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FEATURED Q&A

Why Do Gender Gaps Persist in the Region's Work Force?



More women are in Latin America's labor force now as compared to three decades ago, but gender gaps remain in labor market participation and wages. // File Photo: Mexican Government.

Q The number of women in the work force in Latin America has risen 11 percent over the past 30 years, according to an Oct. 28 report from the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the International Labor Organization. Despite the growing number of working women, the gap between women's participation in the labor market versus men's is about 25 percent, on average. Women's earnings also average about 17 percent less than men's, according to the report. What have been the main reasons behind the growing participation of women in Latin America's work force? Why do such large gaps in labor market participation and pay continue to persist? To what extent are government and private sector efforts to close those gaps working, and what more should be done?

A Paula Tavares, senior legal and gender specialist at the World Bank: "A number of elements have contributed to growing female labor force participation in Latin America, including the removal of formal and informal barriers and the creation of an enabling environment for more equal access to opportunities. Countries in the region have, for example, undertaken legal reforms to eliminate specific job restrictions to women's work in certain industries, equalize property rights and expand paid maternity leave for women. In addition, women have benefited from greater access to education, skills training and higher levels of average income. In particular, reduction in time constraints for women and higher schooling have been identified as key drivers in enabling access to opportunities. But while legal barriers

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Bolivian Officials Fly Provisions Into La Paz Amid Roadblocks

Bolivia's interim government has started transporting food and other supplies into the capital in order to get around roadblocks set up by supporters of former President Evo Morales.

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ECONOMIC

Colombia Facing 'Decisive' Year for Oil Sector: Official

Next year will be a pivotal one for Colombia's oil and gas industry as efforts to increase exploration and production advance, said the head of the private Colombian Petroleum Association.

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ECONOMIC

Ecuador's National Assembly Rejects Economic Reforms

Ecuadorean lawmakers rejected a package of tax and monetary reforms that President Lenin Moreno had proposed in an effort to reduce the country's deficit.

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Moreno // File Photo: Ecuadorean Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Bolivian Officials Fly Provisions Into La Paz Amid Roadblocks

Bolivian officials have begun flying provisions into La Paz as roadblocks set up by supporters of former President Evo Morales have prevented food and fuel from reaching the Andean nation's capital, BBC News reported today. Bolivians stood in long lines over the weekend in La Paz in order to buy basic food staples, Reuters reported. The interim government of President Jeanine Áñez had set up an "air bridge" to deliver supplies to the capital, using airplanes to bypass protesters' roadblocks, according to Presidency Minister Jerjes Justiniano. Amid the country's violent protests following the disputed Oct. 20 election, Morales resigned on Nov. 10 and flew to Mexico, which granted him asylum. He has characterized his departure as a coup, and his supporters are demanding his return. Some of his supporters have armed themselves with handguns, grenades and homemade bazookas, and they have been involved in skirmishes with security forces, Reuters reported. Clashes between demonstrators and authorities have

occurred in several areas, including Cochabamba, where nine people were killed on Friday. In a Twitter posting, Morales said 24 people have been killed during the protests and described the deaths as "crimes against humanity," BBC News reported. Some coca-growing unions based in Morales strongholds have demanded that Áñez step down by today. However, several governments, including those of the United States and Britain, have recognized her government. Áñez has repeatedly said she wants a new presidential election as soon as possible. The European Union's ambassador to Bolivia, León de la Torre, met Sunday with Áñez and offered support to ensure "credible elections ... under the most stringent international standards."

ECONOMIC NEWS

Ecuador Lawmakers Reject Moreno's Economic Reforms

Ecuador's National Assembly on Sunday rejected a package of tax and monetary reforms that the government of President Lenín Moreno had proposed, the latest setback in his efforts to

NEWS BRIEFS

U.S. Imposes Travel Sanctions on Cuba's Interior Minister

The United States on Saturday imposed travel sanctions on Cuban Interior Minister Julio César Gandarilla, Washington's second travel ban of a high-level Cuban official as it moves to increase pressure on the Cuban government and its ongoing support of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, Reuters reported. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the sanction against Gandarilla is in response to the minister's involvement in "gross violations of human rights in Venezuela," as well as "arbitrarily arresting and detaining thousands of Cuban citizens."

