

# Reducing and Reversing Gender Inequalities in Latin America<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

The Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region has experienced a process of economic and social change that has enabled the reduction of the gender gap in some areas and reversed it in others. Demographic and urban transitions have enabled women to live longer and to have fewer children. They have surpassed men in education and reduced the gender gap in the labor market, although various forms of occupational segregation and wage discrimination remain. As elsewhere, the region has made advances in its epidemiological transition, but external causes of death have affected men much more than women, resulting in a growing surplus of women, especially in urban areas. Social achievements in the region have been reflected in higher levels of female participation in decision-making arenas, although parity is still far-off. These various shifts in the nature of gender inequality evoke the need for updating the ICPD's vision and policies in order to address current needs effectively in the LAC region. Inequalities in favor of women do not necessarily offset inequalities in favor of men.

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# Reducing and Reversing Gender Inequalities in Latin America

*“In any given society the degree of woman's emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation” (1808)*

Charles Fourier (1772-1837)

## Introduction

Almost 200 years ago, Charles Fourier called attention to the importance of women for development, stating that the emancipation of society could not exist without the emancipation of women. Less than 20 years ago, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994, still found it necessary to emphasize the need for policies that promote empowerment and the autonomy of women as a means to achieving equality and equity between the sexes, with a view to constructing development that is both sustained and sustainable. Intervening years since the ICPD have witnessed interesting developments in gender equity that bear more attention.

Latin America has long been perceived as a region marked by “machismo” and as heir to a form of social organization dominated by patriarchal behavior. This structure is generally associated with conservative values, wherein men oppose women's rights and their pursuit of things that fall outside of traditional gender roles. Yet, there are clear signs of gender equality breakthroughs in the region. The objective of this paper is to analyze recent reductions and reversals of the gender gap in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region<sup>2</sup> in the health, education, labor market and decision making arenas.

This type of analysis is crucial for updating the debate on issues of gender and development, as set out in the ICPD Plan of Action (PoA). The main questions we propose to address are the following: 1) Are the concepts used and the policies recommended in the Cairo ICPD still entirely valid for the LAC region, or do they need to be brought up to date? 2) What are the advances that have occurred in the process of integration between gender relations and development? 3) What are the main topics that should be included in an eventual updating of the Cairo ICPD on gender issues?

As set out in chapter IV of the ICPD PoA, countries must seek equality and justice, based on a harmonious partnership between the sexes, in order to qualify women to achieve their full potential:

“The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is a highly important end in itself. In addition, it is essential for the achievement of sustainable development. The full participation and partnership of both women and men is required in productive and reproductive life, including shared responsibilities for the care and nurturing of children and maintenance of the household. In all parts of the world, women are facing threats to their lives, health and

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<sup>2</sup> The sources of data utilized in this paper refer primarily to “Latin America and the Caribbean” but our interest is primarily centered on “Latin America”, which in fact constitutes 86% of the LAC region’s population.

well-being as a result of being overburdened with work and of their lack of power and influence. In most regions of the world, women receive less formal education than men, and at the same time, women's own knowledge, abilities and coping mechanisms often go unrecognized. The power relations that impede women's attainment of healthy and fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the highly public". Chapter IV (UN, 1994: 22).

The ICPD PoA assumed that women were disadvantaged in all social activities and that it would be necessary to ensure an increase in the female contribution to development and their full involvement, mainly through improvements in the following areas: 1) Education; 2) Health; 3) Labor market; 4) Social and political participation; 5) Legislation that supports equity and prevents gender discrimination. Moreover, the Plan reinforced the need to guarantee improvements in the status of women in order to increase their capacity to take decisions in the areas of sexuality and reproduction. Besides being a right, the greater autonomy of women in reproductive issues would facilitate the process of fertility regulation and, consequently, would help to bring down fertility rates. As part of this package, the demographic transition and the stabilization of population growth were deemed to be a prerequisite to enable the takeoff towards sustained and sustainable development.

With regard specifically to girls, the PoA sets forth three objectives: 1) To eliminate all forms of discrimination against girls and the fundamental causes of the preference for boys, which results in harmful, anti-ethical practices in terms of female infanticide and prenatal sex selection; 2) To expand public awareness of the value of girls and, at the same time, strengthen self-image, self-esteem and the status of girls; 3) To improve girls' well-being, particularly with regard to health, food security and education.

As far as men are concerned, the PoA assumed that they have been in a position of advantage in society and that they have participated little in reproductive and family matters, leaving the greatest burdens of reproductive and household activities to women. It thus established in chapter 4.25 that: *"The objective is to promote gender equality in all spheres of life, including family and community life, and to encourage and enable men to take responsibility for their sexual and reproductive behavior and their social and family roles"* (UN, 1994: 28-29).

In short, the Cairo ICPD was very clear in its view of women as under-privileged and discriminated members of society and in its consequent defense of women's empowerment and autonomy. Its underlying diagnosis was that females were at disadvantage compared to males in all aspects of life. In addition to promoting women's empowerment in key areas, it strongly recommended that males should take on greater responsibilities in reproductive activities and participate more effectively in household chores within the family sphere.

However, the data presented in this paper show that Latin American women have already overtaken men in a variety of areas (especially education and health) and that these "reverse inequalities" are becoming more pronounced. In other areas, there have been continuous and significant advances, but extensive inequalities still persist. An update of the Plan of Action for the LAC region should address gender inequalities in both directions, since women are not in the worst position in all areas, nor are men in the best position always. A society with equity of

gender cannot be sustained by reverse inequalities; in other words, inequalities in favor of women do not necessarily offset inequalities in favor of men.

To define policies that are compatible with this increasingly complex reality<sup>3</sup>, it is necessary to analyze the data and to learn where there is equity of gender and where there is not, and whether it favors women or favors men. Bearing in mind that gender is a relational concept, it would be necessary to look, not only at the process of empowerment of women, but also at the process of disempowerment of men, as the old inequalities coexist today with reverse inequalities. In practice, equity of gender has always been the exception (Alves and Martine, 2010).

The paper is organized as follows. Firstly, it presents background information regarding population growth, urbanization and the demographic transition in the LAC region. The next section presents trends on male over-mortality for young adults and the differences in life expectancy by gender, revealing the tendency towards an increased surplus of women in the region. The third section presents a discussion on gender gap reversals in education. The fourth tackles the persistence of gender inequality in the labor market, specifying issues related to employment policies, the economy of care, economic growth and poverty reduction. The final section shows the current situation relating to the empowerment of women in politics. Our closing remarks focus on what has changed and what has not in terms of gender inequality in the LAC region and discuss the need to bring the Cairo ICPD PoA up-to-date in the region.

## **Background**

Throughout most of its history, Latin America had a surplus of men in its population. This stemmed not only from the type of colonization, which was focused on the exploitation of primary goods, but also from high rates of births and deaths, and especially high maternal mortality which reduced women's life expectancy.<sup>4</sup> This situation changed completely as from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

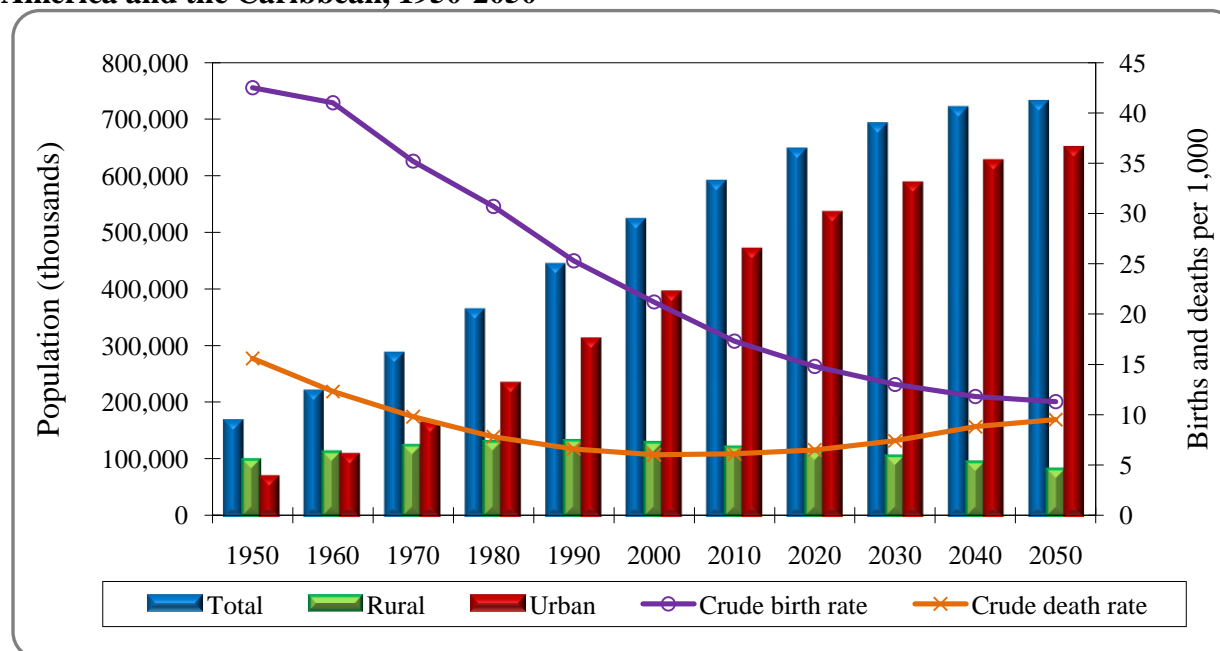
Along with an accelerated process of urbanization and industrialization, which intensified after the Second World War, the region also made important advances in its demographic transition. The crude mortality rate (CMR) dropped during the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century and reached its lowest level in the period between 2005 and 2010, as shown in Figure 1. The crude birth rate remained above 40 per thousand until the middle of the 1960s, at which time it initiated a process of continuous decline. The two curves should intersect in the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, reaching a zero population growth at that time.

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<sup>3</sup> There also exist differences of class, race and region amongst the women themselves in each country. Wherein those living in a single parent families with small children and working in the informal sector are usually those that have the worst social conditions. Moreover, there are many differences among women living in different countries of the region. That is to say, there are differences within and between countries.

<sup>4</sup> Slavery and migration have historically brought more men than women to the continent.

**Figure 1: Population by place of residence, crude birth rate and crude death rate, Latin America and the Caribbean, 1950-2050**



Source: UN/ESA: World Population Prospects, The 2008 Revision, Medium variant, Jan 27, 2011.

As Chackiel and Schkolnik (2004) have showed, the demographic transition occurred in different ways in the countries of the region, but to a greater or lesser degree, all countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have already reached low crude mortality rates. Birth rates are still relatively high due to the age structure and the high percentage of women in reproductive ages, but fertility rates are low as shown in subsequent paragraphs.

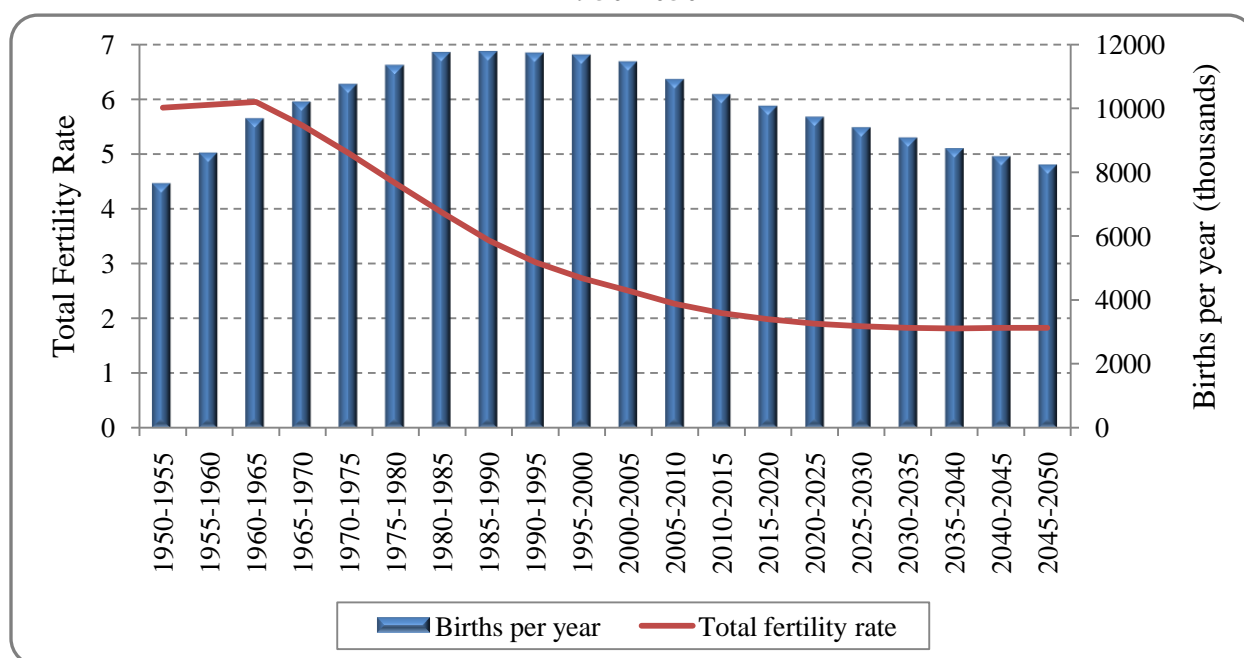
In 1950, the LAC region's population stood at 167 million; this rose to 323 million in 1975, and should hit some 646 million by 2020. The region's population took 25 years to double between 1950 and 1975, and will likely take 45 years to double once again, to then begin a period of very slow growth until it stabilizes around 2050. Although the question of the population explosion (particularly amongst the poor) is still part of some media hype, the LAC region is showing a growth of around 1% yearly and will only continue to present positive rates for the next few decades due primarily to demographic inertia.

