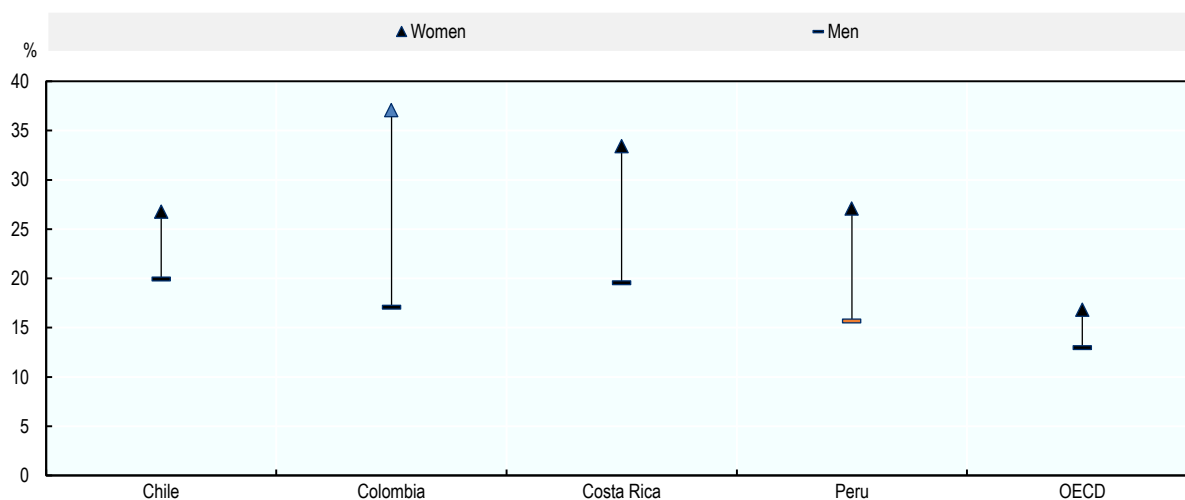
drivers at play, which relate more intrinsically to the fact of being a woman (Bertrand, 2020<sup>[52]</sup>; Ciminelli and Schwellnus, 2021<sup>[53]</sup>). For example, despite important educational gains, women continue to make educational choices likely to result in lower labour market earnings than men. One practical proof of this is the under-representation of women in STEM disciplines. As another example, motherhood can lead women to change labour market decisions in ways that permanently alter careers and undermine earning prospects. In addition, the launch of a new business activity by a woman often happens out of necessity, rather than being triggered by an innovative entrepreneurial opportunity with a potential to expand. Much of these patterns in choices, preferences and opportunities are endogenous to the presence of sticky stereotypes about gender-specific roles, skills, and professions.

Furthermore, the typical disadvantages that stand in the way of acquiring the skills needed to find a quality job that translates into higher earnings prospects in the formal sector are intersectional. In other words, they interact with other risk factors, such as being at a young age, living in a rural area, coming from a poor household, or belonging to an indigenous population group. Although girls and boys share the latter risks and disadvantages equally at birth, it is obvious that any additional barriers to entry that girls and women face, first into education and later into the labour market, will be particularly distortive to outcomes. In the presence of gender stereotypes women have much more to lose from the exposure to other important and pre-existing hurdles than men have.

Figure 1.12 provides an aggregate illustration of the outcomes of these complex interactions between sources of pressure. It does so by depicting the international comparison of the rates of the youth Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs) as a percentage of the youth population. At 17.1% and 37.1%, respectively for young men and women, in Colombia NEETs rates are significantly higher than observed in the regional comparator countries and the OECD average for both groups. In addition, the extent of the gap between women and men is significantly wider. Young women are 2.2 times more likely to be NEETs than young men are, which is close to 70% higher than the OECD-wide average (1.3 times) and larger than the gaps observed in Chile, Costa Rica and Peru.

### Figure 1.12. Women are much more likely to be NEETs than men

Share of population unemployed or inactive (NEET) among 15-29 years, 2021 or last year available



Note: Data refer to 2021 except for Chile 2020 and Peru 2017.

Source: Data for Peru refer to Encuesta Nacional de Hogares (ENAH) otherwise OECD Database on Transition from school to work [https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=EAG\\_TRANS](https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=EAG_TRANS).

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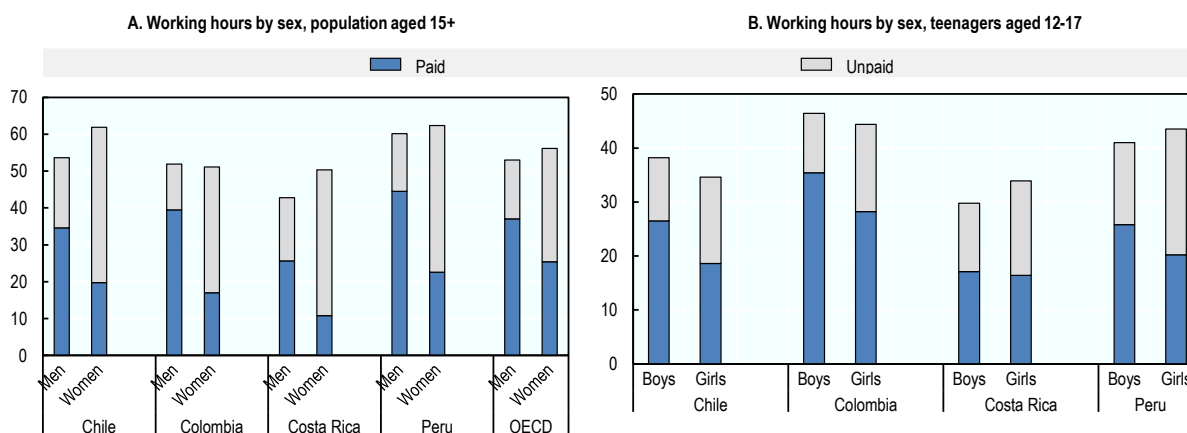
The reasons that explain this situation are multiple. They trace back to the traditional gender-related assignment of roles, whereby women do most of the unpaid domestic work, alongside caring for children and other family members. Another reason may reflect the influence of inherited cultural factors, gender stereotypes and attitudes and their interplay in influencing preferences and actual behaviours differently. Another relates to the role that laws and institutions play in reinforcing these interactions, such as inequalities of access to the property and uses of land, for example. Finally, access to the infrastructure also matters, with the availability of quality care facilities and the supporting physical infrastructure representing one example. The reminder of this section provides a review of these forces, which complement the role that human capital factors play in shaping gender economic outcomes.

### Unpaid work

One key explanation of the lower labour force participation and higher part-time employment rate of women is the higher number of hours that they spend on unpaid care and housework activities. Women in Colombia spend 22 more hours per week performing these tasks than men do, just below Chile (23 hours), Costa Rica (23 hours) and Peru (24 hours), although significantly above the average of OECD countries (15 hours) (Figure 1.13, Panel A). At the same time, Colombian men devote 23 more hours to paid work activities per week than women do, which makes for a sizeable gap, both compared with Chile and Costa Rica (15 hours in both countries) and the OECD average (12 hours).

Girls do more unpaid work, and boys more paid work, when teenagers (Figure 1.13, Panel B). On average, girls in Colombia spend 5 hours per week more on unpaid work than boys, time essentially dedicated to household chores. Conversely, boys spend 7 hours per week more than girls on paid work. As discussed above, unpaid work jeopardises school attendance and learning, prompting the poorer educational outcomes of girls. In addition, a biased configuration of responsibilities earlier on influences future roles in households.

**Figure 1.13. Women and girls in Colombia carry out more hours of unpaid work than men and boys**



Note: Panel A: Data for LAC countries refer to population aged 15+. Given that the survey instruments of the time use surveys are not identical across countries, more attention should be paid to intra- than to cross-country comparisons. The reference year is 2017 Colombia and Costa Rica, 2015 for Chile, 2010 for Peru and around 2014 for the non-weighted OECD cross-country average. The OECD average refers to the entire population aged 15-64 and is calculated by multiplying daily time use values by seven. Panel B: The Colombian average for teenagers refers to 10-17 year-olds. For more information please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under <https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/>.

Source: Panel A: OECD Time Use Dataset (February 2023) and ECLAC CEPALSTAT Gender Statistical System (Working Time by type of work); Panel B: ECLAC (2018), Los cuidados en América Latina y el Caribe.

The *Encuesta Nacional de Uso del Tiempo* (ENUT, National Survey of the Use of Time) carried out regularly by the DANE, provides information on the time spent by the population aged 10 and over in paid and unpaid work activities. During the period from September 2020 to August 2021, 53.3% of men participated in paid working activities that are classified under the system of national accounts (SNA), while only 29.9% of women participated in these activities (DANE, 2021<sup>[54]</sup>). With regards to the participation in unpaid work activities, which are not included in the SNA, the share of women is 90.4%, compared to 63.4% of men. The comparison with the previous survey (2016-17) suggests that values have remained fairly stable over time.

The paid and unpaid work distribution generally starts diverging with parenthood. This also happens in countries where egalitarian attitudes are more prevalent and where there are small or no gaps in the labour market outcomes of young men and women. The decision of new mothers to stay at home after giving birth may become permanent thereafter if it results in a significant alteration of the allocation of work responsibilities within the couple. The extent of this shift will depend upon the attitudes of parents (also see the following section) and their relative labour income (Schober, 2011<sup>[55]</sup>; Sanchez and Thomson, 1997<sup>[56]</sup>). The ENUT survey shows that the average daily time spent on unpaid work activities is 10 hours and 47 minutes, and 9 hours and 51 minutes among Colombian women in the 30 to 39, and 18 to 29 age brackets, respectively (DANE, 2021<sup>[54]</sup>).

In Colombia, 46.6% of families with at least one child under 15 years old register one partner who works full-time and the other who does not work for pay (Table 1.1, Panel A). This is far higher than the OECD average (25.8%), which, conversely, registers higher shares of couples with both parents working full-time, or one parent working full-time and the other part-time. The reasons behind this imbalance can be practical, if, for example, a mother is still breast-feeding or has children who cannot benefit from childcare services outside the family circle. However, it often reflects cultural attitudes, according to which care and housework duties are “women’s prerogatives”. Financial considerations often compound the influence of these factors even further, particularly the anticipation of the fact that the woman would earn significantly less than the man.

One out of four single parents do not work in Colombia (Table 1.1, Panel B). Although this is close to the OECD average, the proportion of female-headed households – notably single-parent households – has increased particularly rapidly in the past decades in Colombia. While in 1990, women headed 22.8% of households, this share rose to 40.7% in 2018 (ONU Mujeres/DANE/Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>).

**Table 1.1. In almost half of families with children in Colombia, one partner does not work**

A. Distribution (%) of employment patterns in couples with at least one child aged 0-14					
	Both partners full-time	One partner full-time, one partner part-time	One partner full-time, one partner not working	Both partners not working	Other
Chile	39.0	9.6	44.5	3.0	3.9
Colombia	31.8	15.4	46.6	2.6	3.6
Costa Rica	21.1	12.7	36.4	1.2	28.6
Peru	35.2	32.0	22.8	1.2	8.7
OECD average	45.6	16.9	25.8	3.4	8.3
B. Distribution (%) of single parents with at least one child aged 0-14 by employment status					
	Working full-time	Working part-time	Working – no information on hours	Not working	
Chile	57.2	13.5	0.1	29.3	
Colombia	58.8	15.4		25.8	
Costa Rica	44.2	21.1		34.7	
Peru	64.7	24.8		10.5	
OECD average	57.3	15.5	1.4	26.4	

Note: Data for Chile refer to 2017 and for Peru to 2018. For Chile, the distinction between part-time and full-time work is based on actual hours worked in the main job during the survey reference week, rather than usual weekly working hours. For Peru, working hours were imputed when responses were missing. For Colombia and Costa Rica data refer to the employment status of the two parents in “two parent households” or “couple families” with at least one child aged 0-14, rather than to couples themselves. For Costa Rica data cover households where at least one child (aged 0-14) shares a relationship with the reported “head of household” only. For more information please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under <https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/>.

Source: “LMF2.2 Patterns of employment and the distribution of working hours for couples with children” and “LMF2.3 Patterns of employment and the distribution of working hours for single parents”, OECD Family Database, <http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm>, accessed on February 2023; and own estimations based on the INE (2019), Encuesta Nacional de Hogares.

### ***Stereotypes and attitudes to gender equality***

Gender stereotypes can influence female employment in multiple ways. Women who believe that their role is in the home will likely feel less inclined to seek outside employment (Christiansen et al., 2016<sup>[57]</sup>). This supply effect often appears compounded by the attitude of partners, if they not only hold the same view but also believe that it is their right to impose it on the spouse. Restrictive masculinities, such as that “real” men should be the breadwinner and earn more than the woman, can contribute to the exclusion of women from better quality positions that are more highly paid (OECD, 2021<sup>[58]</sup>). In addition, views about gender roles in the labour market can also influence the demand for female jobs: employers who believe that certain jobs should go to men, as a priority, are less likely to hire women or pay them the same wage. In countries where more men than women believe that scarce jobs should go to men first, the gender pay gap tends to be larger (Fortin, 2005<sup>[59]</sup>). On the other hand, the expansion of women’s employment will likely have feedback effects on gender attitudes, improving them over time (Seguino, 2007<sup>[60]</sup>).

The evidence available suggests that the traditional male breadwinner *vis-a-vis* female homemaker divide is still common in Colombia, contributing to perpetuating existing attitudes and stereotypes. For several years, the World Value Survey has analysed these attitudes by comparing international feedback on:

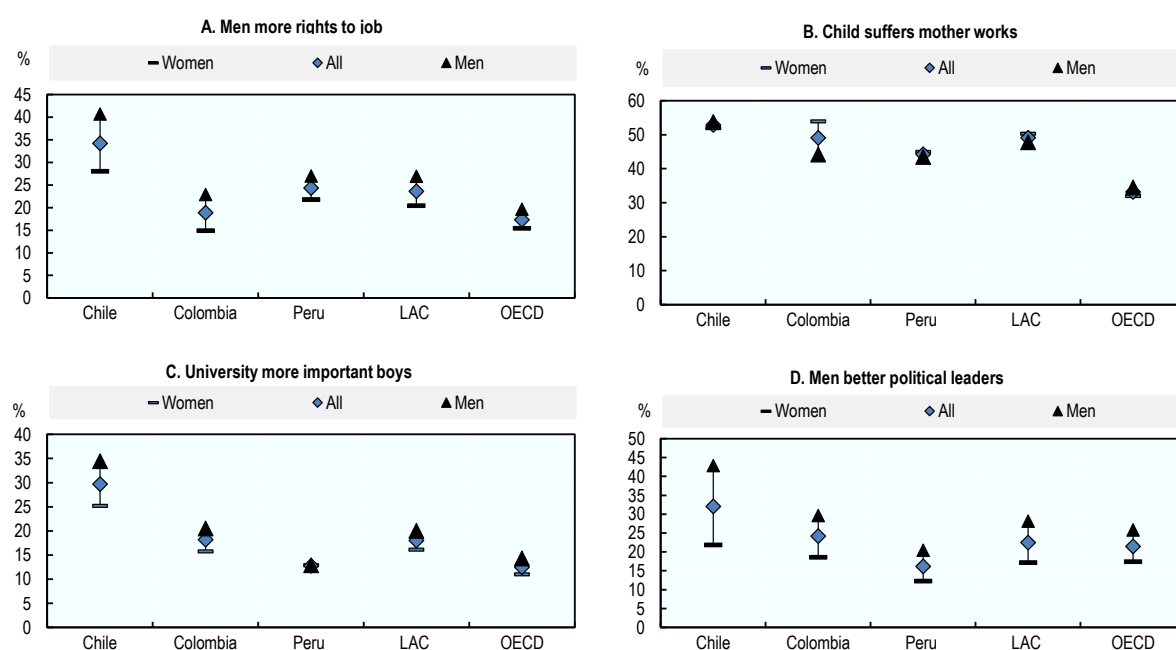
- The “right” of women to participate in the labour market and education (“When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women” and “A university education is more important for a boy than a girl”);
- The leadership potential of both genders (“On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do”); and
- The compatibility of being a mother and working (“When a mother works for pay, children suffer”).



Figure 1.14 compares Colombia with other Latin American countries and a selection of OECD countries on the above statements. Overall, the results for Colombia suggest a mixed picture. For example, fewer individuals than the Latin American average support the statement that “When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women”. However, the share of men agreeing with this statement is significantly higher than that of women. In addition, although the share of total respondents agreeing with the statement that children suffer when the mother works appears to be in line with the Latin American average, it is much higher than the OECD average. More women than men support this view (54% and 44%, respectively).

**Figure 1.14. In Colombia the share of men and women with traditional views on women’s role in economic life is similar to LAC trends**

Share of respondents to 2017 22 World Value Survey who (strongly) agree with the statement



Note: The statements respondents are asked about are: “When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women.”; “When a mother works for pay, the children suffer.”; “A university education is more important for a boy than a girl.”; “On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do.”. The Latin American average is based on Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru. The OECD average is based on Australia, Austria, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Japan, Korea, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, Poland, Slovenia, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye, the United Kingdom and the United States. Both averages are unweighted. For more information please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under <https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/>.

Source: Haerper et al. (2020), World Values Survey: Round 7 – Country-Pooled Datafile. <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp>.

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The National Survey on the Use of Time (ENUT) provides additional insights on gendered roles and stereotyping in Colombia and their potential role in influencing observed disparities in labour market participation. According to one finding of the Survey, 86.1% of the Colombian population agrees, or strongly agrees, with the statement that “both men and women should contribute to the household income” (DANE, 2021<sup>[54]</sup>). Nevertheless, when the questions address gender roles more directly, opinions are not as favourable. Specifically, four out of ten of interviewed people agree, or strongly agree, with the statement according to which “a man’s duty is to earn money and a woman’s duty is to take care of the home and family”. This proportion is considerably smaller in urban areas than rural areas (37.7% and 60.2%,

respectively) (DANE, 2021<sup>[54]</sup>). In addition, seven out of ten Colombians consider that “women are better at doing domestic work than men”, a proportion that reaches almost 80% in rural areas (DANE, 2021<sup>[54]</sup>).