Nicaraguan Authorities Arrest 13 Activists Amid Attempt to Deliver Aid

Thirteen activists of Nicaragua's opposition were arrested as they tried to deliver aid to relatives of jailed opponents of President Daniel Ortega's government, the country's opposition said on Friday, the Associated Press reported. Family members are on a hunger strike in the city of Masaya in protest of their relatives' imprisonment amid a government crackdown against opponents since protests broke out last year. The hunger strikers are demanding the release of 130 people they consider political prisoners.

Citi Taps Romo as Head of Citibanamex Unit

Citigroup has named Manuel Romo as the head of its Citibanamex unit in Mexico, the unit said Friday in a statement, Reuters reported. Romo, who worked for the bank from 1991 to 2008, returned to Citibanamex last April after working for rival Grupo Financiero Banorte. As CEO of Citibanamex, Romo will replace Ernesto Torres Cantú, who was named last month as the head of Citi's Latin America operations.

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to women's work have been largely removed, persistent challenges remain. Occupational segregation and time constraints connected to unpaid care work and family responsibilities primarily undertaken by women often affect women's career choices or opportunities. In addition, violence and sexual harassment can undermine women's ability to work. Legislation on sexual harassment in employment is still lacking in approximately one-third of countries in the region. Overall, legislation and policy are moving in the right direction. Over the last 10 years, legal rights for women in the region increased by about four percentage points, according to the Women, Business and the Law 2019 index. Greater legal gender equality in turn

is associated with higher female labor force participation. But more progress could be made in improving the legal environment, for example, through leave policies that enable women's work, protection from violence and sexual harassment, and promoting women's leadership."



Andrea Ewart, CEO of Develop-TradeLaw and immediate past president of the Organization of Women for International Trade:

"Improved access to tertiary education is one factor that explains the increased participation of women in the labor force across the very diverse Latin American and Caribbean region. Part of a global trend, the share of

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cut down the country's onerous fiscal deficit, El Comercio reported. Within hours, Moreno announced in a televised address that he would send a new proposal to Congress. "In the next hours I will send to the National Assembly a new project of economic urgency, focused on tax issues," said Moreno, El Comercio reported. "I'm sorry that hundreds of thousands of entrepreneurs have to continue paying the advances of an income tax, which as a government we tried to eliminate," he added. The initial reform package was part of Moreno's plan to meet commitments agreed to with the International Monetary Fund in February in exchange for a nearly \$4.2 billion loan, Reuters reported. The bill sought to improve tax collection by increasing some taxes and a special contribution for companies with revenues that exceeded \$1 million annually, as well as give autonomy to the country's central bank. Indigenous movements and social organizations opposed some of the measures, while the business sector questioned others, the wire service reported.

Colombia Facing 'Decisive' Year for Oil Sector: ACP Head

Next year will be "decisive" for Colombia's oil and gas industry, as efforts to boost exploration and production move ahead, said the head of the private Colombian Petroleum Association (ACP), Reuters reported Friday. "I think it will be a better year. I think many of the decisions that the government has taken, especially to reactivate oil and gas activity, will start to bear fruit," Francisco Lloreda said on the sidelines of an oil and gas conference in Bogotá. Colombia's government is currently holding its second oil auction of the year, in a bid to attract new oil investment. The industry faces several problems, however, including fraught community relations and security issues, including the continuous bombing of pipelines by leftist rebels and local protests to shut down production facilities, Reuters reported. The Energy Ministry's key focus is to boost Colombia's reserves, Deputy Energy Minister Diego Mesa said at an [event](#) at the Inter-American Dialogue earlier this year.

CAPITOL HILL WATCH

A Look at U.S. Congressional Activity on Latin America

Democrats, Republicans Voice Concerns Over Bolivia's Political Crisis

U.S. lawmakers from both the Democratic and the Republican parties have voiced concern about Bolivia's political crisis following the resignation of longtime President Evo Morales on Nov. 10. The same day, House Rep. Eliot L. Engel (D-N.Y.), who chairs the House Committee on Foreign Affairs issued a statement calling for a "peaceful and democratic transition led by civilian institutions," while also commending the Organization of American States for its



Rubio // File Photo: U.S. Senate.