The rural population in 1950 was 98.1 million inhabitants, accounting for almost 60% of the total population of the LAC region at that time; it reached its maximum value of 131.3 million in 1990 (representing 30% of the total population). After this point, the rural population began to decline in absolute terms, and will probably reach 81.5 million inhabitants by 2050 (representing just 11% of the total regional population). All population growth from 1990 onwards has been concentrated in urban areas, with cities growing at a higher rate than the total population, and with natural increase of the resident population in urban areas accounting for an increasingly large proportion of that growth. From 1950 to 2050, the total population of the LAC region will likely multiply by 4.4, while the urban population is expected to grow 9.4 times.

Therefore, the high rates of demographic growth that were typical of the LAC region in the recent past have ceased to exist. The population has grown more than 3 times in 50 years, climbing from 167.3 million inhabitants in 1950, to 521.2 million by 2000. The median variant of population projection points to a growth of just 40% between 2000 and 2050 and a population of 729.2 million inhabitants by 2050. The region will probably witness a population decline in the second half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century if the current projections materialize (UN/ESA, 2011). Brazil, which is the largest country in the region, is likely to see negative growth rates by the beginning of the 2030 decade.

Figure 2 shows that the total fertility rate (TFR) in the region, which was around 6 children per woman until 1960-65, has been falling constantly and should reach the replacement level (2.1 children per woman) in 2010-2015. The drop in fertility already affects the average number of live births, which reached its peak in the 1985-90 period, at around 11.8 million children. In the 2005-10 period, 10.8 million children were born in the region and the annual figure for live births should drop to 8.2 million by 2050, almost the same number of children that were born in 1950.

**Figure 2: Total fertility rate (TFR) and births per year, Latin America and the Caribbean, 1950-2050**



Source: UN/ESA: World Population Prospects, The 2008 Revision, Medium variant, Jan 27, 2011

Amongst the five largest countries in the region, only Brazil has a fertility rate below the replacement level in the 2005-2010 period, with Mexico, Colombia, Argentina and Peru having TFRs around 2.3 children per woman. Within each country, fertility differentials are high since the poorest segments of the population still do not have sufficient access to methods of fertility regulation and have high levels of unwanted births. This means that for the region to achieve population stability, a lot of effort is still required to ensure that sexual and reproductive health is universalized, especially for the more excluded segments of society.

The drop in fertility has an impact on economic development and gender relations. It results in a change in the age structure and a reduction in the demographic dependency ratio, which brings about the demographic bonus. Also, a smaller number of children allows women to invest more in their own (and children's) education and to have greater autonomy and participation in the labor market. Better levels of education and participation in the labor market are associated with the greater empowerment of women. In this sense, the region serves as an example that reinforces the arguments made by Malhotra and Ridley (2009):

“[...] we argue that population processes and gender issues are intimately connected, and that declining fertility levels have the potential to set the stage for fundamental transformations in gender relations that then have implications not only for women's lives, but also for broader development processes. To the extent that control over women's childbearing has been a defining basis for gender inequality in the first place, a shift to lower fertility levels can set the stage for reducing the motivation for such control, and thus radically transforming gender dynamics” (Malhotra and Ridley, 2009:2).

The decline in fertility, together with greater female autonomy has banished the so-called “Malthusian ghosts” of the population explosion in the LAC region. Population dynamics are no longer seen as an obstacle to development and the new age structure has been transformed into a window of opportunity, since the average demographic dependency ratio for the region is on the way to reaching its lowest level in the 2020-2025 period. Demographic conditions have been a stimulus for economic growth, while the greater participation of women in public life has made both a microeconomic and macroeconomic contribution to development. Although many sectors of the region's population still have high rates of unwanted pregnancies and/or lack access to modern contraceptive methods, high fertility is no longer a general feature of the region<sup>5</sup>. The misgivings implicit in the Cairo ICPD PoA, regarding the possibility of a demographic explosion, no longer apply to the region, particularly in those countries that have achieved the greatest reductions in the gender gap.

## **Excess male mortality and the surplus of women**

Decreases in crude mortality rate and the accelerated growth of life expectancy are historical achievements that occurred mainly during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even before the fall in fertility rates. According to Arriaga and Davis (1969), life expectancy at birth, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was around 37 years in Europe, and below 30 in Latin America. Nonetheless, as a result of improvements in the standard of living facilitated by the process of urbanization and modernization, as well as the advances made by public health programs, due to the importation of medical technology, expansion of basic sanitation and improved personal and household hygiene, Latin America has gone through a successful epidemiological transition during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1950-55 period, life expectancy at birth, for the total population was 51.3 years; this increased to 73.4 by 2005-10, and is likely to reach 80 by 2045-50. These gains in life expectancy in the LAC region have reduced existing differences in relation to the developed

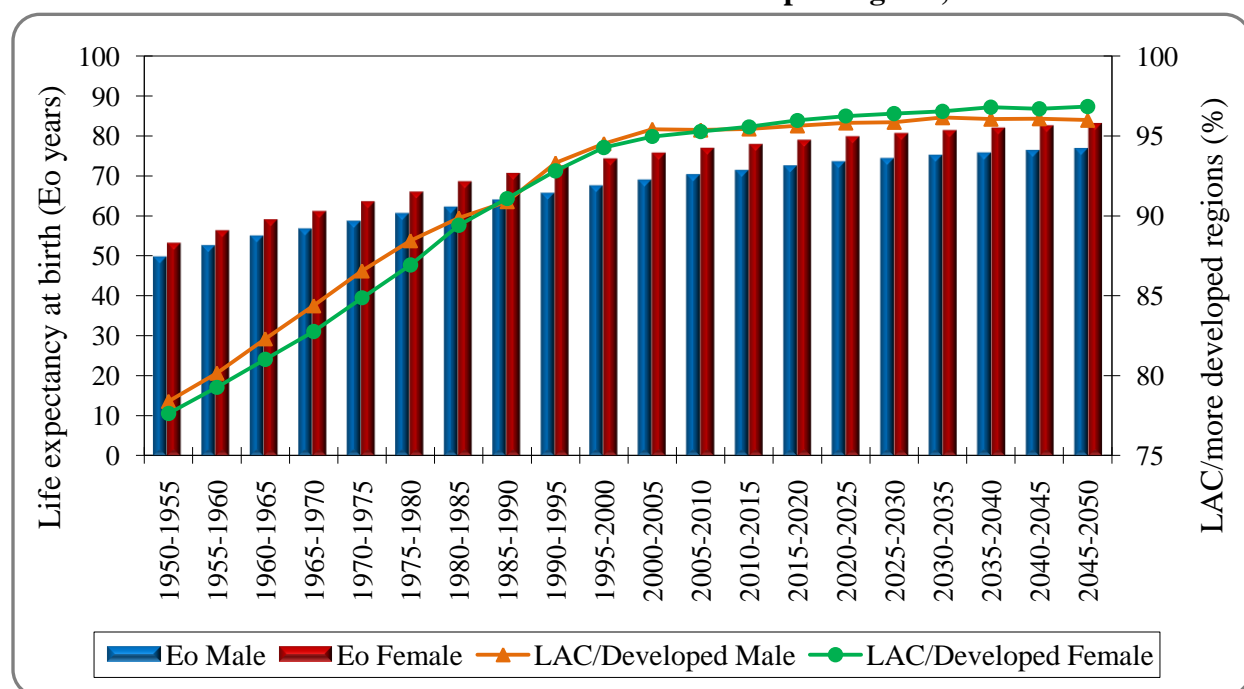
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<sup>5</sup> Although difficult to measure, it is known that high abortion rates exist in the region and given the high rate of unwanted pregnancies, fertility would be even lower in a situation of full access to modern contraceptive methods.

nations. This fact belies the pessimistic predictions of some demographers (Gwatkin, 1980; Palloni, 1981) who had raised doubts about a possible process of convergence for levels in life expectancy at birth between Latin America and those countries with more advanced economies.

Figure 3 illustrates the fact that, in the 1950-55 period, life expectancy in the LAC region for both sexes was around 78% of that found in the developed countries, but this figure climbed to 95% by 2005-10, with the biggest absolute and relative gains being made by women. It also shows that, in the 1950-55 period, life expectancy at birth in the LAC region was 49.7 years for men and 53.1 for women - a difference of 3.4 years between the sexes. By the 2005-10 period, life expectancy at birth was 70.2 years for men and 76.7 for women, a difference of 6.5 years. In other words, the gender gap in relation to survival has increased in favor of women. In a recent study, Medalia and Chang (2010: 2) show evidence of a positive correlation between greater gender equality and the increase in the life expectancy gap: *“We conclude that male and female life expectancy is diverging in LDCs (Less Developed Countries), in part because gender equality has a stronger positive effect on female than male life expectancy”*.

**Figure 3: Life expectancy at birth (Eo), by sex, in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and the relative difference between the LAC and developed regions, 1950-55 and 2045-50**



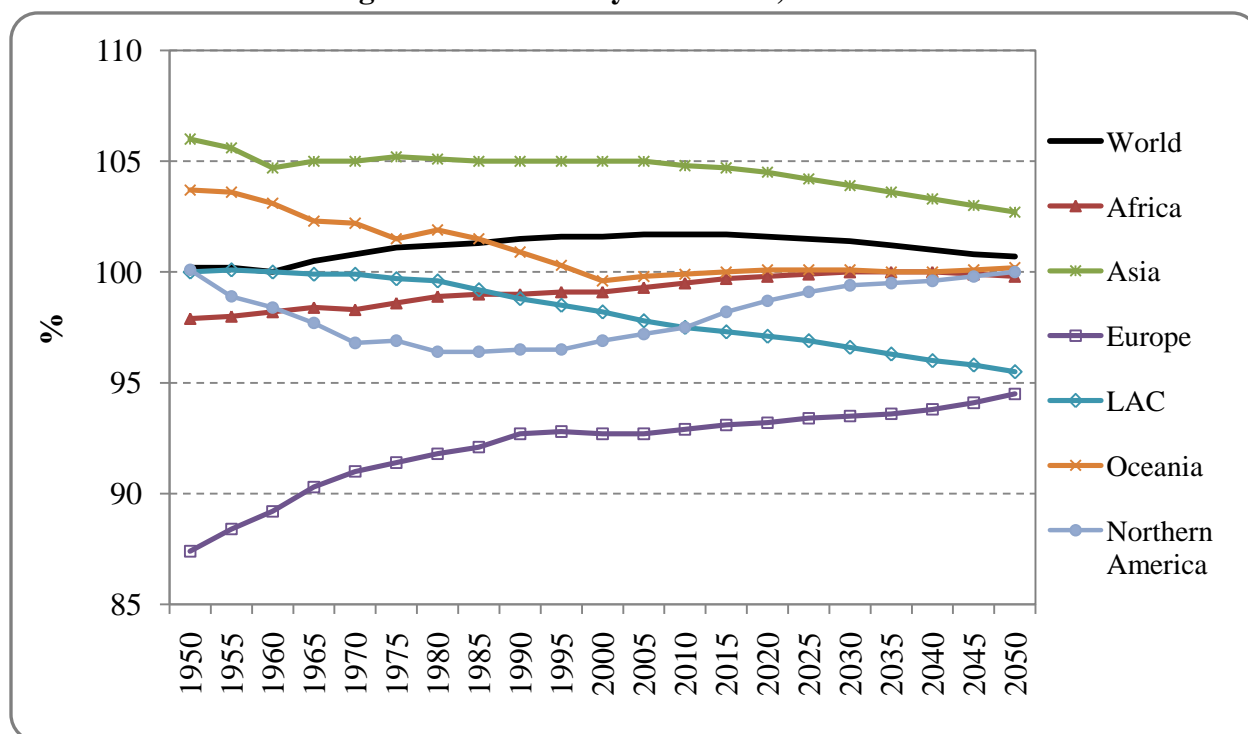
Source: UN/ESA: World Population Prospects, The 2008 Revision, Medium variant, Jan 27, 2011

The greatest differential by sex in life expectancy of women in the LAC region follows women's social advances in Latin American and is also a result of the excess male mortality that encompasses all ages, but particularly men aged 15-39 year old. Sen (1990) assumes that women have a greater biological capacity for survival, but that social inequalities cancel out these advantages in Asia and North Africa. The higher prevailing sex ratio in these regions reinforces the phenomenon of “missing women” so cited in the literature. Although its sex ratio is increasing, Europe continues to be the continent with the highest percentage of women, as shown



in Figure 4. On the other hand, the LAC region shows a trend towards a decline in sex ratio which, if it continues, would make it the continent with the highest percentage of women in 2050.