### ***Institutions and laws***

An analysis across developing and emerging economies suggests that equality under the law, the respect of the right of equal inheritance and the right for women to be head of a household are associated with a decline in the gender gap in labour force participation of around 4.6 percentage points (Gonzales et al., 2015<sup>[61]</sup>). During the past three decades, Colombia has made great strides in reducing discriminatory laws and regulations that can limit the ability of women to choose any profession they want, start a business and be paid equally. The adoption of the 1991 Constitution, which is still in force, established that all individuals shall enjoy the same rights, freedom, and opportunities, without any discrimination, including on account of gender. The equality of all men and women to a job under equitable and dignified conditions, alongside the right to choose a profession or occupation, paved the way to the elimination of many customary laws, which prevented women from working outside the home, having a bank account, and getting loans, or owning and inheriting assets.

The National Development Plan 2018-22 included for the first time a chapter on Gender Equity (World Bank Group, 2019<sup>[11]</sup>), with increasing the educational and economic empowerment of women to eliminate gender gaps in the labour markets a key policy objective. The Plan also prioritises mainstreaming gender equality across all other sectors and areas.

The current National Development Plan (DNP) 2022-26, “Colombia World Power of Life”, includes a strong focus on the mainstreaming of gender policies. To this effect, it incorporates a specific chapter to underscore that change can only be achieved through active engagement of women. This Plan focuses on the importance of closing the gaps between men and women to achieve sustainable development and lasting peace. It prioritises the role of women as engine of economic and sustainable development, including environmental protection. It emphasises the creation and implementation of the National Care System for the redistribution and reduction of unpaid care work. In addition, the DNP establishes measures to promote the participation of women as the cornerstone of the life and peace policy, the recognition and guarantee of women’s health rights, and mechanisms to advance in the eradication of all violence against women and gender-based violence.

Recent international surveys compare the progress achieved by Colombia to improve the regulatory framework against gender discrimination. The OECD’s Social Institutions and Gender Index (OECD, 2020<sup>[62]</sup>) rates the level of gender discrimination in Colombia’s national laws as very low, below the LAC and OECD average (Table 1.2). At the same time, the World Bank Women, Business and the Law index scores Colombia 84 out of 100, below the OECD and Latin American averages (Table 1.3). Women in Colombia have the same legal rights to mobility in the workplace, in marriage, parenthood, and assets, as men have. Colombia does not receive a full score in four components: pay, entrepreneurship, and pension. For example, the Business and Law index suggests that in Colombia the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value is not enshrined in the law, while the law does not explicitly prohibit discrimination in access to credit based on gender.

**Table 1.2. The OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index suggests gender discrimination in Colombia is very low**

	SIGI		Discrimination in the family		Restricted physical integrity		Restricted access to productive and financial resources		Restricted civil liberties	
	Score	Cat.	Score	Cat.	Score	Cat.	Score	Cat.	Score	Cat.
Colombia	15	Very low	9.6	Very low	14.9	Low	14.5	Low	20.6	Low
Peru	24.5	Low	47.7	Medium	26.6	Medium	5.5	Very low	12.9	Low
Costa Rica	27.9	Low	45.7	Medium	24.8	Low	27.5	Medium	10.5	Low
Chile	36.1	Medium	36.4	Medium	18.8	Low	64.8	High	16.6	Low
Latin America	25.4		31.2		21.8		22.9		20.2	
OECD	17.2		25.1		12.6		13.4		17.3	

Note: The Latin American and OECD averages are unweighted means. The Latin American and the Caribbean average of the SIGI is based on Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Guatemala, Jamaica, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay. The discrimination in the family indicator is in addition based on Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Argentina, Panama and Venezuela (the latter three also for the productive and financial resources and civil liberties dimensions). For more information please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under <https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/>.

Source: OECD (2020<sub>[62]</sub>), *SIGI 2020 Regional Report for Latin America and the Caribbean*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/cb7d45d1-en>.

**Table 1.3. Colombia's score on the Women, Business and the Law index is lower than the LAC and OECD average**

	WBL INDEX	Mobility	Workplace	Pay	Marriage	Parenthood	Entrepreneurship	Assets	Pension
Chile	80	100	75	75	80	100	75	60	75
Colombia	84	100	100	50	100	100	75	100	50
Costa Rica	86	100	100	75	100	40	75	100	100
Peru	95	100	100	100	80	80	100	100	100
LAC	87	100	95	77	93	71	84	96	80
OECD	94	100	98	88	96	91	95	99	86

Note: The LAC and OECD averages are unweighted. For the index, 35 questions are scored across the eight indicators based on laws and regulations that were in force at the time of the development of the index. Overall scores were calculated by taking the average of each indicator, with 100 representing the highest possible score. For more information please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under <https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/>.

Source: World Bank (2022<sub>[63]</sub>), *Women, Business and the Law data 2022*, <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/wbl>.

### **Care and physical infrastructure**

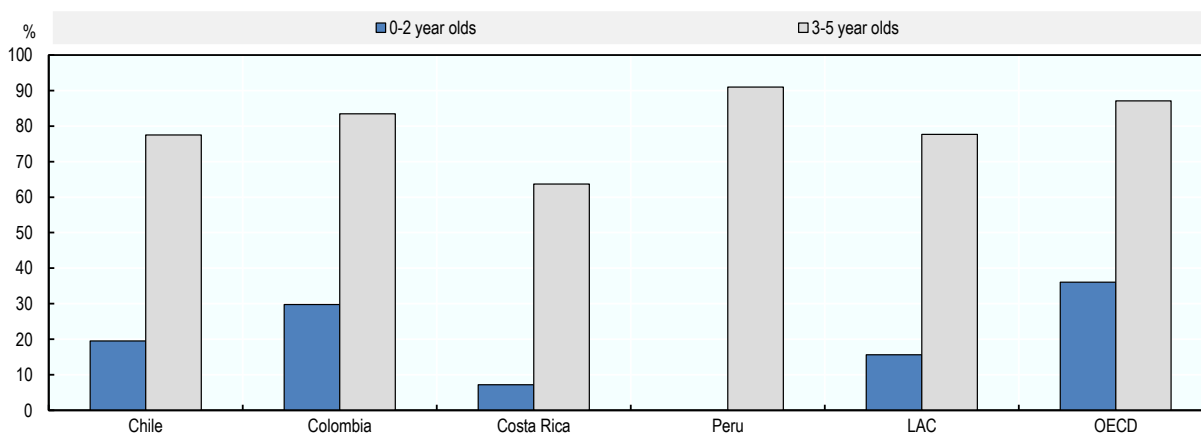
Another factor that can contribute to differences in economic outcomes between men and women is the physical and social infrastructure and, related to this, the availability of labour-saving household technology. Access to reliable and affordable local transport, facilities and services for childcare, elderly care, and the care of people with disabilities, along with electricity and running water, affect how many hours adult household members need to spend on commuting, looking after children, cooking and cleaning and the hours they can devote to paid work. As discussed, given prevailing gender stereotypes and gender pay gaps, women usually end up doing a disproportionate share of unpaid work in the household. At the same time, access to public infrastructure affects how safe people feel and hence their perception about what activities they can pursue. For example, if girls and women have to cross poorly lit areas to get to school or to work, or if sexual harassment is common on public transport, they will avoid going out when it is dark or taking the bus. Insecurity limits the range of economic and leisure options open to women.

Although infrastructure plays an important role in facilitating women's active participation in the labour market and public life in general, it typically varies strongly by geographic areas. Different types of higher quality infrastructure are generally available within the urban areas where well-off households live. Even if a certain infrastructure is not available in a particular area, richer people will likely compensate more easily for this absence. For example, high-income women will likely more likely use private transport means than public transports, and instead of sending their children to a public day care centre, they will hire a nanny or pay for a private day care centre. These considerations point to the importance of financial affordability and good strategic foresight, including on the matter of land uses. For example, if the investment plans of a municipality do not pay due attention to perspective care needs, it will be difficult to increase those services and the supporting infrastructure in a way capable of matching demand conditions.

Access to affordable and quality formal or informal childcare is a key factor in supporting the participation of women in the labour market (Mateo Díaz and Rodríguez-Chamussy, 2016<sup>[64]</sup>). In addition, it is important that school times are designed to match working times. In Colombia, only 30% of children under the age of three attends early childhood care (Figure 1.15). However, 70% of pre-school children aged three to five years enrol in early childhood education and care. Although these rates are higher than in other Latin American countries, they are below the OECD average. Those children who cannot attend a community home, kindergarten, child development centre or school, stay with their mother or father in the home or receive the care of a relative or other adult. Attendance varies significantly across departments and is significantly below the national average in households where the head of household has indigenous, or afro-Colombian ethnicity.


**Figure 1.15. One in three pre-school children are not in early childhood education**

Percentage of children enrolled in early childhood education and care services or in primary education, by age group, 2020 or latest year available



Note: Peru refers to 2018 and data are not available for 0-2 year-olds. For more information please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under <https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/>.

Source: For more information, see “Formal care and education for very young children – PF3.2 Enrolment in childcare and pre-school”, OECD Family Database, <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm> and MINEDU (2019), “Tasa neta de asistencia, educación inicial (% de población con edades 3-5)”, Estadística de la Calidad Educativa.

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In Colombia, as in other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, the family, especially women, are primarily responsible for providing unpaid support to older adults (Flórez, Martínez and Aranco, 2019<sup>[65]</sup>). In perspective, the assistance that the older people in Colombia will need to perform day-to-day will likely increase further, reflecting population ageing. Households with only elderly people, and those with two or

more members in need for care, will be the most vulnerable. However, the growing participation of women in the labour market will tend to shrink the time that they can devote to these activities. In addition, the decline in fertility and the fragmentation of housing into smaller residential entities – reflecting the growth of single-parent households in urban centres – will increasingly limit the capacity of the family to provide unpaid support services. These contrasting patterns suggest that increasing coverage and quality of care of the elderly will be at the forefront of the policy agenda.

Long and onerous commutes negatively affect the economic opportunities and well-being of men and women alike. However, transport needs of women and men may differ. Across many countries, men tend to spend more time commuting to and from work. Women, instead, frequently make short or multi-stop trips – for example, to drop children at school before work and to stop by the market on the way home from work. They are more likely to walk and to take public transport and less likely to drive (Duchene, 2011<sup>[66]</sup>; Lecompte and Juan Pablo, 2017<sup>[67]</sup>). Recent analysis finds evidence of a strong gender gap in transport accessibility in Bogota, which particularly penalises women who live in low-income areas in the outskirts (Moscoso et al., 2020<sup>[68]</sup>).

Even if transport options are available, women may be reluctant to take them if they are afraid of being a victim of robbery, sexual harassment or otherwise attacked. In a 2014 survey of 15 of the 20 largest capitals around the world, women in the Latin American cities (particularly Bogota, followed by Mexico City and Lima) felt the most unsafe (Boros, 2014<sup>[69]</sup>). With perceived safety conditions affecting transport choices, women often report that they prefer to use minibuses than other public transport, even though they are more expensive and slower compared to the metro. The stated reason is that they have their seat in the minibus, which makes them feel safer from harassment. Women who take the bus often wait for less crowded ones. A lack of security also arises from having to walk on poorly maintained and badly lit sidewalks and having to wait for a long time at bus stops in isolated locations (Dominguez Gonzalez et al., 2020<sup>[70]</sup>).

Finally, the amount of work required for maintaining a household in good condition and hours available for other activities also depends on sanitation conditions, especially the provision of clean drinking water and adequate sewage disposal. In addition, the access to electricity and labour-saving technologies, e.g. appliances, such as a washing machine, massively reduce the physical and time effort needed to wash clothes, clean the home and cook. The timesaving effects of household appliances is so important that some economists believe that they have changed the world more than the internet (Chang, 2012<sup>[71]</sup>). In Colombia, as of 2019, virtually all households had access to electricity, with nearly no difference between rural and urban areas (World Bank, 2019<sup>[72]</sup>). However, access to electricity does not necessarily translate into widespread ownership of labour-saving appliances, especially by low-income households.

### ***Gender based violence***

Gender-based violence (GBV) against women and girls represents a global issue. Worldwide, nearly one-third of women experience physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence (IPV) or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime (WHO, 2021<sup>[73]</sup>). This violence is endemic to all regions of the world, including the most economically advanced.

GBV is a complex phenomenon that exists in many different forms and may be experienced within family and intimate relationships, in public spaces and workplaces, and online (OECD, 2021<sup>[74]</sup>). Acts of GBV are usually part of a pattern that can affect all aspects of survivors/victims' lives. This includes their access to education, employment, housing, healthcare and justice, as well as their physical and mental well-being and health. When survivors/victims have children, such impacts extend to them. Moreover, GBV has economic ramifications for survivors/victims, their families and societies as a whole. Studies focused primarily on intimate partner violence estimate such violence typically costs countries between 1-2% of their annual gross domestic product (OECD, 2021<sup>[74]</sup>).

Stereotypes, discrimination, and socio-economic conditions have a direct impact on violence against women in Colombia (OECD, 2020<sup>[75]</sup>). This violence takes various forms: against women in the family (domestic violence, marital rape), in the community (sexual violence, trafficking, feminicide), and with respect to women's reproductive rights. According to the Gender Equality Observatory, regularly published by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), using figures provided by governments on feminicides, Colombia registered 182 cases of feminicides in 2020, the year of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (ECLAC, 2021<sup>[76]</sup>). Although, this corresponds to a decline of 47 cases from the previous year, press articles and issue briefs suggest that the impact of COVID-19 has been severe in Colombia with the country experiencing a significant increase in emergency calls to report domestic violence incidents (Ortega Pacheco and Martínez Rudas, 2021<sup>[77]</sup>).

Colombia's decades-long armed conflict significantly undermined the security of women and girls, particularly internally displaced women. Displaced women and women living in conflict-affected communities face exacerbated vulnerabilities and risk factors for IPV (Keating, Treves-Kagan and Buller, 2021<sup>[78]</sup>; Stark and Ager, 2011<sup>[79]</sup>). Trauma, poverty, changing gender roles, and the general stress of violence and displacement bolster existing levels of IPV and prevent women from accessing help. Indigenous and Afro-Colombian women were disproportionately victims of sexual violence and internal displacement during the armed conflict. Specifically, 51.6% indigenous women and 40.7% of Afro-Colombian women declared themselves to be victims of the conflict. Of these, 59% of the indigenous women and 62.7% of the Afro-Colombian women were displaced (Defensoría del Pueblo, 2019<sup>[80]</sup>).

Reports indicate that indigenous and Afro-Colombian women still experience multiple forms of discrimination despite the fact that the Final Peace Agreement includes gender-responsive provisions for indigenous women within the peace process. The World Bank reports that women living in rural areas where armed conflicts persist are even withdrawing from the peace process or moving away entirely for their own safety (World Bank Group, 2019<sup>[11]</sup>).

The outbreak of the regional refugee crisis and the intensification of displacement flows from neighbouring Venezuela has brought additional challenges, notably related to the long-term marginalisation of refugee women and how this contributes to their victimisation. Given the lack of legal documentation underpinning their marginal status, women migrants are at an increased risk for social, economic and physical insecurity. Recent research analysis reveals the main mechanisms by which displacement can influence the social and economic realities of migrant women: Lack of legal residence and documentation; violence experienced along the life course, with migration increasing the risk for later re-victimisation, social isolation, including loss of support networks and restricted mobility, and financial stress. (Keating, Treves-Kagan and Buller, 2021<sup>[78]</sup>).

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## **2 A holistic policy framework for achieving a balanced sharing of paid and unpaid work**

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This chapter argues that achieving a better sharing of paid and unpaid work between men and women in Colombia requires a comprehensive policy strategy and presents a holistic framework for its development using two policy axes. The first axis focuses on the policies aimed at reducing the barriers that stand in the way of a more equitable division of time and responsibilities between partners: creating a more effective care system, expanding parental leave and reducing the transmission of gender stereotypes through the education system. The second includes the policies that aim to improve the participation of women in the labour market by ensuring girls' access and enrolment in the education system, promoting women in non-traditional careers and leadership positions, supporting female entrepreneurship, and fighting gender-based violence. This chapter reviews each area in detail and provides policy insights for possible improvements.

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As discussed in Chapter 1, a combination of societal, institutional and economic factors stands behind the higher unpaid work burden of women, which weakens their economic outcomes. Policy changes and a gradual shift in attitudes have practically eliminated gender gaps in basic education and reduced those in the labour market.

Nonetheless, women in Colombia continue to be less frequently employed; to work more frequently in the informal sector; to steer away from better-paid STEM careers; and to earn lower wages than men. With the welfare and income gains of reducing these gaps being potentially substantial for both men and women, a more equitable division of paid and unpaid work represents a high priority policy concern.

Given the interplay between different drivers, a holistic policy framework is needed to achieve a more balanced sharing of paid and unpaid work in Colombia. For practical descriptive reasons, it is useful to structure such a broad approach using two policy axes:

- On the one hand, the policies aimed at reducing the barriers that currently stand in the way of achieving a more equitable division of time and responsibilities between men and women, and
- On the other hand, the policies that aim at fostering the participation of women in the labour market through ensuring that women's paid work pays more.

The first axis consists of the policies to reduce the overall amount of unpaid work that families have to carry out, as well as to tackle the hurdles that make it difficult for couples to share paid and unpaid work more equally. Key examples of specific areas within this axis are the policies aimed at the expansion of the public care system for both children and the elderly; introducing or strengthening the regulations governing parental leave and flexible work regulations; and the promotion of gender-neutral approaches at all levels of education.

The second policy axis spotlights the policies that help reduce the gender gap in labour income and lessen the incentive for women to spend long hours on unpaid work and free more hours that they can then dedicate to paid work. These policies include addressing the barriers for all groups of girls to access quality education; promoting women's careers, including in leadership positions; strengthening gender equality in business entrepreneurship; and fighting violence against women in public spaces and the workplace.

Figure 2.1 provides the diagrammatic illustration of the policy framework and its components. The two policy axes are mutually reinforcing: the interplay of positive policy changes across each of them has the potential to significantly increase the number of women who could and would like to work outside the home, as well as the number of men willing to take over caring and domestic tasks.