"thorough audit of the country's flawed presidential election and its call for new elections." The OAS, which the Bolivian government had invited to observe last month's election, said its audit had shown "clear manipulation" of the voting system, The Wall Street Journal reported.

Meanwhile, Sens. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) and Rick Scott (R-Fla.) said Morales' resignation was not a coup, as the former president has claimed, the Voice of America reported. Rubio said the United States was following Bolivia closely, expressing his "support" for re-establishing democracy in the South American country as soon as possible. Both Rubio and Scott said the trend in Bolivia was a result of social and international pressure, and that it should extend to other countries in Latin America, including Cuba and Venezuela, according to the report.

Torres Slams Trump's Choice for DHS Secretary Over Migration Policy

U.S. Representative Norma Torres (D-Calif.) on Nov. 12 blasted President Donald Trump's pick for Homeland Security secretary, Chad Wolf. "[Trump's] choice for [DHS Secretary] is the architect of a policy that needlessly & callously orphaned children," Torres wrote on Twitter, in reference to the family separation policy that the Trump administration implemented last year, which separated migrant children from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border. "His orchestration of #FamilySeparation is disqualifying for this role, and any position serving in the public's trust," she added.

Wolf was sworn in Nov. 13 as the new acting Homeland Security secretary, becoming the fifth person to hold that position since Trump took office less than three years ago. Wolf replaces Kevin McAleenan, who became acting Homeland Security secretary in April and submitted his resignation Oct. 11. At Homeland Security, Wolf will be joined by Ken Cuccinelli, the acting U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services director, who will become the department's acting deputy secretary, unnamed administration officials told The Washington Post.

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women with college education now exceeds that of men in several LAC economies, and this has been the case for some time in the English-speaking Caribbean. A 2015 report indicated that 10 of the top 19 countries with the highest ratio of women to men in higher education were in Latin America and the Caribbean. This growth has resulted from policies aimed at increasing access for low-income students and for women. Yet, to what extent does this development also reflect an increased lack of interest by young men in formal education? A second factor explaining increased participation rates by women in the labor force is the inclusion of informal work, where women tend to predominate. These two developments help to explain the continued wage gap and illustrate the need for continued exploration of this issue, particularly at the national level. Noticeably, the ECLAC report indicates that the own-account work of the gig economy is the fastest-growing area and will account for the bulk of new jobs. How will this affect women? Policies that will help women take advantage of these opportunities include access to credit and technology, increased spending on child support and other social support programs and establishment of business support organizations to provide mentorship and role models for women."

A **Christina Ewig, professor of public affairs and faculty director of the Center on Women, Gender and Public Policy at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota:** "Economic crises of the late 1980s and early 1990s propelled women into Latin America's labor force. Crises, coupled with job losses in traditionally male-dominated sectors such as industry and agriculture, signaled the male-breadwinner model was no longer a realistic family option. The result was some leveling of the economic playing field between women and

men—but through downward, not upward, pressure. In Mexico and Central America, export-oriented assembly manufacturing specifically recruited women, while in the region as a whole, women now dominate low-paid service sector occupations. Women's increased work force participation means that the majority now have a source

“**Analysts have pointed out that a key factor behind the class disparity is the care gap.**”

— Christina Ewig

of autonomous income, which is key to economic and social empowerment. But progress is uneven among women, as the ECLAC report notes: 80 percent of highly educated women participate in the work force, while participation of women with low educational levels hovers between 40 and 50 percent—essentially a class divide. Analysts have pointed out that a key factor behind the class disparity is the care gap. Men have not increased their contributions to housework or child care in the region as women have taken on paid work. This is a tenable situation for better-off women who can afford to purchase care services. But for others, hiring a nanny and housekeeper is not an option, and without it, work options are limited. Governments missed a critical opportunity during the economic boom years to invest in the care supports that could help them tap this large work force of lower educated women—quality, affordable child care, for example. Meanwhile, traditional attitudes regarding gendered divisions of household labor remain a barrier.”

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