**Figure 4: Sex ratio by continents, 1950-2050**

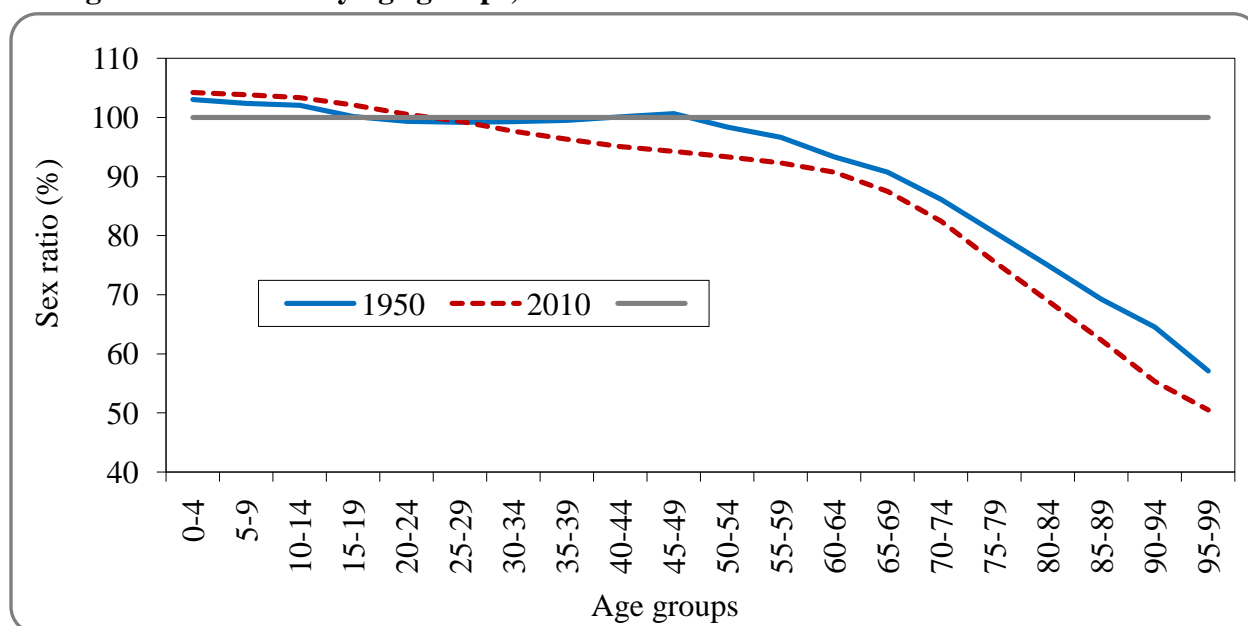


Source: ESA/UN: World Population Prospects, The 2008 Revision, Medium variant, Jan 27, 2011

Data from the UN Population Division show that the sex ratio at birth has remained at around 1.05, that is, 5% more males are born in the LAC region. In explaining this, the literature points to biological reasons related to conception, and not to a preference for male children<sup>6</sup>. In 1950, males comprised the majority of the population through the age of 50, as shown in Figure 5. The high rates of maternal mortality probably contributed to the continuing surplus of males at that time. The 2010 data, however, show that the sex ratio has increased at younger ages, but it begins to drop off quickly after the age of 15 and the surplus of women starts to increase after the age of 25. A big difference can be seen in the sex ratio between the ages of 20 and 50 during the period, mainly as a result of the increase in death caused by external factors.

<sup>6</sup> As asserted by Unisa (2009: 3): "It is well established that under normal conditions, more male than females are born among all human populations and it lies between 103 to 106 males per 100 females at birth".

**Figure 5: Sex ratio by age groups, Latin America and the Caribbean: 1950 and 2010**



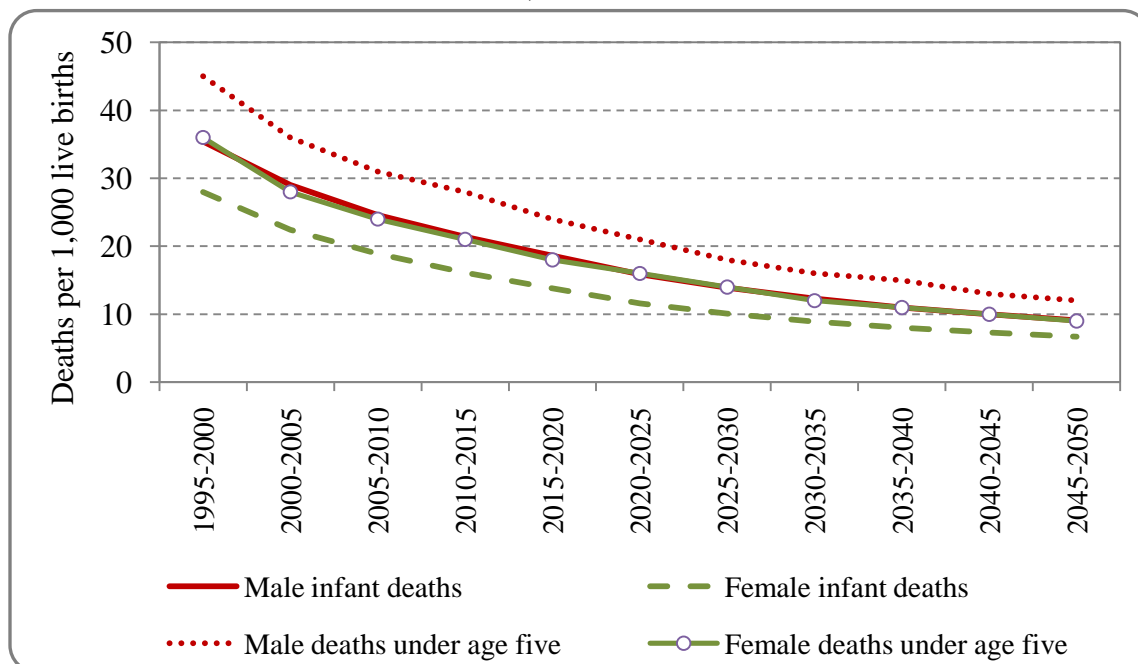
Source: ESA/UN: World Population Prospects, The 2008 Revision, Medium variant, Jan 27, 2011

The infant mortality rate for 1995-2000 was 35.4 per thousand for boys and 28 per thousand for girls (Figure 6). Similarly, the mortality rate for children under age five was 45 per thousand for boys and 36 per thousand for girls. Although the figures for infant mortality and mortality under age five are decreasing, the relative difference by sex stayed the same for the 2005-2010 period and is likely to remain so throughout the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Das Gupta (2009: 2) states that *“Most societies show some degree of preference for sons, though this is often quite mild”*. However, this statement does not appear to apply in the Latin American and Caribbean case. In the region, excess male mortality in the early years of life differs from the pattern found in the majority of Asian countries, where the phenomenon of female infanticide exists, as pointed out in the literature (Sudha, 1999; Smolin, 2011) and as was widely discussed at the Cairo ICPD.

The epidemiological data for the LAC region show that, between 1950 and 2010, there was a sharp decline in maternal mortality and an increase in deaths from external causes (homicide, assaults and traffic accidents), particularly among men. The result of this process is a growing surplus of women in the population in the region, one that increases with age. The increase in violence and deaths from external causes is an epidemic that has spread in recent decades, particularly since the economic crisis of the 1980s. This growth, related in large part to organized crime and drug trafficking, mainly affects men.

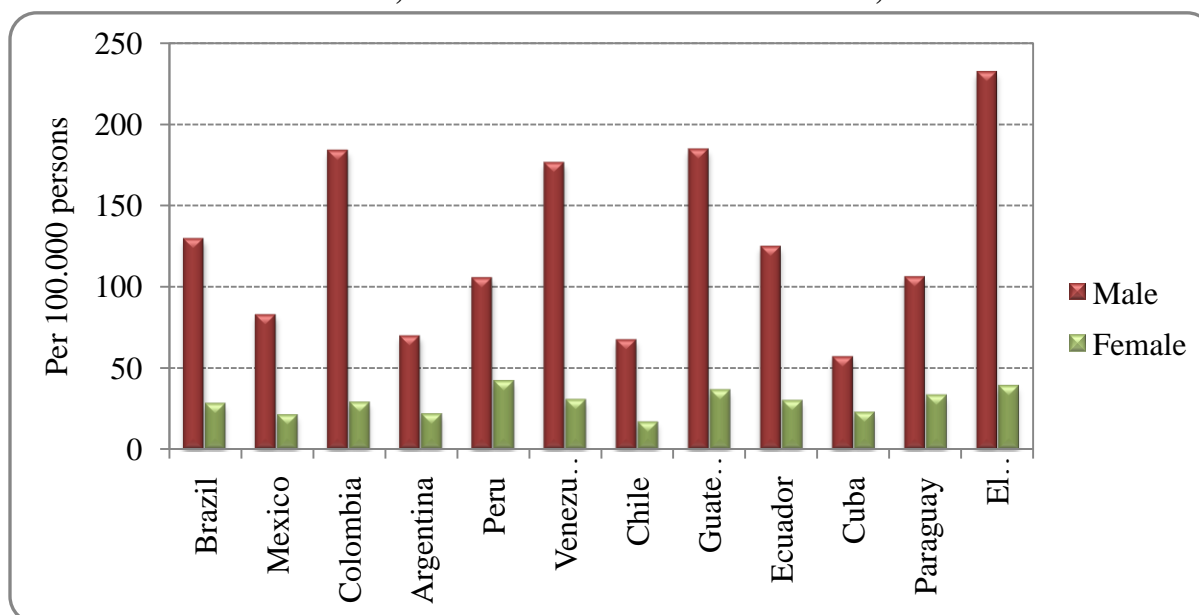
Age-adjusted estimates of the rates of mortality due to external causes (homicide, traffic accidents, suicide, etc.) for the most populated countries in the LAC region having data for 2007 are shown in Figure 7. It can be seen that the rates in general are very high, but the rate for males is, on average, four times higher than it is for females. Amongst the violent causes of death, homicides account for the highest percentage (PAHO, 2010).

**Figure 6: Infant mortality rates and mortality rates under age five, by sex, Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995-2000 and 2045-2050**



Source: UN/ESA: World Population Prospects, The 2008 Revision, Medium variant, Jan 27, 2011

**Figure 7: Age-estimated mortality rates from external causes (C.30.2.0), by sex, select countries, Latin America and the Caribbean, 2007**

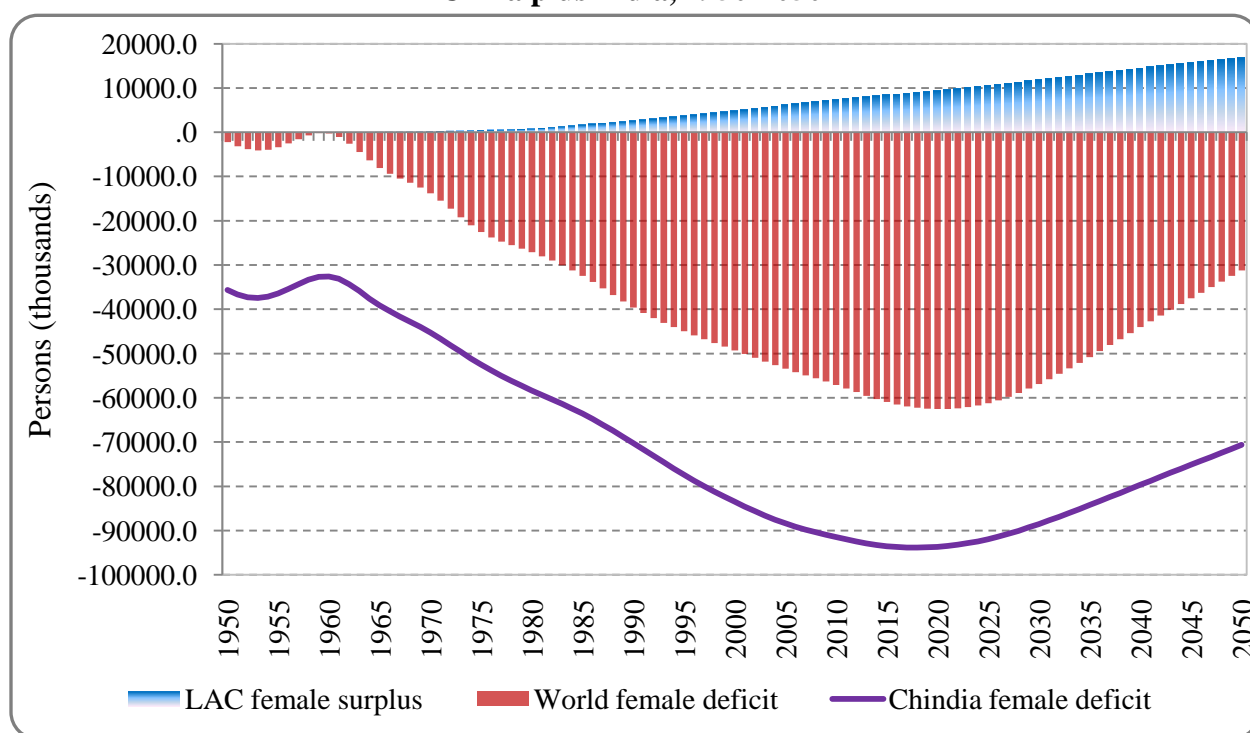


Source: Pan American Health Organization, Health Information and Analysis Project. Regional Core Health Data Initiative. Washington DC, 2010.

The process of masculinization of deaths due to external causes is quite clear in the case of Brazil, which has the biggest population in the region. The accumulated number of deaths from external causes, between 1990 and 2009, was around 2 million men and 400 thousand women. Taking only homicides into account, Brazil had an annual average of approximately 47 thousand males murdered in the last decade, with over 90% of all homicides involving males (Brazil, 2010). To put this into perspective this number of *annual* deaths from homicides in Brazil is greater than the total number of American soldiers killed during the 14 years of the Vietnam War.

The high level of excess male mortality in Latin America and the Caribbean causes the region to have a growing surplus of women in the population. The high rates of male deaths due to external causes, especially homicides, represent one of the elements underlying the reduction in the sex ratio of the region. Figure 8 shows that, in the 1950s, there was a small surplus of men, both in the LAC region and in the world as a whole, and a large surplus in China and India (when taken together, an area referred to as Chindia). Prior to 1960, the surplus of males diminished in these two countries and fell to practically zero in the LAC region and the world. However, from 1960 until 2010, approximately, the surplus of males increased in China and India and, due to the weight of the population in these countries, it also grew for the world as a whole. UN projections suggest that this surplus of males will come down after 2020. As for Latin America and the Caribbean, there is a constant upward trend in the surplus of women.