While not the only policies that contribute to these changes, the specific areas addressed in this chapter emerged during a virtual fact-finding mission with Colombian authorities as the most relevant, in terms of both potential impact and feasibility. The remainder of the chapter reviews each area in detail, starting with an assessment of the challenges and existing policies. A discussion of policy insights completes the analysis of each area, building on the lesson from international experience and the OECD's knowledge of international practices. While there is a general need to ensure that policies and programmes benefit all women, many of the policy recommendations addressed focus on the needs of some population groups more particularly, including indigenous women and women living in remote areas. The key policy insights of each policy area are summarised in Box 2.2 and Box 2.3.

**Figure 2.1. A comprehensive policy framework for achieving a balanced sharing of paid and unpaid work in Colombia**

Reducing barriers to sharing paid and unpaid work equally	Making women's paid work pay more
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a more comprehensive care system</li> <li>• Expanding parental leave in the formal and informal economy</li> <li>• Reducing the transmission of gender stereotypes through the education system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring access to quality education for all</li> <li>• Promoting women in non-traditional careers and leadership positions</li> <li>• Supporting women's entrepreneurship</li> <li>• Fighting violence against women</li> </ul>

## Reducing barriers to sharing paid and unpaid work equitably

### ***Creating a more comprehensive care system***

Experience from the OECD countries shows that the availability of quality and affordable early childhood education and care (ECEC) provisions is essential for children's well-being, learning and development. In addition to supporting a strong start in life and learning, access to comprehensive ECEC, in combination with other family provisions, can expand opportunities for women to participate in labour markets by devoting time to income generating activities (OECD, 2017<sup>[1]</sup>; OECD, 2018<sup>[2]</sup>). In Colombia, on average women spend 22 hours per week more than men on unpaid work, time essentially dedicated to care activities and household chores (Chapter 1). This wide gender gap explains the Colombian Government's present commitment to develop comprehensive care for all children, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable. These are the groups that stand to gain the most from the dual dividends of early childcare, in terms of children's well-being and the economic empowerment of mothers.

Since the launch of the *Programa Hogar Comunitario de Bienestar* (Community Welfare Home Program), in 1986, the bulk of public ECEC services in Colombia has been secured through the system of community homes, (OECD, 2016<sup>[3]</sup>). The system has further expanded overtime, following implementation of the guidelines of Law 1804 of 2016 on State Policy for the Comprehensive Development of Early Childhood. As a result, 67% of ECEC services to up to 6 years of age are comprehensive today, with services 5 days a week. The service also includes meals and reinforced controls of nutritional quality. Low-income families from poor localities have always been a priority target of the *Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar* (ICBF, Colombian Institute for Family Welfare), the agency responsible for the provision of comprehensive ECEC, in co-operation with other public entities, leads.

According to the OECD review of education policies in Colombia, the country's ECEC system has progressed over the years (OECD, 2016<sup>[3]</sup>). In the process, service provision has become more formalised, with the focus of attention including the professionalisation of the caring staff, through widespread training. Efforts to reach out to disadvantaged children have gradually fostered. As one example of good practice, in Medellín the expansion of public childcare centres has included the *Buen Comienzo* (Good Start) programme, which offers comprehensive early childhood development services, eight hours per day, five days per week for infants up to five years of age.

The government's long-term goal is to make comprehensive ECEC accessible for all children. However, the further expansion of the system and its steering towards higher standards of performance remains challenging. As one benchmark, the enrolment rate of children in the three to five years age group (78%) is still 5 percentage points lower than the OECD average (OECD, 2021<sup>[4]</sup>). Furthermore, although the transition year before starting primary school is compulsory, enrolment of five-year-olds is far from

universal. One additional concern relates to the enrolment of children under the age of three, which has declined recently from 32% in 2015 to 26% in 2019. The factors explaining low enrolment rates in Colombia include weak provision and lack of awareness of the importance of comprehensive ECEC for children's social and cognitive development (OECD, 2016<sup>[3]</sup>).

On outcomes, there is encouraging evidence that the positive returns of comprehensive ECEC provision in Colombia extend beyond the well-being of children to include the labour market inclusion of mothers. In theory, the expansion of quality and affordable ECEC provision can either stimulate the labour participation and job search of vulnerable mothers or, alternatively, lead them to simply replace childcare with other unpaid domestic tasks, with hardly any effects on labour market inclusion. In the case of Colombia, earlier investigations have found strong support of the first hypothesis. For example, estimates of the positive effects of *Programa Hogar Comunitario de Bienestar* on mothers' employment rates and hours worked show an increase of 30% in the average probability of employment (Attanasio and Vera-Hernández, 2004<sup>[5]</sup>). Assessment of progress towards ECEC provision by the city of Medellín, including through *Buen Comienzo*, finds that in areas where access to quality and affordable childcare centres is precluded, only three out of ten women participate in the labour market (Cardona-Sosa and Morales, 2015<sup>[6]</sup>). In contrast, twice as many women participate in areas where there is a centre 500 metres away or less. Beyond proximity to comprehensive ECEC providers, the quality of neighbouring conditions also matters. Women who live in neighbourhoods where economic activity is stronger are more likely to search for an occupation (Leonardo and Cardona-Sosa, 2015<sup>[7]</sup>). At the same time, the likelihood of job searching increases with the availability of public transport.

Turning to financial incentives to encourage access to public comprehensive ECEC services, the conditional cash transfer programme. *Familias en Acción* (Families in Action) aims to reduce poverty and inequalities in Colombia by providing payments on the condition that families access health and education services, such as vaccination, medical check-ups, and primary and secondary education. During its existence, the government introduced measures to extend the programme's conditionality to include pre-primary education, particularly with the objective to achieve universal coverage in the transition year. In addition to *Familias en Acción*, the strategy *Unidos* (United Network, previously *Juntos*) targets the most disadvantaged families (including displaced families) through health interventions and support for the development of children under the age of ten.

Following the adoption of the ambitious National Development Plan (NDP) 2022-26, *Colombia Potencia Mundial de la Vida* (Colombia World Power of Life), the intention is to merge these programmes into the new Citizen Income Program for the delivery of conditional and not conditional monetary transfers to households in situations of poverty, extreme poverty and socio-economic vulnerability, prioritizing persons with disabilities. (art. 66 of Law 2294 of 2023).

Although in Colombia, as elsewhere in the Latin American region, the main objective of social welfare programmes is to tackle immediate poverty needs, by providing insurance and supporting families through periods of low income (Orazio Attanasio et al., 2021<sup>[8]</sup>), potentially lasting effects are also important to investigate. Assessment of *Familias en Acción* shows that the programme has contributed to improve child nutrition through growth and development check-ups, as well as increasing access to preventive health services (Lopez-Arana et al., 2016<sup>[9]</sup>). In addition, recent investigation finds that *Familias en Acción* has had major impacts on other crucial drivers to higher standards of living. Although not intentionally targeted by the programme, these manifest in the evidence of a reduction of arrests for criminal behaviour and teen pregnancies, as well as the increase of educational attainment (Orazio Attanasio et al., 2021<sup>[8]</sup>).

However, unlike initial expectation that *Familias en Acción* would also strengthen women's economic empowerment, by substituting the time dedicated to unpaid work with more time for paid work activities, the transfer does not seem to significantly change the employment decisions of mothers. This outcome reflects the fact that the programme does not strengthen in any fundamental way the capacity of women to influence decision-making with partners as to how to comply with the conditionality obligations of the



programme. One possible reason behind this lies in the choice to avoid exacerbating domestic conflicts on the control of resources, including the risk of violence (Fernández Villagómez, 2022<sup>[10]</sup>). Yet, experience so far with *Familias en Acción* appears to suggest that one option for further improving the programme could be by extending the conditions of access to the benefit – the burden of taking the children to the doctor, or to health centres for their periodical checks – to the men as well, rather than continuing to fall on the woman alone (Lopez-Arana et al., 2016<sup>[9]</sup>).

A study focussed on the effects of the obligations attached to *Familias en Acción*, (Marcillo et al., 2021<sup>[11]</sup>) finds that although the transfer decreases the time that women spend caring for household members, it does not necessarily reduce the extent of their unpaid family responsibilities. Given the prevalence of traditional gender roles, the likelihood that the education transfer ends up increasing the time that women spend in other domestic work activities – such as food preparation, cleaning, and house maintenance – remains high. This substitution effect points to the important complementary role played by the policies to change attitudes and discrimination.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Colombia's population is in an advanced stage of demographic transition, reflecting the combination of declining fertility and increasing life expectancy. According to the *World Population Prospects* of the UN, the older population aged 65 or over is growing considerably faster than all younger age groups. A survey by the *Ministerio de Salud y Protección Social* (Ministry of Health and Social Protection) shows that 40.7% of people aged 60 and over have difficulties in performing at least one “daily living activity” – i.e. an activity to manage a basic need, such as personal hygiene, dressing, toileting, and eating. This proportion increases with age, from 26.7% for those aged 60-69, to 81.1% among those that are 80 or older (SABE, 2015<sup>[12]</sup>). Rapid population ageing strengthens the demand for long-term care services as individuals' physical and mental health deteriorates and people lose the ability to perform certain basic daily activities (IDB, 2019<sup>[13]</sup>).

With five Colombian elderly people living in poverty and more than 40% lacking any stable income from the State or private pension fund, corresponding to about 2 million people (DNP, 2016<sup>[14]</sup>), population ageing also fuels the functional dependence of the elderly on the support of other individuals, who typically provide their services on an informal basis. As a result, many older adults in Colombia receive support from their children, other people they live with, and family and friends who do not live with them. Women represent the majority of caregivers (83.9%) with many of these women also carrying out other unpaid domestic tasks, which precludes the access to a paid work activity. The average age of women caregivers is 49 (SABE, 2015<sup>[12]</sup>) – most often helping with basic activities of daily life, such as administering medicines, shopping and going to medical appointments.

Relying on families as the main guarantors of the care of the elderly not only puts the elderly person on an unequal footing when facing difficulties, but also puts them at risk. In extreme cases, the resulting overload can contribute to cases of repeated violence against them, including from relatives. The 1850 Law, published in 2017, established penal sanctions for domestic violence and abandonment, reiterating the family's main responsibility for the care of the elderly. The law also established special protection centres that must be paid for by the person who committed the acts of domestic violence (Ramírez-Bustamante and Garzón-Landinez, 2021<sup>[15]</sup>).

Despite having specific legislation and public programmes focused on the elderly, formal long-term care programmes and policies to address functional dependency remain scarce in Colombia. In addition, there is limited information regarding the actual supply of these services. Since 2008, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP) has the obligation to keep a national record of long-term care providers. However, this record has not been created so far (IDB, 2019<sup>[13]</sup>).

## Box 2.1. National Care System and Bogota's District Care System

### National Care System

With the enactment of Law 2281 of 2023, Colombia joins other Latin American countries in the effort to create a more comprehensive care systems. The Colombian National Care System is an inter-agency co-ordination mechanism for “existing and new services, regulations, policies and technical and institutional actions, with the aim of responding to the demands of care by households in a co-responsible manner between the nation, the private sector, civil society, communities, and between women and men in their differences and diversity in order to promote a new social organisation of care in the country” (art. 6 of Law 2281). The government body in charge of the National Care System is the new Ministry of Equality and Equity, which seeks to “contribute to the elimination of economic, political and social inequalities; to promote the enjoyment of the right to equality; to promote compliance with the principles of non-discrimination and non-regression; the defence of all subjects under special constitutional protection, vulnerable populations and groups that have historically been discriminated against or marginalised, incorporating and adopting rights, gender, differential, ethnic-racial and intersectional approaches” (art. 3 of Law 2281).

### Bogota's Districts Care System (SIDICU)

Bogotá is the first city in Latin America to implement a care facility designed to recognise and reduce the care burden assumed by women. Led by the Secretariat for Women, the *Sistema Distrital de Cuidado*, articulates various care services in Bogota (Alcaldia Mayor de Bogota, 2021<sup>[16]</sup>). The programme aims to meet the needs for both the caregiver and the cared for, which can be children under five, people with disabilities, and the elderly. It articulates existing programmes and services to meet the demands of care at all levels of government, while involving the private sector, local communities and households. Its objectives are: (1) to recognise the care work of the people who carry it out; (2) redistribute care work between men and women, and (3) reduce unpaid care work for caregivers. The system is divided into two blocks of care centres and mobile units:

- *Manzanas de Cuidado* (Blocks of Care) are areas that concentrate care services with a proximity and simultaneously criteria, which allows people to access them without having to walk more than 20 minutes. Its objective is to package services close to the homes of the people they care for and those who require care and provide them simultaneously: while the caregiver accesses training or respite, those who require care are in a space of well-being and capacity development. Its objective is that women can relieve themselves of the care tasks that are traditionally assigned to be carried out by them. Some services include laundry, care centres for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities, canteens, and leisure spaces, amongst others. Since 2020, the district of Bogota has opened seven Apples of Care centres.
- *Unidades Móviles de Cuidado* (Mobile Units of Care) are the itinerant strategy of the District System of Care. These are fully equipped vehicles, which provide care services in rural and remote areas where there are no *Manzanas de Cuidado*. They can also provide home care services if needed. In 2020, a pilot project involving two mobile units was launched before broader scale implementation.
- Both modalities include flexible training (weekends, nights and hybrid) where the *madres cuidadoras* can culminate their schooling and benefit from other educational training.

## Policy insights

**Foster ongoing efforts to make comprehensive ECEC programmes accessible to all children.** For children, access to affordable and reliable ECEC programmes means improved learning opportunities, alongside stronger opportunities to strengthen well-being and standards of living. Mothers will benefit from the positive externalities of entrusting a secure environment for their children to actively seek a job in the labour market and spend more time in a paid work activity. To achieve the dual dividends of an inclusive and effective ECEC system, Colombia will need to further address inequalities in participation, particularly the exclusion of most disadvantaged children who stand to reap the greatest benefits. The community homes approach has proven to be an effective means to reach households in rural and remote areas. This provision should be expanded to reach a greater number of families and areas, including those with high indigenous populations, and provided with appropriate resources to support children until they reach school age.

**Professionalise community-based programmes.** Some countries have chosen to reinforce the offer of continuous training programmes to childcare workers, by increasing the options for shorter, but more regular and better-spaced programmes. Viet Nam, for example, offers opportunities for continuous training of up to two months each year (Neuman, Josephson and Chua, 2015<sup>[17]</sup>). In Colombia, a similar approach would suit the needs of rural and far-away areas particularly well, since a well-trained childcare workforce is in particularly short supply in these areas, compared to the urban centres. At the same time, childcare needs tend to follow the seasonality of agriculture outputs in these areas, meaning that they pick up when agriculture and harvesting activities intensify, before bouncing back as soon as seasonal factors moderate. Accommodating these variations, unknown to the urban centres, requires a high capacity to adapt.

Furthermore, several countries have adopted more decisive compensation policies. Ecuador, for example, has tripled the pay for community childcare providers from one-third to the full minimum wage (Moussié, 2016<sup>[18]</sup>). Aside from pay increases, the growing professionalisation can entail feedback effects on the expansion of formalisation if the time devoted to childcare work qualifies the individual for pension credits and health coverage. By increasing the attractiveness of the childcare profession this will support the expansion of labour force participation, particularly women.

**Ensure that all five-year-old children begin the transition year on time and are ready for schooling.** Colombia could reinforce measures to increase enrolment, such as ensuring a full school day for children in the transition year. By reassuring parents that their young child would be supervised during their work hours and receive adequate nutrition throughout the day, this could have positive returns on their capacity to adapt working hours, with potentially beneficial effects on the labour market participation of mothers. Linking the *Familias en Acción* programme to children's attendance at school in the transition year, would provide a financial incentive for parents to enrol their children. Media campaigns or the engagement of local community leaders could be a useful tool to raise awareness of the importance of children entering the transition year in a timely fashion.

**Support informal carers.** There is no unequivocal definition of informal carer. Under one common definition, an informal carer, or caregiver, is an individual who provides care assistance to those in need of it within the context of a pre-existing relationship – a family member, a close relative, a friend, or neighbour – and without having received qualifying training. However, the definition can also include activity that takes place beyond the sphere of existing relationships, such as the case of a non-professional, non-trained individual who works for pay in a private household without a formal contract. Many migrant workers fall into this category. Informal carers form the first line of support for elderly people in all countries, regardless of the level of development.

Low- and middle-income economies rely on the unpaid labour of informal carers to a high extent because the supply of specialised healthcare services is scarce in these countries, while they also have a sizeable informal care sector. However, in the more advanced economies, the attention devoted to informal care

has also increased remarkably, over the past years. This reflects a range of sources of pressure, with longer life expectancy, changing illnesses, the growing number of elderly people with limitations and population ageing, the most frequently cited. Today about 14% of people aged over 50 provide informal care on a daily or weekly basis on average in OECD countries. Three out of five daily carers are women. The recognition of the role those informal caregivers play, as well as of the importance to implement actions directed at improving their conditions, are issues of relevance to all societies.

The OECD has recently carried out an extensive review of the policies to support informal carers in EU countries (Rocard and Llana-Nozal, 2022<sup>[19]</sup>). Taken together, the key messages of this work provide a framework for responding to challenges as countries increasingly commit themselves to harmonise and protect the rights of informal carers:

- In the past decade, countries have taken steps to facilitate access to information to support informal carers through websites and social centres. In France, for example, local information centres, such as “House for older people and carers” are successful in reaching out to carers. In the Netherlands, General Practitioners (GP) are involved in the identification of informal carers. Public services and NGOs also run various types of local information centres. One example for Latin America is the city of La Plata in Argentina where a network of residents, academic experts and service providers has created a website with such information.
- Training plays a key role to prevent physical and mental exhaustion of carers and strengthen the quality of long-term care. Countries increasingly adopt schemes to strengthen the access of caregivers to individual learning and online training. In Peru, a study on the effectiveness of measures to improve the lives of people with dementia and their caring families in Lima has shown that even brief, simple interventions focusing on family caregiver education and training about specific long-term illnesses, such as dementia, may be highly beneficial in contexts characterised by low awareness and limited support from formal services. Benefits are visible in significantly reduced stress of family caregivers and increased quality of care for older people (Mariella Guerra et al., 2011<sup>[20]</sup>).
- Respite care is a necessary tool to help carers rest and manage other responsibilities. Countries can include the financial support for respite care in the allowances towards carers or their families. In Germany, for example, a beneficiary family caregiver may be eligible for respite care for 4 weeks a year. In Brazil, the city of Belo Horizonte has introduced a pilot project in which trained social and health workers spend a week working with the families of dependent older people to bring some respite care to people’s homes but also to train family members on how to care for their relatives (UN Women, 2017<sup>[21]</sup>).