**Figure 8: Female surplus and female deficit, Latin America and the Caribbean, World and, China plus India, 1950-2050**



Source: ESA/UN: World Population Prospects, The 2008 Revision, Medium variant, Jan 27, 2011

Evidently, international migration could, in theory, be helping to create this female surplus in Latin America, if there is selectivity in the migration process, with a sharper exodus of men or a greater influx of women. According to the UN Population Division, however, the number of women migrants, as a percentage of the total international migrants in the region, varied from 49.7% to 50.1% between 1990 and 2010, numbers which are insufficient to explain any significant part of the observed surplus.

According to Canales (2009), around 2000 there were 19.2 million Latin Americans residing in countries outside the region, while there were 2 million immigrants arriving from countries outside the region. Though complete statistics on Latin American immigration are not available and the situation varies depending on the countries of origin and destination, there is a certain equilibrium in the sex ratio of migration from the LAC region as a whole:

“Accordingly, there is wide diversity in the composition of migrant populations. Migration to Spain is principally female in nature, while in the United States, the situation is more heterogeneous. Mexican and Central American migrants in the United States are primarily male. In contrast, Dominican, Haitian, Colombian, Bolivian and other American emigrants to the United States tend to be female” (Canales, 2009: 95).

In short, the main explanation for the surplus of women in Latin America has to come from excess male mortality, which can already be seen in the infant mortality rates and in the mortality rates under age five. However, these differences in mortality between men and women are hugely exaggerated between the ages of 15 and 39, due mainly to external causes. Accordingly, the surplus of males that exists in the early age groups due to the higher number of male births (5% more men than women in the region) transforms itself into a surplus of women as the age of the population rises.

One interesting way of observing these population surpluses by age is shown in Figure 9, which compares data for Latin America and the Caribbean, China, Brazil and El Salvador, for 2010. It can be observed that, in China, there is a large surplus of men in the early age groups and this diminishes a little with advancing age, but it only becomes a female surplus after the age of 70. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the surplus of men is lower in the early age groups and changes to a surplus of women after 50 years of age. On the other hand, in Brazil, which has a high excess male mortality due to external causes, the surplus of females emerges much earlier, at age 25.

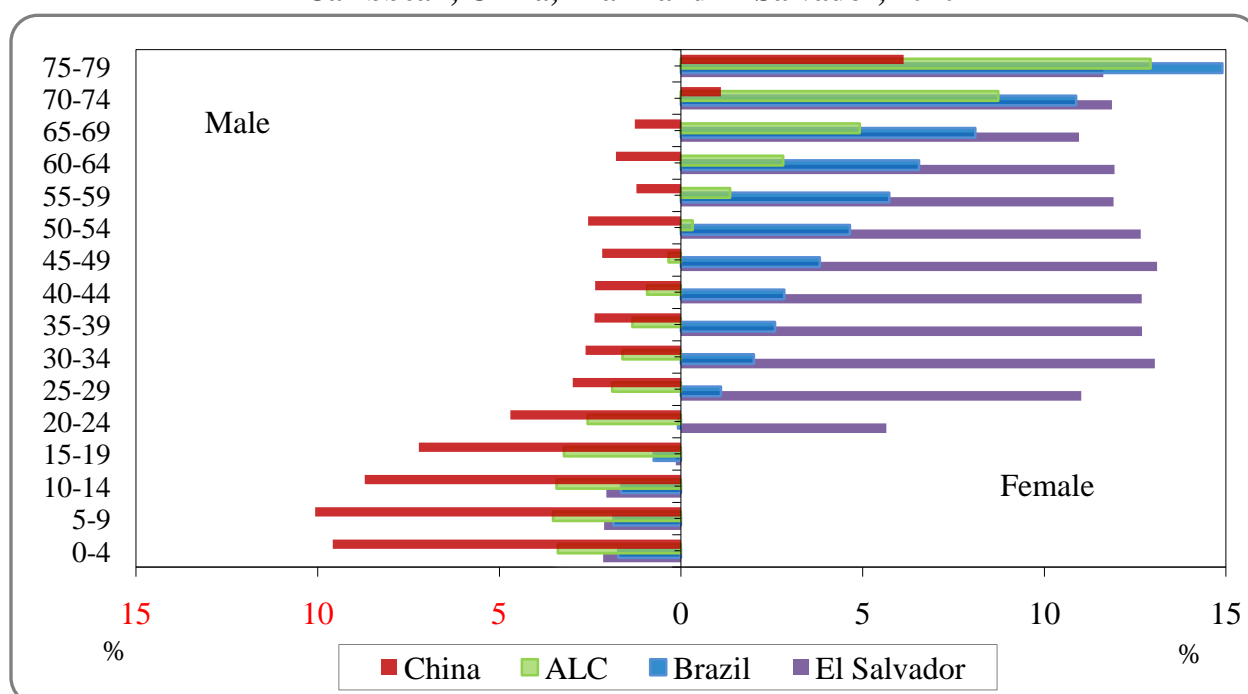
In El Salvador, however, the female surplus emerges even earlier at age 20 and reaches a percentage in excess of 10% after age 25. El Salvador had a sex ratio of 89.1 men for every 100 women in 2010. The country has been through a civil war that significantly increased the percentage of male deaths in the 1980s, until the 1992 internal peace agreement. Nonetheless, in the 1990s, there was an increase in the percentage of male deaths as a result of greater delinquency in the aftermath of the peace process (Cruz and Gonzáles, 1997). In 2007, there were 232 male deaths and 38.9 female deaths for every one hundred thousand inhabitants (PAHO, 2010).

The other demographic component that could explain the surplus of women in these countries is male international emigration. However, data from the UN's Population Division (UN/ESA, 2009) show that the number of women migrants as a percentage of the total of overseas migrants from Brazil was 46%, China 50% and El Salvador 53%, between 1990 and 2010<sup>7</sup>. This allows us to conclude that high excess male mortality represents reverse gender inequality and explains a big part of the female surplus in the LAC region.

The excess adult male mortality has a big impact on families, as parents lose children, wives lose husbands and sons lose their fathers. Moreover, an imbalance between men and women in the marriage market usually leads to a situation of “marriage squeeze” which has an influence on the number and type of marital unions (Greene and Rao, 1995).

This female surplus in the population expands as the demographic transition and the transformation of age structures progresses, that is, the sex ratio falls as one moves from a young population to an aging population. The more the region advances in the demographic transition process and the lower its fertility rates, the greater will be the impact of population aging, accentuating the reverse inequalities already in motion. Population aging was another subject not adequately dealt with by the Cairo ICPD. Hence, an updated Action Plan should also tackle the question of the feminization of aging, as the female surplus grows significantly for older ages, leading to another important set of social issues that needs to be addressed by public policy.

**Figure 9: Percentage of male and female surplus, by age group, Latin America and the Caribbean, China, Brazil and El Salvador, 2010**



Source: ESA/UN: World Population Prospects, The 2008 Revision, Medium variant, Jan 27, 2011

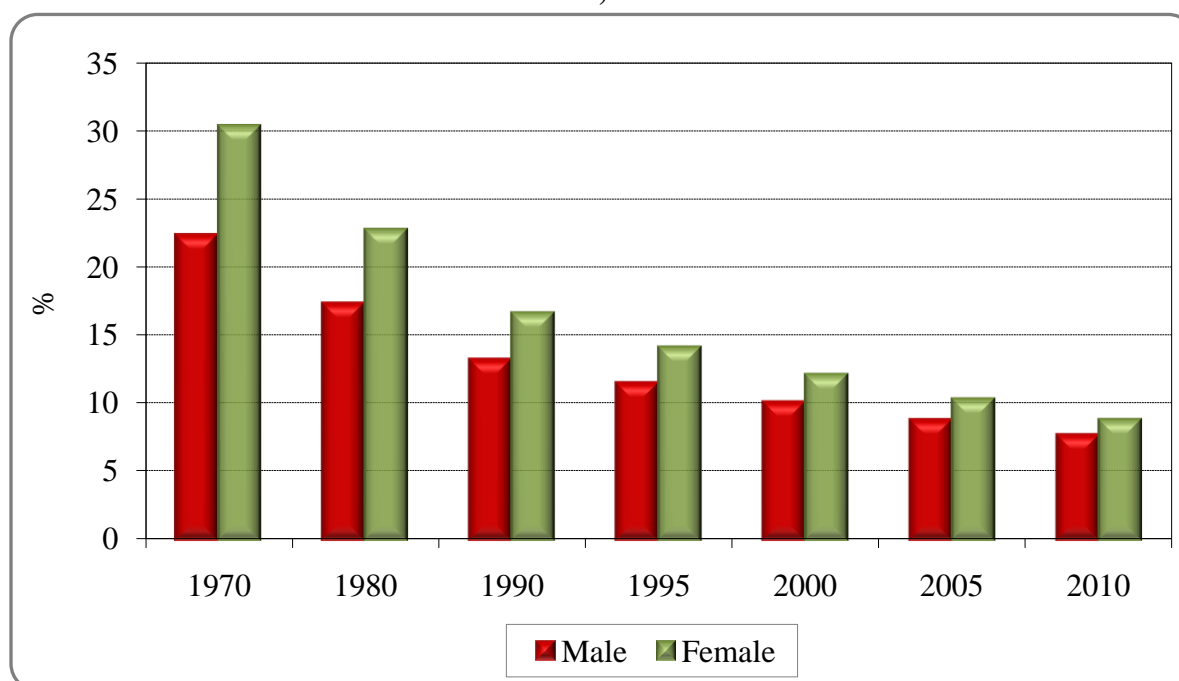
<sup>7</sup> These data relate to legal emigration, but in overall terms, we believe that illegal emigration does not possess a pattern that is very different as concerns the sex of migrants.

## The reversal of the gender gap in education

Two decades ago, there was great concern across the world about the prevailing low levels of education, especially among women, given that the great majority was not attending school. This concern is reflected in the Cairo ICPD PoA, which states, in chapter IV: “*There are 130 million children who are not enrolled in primary school and 70 per cent of them are girls*”. In addition, based on this situation, the Millennium Development Goals defined the following goal: “*Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015*” (Target 3A, MDG # 3). In the past, the majority of women in the LAC region did not have adequate access to school and had lower enrollment rates compared to men. Although the global concern over education is still valid, women have advanced more than men in school and this has produced what we call a reverse gender gap in education.

Figure 10 shows illiteracy rates for the population aged 15 and above by sex in the LAC region. It can be observed that female illiteracy was over 30% in 1970, reflecting the lack of access to schooling for the older generations. Over the course of the last four decades, however, illiteracy rates have dropped continuously as school coverage expanded for the younger generations. This difference is not as sharp when viewing male and female populations in the aggregate simply because older women have the largest illiteracy levels.

**Figure 10: Illiteracy rates in the population aged 15 years or over, Latin America and the Caribbean, 1970-2010**



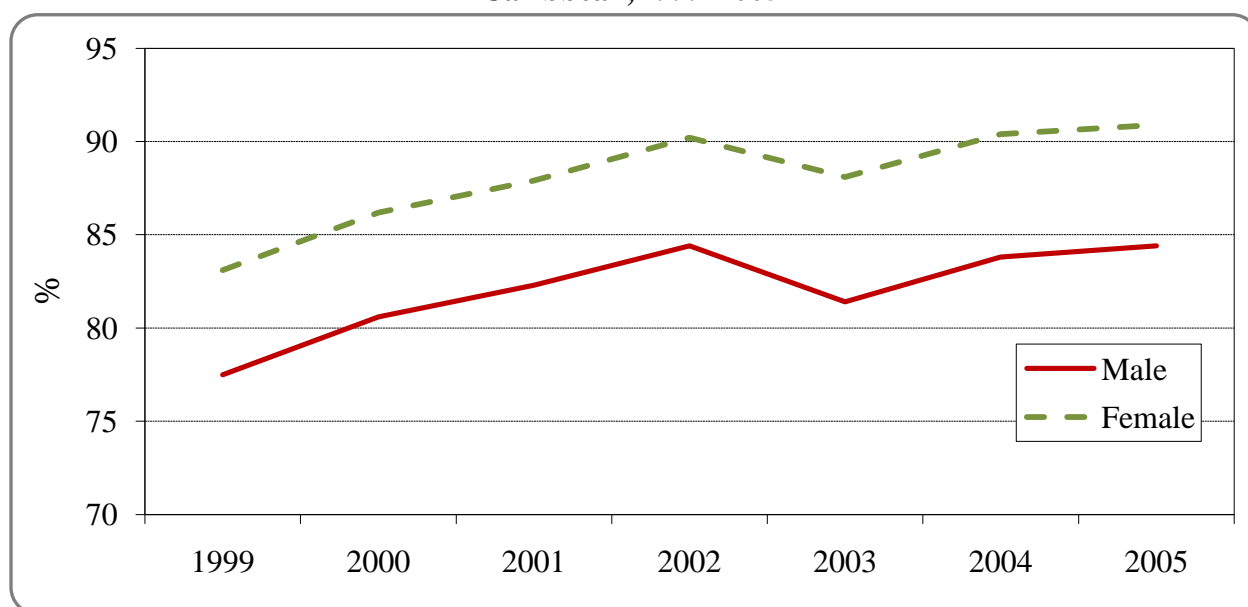
Source: CEPALSTAT, 2010. Databases and statistical publications. <http://www.cepal.org/oig/>

However, the enrolment rates of the younger generations who are currently in school show that the situation has been inverted. Enrolment in primary education is similar for both sexes, but women have overtaken men in terms of secondary school and higher education enrollments.

Thus there is a generational difference between women, with older women in a worse position than men and younger women in a better position. Figure 11 shows the rate of enrolment in secondary education for Latin America and the Caribbean over the 1999 to 2005 period. It should be noted that women have higher rates and that the difference in favor of women has grown over the entire period. In short, the region has a reverse inequality which is on the increase.