### ***Expanding parental leave in the formal and informal economy***

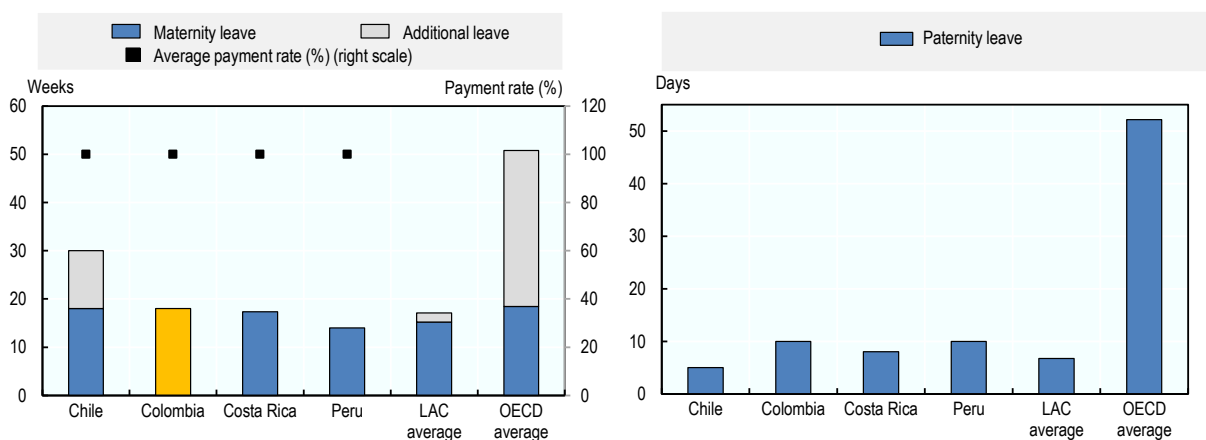
Parental leave policies affect family decisions about the division of paid and unpaid work between partners. When there is no maternity leave, mothers may have to drop out of the labour force and subsequently find it difficult to re-enter. A study of 159 countries finds that female labour force participation is positively correlated with the length of maternity leave, if under 30 weeks (Del Rey, 2021<sup>[22]</sup>; World Bank, 2022<sup>[23]</sup>). In OECD countries, the female employment rate rises slightly with the length of the statutory maternity leave but starts to fall when the duration exceeds two years. This underscores that beyond a certain limit, excessively long maternity leave periods may be counter-productive, leading to a widening of the gender employment gap, rather than shrinking it (Thévenon and Solaz, 2012<sup>[24]</sup>). It also brings to attention the positive balancing role that fathers can play by taking paternity leave and their contribution to counter the frequent pattern whereby couples revert to a traditional division of labour when they become parents. For example, in Norway, couples whose child was born four weeks after the introduction of paternity leave reported fewer conflicts about the division of unpaid work and some improvements in the sharing of housework tasks than couples whose child was born just beforehand (Kotsadam and Finseraas, 2011<sup>[25]</sup>).

Evidence from Sweden and Spain likewise suggests that couples have started to split unpaid work more equally since the introduction of more gender-equal parental leave policies (Haggqvist et al., 2017<sup>[26]</sup>). For example, a study of the effects of paternity leave on labour market outcomes in Spain showed that as little as two weeks of paid paternity leave can increase a mother's probability of reemployment shortly after childbirth (Farré, 2017<sup>[27]</sup>). A detailed analysis from Germany shows that fathers who took parental leave decreased their paid work afterwards and increased the hours devoted to childcare. However, only fathers who took more than two months of leave also increased the involvement in other types of unpaid work (Bünning, 2015<sup>[28]</sup>).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, in Colombia, two rounds of legislative changes extended maternity leaves, the first in 2011 from 12 to 14 weeks, and the second in 2017 from 14 to 18 weeks. This exceeds the regional average of 15 weeks and the minimum of 14 defined by the 2000 ILO Convention No. 183 on Maternity Protection (Figure 2.2). Mothers of a multiple births or children with disabilities are allowed 2 additional weeks of leave. Paternity leave has also increased in the last year from 8 days to 2 weeks and the law contemplates that for every 1% decrease in the national unemployment rate, paternity leave will be extended by 1 additional week, to a maximum of 5 weeks. Paternity leave in Colombia now exceeds the regional average of 7 days but is far below the OECD average (Figure 2.2). However, it is important to note that the OECD average of around eight weeks reflects in part the extremely high entitlements of one year of paternity leave in Korea and Japan. Very few men in either of the two countries take any paternity leave, let alone a one-year period (Rich, 2019<sup>[29]</sup>).

## Figure 2.2. Maternity and paternity leave allowances in Colombia are above the regional average

Maternity leave in weeks and paternity leave in days, 2022 or latest available



Note: The Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) and OECD averages are unweighted. The 12 weeks of additional leave in Chile can be taken by either mothers or fathers and can be extended to 18 weeks at 50% rather than 100% of pay. Values for Latin American countries generally refer to the leave that workers in the formal sector are eligible for. The weeks of paternity leave are multiplied by five to arrive at a daily value, assuming a five-day working week. The OECD average is based on the sum of paternity leave and parental leave reserved for fathers.

Source: For OECD countries, data refer to OECD, "Table PF2.1.A. Summary of paid leave entitlements available to mothers" and "Table PF2.1.B. Summary of paid leave entitlements for fathers", OECD Family Database, [http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2\\_1\\_Parental\\_leave\\_systems.xlsx](http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2_1_Parental_leave_systems.xlsx) and IPC-IG and otherwise data refer to UNICEF (2020), "Table 6: Duración y beneficios de las licencias (regímenes generales)", Maternidad y Paternidad en el lugar de trabajo en América Latina y el Caribe – Políticas para la licencia de maternidad y paternidad y apoyo a la lactancia maternal". [https://www.unicef.org/lac/media/13931/file/Maternidad\\_y\\_paternidad\\_en\\_el\\_lugar\\_de\\_trabajo\\_en\\_ALC.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/lac/media/13931/file/Maternidad_y_paternidad_en_el_lugar_de_trabajo_en_ALC.pdf).

StatLink  <https://stat.link/dixvlg>

The schedule of maternity leave for a dependent employee typically includes 1 week of pre-birth leave (up to 2 weeks if prescribed by a doctor) and 17 weeks of post-birth week. The first 12 weeks of leave are reserved for the mothers, but the last 6 weeks are transferable between parents. Parents may choose to exchange a period of their leave for a part-time work period, equivalent to twice the time of the corresponding chosen period, provided that at least the first 12 weeks of maternity leave are taken in full. During these times of leave, the parent taking the leave is entitled to receive full salary; the cost is covered by the contributory government-sponsored insurance EPS or “Health Promotion Agency” (*Entidad Promotora de Salud*), assuming that the beneficiary has contributed for at least 9 months before the date of the birth. Regulations in the country include anti-discrimination measures, such as prohibiting employers from requiring a pregnancy test as a condition of employment, for example, or asking employees about their plans to have children.

Maternity, paternity, and parental leave for dependent workers are generous in Colombia, in comparison to other countries in the Latin America region. However, it is important to note that more than half of individuals of working age in the country are employed in the informal sector and as a consequence are rarely covered by these benefits (i.e. independent workers can contribute to the EPS and receive these benefits, but they need to contribute with 12.5% of their declared income). Latest estimates from the National Statistical Institute (DANE, 2022<sup>[30]</sup>), show that 58% of working age individuals work in the informal sector and that prevalence is slightly higher among men (59.9%) than women (55.4%). Most informal workers (84.6%) are employed in micro enterprises (with 10 or less workers), which tend to be characterised by low levels of productivity and limited capacities to provide benefits, such as parental leave, to its employers.

Once parents return to work, they have little options for easing the time-crunch of simultaneously working and caring for the children. In Colombia, a new law approved in 2021 has reduced the statutory maximum weekly working hours from 48 to 42. This reduction will take effect gradually between 2023 and 2026 (i.e. 47 hours in 2023, 46 hours in 2024, 44 hours in 2025 and 42 hours in 2026), without deductions of salaries and social benefits. As a result, the country has moved closer to the standard work week of 40.4 hours that is common to many OECD countries. While the change in the law points in the right direction, current statistics show a mismatch between reality and regulations in practice. The current law requires a maximum of 48 hours per week for full-time employment, but estimates based on household surveys show that on average a fully employed individual in Colombia works 49.5 hours per week (with differences among sexes, 50.4 hours for men and 48 hours for women) (OECD, 2022<sup>[31]</sup>).

### *Policy insights*

**Establish parental leave with reserved paternity leave weeks.** Although Colombia has moved towards allowing more parental leave that either men or women can benefit from, as elsewhere, few fathers take the leave. Several European countries (including Iceland and Sweden) have successfully boosted their take-up through reserving a certain share of the parental leave for fathers, meaning that the total leave that a couple can use is longer if both take it. Another policy option is to lengthen paternity leave, which cannot by definition be transferred to the mother (OECD, 2019<sup>[32]</sup>).

**Extend parental protection to informal workers.** Extending maternity protection to workers in the informal sector would be essential to achieve a more balanced distribution of paid and unpaid work activities between partners. In addition, by releasing women who work in the informal sector from the pressure to work too far into pregnancy and to return too soon after childbirth, it would reduce the high exposure of vulnerable populations to healthcare and economic risks (WIEGO/ILO/UNICEF, 2020<sup>[33]</sup>).

Although the expansion of coverage to workers not employed in the formal sector is a gradual process, given the simultaneity between a sizeable informal sector, which erodes the existing financing base, and a limited fiscal space, which hampers the ability to respond to higher social investment needs, Colombia could consider a non-contributory scheme targeted to most vulnerable parents. A study of OECD

economies finds that having the government administer maternity benefits financed by public fund makes it less likely that employers will discriminate against women of childbearing age (Thévenon and Solaz, 2012<sup>[24]</sup>).

The *Familias en Acción* programme already provides conditional benefits to poor households with children (identified using a proxy means test). The programme targets households with children up to 18 years of age and has a special provision for those with small children, up to 6 years of age. For these households the programme provides cash transfers every two months conditioned to effective access to children's health check-ups, as officially recommended by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection. The transfer associated to the conditionalities on health does not increase with the number of children in the household. The coverage of conditional cash transfers in Colombia is still limited; World Bank estimates show that only 41.4% of the poorest quintile of population in rural areas benefit from conditional cash transfers and 26.5% in urban areas (World Bank, 2022<sup>[34]</sup>).

### ***Reducing the transmission of gender stereotypes through the education system***

There is a vast literature on how attitudes about gender roles are transmitted to children, including the role that stereotypes play in influencing the educational and occupational choices of girls and boys (OECD, 2012<sup>[35]</sup>; Karlson and Simonsson, 2011<sup>[36]</sup>; Wahlstrom, 2003<sup>[37]</sup>). They shape and structure ambitions, including the professional careers people aspire to (UNESCO, 2021<sup>[38]</sup>; OECD, 2020<sup>[39]</sup>). As noted in Chapter 1, girls may shy away from choosing educational tracks and occupations perceived as traditionally masculine, such as STEM degree programmes (OECD, 2015<sup>[40]</sup>). Given that occupations characterised by a strong presence of male workers are often better paid, these choices can permanently hamper women's earning potential (Kunze, 2018<sup>[41]</sup>). At the same time, boys brought up to believe in traditional gender roles may gravitate away from care professions (OECD, 2017<sup>[42]</sup>), and may be less willing to participate in housework and childcare activities once they are adults (Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2010<sup>[43]</sup>).

Gender equality and education are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2020<sup>[44]</sup>), which recognises the key role that education can play in challenging and transforming unequal social and gender relations, norms, and practices. A stereotype-free educational approach can allow boys and girls acquiring full awareness of their strengths, along with the tools to nurture them so to be able to pursue their interests and aspirations freely throughout the life cycle (UNESCO, 2004<sup>[45]</sup>). This approach rests on two notions:

- The first is that the education system has a key role to play in tackling the persistence of gender stereotypes (Bousseau and Tap, 1998<sup>[46]</sup>; OECD, 2012<sup>[35]</sup>). For example, even though girls have gained access to schooling on a similar scale to boys in many countries, curricula and school materials have not followed through, implying that the representation of gender roles remains the same, using the old archetypes. Country initiatives to address these issues include the introduction of a more inclusive language in the textbooks and improving the balance between numbers of men and women represented in textbooks (UNESCO, 2020<sup>[44]</sup>). In many countries, including across Latin America, the textbooks continue to act as an important driver to the reproduction of traditional roles assigned to men and women. Research has shown that in textbooks, men often appear in a wide variety of professional (paid) roles and women in domestic (unpaid) roles (EU, 2012<sup>[47]</sup>). A stereotype-free educational approach can significantly help addressing these gaps and their transmission between generations. In Colombia, a recent qualitative study (Mahecha-Ovalle, 2022<sup>[48]</sup>) on the use of inclusive language in schools revealed a negative attitude of teachers based on the presumption that this language does not follow the official guidelines of the *Real Academia Española* and therefore should not be adopted in formal education. The authors interpret this evidence to conclude that many teachers still lack familiarity with the notion of inclusive language and its potential as a vehicle to address gender stereotypes in classrooms.



- The second concept assumes that the potential for teachers to support students' self-esteem, confidence and life paths remains largely underused. Several studies reveal that the teachers' attitude affects the interest of the students in school subjects, influencing, in turn, career orientations (OECD, 2012<sup>[35]</sup>; OECD, 2015<sup>[40]</sup>). If teachers do not trust girls' scientific abilities and provide them with less encouraging feedbacks, for example, girls' success and interest in these subjects can be reduced (OXFAM, 2005<sup>[49]</sup>; OXFAM, 2007<sup>[50]</sup>). In Australia, Norway and Hong Kong, China, the influence of gender norms on the beliefs of teachers are already apparent at the pre-primary level and manifest through a stronger engagement of boys in games that develop scientific understanding (UNESCO, 2020<sup>[51]</sup>). Female teachers in science and mathematics have a potentially important role to play in addressing these biases and in reorienting girls' interests and choices towards STEM disciplines (OECD, 2019<sup>[52]</sup>; Breda et al., 2020<sup>[53]</sup>; Ahmed and Mudrey, 2019<sup>[54]</sup>). For Chile, a study by the Ministry of Women and the National Women's Service (SERNAM, 2009<sup>[55]</sup>) showed that teachers often address classes using masculine forms (such as "boys" and the male forms for all children and students, regardless of the gender). When giving examples, they tend to confine female characters to the "private world" spheres, namely the domestic, maternal and care settings, with male characters placed in the "public world" settings where fully-fledged economic activities take place.

Gender biases of parents can also influence girls' expectations and career choices. As mentioned in Chapter 1, access to higher education in STEM disciplines for girls represent a worldwide problem, despite the fact that these disciplines generate higher returns to education and higher employability levels. Data from PISA assessments suggest that girls do not seem to be getting much encouragement from their parents. In all countries and economies surveyed on this question in 2012, parents were more likely to expect their sons, rather than their daughters, to work in a STEM field – even when boys and girls performed equally well in mathematics and science. In Colombia the share of men graduates in STEM subjects exceeds the corresponding share of women graduates by about 21 percentage points.

As part of its broader policies to promote equal opportunities for men and women, the Colombian Government has introduced important measures to address discriminatory practices in the educational sector. The 2018-22 *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo* (National Development Plan) included objectives to "promote equal access and participation of women in the labour market; promote the right of women to a life free of violence; promote the sexual health and reproductive rights of girls, boys and adolescents and reduce harmful practices related to child marriage and early unions; and, increase the participation of women in decision-making spaces" (National Planning Department Colombia, 2022<sup>[56]</sup>). On implementation, it included two strategies related to education, aimed at reducing girls' dropouts and gender-based violence in schools, respectively (statistics show that in 2021 76.1% of reported violence cases among children and teenagers between 6 and 17 years of age were targeted to girls) (Observatorio Nacional de Violencias de Género, 2022<sup>[57]</sup>). These strategies were reflected in the *Plan Sectorial de Educación 2018-22* (Sectorial Plan for Education).

As reported by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, Colombia, 2022<sup>[58]</sup>), between 2018 and 2021 the implementation of the Sectorial Plan's strategies for women's equality included three main activities: (i) technical assistance to Education Secretaries nationwide, (ii) teacher training programmes that promote gender inclusiveness and (iii) the development of protocols to prevent gender-based violence in schools and higher education institutions. The first activity, technical assistance to Education Secretaries, focused on the implementation of warning systems to monitor girls' dropouts. These systems gather information on the reasons behind dropouts putting special emphasis on those related to gender, such as teen pregnancy, gender-based violence or care obligations. The second activity, teacher training programmes, included guidelines on how to promote the participation of girls and boys in all disciplines (including math for girls and language for boys). As a result, by 2021, 5 700 teachers received this training (representing 71.3% of the end-goal included in the National Development Plan 2018-22 of 8 000 by 2022) (Ministry of Education, Colombia, 2022<sup>[58]</sup>). The third activity, involving protocols for the prevention of



gender-based violence and discrimination based on gender for schools and higher education institutions, was prepared by the ministry with the goal of providing guidance to institutions on how to implement their own plan to prevent violence against women (Ministry of Education, Colombia, 2022<sup>[59]</sup>). Along with efforts from the Ministry of Education, Departments of Education at the subnational level developed guidelines to promote a more inclusive gender approach in local schools. In particular, the region of Antioquia (Secretaria de las Mujeres de Antioquia, 2019<sup>[60]</sup>) and the district of Bogota (Secretaria de Educacion del Distrito de Bogota, 2015<sup>[61]</sup>) developed protocols to guide schools in the identification of harmonised approaches to tackle gender biases in the classrooms.

The educational commitments of the National Development Plan 2022-26 recognise the role that training and upskilling play in reducing gender gaps and fostering the economic autonomy of women through greater job opportunities and productive inclusion. From early childhood to higher education the Plan aims to strengthen teacher training strategies and the dissemination of good practices to promote access of girls, adolescents and young people to STEM disciplines, environmental education and other relevant education programmes with a gender and intercultural approach.

### *Policy insights*

**Mainstream trainings to help teachers becoming more mindful about the importance of gender attitudes and stereotypes at school.** This could be done by building on the experience with implementing teacher training programmes that promote gender inclusiveness under the *Plan Sectorial de Educación 2018-22* (Sectorial Plan for Education) and other small-scale initiatives from sub-national governments such as Bogota and Antioquia. For example, there is evidence that many teachers in Colombia lack familiarity with the notion of inclusive language and its potential as a vehicle to address gender stereotypes in classrooms. One lesson from the international experience is that the efforts to create a culture conducive to gender equality should start from early education and with the willing support of the teachers (OECD, 2012<sup>[35]</sup>). Specific training is important to help the teachers adapting their pedagogical approaches to the age group of the children (UNESCO, 2017<sup>[62]</sup>). For example, teachers have played a pivotal role in the initiatives undertaken by the government of the Flanders (Belgium) to raise awareness about gender roles in Flemish schools. Teachers received trainings to detect the presence of gender attitudes and stereotypes in the curriculum material and were encouraged to propose solutions on how to improve the situation. There is evidence of teachers having subsequently become more mindful of the importance to avert the use of a spoken language with the children that could favour the development of stereotyped gender roles. Assignments that could reinforce the development of identity aspects (girls to carry out organisational and support roles such as taking notes, planning events, co-ordinating group work, and so on) have gradually diminished. These outcomes were helped by changing the organisation of the classrooms and making recourse to mixed groups to limit splitting boys and girls (Council of Europe, 2014<sup>[63]</sup>). The lessons from this experience provide a potentially useful benchmark against which to assess the pedagogical guides issued by the Colombian Government and progress with implementation.

**Strengthen the engagement of families in the process of creating gender-sensitive education.** Although the schools play an important role in the education of future citizens, involving parents is key when introducing a new educational approach aimed at strengthening gender-sensitive education. The family often acts as “spokesperson” of entrenched prejudices and parents could view the new initiatives to change course with suspicion. The Ministry of Education in Colombia already includes as part of its sectoral plan 2018-22 a strategy to support the *Alianza Familia Escuela* (Family-School Alliances) (Ministry of Education, Colombia, 2022<sup>[64]</sup>). These Alliances promote joint efforts between educational institutions and families and incorporate activities for the promotion of gender equality (Ministry of Education, Colombia, 2022<sup>[58]</sup>; 2019<sup>[65]</sup>). International experience can serve as inspiration to strengthen gender issues in the Family-School Alliances. In Peru the Ministry of Education launched a national campaign in 2019 to inform parents about the importance of mainstreaming gender-sensitive practices in education and their interactions with the curriculum. Almost 140 information centres opened to explain families how and why

the gender approach is implemented in the education curriculum (MINEDUC, 2019<sup>[66]</sup>). In Ireland, as part of the gender mainstreaming strategy, the Ministry of Education and Science developed guidelines, for use by the whole school community, including parents. The guidelines for primary and secondary schools provide parents with information about school obligations in relation to equality legislation, explanation of gender mainstreaming and what it entails and suggestions for actions that parents can undertake at schools (Council of Europe, 2011<sup>[67]</sup>; EIGE, 2020<sup>[68]</sup>). The pedagogical guidelines implemented by the Chilean Government encourage the schools to take a more pro-active role to engage the families by exploring options for co-operation with the parents' associations (OECD, 2021<sup>[69]</sup>). The guidelines include a video that parents can watch for their background ahead of participating to a discussion meeting. The Spanish *Irene* programme informs and trains parents as part of a wider initiative aimed at preventing sexual violence committed by young cohorts in secondary education (Council of Europe, 2014<sup>[63]</sup>).

### **Scale up efforts to increase the interest of girls in STEM disciplines while promoting role models.**

In June 2021, the Colombian Ministry of Education and the Regional Office of the Siemens Stiftung Foundation published a guide directed to pre-school teachers to promote STEM disciplines among girls and a more gender inclusive approach in the classroom (Ministry of Education, Colombia and Siemens Stiftung Foundation, 2021<sup>[70]</sup>). The same year, the Ministry of Technology and Communications and the Maloka Corporation launched the programme “Chicas STEAM” (STEAM Girls) which aims at promoting the interest of girls and young women between the ages of 12 and 15 in STEM disciplines (Maloka Corporation, 2022<sup>[71]</sup>).

The Peruvian experience provides an interesting example of continued efforts to promote STEM disciplines among girls. Eureka in Peru is a long-standing nationwide programme on science and technology that dates to the mid-1980s. It aims at stimulating the curiosity of children in primary and secondary education for STEM disciplines. Teachers and students work together to the development of a scientific culture using pedagogical approaches adapted to the age of the children. Between 2012 and 2022, the National Council for Science, Technology, and Technological Innovation (CONCYTEC), in partnership with private donors implemented the programme MaCTec Peru (Mini Academy for Sciences & Technology). The programme aimed at reducing the gender gap in STEM fields and targeted young Peruvian girls (between 8 and 11 years old) from urban and rural areas. The main activity of the programme consisted of workshop participated by established scientists at which girls from different backgrounds, learned, created and experimented. Upon returning home, they shared their experience and applied their learning with their peers and possibly more widely with their communities. MaCTec Peru was awarded the UNESCO Prize for Girls' and Women's Education for its “Mobile MaCTec Bus Labs” project (UNESCO, 2023<sup>[72]</sup>). Mentoring and role models have shown to have concrete positive results in stimulating girls' interest in STEM fields.

Similar to the MacTEC initiative in Peru, in 2017, the OECD and the Government of Mexico jointly launched the “NinaSTEM Pueden” programme, a project aimed at stimulating the curiosity and passion of Mexican girls for STEM subjects through educational opportunities outside the classroom, inspired by meetings with women mentors who have excelled in these fields (OECD, 2020<sup>[73]</sup>). Another Mexican programme, “Codigo X”, promotes the inclusion of girls and women in the ICT sector by organizing workshops, conferences and hackathons for girls and young women on digital literacy, robotics and programming, while showing them the different opportunities they have in technology careers (OECD, 2018<sup>[79]</sup>).

To further strengthen ongoing initiatives, the Government of Colombia could expand teacher trainings to tackle gender biases in STEM educations (Corbett and Hill, 2015<sup>[74]</sup>; OECD, 2017<sup>[42]</sup>). These efforts could include by equipping the teachers with appropriate pedagogical tools to help children, particularly, girls, overcoming the anxiety about mathematics and their lack of confidence in their own science and mathematics abilities. Initiatives such as the one implemented by VHTO – the Dutch National Expert Organization on Girls/Women and Science/Technology – train teachers to help the young generations to become aware of their talents and how to use them in STEM professions (VHTO, (Dutch) National Expert Organisation Girls/ Women and Science/Technology, 2014<sup>[75]</sup>).

Keeping the momentum for change is essential, given that fighting gender stereotypes through the education system is a long-term process. Enhancing gender equality in education is a long-term process that requires capitalizing on present and previous efforts to promote improvements. By implication, continuous monitoring of achievements can be of great value to put Colombia on a sustainable path of progress. As part of a defined long-term strategy, Colombia could identify a clear set of intermediate targets and standards, against which to organise an independent monitoring body in charge of assessing progress and disseminating success stories at school.

### Box 2.2. Summary of policy options for reducing barriers to sharing paid and unpaid work equally in Colombia

Institutional, legal and cultural constraints lie in the way of reducing the barriers to achieving a more equitable sharing of unpaid work activities in Colombia. The OECD suggests to:

#### Create a more comprehensive care system

- **Foster ongoing efforts to make early childhood education and care (ECEC) programmes accessible to all children.** As an integral part of the *Programa Hogar Comunitario de Bienestar* (Community Welfare Home Program), the community homes are an effective means to reach households in rural and remote areas. This programme should be expanded to reach a greater number of families and areas, including those with a high concentration of indigenous populations. It should also be provided with appropriate resources to support children until they reach school age. For children, the access to affordable and reliable ECEC programmes mean improved learning opportunities, alongside stronger opportunities to strengthen well-being and standards of living. For mothers will a secure environment for their children means more opportunities to actively seek a job in the labour market and spend more time in a paid work activity. To achieve the dual dividends of an inclusive and effective ECEC system, Colombia will need to further address inequities in ECEC participation levels, particularly among the most disadvantaged children who stand to reap the greatest benefits.
- **Professionalise community-based childcare programmes.** Some countries have chosen to reinforce the offer of continuous training programmes to childcare workers, by increasing the options for shorter, but more regular and better-spaced programmes. Viet Nam, for example, offers opportunities for continuous training of up to two months each year. In Colombia, a similar approach would suit particularly well the needs of rural and far-away areas, where a well-trained childcare workforce is in particularly short supply, compared to the urban centres. At the same time, childcare needs tend to follow the seasonality of agriculture outputs in these areas, meaning that they pick up when agriculture and harvesting activities intensify, before bouncing back as soon as seasonal factors moderate. Accommodating these variations, unknown to the urban centres, requires a high capacity to adapt. Several countries including Ecuador, for example, have adopted more decisive compensation policies for community childcare providers. Aside from pay increases, the growing professionalisation can entail feedback effects on the expansion of formalisation if the time devoted to childcare work qualifies the individual for pension credits and health coverage. By increasing the attractiveness of the childcare profession this will support the expansion of labour force participation, particularly women.
- **Ensure that all 5-year-old children begin the transition year on time and ready for schooling.** Colombia could reinforce measures to increase enrolment, such as ensuring a full school day for children in the transition year. By reassuring parents that their young child would be supervised during their work hours and receive adequate nutrition throughout the day, this

could have positive returns on their capacity to adapt work hours, with potentially beneficial effects on the labour market participation of mothers. Linking the *Familias en Acción* programme to children's attendance at school in the transition year, would provide a financial incentive for parents to enrol their children. Media campaigns or the engagement of local community leaders could be a useful tool to raise awareness of the importance of children entering the transition year in a timely fashion.

- **Improve the conditions of informal caregivers.** The OECD has recently developed a framework for helping countries with their commitments to recognise and protect the rights of informal carers. Some of the framework's recommendations could be of interest to Colombia. They include supporting information sharing through websites and social centres, alongside more training to prevent physical and mental exhaustion of carers and to strengthen the quality of long-term care. In addition, respite care is a necessary tool to help carers rest and manage other responsibilities. Financial support to carers can take the form of cash benefits, either paid to carers directly through a carer allowance, or indirectly via those receiving the care. Beyond providing financial support to carers, countries increasingly take measures to ensure that caring time qualifies for pension credits and that carers benefit from health coverage.

#### Expand parental leave in the formal and informal economy

- **Establish parental leave with reserved paternity leave weeks.** Although Colombia has moved towards allowing more parental leave that either men or women can benefit from, as elsewhere, few fathers take the leave. Several OECD countries, including Canada, many European countries, Japan and Korea have successfully boosted take-up among fathers through reserving a certain share of the parental leave for fathers, meaning that the total leave that a couple can use is longer if both partners take it. Another policy option is to lengthen paternity leave, which can per definition not be transferred to the mother.
- **Extend parental protection to informal workers.** Extending maternity protection to workers in the informal sector is essential to achieve a more balanced distribution of paid and unpaid work activities between partners. In addition, by releasing women who work in the informal sector from the pressure to work too far into pregnancy and to return too soon after childbirth, it will help reducing the high exposure of the vulnerable populations to healthcare and economic risks. Latest estimates show that only 41.4% of the poorest quintile of population in rural areas and 26.5% in urban areas benefit from conditional cash transfers. An expansion of the coverage of the conditional cash transfer programme *Familias en Acción* (Families in Action), which targets poor households with children, could support maternal protection of the most vulnerable.

#### Reduce the transmission of gender stereotypes through the education system

- **Mainstream training to help teachers becoming more mindful about the importance of gender attitudes and stereotypes at school.** This could be done by building on the experience with implementing teacher training programmes that promote gender inclusiveness and other small-scale initiatives from sub-national governments such as Bogota and Antioquia. Many teachers in Colombia lack familiarity with the notion of inclusive language and its potential as a vehicle to address gender stereotypes in classrooms. International experience shows that the efforts to create a culture conducive to gender equality should start from early education and with the willing support of the teachers. Specific training is important to help the teachers adapting their pedagogical approaches to the age group of the children. For example, teachers have played a pivotal role in the initiatives undertaken by the government of the Flanders (Belgium) to raise awareness about gender roles in Flemish schools.

- **Strengthen the engagement of families in the process of creating gender-sensitive education.** Although the schools play an important role in the education of future citizens, involving parents is key when introducing a new educational approach aimed at strengthening gender-sensitive education. The family often acts as “spokesperson” of entrenched prejudices and parents could view the new initiatives to change course with suspicion. The Ministry of Education in Colombia already promotes through the *Alianza Familia Escuela* (Family-School Alliances) joint efforts between educational institutions and families and incorporate activities for the promotion of gender equality. International experience can serve as inspiration to strengthen gender issues in the Family-School Alliances. For example, the Spanish Irene programme informs and trains parents as part of a wider initiative aimed at preventing sexual violence committed by young cohorts in secondary education.
- **Scale up efforts to increase the interest of girls in STEM disciplines while promoting role models.** In 2021, the Colombian Ministry of Education and the Regional Office of the Siemens Stiftung Foundation published a guide directed to pre-school teachers to promote STEM disciplines among girls and a more gender inclusive approach in the classroom. To further strengthen ongoing initiatives, the Government of Colombia could expand teacher trainings to tackle gender biases in STEM educations. These efforts could include by equipping the teachers with appropriate pedagogical tools to help children, particularly, girls, overcoming the anxiety about mathematics and their lack of confidence in their own science and mathematics abilities. Initiatives such as the one implemented by the Dutch National Expert Organization on Girls/Women and Science/Technology train teachers to help the young generations to become aware of their talents and how to use them in STEM professions.

## Making women’s paid work pay more

### ***Ensuring access to quality education for all***

Although most countries have made important strides in expanding opportunities of access to quality education, giving all children and youth access to quality education remains essential to support well-being and to create the conditions for economic independence. Poor children and young people who drop out of the school system prematurely are more likely to find themselves in situations of vulnerability, to be exposed to violence and to adopt risky behaviours. Adolescent girls and young women from the poorest households are more likely than girls and young women from wealthier households to become pregnant or give birth before the age of 18 (UNFPA, 2013<sup>[76]</sup>).

As discussed in Chapter 1, in Colombia educational outcomes are highly heterogeneous. Attendance of primary schools is high (93%), regardless of whether children live in rural or urban areas. However, enrolment rates decline strongly with age especially in rural settings: more than half of women between 13 and 24 years old do not attend any educational institution in rural areas, compared to around 37% of women in urban areas. For the group of 6 to 11 years old, the rate of school attendance among children who belong to families self-identified as indigenous is 74%, compared to 92% among non-indigenous families. For the group of 12-18 years old, the rate falls to 55% for indigenous children, compared to 74% for other children (Freire et al., 2015<sup>[77]</sup>). In the same line, the average years of education vary significantly across socio-economic groups. Statistics on children living in rural areas show that they receive on average five and a half years of education, compared to more than nine years for children from urban areas. In the rural areas, the illiteracy rate among children over 15 years old exceeds 12%, which is almost four times higher than in the urban areas (3.3%) (USAID, 2020<sup>[78]</sup>).

Work activities outside school influence educational attainment. In Colombia, regardless of sex, about 1 million or 9.8% of children between 5 and 17 years of age work, either outside their house or inside their

homes doing chores for 15 hours or more per week (DANE, 2022<sup>[79]</sup>). While the prevalence of child labour outside the house is higher among boys (6.4% vs. 3.2% for girls), this changes when house chores are factored, with a prevalence of 10.8% among girls and 8.9% for boys. Prevalence also increases with age, showing a bigger burden among teenagers between 15 and 17 years of age (27.5%), compared to smaller children between 5 and 14 years of age (4.5%). For those working outside the house, the sector with the biggest concentration of child labour is agriculture (45.6% of child labour outside the house is concentrated in agriculture activities), indicating a higher prevalence of this issue in rural areas.

Teenage pregnancy also stands out as a major source of concern in Colombia. Although the adolescent fertility rate has decreased over the last two decades in Colombia (World Bank Group, 2019<sup>[80]</sup>), the number of births per 1 000 women between 15 and 19 years of age is the highest among OECD countries. By 2020, in Colombia the adolescent fertility rate equalled 53.2 births per 1 000 women aged 15 to 19, significantly higher than the OECD average of 9.4 (OECD, 2022<sup>[81]</sup>). Teenage mothers are less educated than their peers, since adolescence motherhood associates to a high probability of attending classes irregularly, repeating school grades and leaving formal education prematurely (OECD, 2018<sup>[82]</sup>). In Colombia in 2018, 86.2% of women that had a child during their teen years only attained primary or secondary education, compared to 71.5% among those that postpone motherhood (UNFPA Colombia, 2022<sup>[83]</sup>). Half of teenage girls dropping out of school in Colombia cite pregnancy as a principal cause (Daniels, 2015<sup>[84]</sup>).

Early motherhood is not equally distributed by socio-economic contexts. Adolescent pregnancy is higher among women who are in the poorest quintile (5.5%), are indigenous and live in polygamous families (5.1%), live in rural areas (4.8%), or in the Region of the Orinoquía and Amazonía (4.6%). Partly related to these factors, adolescent pregnancy is higher among displaced women (4.4%) or reside in municipalities directly affected by the internal armed conflict (3.8%) (Murad-Rivera R, 2018<sup>[85]</sup>). In 2015, the percentage of women aged 13 to 19 who are already mothers or pregnant with their first child in the lowest quintile is 6 times higher than those in the highest quintile; among women with only primary education, it is five times higher than the percentage of women with higher education.