Nevertheless, higher women's rates of enrolment in secondary education could be simply reflecting the difficulties that women have in penetrating the labor market. In this case, the higher enrolment rates for women at higher educational levels might reflect a strategy for investing in human capital in order to acquire better conditions of competitiveness (Alves and Correa, 2009). Be that as it may, the continuation of this trend could, in the long run, produce a situation of inequality between men and women that is detrimental to social equity.

**Figure 11: Enrolment rates for secondary education by sex, Latin America and the Caribbean, 1999-2005**

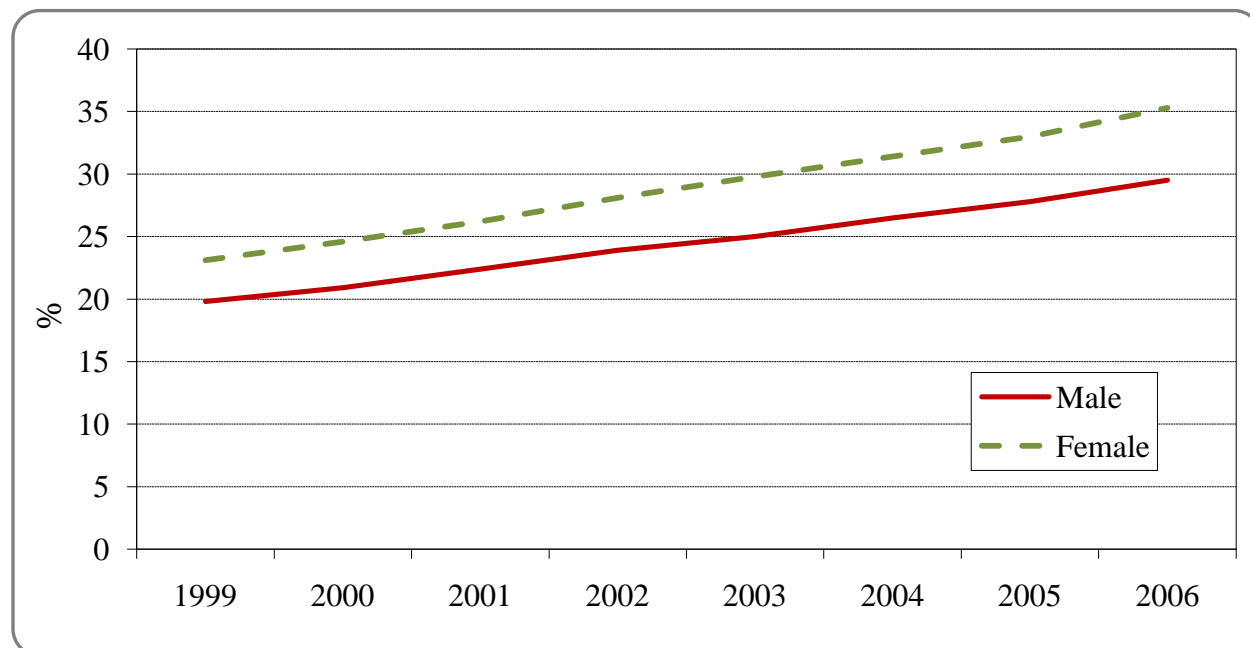


Source: CEPALSTAT, 2010. Databases and statistical publications. <http://www.cepal.org/oig/>

It is important to observe that the differences in enrolment rates favoring women is widening, as illustrated in Figure 12, which shows the enrolment rate for higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean from 1999 to 2006. Considering that higher education opens up greater opportunities for quality jobs, this is a reverse gender inequality that favors women and has the potential to create other inequalities in the region. Whether this gap will continue to grow and what effective policies could effectively address the male deficit in Latin American universities are issues that need to be dealt with. This reverse inequality could have enormous social consequences, since males without access to decent jobs and not enrolled in school are more prone to be involved in violence of different sorts, further accentuating the female surplus discussed earlier.



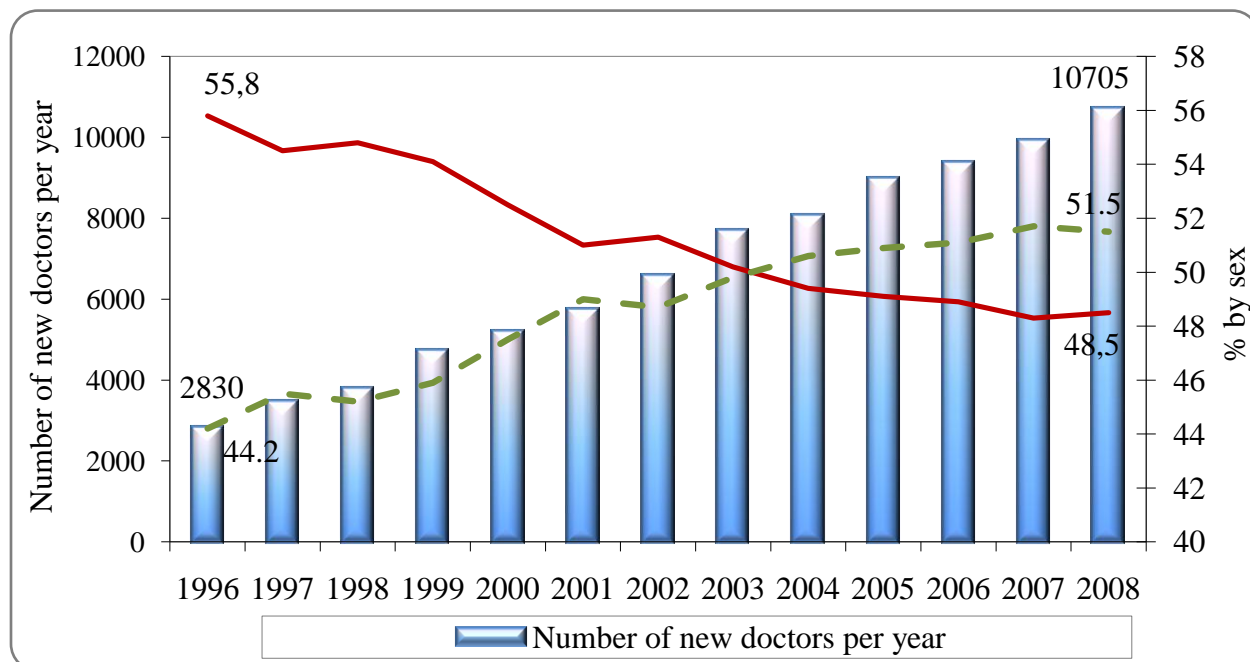
**Figure 12: Enrolment rates for higher education by sex, Latin America and the Caribbean, 1999-2006**



Source: CEPALSTAT, 2010. Databases and statistical publications. <http://www.cepal.org/oig/>

From the foregoing it is clear that the process of reversing the gender gap in education in the region started with the massive influx of women into primary education, advanced with greater female presence in secondary education and progressed still further with the increased entry of women in higher education. The process does not stop there, however. The greater number of women with diplomas in higher education increases competitiveness amongst women for post-graduate work. Figure 13 shows that is clearly the case of Brazil, which is the country with the most extensive post-graduation system in Latin America. There, 2,830 persons received a doctor's degree in 1996, and this figure grew to 10,705 in 2008. Figure 13 shows the number of doctoral degrees in Brazil between 1996 and 2008. Women accounted for 44.2% of those degrees in 1996, surpassed the number of men in 2004, and accounted for 51.5% of all doctors receiving degrees in 2008. Thus, reverse inequality is clearly growing at this level also. The trends in education in other countries indicate that the Brazilian case is not an exception in Latin America.

**Figure 13: Number of persons that received doctor's degree and percentage by sex, Brazil, 1996-2008**



Source: CGEE (Centro de Gestão e Estudos Estratégicos). “Doutores 2010: estudo da demografia da base técnico-científica brasileira”.

Overall, education indicators for the LAC region show that not only were the targets of the Cairo ICPD and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) met, but they were actually exceeded. Moreover, women from the younger generations are continuously increasing their advantages over men at all levels of education. The greater proportion of young men not in school and outside the labor market has impacts on sociability, in the process of transition to adulthood, and in relationships between men and women. As Lam (2007) observed:

“In order to fully understand the situation of young people in developing countries today it is important to understand the rapid demographic changes that produced the historically unprecedented numbers of young people in the world today. These demographic changes potentially have important implications on the labor market opportunities, access to public resources, and access to family resources for youth” (Lam, 2007: 2).

## Gender inequalities in the labor market

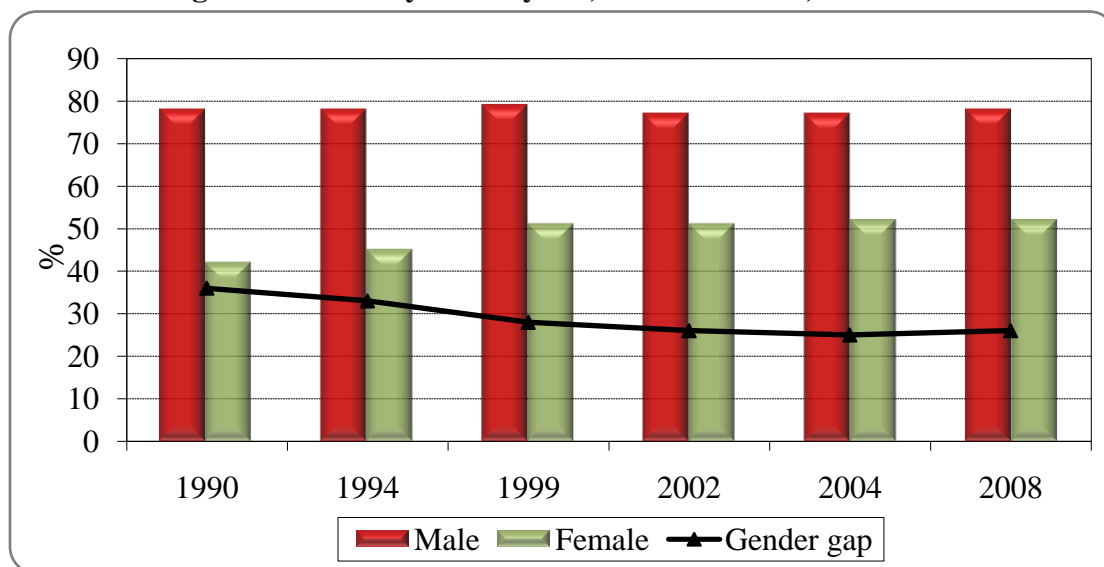
Participating in development is not just a women's right, but also a precondition for development itself. The contribution of women to the economy and gender parity in the public and private sectors is being increasingly recognized, even in the business world, as stated by Klaus Schwab, founder and CEO of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. In the preface to the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) report, he states: “From a values and social justice perspective, empowering women and providing them with equal rights and opportunities for

*fulfilling their potential is long overdue. From a business, economic and competitiveness viewpoint, targeting gender parity is a necessary condition for progress.” (WEF, 2009: V).*

The growing participation of women in the labor market is one of the main characteristics of the economic development process in Latin America and the Caribbean. Urbanization, the demographic transition, the growth of educational levels, the decline in fertility and the increasing number of women working in extra-domestic jobs are all trends that are mutually reinforcing. One might make the case that the presence of an increasingly well-educated female surplus in the LAC region constitutes a “female demographic bonus” that could help invigorate and speed up the region’s economic takeoff. Whether or not it functions in that manner depends very much on the region’s ability to overcome remaining hurdles in women’s employment, particularly those deriving from the overlap between their current burdens in reproduction and social reproduction.

As shown in the previous section, women achieved parity in terms of enrollment rates and then reversed the gender gap in education. The higher the levels of female education, the greater the chances of productive female participation in the labor market. In this context, it is worth noting that, women’s activity rates went from nearly 40% in 1990 to over 50% in 2008, while men’s activity rates remained steady over that period. The line on Figure 14 shows this process, with a reduction in the gender gap in the activity rates from 1990 to 2008.

**Figure 14: Activity rates by sex, Latin America, 1990-2008**

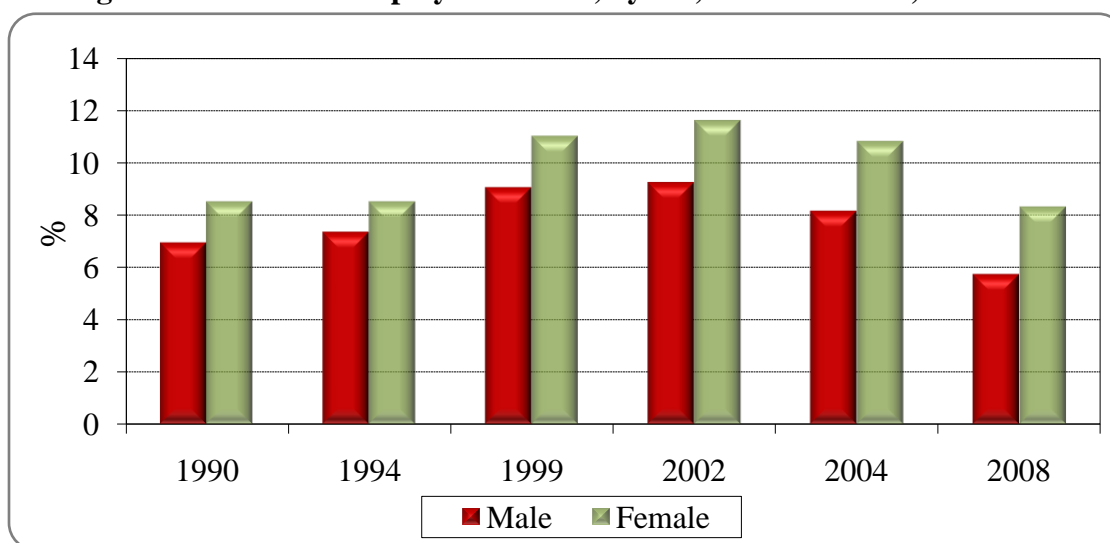


Source: CEPAL, Millennium Development Goals, 2010, July 2010. Chapter 5.