Moreover, there is a strong correlation between teenage pregnancies and gender-based violence. Registered fathers of new-born babies of 10 to 14 years old mothers are 5 to 10 years older than the mother (UNFPA Colombia, 2022<sup>[83]</sup>). In Colombia, having sexual relations with a minor under 14 years old is illegal and sentenced by penal law (UNFPA Colombia, 2022<sup>[83]</sup>).

### *Policy insights*

**Continue the efforts to reward poor families for their engagement in their children's education.** The opportunity cost of primary education refers to the loss of returns accrued by the family from child labour and/or from the contribution that the child gives to the household by absolving domestic tasks, such as taking care of younger siblings, performing household chores, and caring for livestock. Opportunity costs are especially relevant in poor, rural, agrarian households, where child labour is in high demand and therefore the immediate returns from schooling may be lower than the returns from the labour market. In certain contexts, the issue is of greater concerns for girls than for boys, reflecting the gendered distribution of household chores, marriage customs, and the lack of employment opportunities for girls after schooling. Boys may be responsible for livestock or other farming activities in the family.

By providing regular transfer benefits to parents of poor background who chose to keep their children at school, conditional cash transfers (CCTs) programmes should entice a decline of the opportunity cost. In Colombia, the programme *Familias en Acción*, which provides conditional benefits to poor households with children up to 18 years of age, encompasses a special provision for those households with children in school age. For these households the programme provides cash transfers conditioned to enrolment in school and a minimum of 80% attendance of the scheduled classes per school bimester. This transfer increases with the number of children in the household (up to three children), population density of area of

residency (transfers' amounts are differentiated for four types of areas and reflect higher opportunity costs of urban areas) and school grade (higher for children in high school). A recent impact evaluation shows that *Familias en Acción* increases the probability of school enrolment in the main 14 cities of the country and in rural areas by 12 percentage points (Arteaga, Trujillo and Gomez, 2019<sup>[86]</sup>). The programme also shows impacts in reducing the probability of teenage pregnancy in rural areas and child labour in urban areas by 4 percentage points respectively. Cortés, Gallego and Maldonado (2016<sup>[87]</sup>) argue that the programme could boost its impacts in reducing teenage pregnancy if its renewal is conditional to school success.

Another evaluation of *Familias en Acción* identifies five main challenges in the first 10 years of operation of the programme (Angulo, 2016<sup>[88]</sup>). First, improved targeting mechanisms have helped to reduce exclusion errors of the poorest and most vulnerable families. These improvements have been introduced in recognition of the fact that socio-economic status may evolve overtime and accordingly the algorithm used to estimate poverty must be able to capture changes in status timely. Second, continuous investment in time and resources were necessary to strengthen local governments' technical capacities for the verification of co-responsibilities in education and health in the field. Third, existing barriers preventing accessibility in different contexts have proven challenging, so that the programme is in constant revision of its payment strategy by promoting simplification and the financial inclusion of beneficiaries. Fourth, it would be important to preserve the integrity of the programme by preventing the risk of political manipulation, particularly by the local authorities and especially during targeting and verification of conditionalities, while also promoting a strategy to raise the implementation capacities of the municipalities. Fifth, it is important to keep a strong link between the programme and the overall national poverty reduction strategy. This means expanding the program's co-ordination efforts to better connect beneficiaries with initiatives outside the core goal of the programme, such as those promoted by the Ministry of Labour to foster labour market inclusion. All in all, important efforts have already been achieved to improve *Familias en Acción* in the face of emerging challenges and changing realities on the ground. Looking forward, maintaining the same responsiveness will remain a key to ensure impact.

The intention of the NDP 2022-26 is to harmonise the programmes of conditional and unconditional monetary transfers in charge of the Administrative Department for Social Prosperity (art. 66 of Law 2 294 of 2023). In addition, it promises to continue working on family and community accompaniment to overcome poverty, including with an emphasis on female-headed households.

**Communicate the benefits of completing studies.** Students from low-income families often are ill-informed about the monetary and social returns of education and the wider range of job opportunities studies can open the door to. Influenced by the perception that education does not affect their future well-being, students may drop out of school prematurely to support the income of their families. In 2021, the Colombian Ministry of Education launched with the support of three Foundations (Santo Domingo, Education above All and Pies Descalzos) the campaign *Este cuento es tuyo* ("This story is yours") to promote school enrolment, retention and completion of all grades in the context of post pandemic schools' reopening (Ministry of Education, Colombia, 2021<sup>[89]</sup>). International experience has proven the potential of communicational campaigns as a rapid way to inform students about the benefits of education at moderate costs. In Peru, the programme *Decidiendo para un futuro mejor* (Deciding for a better future) implemented by an innovation lab inside the Ministry of Education (MineduLAB) consisted of a campaign to transmit information on the monetary and social returns of basic and higher education through videos and infographics sent to educational institutions (MineduLAB, 2018<sup>[90]</sup>). The videos showed students reflecting on the importance to study and have goals, based on their personal experience and family environment. They also provided information on funding opportunities to higher education, such as via scholarships and educational credits. The results of a randomised experiment to evaluate the pilot programme show a significant decrease in the number of dropouts (MineduLAB, 2018<sup>[90]</sup>). The observed progress of student performances was particularly strong among girls, which reveals that one of the most important potentials of the programme resides in the ability to help closing gender gaps in education.



School mentoring and student counselling are also a key to making girls and young women stay in the education system. Interestingly, private sector can play a leading role in these initiatives. One example is The Girls' Network (<https://www.thegirlsnetwork.org.uk/>), which is a UK national charity aiming to inspire and empower girls aged 14 to 19 from disadvantaged communities by connecting them to a peer mentor, and a network of professional women acting as role models. The initiative involves partnerships with schools and colleges. All mentors are women who have received a yearlong training in mentoring, after having undergone an application process. More than 500 trained mentors give practical advice on how to identify and access opportunities and how to develop the confidence to seize them.

### **Ensure comprehensive sexuality education and information at school and out-of-school.**

International guidelines from UNESCO points to the importance of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) as a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality. CSE addresses sexual and reproductive health challenges – reproduction, modern contraception, pregnancy, and childbirth, along with sexually transmissible infections (STIs). Insofar as it uses a human-rights-based approach, CSE involves raising awareness among young people about own rights and the respect of the rights of others, including the right to safe responsible and respectful sexual choices free of coercion and violence. The goal is to equip young people with the tools that they need to achieve healthy lives and relationships. Awareness about the importance of this objective is particularly important, given the growing exposure of young people to scientifically incorrect, conflicting, and confusing information about sexuality and gender. The case of Finland, which represents an advanced model of comprehensive sex education in Europe, points to the effectiveness of the co-operation between school and health authorities on sexuality education for the young as one key strength of the Finnish model (Kontula, 2010<sup>[91]</sup>). Peru launched in 2012 the Multisector Plan for the Prevention of Pregnancy in Adolescents 2013-21. This plan sets out five main objectives: 1. Postpone the start of sexual activity in adolescence; 2. Increase the percentage of adolescents who complete secondary education; 3. Ensure the inclusion of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in the National Curricular Framework; 4. Increase the use of modern contraceptive methods among teenagers; and 5. Reduce sexual violence against girls and teenagers (MINSa, 2012<sup>[92]</sup>). As part of the implementation of the plan the ministries of Health and Education launched initiatives that include: (i) the creation of adolescent-friendly spaces in primary health centres; (ii) development and dissemination of guidelines and virtual courses for teachers on comprehensive sexual education at all levels of education; and (iii) campaigns to assist girls and teenagers who are victims of violence.

In Colombia, several laws and national plans have ratified CSE as a key element of formal education. The General Education Law (*Ley General de Educación*, law 115) from 1994 mandates all educational institutions to include sexual education as a cross-cutting issue for students at different ages (Congress of the Republic of Colombia, 1994<sup>[93]</sup>). The 2012-21 Public Health Plan included as an objective that “by 2021, 80% of public educational institutions guarantee that girls, boys, adolescents and young people have sexual education, based on the exercise of human, sexual and reproductive rights, from a gender and differential approach” (Profamilia, 2022<sup>[94]</sup>). In 2013, the School Coexistence Law (*Ley de Convivencia Escolar*, law 1620) highlights the relevance of sexual education from a human rights approach. The National Policy on Sexuality, Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights, revised in 2014, also includes the objective to facilitate access to sexual education from the health sector and other sectors such as education (Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Colombia, 2014<sup>[95]</sup>).

The NDP 2022-26 takes on a commitment to step up the policies addressing sexual and reproductive rights using a broad ranged sexual education approach, including effective access to contraceptives.

Even though it has legal backing, the implementation of CSE has proven challenging in Colombia. In 2008 the Ministry of Education in collaboration with UNFPA launched the Program of Education in Sexuality and Construction of Citizenship (PESCC) aimed at developing life competencies for a healthy sexual and reproductive life. The programme was initially piloted directly by the national Ministry of Education but in 2010, after its incorporation in the national Educational Policy, resources were transferred to local



governments states which became in charge of its implementation (Beltrán Villamizar, Galvis Aparicio and Vargas Beltrán, 2013<sup>[96]</sup>). An evaluation of the programme in 2014 showed that implementation was low (only about 17% of public schools implemented PESCC in 2013) mainly due to lack of commitment of key implementing actors who perceive sexual education as irrelevant for the school context (Universidad de los Andes, 2014<sup>[97]</sup>). However, where correctly implemented, PESCC supports outcomes of increased knowledge, better attitudes, and improved sexual practices. In particular, the evaluation identified a significant increase in access to information on available health and contraception services. In 2021 a draft bill aimed at including sexual education as part of official schools' curriculum was discussed in Congress but encountered opposition and was not approved (Congress of the Republic of Colombia, 2021<sup>[98]</sup>).

With the average years of education varying significantly across socio-economic groups in Colombia, it is essential that CSE programmes reach out-of-school young people and children, who are often most vulnerable to misinformation, coercion, and exploitation. The UNFPA's guideline on out-of-school CSE complements the initially provided guideline of UNESCO by providing evidence and informed insights to address this specific dimension (UNFPA, 2020<sup>[99]</sup>). It recommends a more informal and flexible setting than may be possible in school, involving smaller learning groups, adaptable class times, more varied and creative delivery of the curriculum, and more interaction among learners. One important aspect relates to the question about who should be in charge of delivering the information. Facilitators can encourage learners to share questions and perspectives that they may be reluctant to voice within a learning environment that they perceive as excessively formalistic. Of essence is ensuring that both girls and boys feel that they can safely and comfortably raise questions, clarify doubts and address concerns. Trained young individuals who students can identify as peers can help the creation of a supportive information setting.

**Provide medical and financial support to vulnerable girls and teenage mothers.** Young mothers concentrate among the most vulnerable and have limited access to key resources such as medical, psychological and income for basic needs. The *Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar* (Colombian Institute of Family Welfare) has a programme targeted to vulnerable adolescents and women over 18 who are pregnant or lactating that provides psychological support, referrals to relevant health and education services and, for cases of mothers without family support, temporary housing (ICBF, 2016<sup>[100]</sup>). International experience shows the potential of this type of interventions. In Uruguay a programme aims at promoting educational projects for mothers under the age of 23. It provides mothers with financial support for childcare, alongside with social support to help them acquire skills and competencies. In Australia, the government has created several transfer programmes for teenage parents, including the JET Childcare Fee Assistance subsidy, for example, which allows young mothers and partners paying for the care of the children during work or school times. Paid directly to childcare providers, the amount depends on the income of the family, the child's age and the hours that the mother and partner spend at work or in education. These programmes underscore the importance of targeting, especially with a view to reaching out to rural and remote areas.

### ***Promoting women in non-traditional careers and leadership positions***

In Colombia four in ten businesses are led by a woman. The majority of these businesses are SMEs (78.2% of business led by women are micro or small, 17.5% medium and 4.3% large) and concentrate in sectors associated to traditional female roles (food production 21.4% and clothing manufacture 15.6%) (DANE, ONU Mujeres and CPEM, 2022<sup>[101]</sup>). Smaller firms are typically less capable than large companies to support work-life balance and promote women's careers. Conversely, large Colombian companies are managed almost exclusively by men. Female share of seats on boards of the largest publicly listed companies in 2021 is 12.9%, below the OECD average of 28% (OECD, 2022<sup>[102]</sup>), but higher than the latest estimate for Latin America of 10.4% (Deloitte, 2022<sup>[103]</sup>).

Several barriers prevent Colombia women from attaining leadership positions. As in other Latin American countries, a key barrier relates to the influence of gender stereotyping about leadership figures and the entrenched prejudices they have to overcome to rise in their careers (Nathan Associates, 2016<sub>[104]</sub>). Managers are more likely to hire candidates whose characteristics are similar to theirs but since most hiring managers are men, women applications are less likely to be retained. This discourages them from submitting their candidacy for senior management positions. Furthermore, talent is frequently defined as a pattern of behaviour associated with male characteristics – such as assertiveness and competitiveness, for example – which reinforces the belief that good managers are men (Cabrera, 2007<sub>[105]</sub>; Warren and Walters, 1998<sub>[106]</sub>). Career interruptions due to maternity further reduce opportunities for promotion (UNDP, 2010<sub>[107]</sub>). In addition, corporate, academic, or political leadership positions require long work hours, a high degree of flexibility and a disposition to travel. These characteristics are difficult to reconcile with the fact that women in Colombia spend significantly more time on family and domestic obligations than men do.

Balancing work and life responsibilities is very difficult for women in scientific academic fields. This means particularly high risks of career slowdowns, when not abandonments. In Colombia, women only represent 37.8% of the countries' researchers and while their participation in medical and health scientific research activities is high (59.6%), they are underrepresented in natural sciences (28.2%), engineering and technology (18.4%), agricultural sciences (37.6%), social sciences (46.4%), and humanities and arts (27.1%) (Franco-Orozco and Franco-Orozco, 2018<sub>[108]</sub>). This unequal situation persists in scientific leadership, where only 33.6% of scientific groups in Colombia are led by female researchers. On top of underrepresentation, women tend to get paid less. In undergraduate programmes the highest gender pay gap is found in medical and health sciences degrees (17.2%) and in postgraduate programmes in engineering, architecture, and urbanism degrees (37.6%) (Franco-Orozco and Franco-Orozco, 2018<sub>[108]</sub>).

Regarding the representation of women in congressional electoral lists, Colombia established a statutory share of 30% in 2011. This was reached for the first time by the recently elected 2022 Congress, showing a significant increase in women's participation from the previous Congress elected in 2018 in which the share of congresswomen was 19.7%. With these results, Colombia is above the global average for women's participation in parliaments (25%), and closer to the average in the Americas region (32.4%) (DANE, ONU Mujeres and CPEM, 2022<sub>[101]</sub>).

Colombia is also showing important progress in the representation of women in the executive branch and in management positions of public entities in general. The last (2018) and current (2022) administrations had a woman as vice-president and equal number of men and women in ministerial cabinet positions. Worldwide only 22% of cabinet positions are held by women (World Bank Group, 2019<sub>[80]</sub>) (DANE, ONU Mujeres and CPEM, 2022<sub>[101]</sub>). By 2021, women represent 46% of management positions of public entities, with 45% females in highest decision-making level and 47% in other levels of decision-making, that is higher than the statutory share of 30% established for public entities by the law 581 in 2000 (DANE, ONU Mujeres and CPEM, 2022<sub>[101]</sub>).

At the local level the situation is less positive, only 2 of the 32 governors are female (6.3%) and 132 of 1 099 districts (12%) have female mayors (DANE, ONU Mujeres and CPEM, 2022<sub>[101]</sub>). As identified by a 2015 World Bank report, different obstacles prevent women from participating in politics in Colombia: (i) the quotas established by law are often not enforced due to the lack of effective sanctions, (ii) a male-dominated political culture and the prevalence of patriarchal social norms dissuade women from engaging in political activities, especially at higher levels; and, (iii) political violence against women, nearly two-thirds (63%) of women in politics report receiving some form of aggression (such as restrictions on women speaking and the refusal to grant them the full financial and administrative resources required for their public duties) due to their gender (World Bank Group, 2019<sub>[80]</sub>).

## *Policy insights*

**Create targets for women’s representation in private companies.** Firms with above-average representation of women on their boards throughout the world tend to be rated higher for corporate social responsibility, financial performance and shown to have a higher survival rate than those with male-dominated management (World Bank Group, 2019<sup>[80]</sup>). Yet, in Colombia the 2014 official guidelines for best corporate practices (Corporate Governance Code) do not include requirements for gender diversity on boards. A study on 300 companies in Colombia, shows that by 2020 24% have set out a committee for gender parity (compared to 31.8% in Peru and 22.3% in Mexico). On average, Latin American companies with a committee for gender parity provide their employees with more flexible work options – including flexible hours (20.4 percentage points more than those without a committee), and opportunities for home-based work (13.4 percentage points more) – as well as childcare services, whether direct, or in the form of financial assistance (21.5 percentage points more) (Aequales, 2020<sup>[109]</sup>).

International experience provides examples of best practices to promote women representation in private companies. In Germany, the 2015 Act on equal participation of women and men in executive positions in private and public sectors set a 30% gender diversity quota for supervisory boards and required listed and co-determined companies (where workers can vote for representatives on the board) to establish targets for gender equality at the top two levels of management. Israeli state-owned enterprises have a legal target of appropriate representation for both genders on the board of directors – usually 50% unless there is a sound reason why such representation is not achievable. Until reaching the goal, preference shall be given to directors of the under-represented gender. Enterprises that do not comply can be sanctioned.

Further to rule-based approaches that involve sanctions, certification mechanisms that praise and put forward companies that comply with announced objectives and commitments in favour of gender equality can generate positive reputational effects, which act, in turn, as an incentive for other companies to adopt similar practices. As one example, the UNDP runs the Gender Equality Seal Certification Programme in the LAC region, which aims to create certification incentives for private companies that meet commitments towards gender equality (OECD, 2020<sup>[39]</sup>).