Although there is a long-term tendency towards an approximation of parity in the overall activity rates for both sexes, there are still several obstacles that hinder female participation, both on the demand and the supply side. Processes of occupational segregation and wage discrimination restrict female participation in productive activities. On the other hand, the burden of domestic chores and activities in the economy of care increase female responsibility in the family sphere and decrease the full female labor market supply. Thus, there are restrictions that need to be overcome in order to achieve greater gender equality in productive and reproductive activities.

One of the restrictions on greater female labor market participation is the higher rate of unemployment that affects the female population in the region. Unemployment, for both sexes, increased between 1990 and 2002 (Figure 15). On the positive side, unemployment fell and hit its lowest level in the last 20 years at the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. During this whole period, female unemployment rates were always above those of men in the LAC region. However, continuing economic growth and an increase in the demand for labor, approximating a situation of full employment at the current time, may help greater female insertion in productive activities and the continuing reduction of the gender gap.

**Figure 15: Urban unemployment rates, by sex, Latin America, 1990-2008**

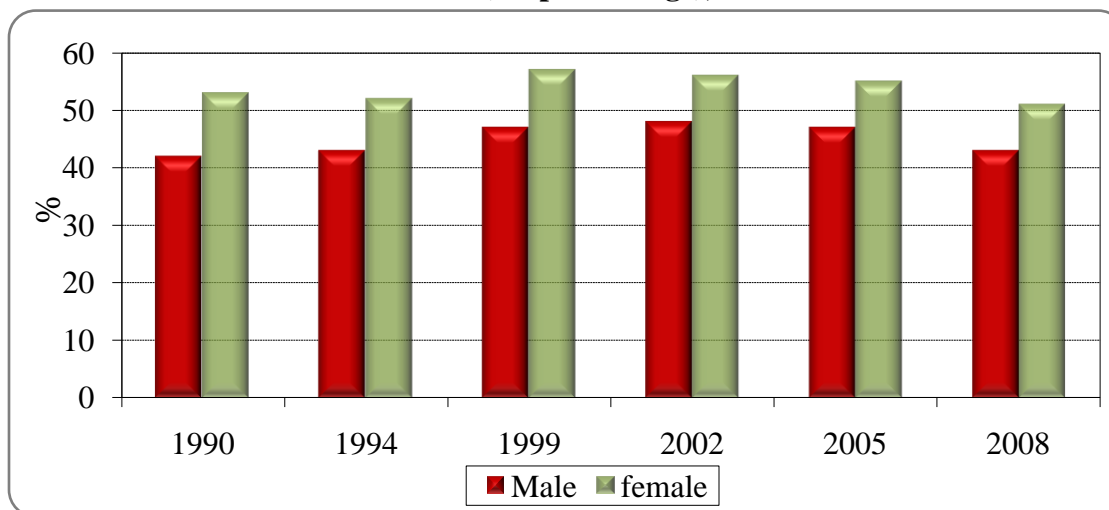


Source: CEPAL, Millennium Development Goals, 2010, July 2010. Chapter 5.

Complementary data show that unemployment primarily affects young women residing in urban areas. A new cycle of economic growth in the region, starting in 2010, may reduce even further the gender inequalities in the labor market in the LAC region, but it requires active policies by the State and the private sector, such as early school enrollment of children, to raise the supply and eliminate restrictions in demand, particularly through the reduction of the domestic and non-remunerated jobs carried out by women.

Another limitation on female labor market participation arises from the high level of informality in urban work in the LAC region. Around one half of the economically active urban population is occupied in low productivity work. The precarious nature of the work was on the rise up until 2002, but started to drop thereafter (Figure 16).

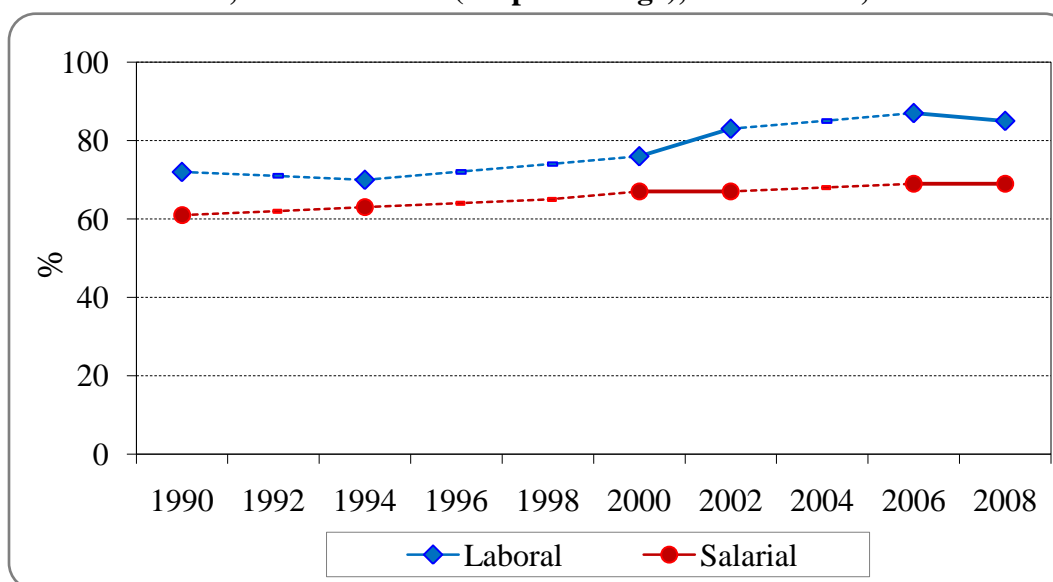
**Figure 16: Urban population occupied in low productivity work by sex  
Latin America (simple average), 1990-2008**



Source: CEPAL, Millennium Development Goals, 2010, July 2010. Chapter 5.

In the current decade, there was also a reduction of the gender gap in terms of labor and salary income rates, as shown in Figure 17. This decrease is a result, on the one hand, of the growth in female active employment rates within a context of improvements in women's level of schooling and, on the other hand, of the reduction in unemployment and informal labor rates.

**Figure 17: Average labor and salary income of women compared with those of men –  
urban zones, Latin America (simple average), 11 countries, 1990-2008**



Source: CEPAL, Millennium Development Goals, 2010, July 2010. Chapter 5.

Without a doubt, there is now a picture of reduced gender inequality and progress in the status of women in the labor market in Latin America. Though these advances are continuous, the pace of improvement is slow. Some groups of women present faster progress while others remain in

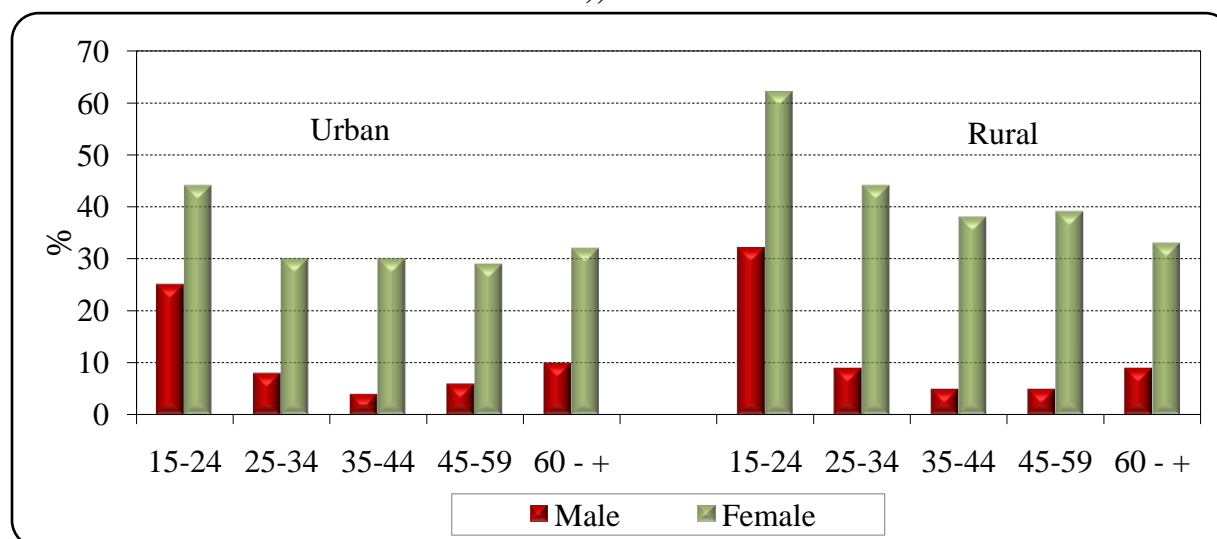
unfavorable conditions. It should be emphasized that wage differentials have fallen for the younger generations (Oliveira and Guimarães, 2009). In this regard, it would be important to show how the salary and income gap differs according to the generational cross-section, but that discussion falls outside the remit of this paper.

On the other hand, there is a significant portion of the Latin American population that does not have any income, and this situation is more common among young women living in rural areas (Figure 18). More than 60% of women between the ages of 15 and 24 who are living in rural areas had no income. The percentage of men with no income between the ages of 35 and 44 is just 4% in the urban areas and 5% in the rural areas. In general, urban areas offer greater work and salary opportunities for women.

The greater percentage of women with no income is due to their greater involvement in unpaid household work in the care economy. According to the Gender Equality Observatory of Latin America and the Caribbean (2011), the number of hours devoted to unpaid domestic work varies greatly in each country, but there is a general pattern demonstrating that women dedicate a much larger part of their time to unpaid domestic work than men. When it comes to paid work, the situation is inverted, with men devoting more time to paid work than do women. Overall, however, the daily or weekly workload of women is considerably greater than that of men, when the time devoted to paid and unpaid work are duly added up (Cepal, 2010).

The sexual division of labor keeps a large number of women in unpaid jobs, such as caregivers, while men are steered towards paid jobs and towards assuming a traditional role as family breadwinners. The double workload of women is a burden that makes it difficult for women to get access to better paid jobs and managerial positions in both the private and public sector.

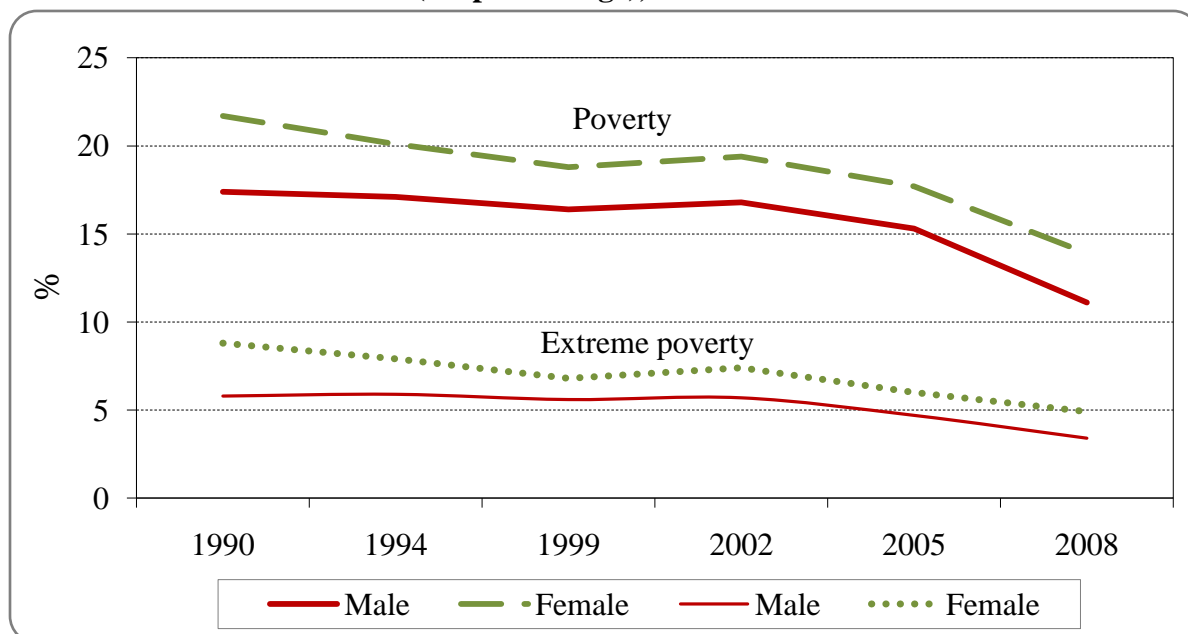
**Figure 18: Percentage of the population with no income by age group and sex for place of residence, Latin America (simple average) – urban areas (15 countries) and rural areas (14 countries), around 2008**



Source: CEPAL, Millennium Development Goals, 2010, July 2010. Chapter 5.

The combination of a lower income among those who do participate in the labor market with the high percentage of women having no income results in higher rates of poverty and extreme poverty, in comparison to men, as shown in Figure 19. The 1980s, a decade marked by economic crisis and increased rates of poverty, had a more acute impact on females, thus widening the problem of the “feminization of poverty”. Since 1990, however, poverty and extreme poverty have been declining in the LAC region, with the decline becoming more accelerated since 2002, as economic growth returned to historic levels.

**Figure 19: Poverty and extreme poverty gap by sex, Latin America and the Caribbean (simple average), 1990-2008**



Source: CEPAL, Millennium Development Goals, 2010, July 2010. Chapter 5.

### Employment policies and the care economy

Employment is a right established by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Target 1B of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), established by the international community, states the following as an objective of countries: “*Target 1.B: Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people*”. Accordingly, macroeconomic policies should manage fiscal, monetary and currency instruments in order to create jobs for the entire population of economically active ages. People without work are people without rights. Countries without full employment are countries that are wasting their productive potential, as well as their potential for well-being.