In addition, international experience shows that business associations and networks can play a strong role in supporting women who are in leadership positions to act as role models, and raise awareness of women in leadership (OECD, 2017<sup>[42]</sup>). At the company level, mentorships programmes or networking spaces for women inside companies can also help strengthening the interest of women to participate in governance and decision-making bodies.

**Promote an academic culture that integrates female faculty members and supports them to excel.** Particularly in the STEM fields, finding qualified candidates for academic positions starts with creating an inclusive learning environment for all students (Nathan Associates, 2016<sup>[104]</sup>). To this end, mentoring for junior faculty members and nurturing a culture that promotes work-life balance for all faculty members will help ensuring that women are more satisfied with their careers and have the opportunity to excel. Women who chose to stay in academia are more likely to have opportunities for training and career development, to have support from co-workers or supervisors, and for balancing work and non-work roles than were women who left the profession (Corbett and Hill, 2015<sup>[74]</sup>).

**Continue the efforts to strengthen women’s representation in public leadership.** Although the quota system in the Colombian Congress and public entities has provided positive results, more actions remain needed to address women’s persisting under-representation in public leadership, especially at the sub-national level. Changes to the law and policy reform are important to ensure that men and women have equal access to political representation in election practices and public office, in civil service recruitment and promotion, and in human resources management in general within the public sector. Tackling the mind-sets of incumbent male leaders and managers and changing institutional cultures still embedding gender bias in both public and private sectors is also key.

**Implement specific targets, monitoring and evaluation systems.** Tracking progress in gender balanced leadership and addressing remaining challenges with tangible reforms might require the support of specific targets and the collection of gender-disaggregated data, in both private and public sectors. Measurable objectives are important to evaluate whether goals for women’s representation in different professions and at the leadership level are met. A way of measuring these achievements could be by increasing companies’ participation in the “PAR” Ranking, developed by Aequales (a Colombian company, <https://form.aequales.com/en>), that aims at measuring gender equality and diversity in private companies, public entities and SMEs in Latin America. To be part of the ranking companies need to request their employees to respond to a virtual, access free and confidential questionnaire. Results from each company are measured to estimate indicators on gender equity and presented in an annual ranking that shows comparable results by firms organised by categories such as size of the organisation, sector, public vs. private, among others. In Australia, the Workplace Gender Equality Act requires non-public sector employers with 100 or more employees to disclose their “Gender Equality Indicators” in annual filings with the Workplace Gender Equality Agency.

### ***Supporting women’s entrepreneurship***

As discussed in Chapter 1, women in Colombia are less likely to be entrepreneurs than men. While there is not a significant gap in the proportion of men and women who are own-account workers, the share of those who are employers is about twice as large among men than women. Such a significant difference is reconcilable with the fact that women’s businesses are more likely to be informal and to take the judicial form of natural persons whose businesses are individually owned, rather than having a corporate structure.

Moreover, most women-led businesses take the form of micro or small enterprises (78.2%). In addition to the likelihood of operating in the informal sector, these companies tend to be created out of necessity, rather than building on the opportunity of a regular, possibly growing, income. As a result, many women-led businesses do not develop enough to become an established business that drives to further job creation. In Colombia, of every ten micro enterprises, only three survived after five years; this compared to a survival rate of seven out of ten for large, and five for small and medium enterprises (Dini, 2020<sup>[110]</sup>)

Several interdependent forces stand behind these patterns. As discussed in other parts of this report, women do not have the same opportunities of access to education and training as men have. Additionally, the longer hours that they devote to care and household chores reduce the time that they can spend in income generating activities. Furthermore, the lack of access to financial services – such as, saving accounts and credit loans – significantly limit the ability of women to focus on the design and the development of productive businesses. In 2017, 42.5% of women and 49.4% of men in Colombia had an account at a financial institution or at a mobile-money-service provider; female access to an account is lower than the regional average for Latin America (52%) and for upper-middle income countries (69%) (World Bank, 2023<sup>[111]</sup>).

Tackling the mix of barriers is key to ensuring that Colombian women can engage in new businesses and subsequently expand their activities. Since 2004 the country has organised its support to micro, small and medium firms through the *Sistema Nacional de Apoyo a las Mipymes* (National System to Support Micro, Small and Medium Businesses). While this support is not directly targeted to women, as mentioned above, women-led businesses are overrepresented among micro and small firms. The National System support is organised in five main axes (Mincomercio, 2020<sup>[112]</sup>):

- **Access to financing.** This axis includes support by directly providing credit lines or loan guarantees for micro, small, and medium firms through three main institutions: the National Fund for Financing the Agricultural Sector (FINAGRO), the Bank for Business Development of Colombia (BANCOLDEX) and the National Fund for Guarantees (*Fondo Nacional de Garantías*).
- **Innovation.** The Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation provides support to micro, small, and medium firms through activities such as: (i) signed agreements with the local representatives

of the Colombian Confederation of Chambers of Commerce (*Confecámaras*) to promote innovation in firms; and (ii) tax benefits to a group of research and innovation projects selected through a competitive call for proposals.

- **Business development and exports promotion.** The main actor of this axis is INNPulsa, a government entrepreneurship and innovation agency, which provides support through activities such as: (i) grants to promote exports among micro business with potential in international markets, through the integration of global value chains, in co-ordination with the national agency for the promotion of exports, ProColombia; (ii) promote business' cluster formation through the programme iNNovaClúster.
- **Entrepreneurship promotion.** The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism establishes and monitors policies to ensure an enabling environment for successful businesses by establishing a single national policy to promote entrepreneurship and maintaining international free-trade agreements such as the Pacific Alliance (which integrates the economies of Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru).
- **Productive and social inclusion.** The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism and INNPulsa maintain programmes to support business owned by victims of the armed conflict. These programmes cover issues such as technical assistance to improve entrepreneurship skills and promoting access to markets and productive assets.

In addition to the National System to Support Micro, Small and Medium Businesses, the Office of the Vice-president of Colombia launched in 2021 the Fund Women Entrepreneur (*Fondo Mujer Emprende*) (Vicepresidencia Colombia, 2023<sup>[113]</sup>). Now called *Fondo para la Promoción de la Autonomía y el Emprendimiento de la Mujer* (Fund for the Autonomy and Entrepreneurship of Women), this Fund provides, through a gender approach, financial and non-financial (training and coaching) support to women entrepreneurs in rural and urban settings in co-ordination with key national actors such as FINAGRO, Rural Development Agency (Agencia de Desarrollo Rural, ADR), INNPulsa, BANCOLDEX and Confecámaras. Support through the Fund is differentiated in three categories: life, opportunity and and scalable. Business classified in the “life” category are informal, small, normally for self-employment that aim at generating daily income for subsistence. “Opportunity” businesses show some level of innovation, with the potential to generate wealth and quality jobs. And “scalable” firms are characterised for their high level of innovation with the potential to generate wealth, quality jobs and export.

The World Bank “doing business” index ranks Colombia as one of the best economies to start a business in the Latin America region (World Bank Group, 2020<sup>[114]</sup>). The country’s score for this category is 87 compared to 79.6 for the region (the maximum score, representing ideal conditions to start a business is 100). This relatively high score is explained by the absence of minimum capital requirements and, lower than the regional average, time and cost required to start a business. Nevertheless, the index shows space for improvement in the number of procedures to legally start and formally operate a company (7 in comparison with an average of 8.1 in Latin America and 4.9 in OECD’s high-income countries) (World Bank Group, 2020<sup>[114]</sup>). While common to men and women, the adverse effects of the barrier of complex procedures may be particularly important for women whose time is typically more limited, given existing norms and the dominant division of caring obligations in Colombia.

A further pre-requisite to bolster women’s entrepreneurship is the equal treatment of men and women about the rights on the property and the use of land. While in Colombia, women have the same legal right as men to own, use and make decisions over their land and nonland assets, irrespective of marital status, the armed conflict has shown detrimental effects on women’s access to land, especially in rural areas (OECD, 2019<sup>[115]</sup>). The armed conflict provoked the displacement of millions of people, which made land claiming and distribution complicated. The Law for Victims and Land Restitution (*Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras*, law 1448) of 2011 guarantees the right to land restitution to the victims who have lost their land as a result of the conflict, emphasising the protection of women and other vulnerable groups.

International evidence shows that women with secure land and property rights earn 4 times more income and save 35% more than women without access to land and property; their children are 10% less likely to be sick, 33% less likely to be underweight, and twice as likely to complete secondary school (USAID Colombia, 2023<sup>[116]</sup>).

### *Policy insights*

**Strengthen the use of bundled approaches to support women’s entrepreneurship.** A growing body of research explores the interplay between finance and women’s entrepreneurship development in contexts of high informality (ILO, 2014<sup>[117]</sup>; ILO-WED, 2018<sup>[118]</sup>). These works concur that access to formal saving services – e.g. opening a bank account in a women’s names – can encourage women to put some money aside for business uses, while at the same time withstanding pressures to share the money with relatives. Moreover, they agree that more flexible debt repayment conditions – such as a grace period on loans, for example – help women’s business activities and increase the likelihood of their survival.

Another important conclusion of these works is that reaching a strong level of financial inclusion requires more than just the opportunity to open a banking account and to access loans. This reflects the complex nature of the gender financial divide, which involves the coexistence of many layers of structural and individual barriers. For Colombia, these conclusions highlight the importance of continuing to foster the dissemination of programmes that combine access to financial services with other dimensions of entrepreneurship development, such as markets and business training, for example, alongside financial education and the acquisition of digital skills (Alliance for Financial Inclusion, 2021<sup>[119]</sup>). The recently launched *Fondo Mujer Emprende* in Colombia (Fund for Women Entrepreneurship), now labelled *Fondo para la Promoción de la Autonomía y el Emprendimiento de la Mujer* (Fund for the Autonomy and Entrepreneurship of Women), constitutes a first step in the right direction.

A review of existing programmes to support entrepreneurship in low- and middle-income countries confirms that training can play a powerful role in strengthening individuals’ business competences with positive feedback effects on job creation. However, to be successful training programmes have to meet certain requirements, such as targeting early entrepreneurs, being intensive and offered in combination with financial support (Grimm and Paffhausen, 2015<sup>[120]</sup>). Work by the OECD also shows that the adoption of gender-sensitive approaches in the design of training programmes is key to broadening access, thus expanding the pool of potentially interested women. These approaches should put especial attention to: (i) adaptability, taking into account women’s schedules and time restrictions for transportation and participation in courses (short courses, online courses and training videos, could be preferable to long training programmes); (ii) content should focus on tasks and techniques that women perceive as their prerogative. For example, in Peru, a research initiative to improve potato farming showed very limited participation of women (less than 15% of all participants) because potato is perceived as a “male” crop; women’s participation peaked to 60% for sessions on planting, harvesting and evaluating potato clones, because these are tasks traditionally associated to female work (FAO, 2011<sup>[121]</sup>); and, (iii) particularly for women in low-income households, trainings should pay attention to certain day-to-day needs, such as women’s care responsibilities of children and elderly during the time spent in training (OECD, 2019<sup>[122]</sup>).

Networking and mentoring guidance – via the creation of women’s associations and forums, for example – are also an important catalysts of market information and can greatly facilitate knowledge sharing among peers. Experience from European countries suggests that mentorship between experienced and new entrepreneurs can enhance business skills as well, if the mentor and mentee match well. Using interviews to figure out which mentor to match to which mentee is hence worthwhile. In addition, business accelerators or incubators can also provide opportunities for further training and networking in combination with business, financial and legal advice (OECD/EU, 2017<sup>[123]</sup>). Such accelerators could be run by the public sector itself or operated by the private or non-profit sector, with potential public funding (OECD/EU, 2017<sup>[123]</sup>).

Finally, Colombia should continue efforts to simplify the administrative procedures to formally register companies. The number of procedures to start a business have significantly declined since 2004 (20 procedures were needed to start a business in 2004, by 2020 this number was reduced to 7) (World Bank Group, 2023<sup>[124]</sup>). This pattern should continue by policies such as (i) having government agencies substitute to notaries and municipalities in the registration process in order to limit anti-competitive practices and (ii) creating an online one-stop shop for firm creation.

**Boost the impact of land restitutions for victims of the armed conflict by packaging them with support to women’s entrepreneurship.** Initiatives to revamp land-titling programmes play an essential role in supporting the entrepreneurial activities of rural women. At the same time, the conclusions of recent work on the impact of land-titling and tenure security programmes on farm investment show that policy makers should take into due account the fact that land titling programmes typically work as a complement – without substituting for – other programmes aimed at fostering women economic empowerment (Navarro-Catañeda et al., 2021<sup>[125]</sup>). According to the ILO, such complementary programmes should include technical trainings to improve the economic performance of women businesses (ILO, 2016<sup>[126]</sup>), ranging from improving seeds, for example, to the acquisition of managerial skills, alongside other skills related to identify potential markets. One policy insight that can be drawn for Colombia from this evidence is that land-titling in the country should be complemented with activities under the Productive and Social Inclusion axis of the *Sistema Nacional de Apoyo a las Mipymes* (National System to Support Micro, Small and Medium Businesses), which implements programmes to support businesses owned by victims of the armed conflict. The creation of networks of school ambassadors could help overcoming the lack of role models that women entrepreneurs from rural communities typically suffer. The *Frauen unternehmen* initiative in Germany provides a potentially interesting example of how the programme could be organised. The ambassadors are selected by a jury, which increases their prestige. In addition, they generally attend a limited number of events with peers so to keep the required commitment relatively light (OECD/EU, 2017<sup>[123]</sup>).

**Monitor the effects of policies.** Systematic review of the wide-ranging effects of entrepreneurship programmes in low- and middle-income countries points to the complexities of evaluating outcomes both in terms of job- and firm-creation (Grimm and Paffhausen, 2015<sup>[120]</sup>). This reflects the fact that many conditions have to be met before interventions in favour of individual enterprises improve business performance and lead to the decision to create a new business or to hire additional employees. In other words, it likely takes a long chain of intermediate results before policy interventions materialise into a sustainable expansion of employment, which is also linked to improving and increasingly secure working conditions.

It is also important to consider that many of the policy measures implemented do not primarily aim to create employment but rather to improve management practices, to achieve more stable income flows and reduce poverty. For example, the benefits of mentorship and access to role models tend to materialise in changed practices regarding the way existing resources are utilised, without necessarily delivering more jobs (ILO, 2014<sup>[117]</sup>). Similarly, the evidence available seems to suggest that although finance and training programmes have positive effects on business outcomes such as improved knowledge and practice and sometimes income, wider effects on labour market activities and practices are generally weaker and sometimes insignificant (Grimm and Paffhausen, 2015<sup>[120]</sup>). These findings highlight that it may be more desirable to seize the effects of interventions on sales, revenues and income levels than to quantify employment outcomes, which may depend by other drivers. The availability of disaggregated indicators by gender might also deserve attention as a mean to portraying possible unintended inequalities of outcomes that may emerge on the way to financial inclusion (Trivelli Ávila and Caballero Calle, 2018<sup>[127]</sup>).

## **Fighting violence against women**

Women safety plays a key role in women economic empowerment. In all countries, women are victims of violence, not only at home (perpetrated by their current and former partners or other family member) but also in public spaces, public transports, school, universities and at work. Adding to physical and mental suffering, harassment, sexual or physical abuse and rape undermine girls and women educational and economic opportunities, ultimately affecting their participation in the labour market (ILO, 2018<sub>[128]</sub>). For instance, the victims of domestic violence are less likely to be economically active, and when active, less likely to be productive, a consequence of physical and mental suffering (ECLAC, 2016<sub>[129]</sub>).

To limit the exposure to violence in public spaces, at school and at work (ECLAC, 2016<sub>[129]</sub>), many girls and women restrict their movements, which potentially limits their educational and work opportunities, alongside to enjoy life (OCAC, 2020<sub>[130]</sub>). Violence at work may lead to quit a potentially good job opportunity; if the women chooses to stay, she does so at a cost to her well-being (ILO, 2018<sub>[128]</sub>). A high percentage of girls who have experienced a traumatic episode at school have to change school or leave the educational system altogether (OCAC, 2020<sub>[130]</sub>).

Colombia has one of the highest rates of intimate partner violence against women in Latin America (Bott et al., 2022<sub>[131]</sub>; ECLAC, 2022<sub>[132]</sub>). 32.3% of women between 15 and 49 years of age in the country reported experiencing physical violence from an intimate partner at least once in their life (Bott et al., 2022<sub>[131]</sub>), compared to estimated averages of 25% for the Latin American region and 27% for the world (WHO, 2023<sub>[133]</sub>). Reports on sexual violence from an intimate partner in Colombia are also among the highest in the region: The country prevalence is 7.6%, compared to a 6.5% reported in Peru, 6.3% in Mexico and 5.4% in the Dominican Republic; only surpassed by Haiti (11.2%) and Nicaragua (7.8%) (Bott et al., 2022<sub>[131]</sub>). Outside the home, women are also the main victims of sexual harassment on the streets, in transports and at the workplace. In Bogota, 83.4% of women (14 years or older) have experienced sexual harassment in public spaces, in particular when using the city's rapid bus system *Transmilenio* (80.4%), on the streets (79%) and in buses from the Integrated Public Transport System (46.5%) (Veeduría Distrital Bogota, 2022<sub>[134]</sub>). At the workplace women are also more prone to become victims of sexual harassment by co-workers (42%) and supervisors (26%) but only 9% reported it to authorities (Senado de la Republica Colombia, 2023<sub>[135]</sub>; ELSA, 2022<sub>[136]</sub>).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Colombia registered 182 cases of feminicides in 2020 and although this showed a decline from 2019 (with 229 cases), in 2021 the number increased again to 210. In general, the rate of femicide per 100 000 women slightly increase from 0.7 in 2019 and 2020 to 0.8 in 2021 (ECLAC, 2022<sub>[132]</sub>). This trend is similar for feminicides among girls and adolescents, in 2019, 12 of each 100 feminicides were of minors, the rate lowered to 10 for 2020 but increased again to 12 in 2021; most of these deaths were of adolescents between 12 and 17 years of age (DANE, ONU Mujeres and CPEM, 2022<sub>[101]</sub>). While these statistics already show a problem, official numbers of feminicides are often criticised for underestimating the number of deaths. For example, for 2021 the *Observatorio Colombiano de Femicidios* (Colombian Femicides Observatory) reported 622 feminicides or almost 3 times the official number (Observatorio Colombiano de Femicidios, 2023<sub>[137]</sub>). A report from the United Nations Development Programme (PNUD) argues that in countries with armed conflict, such as Colombia, official numbers of feminicides don't account for women's forced disappearances that end-up in mass graves; since there is no official categorisation of the reason for death, these are not counted as feminicides (UNDP, 2021<sub>[138]</sub>). In recent years, mobilisations against feminicides have increased across Latin America, which has the highest rate of feminicides in the world. After the murder of a young Argentine woman, the #Niunamenos collective launched an awareness campaign that resonated throughout the region focusing on violence against women.