As shown above, women still suffer most from the lack of employment, from unemployment and under-employment. Women without opportunities to work are citizens without rights. However, there is a sexual divide that has, historically, established that men should provide household income and women should provide care to the family. In part, this has changed, since more and more women have come to be providers of income. However, a small percentage of men have

taken over the tasks of caring, thus leaving women to carry on the double burden of working both outside and inside the home, that is, in the labor market and in the private world.

There is, therefore, an inverse relation between availability for participation in the labor market and the obligations linked to the care activities that enable social reproduction. In general, women are overburdened with the chores of reproduction, while men have greater availability for productive activities. As the economic system favors productive market forces, the benefits from insertion in the productive environment are greater than those in the reproductive environment.

The greater the burden of domestic activities, the less the time women have to compete in the paid labor market. For example, families with many small children require greater presence in the caring of their members, which restricts, in a biased sexual division of labor, the productive potential of women. The questions that are posed in terms of public policies and the sexual redivision of labor are how to liberate women for the exercise of their right to paid work, how to get men engaged in the care economy, and how the State can supply the tools to reduce the gap between production and social reproduction.

In addition, however, women's rights come up against other barriers to their full participation in the labor market. Job segregation and wage discrimination restrict female participation and contribute to the continuance of gender inequality in the economically active population. In recent decades, women have overcome obstacles and made advances in terms of jobs and salaries, but the existence of formal and informal barriers in the market economy, combined with the burden of obligations in the care economy, have had the effect of keeping female activity rates in the labor market lower than those for males.

The care economy embraces, among others, childbearing and childrearing, the care of elderly parents or individuals with special needs, and other activities involving education, health and household chores. The fact that all human reproduction is dependent upon the care economy and, consequently, that the very existence of production and the market depends on it, is insufficiently recognized by society and by policymakers.

According to the CEPAL report entitled "*What kind of State? What kind of equality?*" the need to reconcile the individual's professional life with family life – based on the redistribution of care-related tasks between the State, the market and families - continues to be a blind spot for public policies in Latin America and the Caribbean. There is a gap between the legal obligations towards care by both spouses in relation to their offspring and forbears and the policies, services, infrastructure and provisions available for it to happen. In this situation, the inequalities of gender are quite clear. According to Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of ECLAC, it will not be possible for women to achieve work equality while the burden of unpaid work and caring, which is historically left to women, remains unresolved:

“The incorporation of women into the labor market with the same conditions as men requires an analysis and a strategic change in the social and symbolic function established in society. This implies, on the one hand, the redistribution of the unpaid workload associated with reproduction and with the maintenance of human life and, on the other hand, the dismantling of the system of power that



subjugates women, in the private (the right to a life free of violence, the right to decide fully about reproduction and its conditions), as in the public sphere (equitable representation at the decision-making levels in society)” (Cepal, 2010: 7-8).

Although the absolute number of hours that women and men devote to unpaid domestic work and to paid work varies greatly from country to country, two fundamental trends can be observed: “i) *in all cases, total working hours are greater for women than for men and ii) in all cases, women are the ones that devote the most part of their time to unpaid work*” (Cepal, 2010: 30).

Accordingly, there is a need to provide a link between the spheres of production and reproduction and the employment system and the care of families and individuals. From the point of view of ownership of rights, public policies should ensure access to employment while also providing public services to those who give and receive care.

The creation of policies that reconcile work and family, involving men and women equally, is essential in order to articulate the tasks of production and reproduction which, in turn, influences fertility rates. Couples with a many children need day care centers and kindergartens so that they can enter the labor market. Women who have successful professional careers, with few children and fertility levels below the desired fertility, need flexible working policies and incentives in order to achieve their desired family size (Esping-Andersen, 2001; McDonald, 2006).

This would be an important topic when updating the Cairo ICPD PoA, since there exists a phenomenon of “unwanted fertility by fault” among those women with a higher level of education, (Peri, Pardo; 2008). Moreover, the issue would be of considerable interest to countries, such as those in the Southern Cone of the LAC region, that are already showing concern with decreasing population growth.

### **Economic growth, reduction of poverty and gender equality**

The lack of opportunities for the inclusion of the female labor force in the market has been one of the factors underlying the feminization of poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean. The incidence of poverty mainly affects female single-parent families (Itaboraí, 2010). Women from the poorest strata of the population suffer from the lack of support in the form of public policies that would ensure full-time education for the children, and from a lack of flexible working opportunities. This situation is aggravated during times of economic recession or of low growth in GDP.

Latin American countries achieved independence some 200 years ago. In the first five or six decades of independence, they went through a process of national affirmation and essentially lacked a structure that would favor economic development. Between 1870 and 1973, however, according to data provided by Maddison (2001), per capita income in Latin America rose 6.7 times (or 1.8% per year) while the world’s per capita income grew 4.7 times (or 1.5% per year). The best period of economic growth in history took place between 1950 and 1973, when the world, led by the developed countries, grew at 2.9% per year, and Latin America growing at 2.6% per year..

However, the internal debt crisis and rampant inflation threw Latin America into a great economic crisis in the 1980s. In the so-called lost decade, according to IMF data, global and developed countries' GDP grew at 3.3% per year, while Latin America was growing at just 1.5% per year. Since the Latin American population was growing at 2% per year in the 1980s, there was, for the first time in 100 years, a reduction in per capita income over the course of a decade.

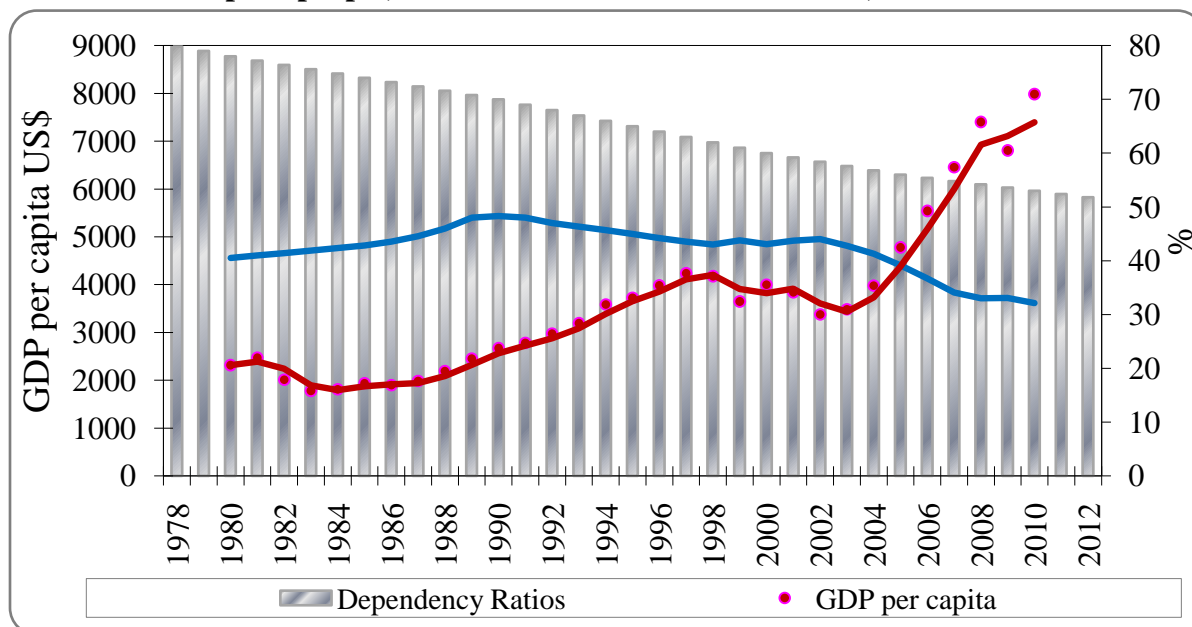
In the 1990s, Latin America grew at the same average rate as the rest of the world, with an increase of 3.2% per year, while the developed countries saw a 2.8% growth per year. However, as the population of the world and of Latin America was growing at around 1.6% per year and the population of the developed countries at only 0.4% per year, the growth in per capita income of the two blocs was practically identical. This means that international income inequalities between countries remained at high levels.

Nevertheless, the situation began to change at the turn of the millennium. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Latin America saw a GDP growth of 3.4% per year (2.2% per capita) and the developed countries 1.6% per year (1.3% per capita). The best performance came from the group of emerging countries that had a GDP growth of 6.2% per year (5% per capita), with China and India leading the way.

For the 2011-2015 period, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is pointing to an annual growth in GDP of 2.4% in the developed economies (2.2% per capita), 4.1% (3.2% per capita) in Latin America and 6.6% (5.3% per capita) in the emerging economies, with high growth continuing in the "Chindia" bloc. Therefore, since the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Latin America has been growing and should continue to grow more than the developed economies, though at a lesser pace than the more dynamic, emerging economies, particularly those in the east of Asia.

There is an inverse relationship between per capita income and poverty (Figure 20). Note that in the so-called "lost decade" (1980s), the percentage of the population living below the poverty line was 40.5% in 1980 and this rose to 48.3% in 1990. In the following decade, while there was a certain recovery in per capita income, poverty was only slightly down, at 44%, in 2000 (though above the 1980 level). In other words, the last two decades of the past century were very detrimental economically for Latin America. Between 1998 and 2003, there was once again a slight drop in per capita income and the poverty reduction process stagnated.

**Figure 20: Demographic dependency ratio, moving average GDP per capita and percentage of poor people, Latin America and the Caribbean, 1978-2010**



Source: World Population Prospects, The 2008 Revision, and IMF, CEPALSTAT, 2011

Starting in 2003, however, the region saw an accelerated increase in per capita income and the percentage of people living below the poverty line dropped to its lowest level, at 32.1%, by 2010. Clearly, this is still a high percentage. The good news though is that poverty in the region has been showing a tendency to fall and this is expected to continue in coming years, given the improvements in macroeconomic indicators.

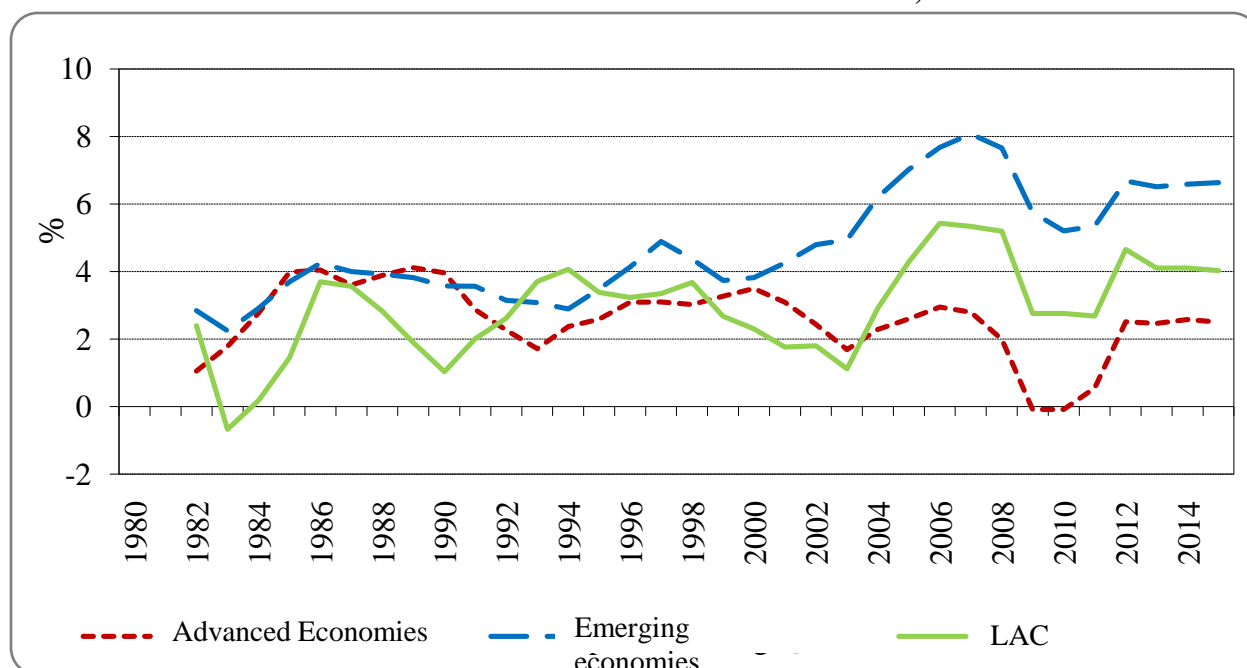
CEPAL (2010) also points out that Latin America was not affected by the global recession of 2009, demonstrating greater resilience and returning to pre-international crisis employment levels much more quickly. Unemployment rates also fell during 2010. Together with the increase in social spending, there was an improvement in the quality of life of the population and a reduction in inequality. Latin America continues to be one of the most unequal regions of the world, but it has an average income per capita above that of Africa and Asia and also above that of China and India.

Accordingly, there is a certain optimism regarding Latin America's capacity to overcome the difficulties encountered in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and to resume the historic pace of growth that was featured from 1870 to 1980. Figure 21 shows a rise in average rates of GDP growth in the region after 2003. This larger growth signifies a shift in relation to the advanced economies, though the region does not have the same dynamism as the emerging economies of eastern Asia.

Obviously, economic growth forecasts carry a large degree of uncertainty. The deepening of an economic crisis in Europe or a significant hike in oil prices due to a political crisis in the Middle East could lead to a reduction in growth, both globally and in the LAC region. A fiscal crisis and an increase in inflation are other factors that could limit growth. But the available data would

indicate that the economic and demographic prospects are good for the LAC region in the current decade.