Colombia has several laws and accompanying measures against different forms of violence against women. In 2006 and 2008 the country passed laws to sanction harassment at the workplace (law 1010)



and sanctions for gender-based violence (law 1257). The law 1719 in 2014 introduced measures to guarantee access to justice for victims of sexual violence, especially in the context of the armed conflict. In 2015 the Law 1761 (known as *Ley Rosa Elvira Cely*) was approved to incorporate femicide as a crime, separated from the general concept of aggravated homicide. Several measures to fight violence accompany these laws. For example, in 2016 the country established the National Violence Observatory (*Observatorio Nacional de Violencias*) managed by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection to generate, collect, analyse and disseminate information on gender-based violence nationwide (Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Colombia, 2023<sup>[139]</sup>). In addition, as part of a comprehensive approach to gender violence, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection has developed guidelines and protocols for the care of abused girls and women victims of gender violence, for victims of sexual violence, for monitoring gender crimes against women displaced by the armed conflict, and materials for the campaign *Nada justifica la violencia contra la mujer* (Nothing justifies violence against women) (Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Colombia, 2023<sup>[140]</sup>).

The NDP 2022-26 includes a commitment to strengthen the fight against gender-based violence and femicide. To this end, it promises to use a broad-ranging approach, from preventive assistance to access to justice, as well as monitoring of outcomes.

### *Policy insights*

#### **Lower barriers restricting access to the justice system by victims of violence and harassment.**

Victims of violence against women often hesitate to report the crime for fear of high risks re-victimisation amid lengthy procedural requirements. In Colombia, between 2019 and 2021, only 36% of feminicides are followed by a criminal complaint and of them only 20% receive a conviction (UNDP, 2023<sup>[141]</sup>). The *Comisariías de familia* (Family Police Stations) are the main entity for the prevention of violence and assistance to victims nationwide. They depend entirely on local governments and, even though there are various protocols prepared by the National Police Department and Ministry of Justice to guide and improve their work, there are reports of a wide variation in the way they function and their capacities to assist victims of gender-based violence (World Bank Group, 2019<sup>[80]</sup>). A recent qualitative study in 27 districts of Colombia shows that victims of violence seem to have a strong preference for conciliation, lack knowledge of available resources to support them and are influenced by social norms against formal complaints. Authorities also seem to lack knowledge on how to accompany a process involving gender-based violence and of available protection measures and other resources to support victims (UNDP, 2023<sup>[141]</sup>). Providing training to police and justice officers on how to address violence against women, including best practices on how to interact with the victims, can make the process of reporting these crimes less difficult. For example, in 2019, Mexico launched a police-training Programme that aims to ensure the correct application of procedural protocols in situations of gender violence. Hardly any victim can meet the current six-month deadline for reporting harassment or sexual violence, in particular against minors. Acknowledging the fact that the decision to report can be longer, a time extension seems desirable.

**Encourage and guarantee safe complaint processes for victims.** At workplaces and in schools, women may be reluctant to report harassment or violence, reflecting the fact the perpetrators are often in a superior hierarchical position, such as that of a teacher or a boss (ILO, 2018<sup>[128]</sup>). Accordingly, the Colombian Government could consider devoting more efforts to implementing safe complaint mechanisms to facilitate the reporting of these situations at the workplace. International experience on the matter suggests that the policy initiatives to encourage companies to adopt complaint mechanisms can rely on different tools, such as collective agreements, for example, the regulations on Occupational Health and Safety and the employment legislation (Eurofound, 2015<sup>[142]</sup>). In the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, for example, the employers' obligation to set out procedures or measures to tackle violence and harassment in the workplace is a part of the approach to safeguard employees' mental and physical health. As such, it pertains to the regulations for improving well-being and health issues at work. Legislation

in Belgium and France has introduced a specific duty on the employer to prevent violence and harassment. Ireland advises the employers to introduce a code of conduct in order to show their commitment to tackling abusive behaviour, which is highly relevant in case of a court claim. It is equally important that the regulatory framework encourages the adoption of preventive practices, by setting out principles and guidelines to enable the employers adopting more pro-active initiatives. In compliance with these guidelines, some private employers have workshops and trainings in place to explain the law against sexual abuse at work and to raise awareness about the different manifestations of sexual abuse at work, along with how to report them. The role of social partners can also be important to scale up preventive actions at workplace level drawing from their expertise, including by helping the design of individual support, such as the presence of confidential counsellors.

**Educate the youth about different aspects of sexual violence and harassment.** Although Colombia has launched awareness campaigns for sexual violence, these campaigns do not target teenagers, even though young women are often victims. One international example is the campaign #MeGustaComoEres (#ILikeHowYouAre) launched by Spain in 2019 to prevent gender violence among young people and targeting teenage girls and boys. Through the promotion of respect, acceptance and autonomy in the couple, the campaign focuses on the main manifestations of gender violence, with the aim of identifying and preventing them. A completely digitally supported campaign, it is disseminated through social networks. Other campaigns target street sexual harassment. In Argentina, the campaign #Cambiáeltrato, which showed a young man explaining to another that his behaviour with women on the street was not appropriate, went viral.

**Monitor transport security.** The lack of secure transports can lead women to restrict their movements as a way of reducing the exposure to risky behaviours. Such drastic resolutions discourage, in turn, women from participating in labour markets, with the adverse effects on incomes being potentially important for households in remote areas. In Colombia, in 2021 the Ministry of Transport launched the campaign *Alto al acoso en el transporte* (Stop harassment in public transportation) and worked in the identification of policies to make public transportation safer for women (Ministry of Transport, Colombia, 2023<sup>[143]</sup>; Ministry of Transport, Colombia and IDB, 2021<sup>[144]</sup>). But while policies can be designed and monitored based on data produced in cities such as Bogota, this is not the case for other areas in the country. Lack of data acts as a barrier to identify hotspots and assess the effectiveness of policies.

### Box 2.3. Summary of policy options for making women's paid work pay more in Colombia

A range of interdependent policies can reduce the gender gap in labour income, thus leading to strengthen the incentive for women to spend more hours on paid work. The OECD suggests to:

#### Ensure access to quality education for all

- Continue the efforts to reward poor families for their engagement in their children's education. Recent impact evaluation shows that the programme *Familias en Acción* has increased the probability of school enrolment in both urban and rural areas. It has also led to a reduction of teenage pregnancy in rural areas and child labour in urban areas, although the potential of the programme to reduce teenage pregnancy could be strengthened by making its renewal conditional to school success. Looking forward, keeping the programme responsive to emerging challenges and changing realities on the ground will be a key to ensure impact. According to some observers the potential benefits of strengthening program's co-ordination could be high. For example, this could require expanding the program's co-ordination efforts to better connect beneficiaries with initiatives outside the core goal of the programme, such as those promoted by the Ministry of Labour to foster labour market inclusion.
- Communicate the benefits of completing studies. Students from low-income families often are ill-informed about the monetary and social returns of education and the wider range of job opportunities studies can open the door to. Influenced by the perception that education does not affect their future well-being, students may drop out of school prematurely to support the income of their families. In 2021, the Colombian Ministry of Education launched with the support of three Foundations (Santo Domingo, Education above All and *Pies Descalzos*) the campaign *Este cuento es tuyo* (This story is yours) to promote school enrolment, retention and completion of all grades in the context of post pandemic schools' reopening. International experience has proven the potential of communicational campaigns as a rapid way to inform students about the benefits of education at moderate costs. School mentoring and student counselling are also a key to making girls and young women stay in the education system.
- Ensure comprehensive sexuality education and information at school and out-of-school. International guidelines from UNESCO points to the importance of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) as a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality. Even though it has legal backing, the implementation of CSE has proven challenging in Colombia. The current CSE programme (Programme of Education in Sexuality and Construction of Citizenship, PESCC) is overseen by sub national governments. An evaluation of this programme showed that only about 17% of public schools implemented it mainly due to lack of commitment of key actors who perceive sexual education as irrelevant for the school context. Nevertheless, the evaluation also showed that where correctly implemented the PESCC programme supported a significant increase in access to information on available health and contraception services as well as increased knowledge, better attitudes, and improved sexual practices. In particular, the evaluation identified a significant increase in access to information on available health and contraception services. In 2021 a draft bill aimed at including sexual education as part of official schools' curriculum was discussed in Congress but encountered opposition and was not approved.
- Provide medical and financial support to vulnerable girls and teenage mothers. Considering that teen pregnancy is more prevalent among girls that are less educated than their peers, the government should ensure that medical and financial support to vulnerable girls and teenage mothers is available. An experience to build upon is the programme implemented by the *Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar* (Colombian Institute of Family Welfare) that provides

psychological support, referrals to relevant health and education services, along with temporary housing to vulnerable girls over 18 who are pregnant or lactating and without family support. International experience shows the potential of this type of interventions. In Uruguay a programme aims at promoting educational projects for mothers under the age of 23. In Australia, the government has created several transfer programmes for teenage parents, including the JET Childcare Fee Assistance subsidy, for example, which allows young mothers and partners paying for the care of the children during work or school times. These programmes underscore the importance of targeting, especially with a view to reaching out to rural and remote areas.

### Promote women in non-traditional careers and leadership positions

- **Create targets for women’s representation in private companies.** In Colombia, female share of seats on boards of the largest publicly listed companies in 2021 is 12.9%, below the OECD average of 28%, but higher than the latest estimate for Latin America of 10.4%. A study on 300 companies in Colombia, shows that by 2020 24% have set out a committee for gender parity (compared to 31.8% in Peru and 22.3% in Mexico). International experience provides examples of best practices to promote women representation in private companies. In Germany, the 2015 Act on equal participation of women and men in executive positions in private and public sectors set a 30% gender diversity quota for supervisory boards and required listed and co-determined companies (where workers can vote for representatives on the board) to establish targets for gender equality at the top two levels of management. Israeli state-owned enterprises have a legal target of appropriate representation for both genders on the board of directors – usually 50% unless there is a sound reason why such representation are not achievable. Until reaching the goal, preference shall be given to directors of the under-represented gender. Enterprises that do not comply can be sanctioned.
- **Promote an academic culture that integrates female faculty members and supports them to excel.** Particularly in the STEM fields, finding qualified candidates for academic positions starts with creating an inclusive learning environment for all students. To this end, mentoring for junior faculty members and nurturing a culture that promotes work-life balance for all faculty members will help ensuring that women are more satisfied with their careers and have the opportunity to excel. Women who chose to stay in academia are more likely to have opportunities for training and career development, to have support from co-workers or supervisors, and for balancing work and non-work roles than were women who left the profession.
- **Continue the efforts to strengthen women’s representation in public leadership.** Although the quota system in the Colombian Congress and public entities has provided positive results, more actions remain needed to address women’s persisting under-representation in public leadership, especially at the sub-national level. Changes to the law and policy reform are important to ensure that men and women have equal access to political representation in election practices and public office, in civil service recruitment and promotion, and in human resources management in general within the public sector. Tackling the mind-sets of incumbent male leaders and managers and changing institutional cultures still embedding gender bias in both public and private sectors is also key.
- **Implement specific targets to support monitoring and evaluation.** Tracking progress in gender balanced leadership and addressing remaining challenges with tangible reforms might require the support of specific targets and the collection of gender-disaggregated data, in both private and public sectors. Measurable objectives are important to evaluate whether goals for women’s representation in different professions and at the leadership level are met. A way of measuring these achievements could be by increasing companies’ participation in the “PAR”

Ranking, that aims at measuring gender equality and diversity in private companies, public entities and SMEs in Latin America.

### Support women's entrepreneurship

- **Promote the use of bundled approaches to strengthen women's entrepreneurship.** Given the importance of the interplay between different layers of barriers to entrepreneurship, the OECD report puts forward the view that strengthening women's entrepreneurship could require the use of bundled approaches. For Colombia this means that more opportunities of access to formal saving services – e.g. opening a bank account in a women's names – and to more flexible debt repayment conditions – like a grace period on loans, for example – could combine with other non-financial measures, such as markets and business training, for example, alongside financial education and the acquisition of digital skills. At the same time, Colombia should continue efforts to simplify the administrative procedures to formally register companies. The transformation of the *Fondo Mujer Emprende* (Fund for Women Entrepreneurship) into the *Fondo para la Promoción de la Autonomía y el Emprendimiento de la Mujer* (Fund for the Autonomy and Entrepreneurship of Women), with permanence and legal status, constitutes a step in the right direction.
- **Boost the impact of land restitutions for victims of the armed conflict by packaging them with support to women's entrepreneurship.** Initiatives to revamp land-titling programmes play an essential role in supporting the entrepreneurial activities of rural women. At the same time, the conclusions of recent work on the impact of land-titling programmes on farm investment suggest that policy makers should be wary of overemphasising the impact of tenure security on agrarian investment. This is because land titling programmes typically work as a complement – without substituting for – other programmes aimed at fostering women economic empowerment. According to the ILO, such complementary programmes should include technical trainings to improve the economic performance of women businesses, ranging from improving seeds, for example, to the acquisition of managerial skills, alongside other skills related to identify potential markets. The creation of networks of school ambassadors could help overcoming the lack of role models that women entrepreneurs from rural communities typically suffer.
- **Monitor the effects of policies.** Recent empirical analysis points to the fact that it typically takes a fairly long chain of intermediate results before policy interventions to support entrepreneurship create a sustainable expansion of employment. This suggests that in its policy thinking about how to monitor the effects of interventions it might be more desirable for Colombia to seize the impact on sales, revenues and income levels than to quantify employment outcomes. The availability of disaggregated indicators by sex deserves significant attention to portray possible unintended inequalities of outcomes that may emerge on the way to financial inclusion.

### Fight violence against women

- **Lower barriers restricting access to the justice system by victims of violence and harassment.** Victims of violence against women often hesitate to report the crime for fear of high risks re-victimisation amid lengthy procedural requirements. In Colombia, between 2019 and 2021, only 36% of feminicides were followed by a criminal complaint and of them only 20% receive a conviction. The *Comisariías de familia* (Family Police Stations) are the main entity for the prevention of violence and assistance to victims nationwide. They depend entirely on local governments and, even though there are various protocols prepared by the National Police Department and Ministry of Justice to guide and improve their work, there are reports of a wide variation in the way they function and their capacities to assist victims of gender-based violence.

A progress in this direction is the creation of the *Sistema Nacional de Registro, Atención, Seguimiento y Monitoreo de las Violencias Basadas en Género* (National System for the Registration, Attention, Follow-up and Monitoring of Gender-Based Violence), which aims to centralise the information on individual cases of GBV.

- **Encourage and guarantee safe complaint processes for victims.** At workplaces and in schools, women may be reluctant to report harassment or violence, reflecting the fact the perpetrators are often in a superior hierarchical position, such as that of a teacher or a boss. Accordingly, the Colombian Government could consider devoting more efforts to implementing safe complaint mechanisms to facilitate the reporting of these situations at the workplace. International experience on the matter suggests that the policy initiatives to encourage companies to adopt complaint mechanisms can rely on different tools, such as collective agreements, for example, the regulations on Occupational Health and Safety and the employment legislation.
- **Educate the youth about different aspects of sexual violence and harassment.** Although Colombia has launched awareness campaigns for sexual violence such as *Nada justifica la violencia contra la mujer* (Nothing justifies violence against women), these campaigns do not target teenagers, despite the fact that young women are often victims. One international example is the campaign #MeGustaComoEres (#ILikeHowYouAre) launched by Spain in 2019 to prevent gender violence among young people and targeting teenage girls and boys. Through the promotion of respect, acceptance and autonomy in the couple, the campaign focuses on the main manifestations of gender violence, with the aim of identifying and preventing them. A completely digitally supported campaign, it is disseminated through social networks.
- **Monitor transport security.** In Bogota, 80.4% of women (14 years or older) have experienced sexual harassment when using the city's rapid bus system *Transmilenio*. The lack of secure transports can lead women to restrict their movements as a way of reducing the exposure to risky behaviours. Such drastic resolutions discourage, in turn, women from participating in labour markets, with the adverse effects on incomes being potentially important for households in remote areas. In Colombia, in 2021 the Ministry of Transport launched the campaign *Alto al acoso en el transporte* (Stop harassment in public transportation) and worked in the identification of policies to make public transportation safer for women. But while policies can be designed and monitored based on data produced in cities such as Bogota, this is not the case for other areas in the country. Lack of data acts as a barrier to identify hotspots and assess the effectiveness of policies.

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## Gender Equality at Work

# Gender Equality in Colombia

## TOWARDS A BETTER SHARING OF PAID AND UNPAID WORK

The OECD review of *Gender Equality in Colombia: Towards a Better Sharing of Paid and Unpaid Work* is the third in a collection of reports focusing on Latin American and the Caribbean countries, and part of the series *Gender Equality at Work*. The report compares gender gaps in labour and educational outcomes in Colombia with other countries. Particular attention is put on the uneven distribution of unpaid work, and the extra burden this places on women. It investigates how policies and programmes in Colombia can make this distribution more equitable. The first part of the report reviews the evidence on gender gaps and on what causes these, including the role played by attitudes. The second part develops a comprehensive framework to address these challenges, presenting a broad range of options to reduce the unpaid work burden falling on women, and to increase women's labour income. Earlier reviews in the same collection have looked at gender equality policies in Chile (2021) and Peru (2022).



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