**Figure 21: Annual growth rates (moving average) for advanced, emerging, and developing economies and for Latin America and the Caribbean, 1980-2015**



Source: IMF (<http://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/index.php>) Accessed: Jan 11, 2011

The prospects for higher economic growth in the LAC region during the second half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century may have a positive impact on the reduction of gender inequality. Firstly, women may benefit from the reduction in unemployment and from the possibility of attaining levels of full employment in some countries of the region. Lower female activity rates and the higher levels of unemployment for women can be explained in part by restrictions in the supply of paid work. In this regard, a relative scarcity of labor could favor a greater female participation in the labor market.

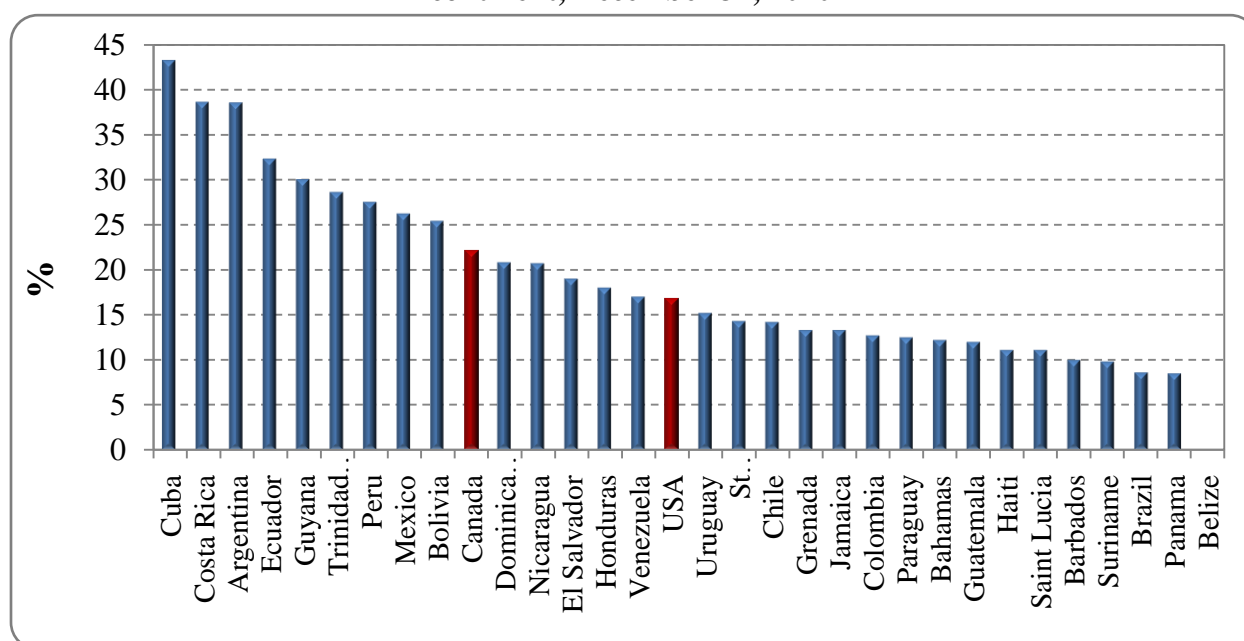
Secondly, economic growth in Latin America should favor the growth of the middle class and the expansion of household consumption. An OECD report (2011, 175) shows that while the middle class in Latin America has several vulnerabilities, it also “*provides a solid foundation for economic progress*”. Poverty reduction and the growth of the middle class tend to reduce gender gaps because they open up more opportunities for women. Access to consumer durables such as refrigerators and washing machines is important in alleviating the domestic labor of women and is correlated with greater integration into the labor market and greater female autonomy (Lavinás, Alves and Nicol, 2006).

## Empowerment of women in politics

The consolidation of democracy is a recent accomplishment in the region and has allowed advances in female participation in the decision-making processes of the countries. Figure 22

shows the percentage of women in parliament (Lower or Single House) in the majority of countries on the American continent. Large variations can be observed, but Cuba, Costa Rica, Argentina, Ecuador and Guyana have rates of representation of women over 30%. In these five countries, women have rates of participation in institutional politics well above those of Canada, (22.1%), and the USA (16.8%). On the other hand, Brazil, Panama and Belize have rates below 10%.

**Figure 22: Percentage of women in parliament (Lower or Single House), American continent, December 31, 2010**

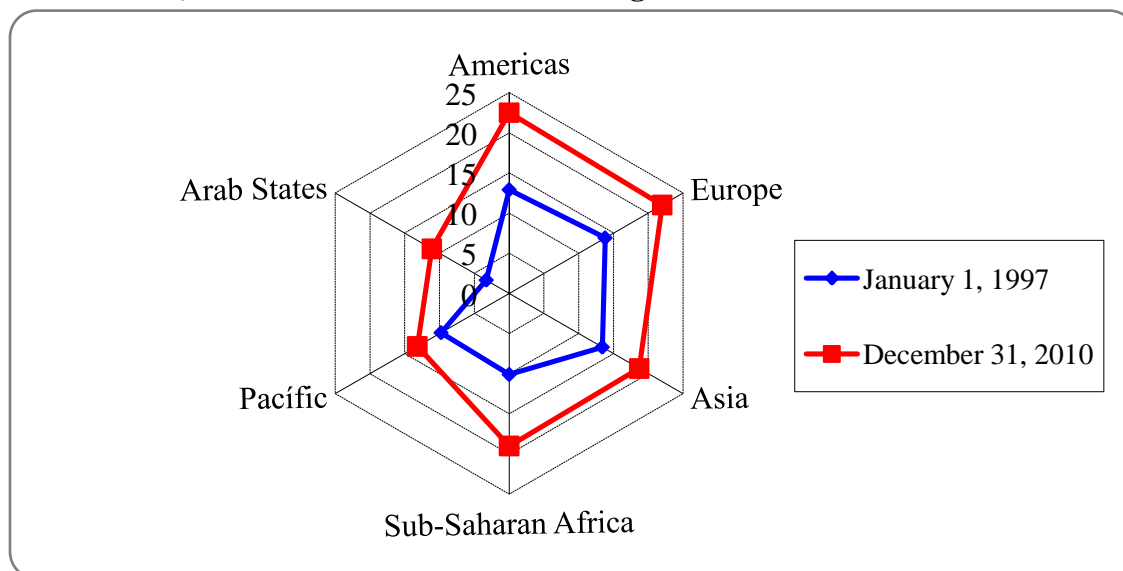


Source: IPU - Inter-Parliamentary Union. Situation at December 31, 2010

The American continent made the greatest progress in terms of female participation in parliaments since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, which proposed the use of quota policies to bring down the democratic gender deficit (Figure 23). As of January 1, 1997, women in the Americas occupied 12.9% of seats in the House of Representatives (or equivalent) and this figure rose to 22.7% by December 31, 2010, ahead of women in Europe who represented 21.9%, by the same date.

Moreover, in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Latin America succeeded in electing women to the top Executive posts in several countries. The list includes Michelle Bachelet who was elected president of Chile for the 2006-2010 administration, Cristina Kirchner as President of Argentina (2007-2011), Portia Simpson-Miller as prime-minister of Jamaica (2006-2007), Laura Chinchilla as president of Costa Rica (2010-2013) and Dilma Rousseff as president of Brazil (2011-2014). It is interesting to observe that, by contrast, the USA, even with its 230 years of democracy, has never elected a woman president, nor even as a vice-president of the country.

**Figure 23: Percentage of women in parliament (Lower or single House), regions of the world, 1997-2010 and women heads of government in Latin America.**



Source: IPU - Inter-Parliamentary Union. Visited in February, 21, 2011

Female participation in Latin American politics is clearly a long way from achieving gender parity in political representation (50/50 participation for both sexes), as was proposed by the Tenth Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, which took place in Quito between August 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Nevertheless, it is important to observe that the region as a whole is ahead of other continents in terms of the rate of political participation by gender, despite the lag in certain countries. The fact that the region has made advances in the construction of democratic regimes, that it has a surplus of women in the population and that it has women with increasingly higher levels of education, might explain, at least in part, the progress of women in terms of political representation.

## Closing remarks

The LAC region had a precocious urban transition in comparison with other developing areas: in 1950, it already had approximately the same proportion of its population living in urban areas as do Africa and Asia today. Moreover, much of the urban population has become concentrated in larger cities: one out of every three residents in the region now lives in a city of more than a million inhabitants (Rodriguez and Martine, 2008). This early transformation had a huge impact on the region's rapid fertility decline and on the eventual makeover of cultural values and the social processes reflected in this paper. It explains why, even in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which were defined by recession and economic stagnation, there was progress in gender relationships in Latin America and the Caribbean. Urban and demographic transitions have been fundamental for the new social, economic and cultural configurations. Specifically, the movement from a rural, agrarian economy, with a heavy weighting of subsistence and production activities for own consumption – to an urban, industrial and service economy, regulated by market relations, has had a significant impact on gender relationships.

Today, the LAC region and North America are the most urbanized regions in the world (UN/ESA, 2011). In general, the opportunities for the advancement of women and for the exercise of women's rights are greater in the urban environment, where there are more openings in education, paid work, cultural wealth and political participation, in addition to better access to health in general and also to sexual and reproductive health. In this light, intense female migration to the cities and greater access to schooling were some of the main factors that enabled a reduction in gender inequalities in the LAC region.

The demographic transition has also had a major social impact, since the drop in mortality rates and the increased life expectancy allows people to invest more in their own human capital, enabling a higher earnings return in keeping with their better professional qualification. Today, this process particularly favors women who are starting to make greater inroads into the labor market and to encounter less social segregation.

The fall in fertility rates took place in parallel with changes in family arrangements and the reversal of the intergenerational flow of wealth (Caldwell, 1976). This means that parents started to invest less in the quantity and more in the quality of their children. The size of families diminished, became more diversified and had higher spatial and social mobility. Increased access to information and more modern contraceptive methods leading to increased women's capability and autonomy in regulating fertility, and the ability to separate sexuality and reproduction are indicators of female empowerment associated with changes in gender relationships. Several countries in the LAC region (Cuba, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay) already have fertility rates below replacement level.

The rapid urban and demographic transitions experienced by the LAC region opened up a window of opportunity for women in the region to overcome the most prejudicial aspects of the patriarchal society that bestowed the privilege of power on men (fathers and husbands). As Therborn (2006) demonstrated, the region, the LAC region, as other parts of the world, has gone through a process of dismantling the patriarchy (*depatriarcalization*), which has enabled a change in existing national legislation based on "*pater familias*" to legal standards that recognize equality of rights between men and women. The triumph of women's right to vote was an important step towards other female conquests. The election of several women to the highest levels of authority in the region accentuates the progress achieved since that important first step. Demographic and social dynamics have enabled the empowerment of women in the LAC region in the sense defined by Dixon-Mueller (1998: 3): "*Female empowerment refers to the capacity of individual women or of women as a group to resist the arbitrary imposition of controls on their behavior or the denial of their rights, to challenge the power of others if it is deemed illegitimate, and to resolve a situation in their favor*". In many ways, the countries of Latin America are treading the path to a post-patriarchal social configuration (Alves, Correa, 2009).

Nowadays, it can be stated that gender inequalities in the LAC region are not uni-directional. That is to say, women are not always disadvantaged in relation to the opposite sex. In some areas, women have the advantage over men, as reflected in indicators of life expectancy at birth and vulnerability to external causes of death as well as in education. In these cases, reverse gender inequalities prevail. The benefits of such advantages, however, are not perfectly linear. For instance, the surplus of women in the region due to high male mortality from external causes

(particularly homicides), creates a phenomenon that is inverse to that which is occurring in China and India. Instead of “missing women”, the LAC region is witnessing a phenomenon of “missing men”, due to the increase in internal violence in the region that causes excess male mortality.

In other areas, however, as in the labor market and in political representation, gender inequality continues to favor men, though this inequality has been diminishing in recent decades. As a general rule, women have achieved a growing insertion in the economically active population, but they continue to have a greater presence in unpaid work and activities in the care economy. The growing participation of women in public activities has not yet made its presence fully felt in terms of political representation, though the LAC region is the region of the world with the highest rates of female representation in politics.

For women to make further progress in their quest for better employment and salary conditions, it will be necessary for men to share more effectively the tasks of reproduction and of the care economy. To this end, public policies need to give voice to integrated actions with the basic institutions of society: the state, the market and the family. The articulation of different functions among these three institutions could guarantee a social and sexual division of labor that is more equitable from a gender point of view.

Gender policies also need to be linked to policies aimed at the reduction of poverty and social inequality. However, the system of social protection in Latin America and the Caribbean was built in a distinct time and in space, as the process of modernizing the region was marked by segmentation, limited scope and heterogeneity. In recent decades, the possibility of a universal and redistributive profile of social policies was rendered impracticable due to the predominance of concentrating economic models, of centralizing, authoritarian or populist political regimes and of the reduced capacity for political influence by the popular sectors.

Recently, income transfer policies established that women have a central role in the promotion of the wellbeing of family members and in intergenerational mobility. However, if these policies are to show effective results, they cannot reinforce “familyism”, that is, the transfer of the majority of the responsibility for the social welfare of its members to the family unit. This approach has the effect of making women, as the caregiver of family members, responsible for social protection. The State is fundamental in making possible the process of policies’ defamilization as well as the mercantilization of the workforce.

Therefore, defamilization does not mean opposing the family, but rather opposing the transfer of responsibilities to the traditional and hierarchic family arrangements, with a strong gender and generation bias. To defamilize policies of social protection is to avoid the transfer of the responsibilities of care and welfare from the public domain to the bosom of the family. The obligation of the State with the provision of education, health and social protection policies is fundamental in guaranteeing that poverty and the reduction of gender inequalities is overcome.

Economic progress during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century generated propitious conditions for social advancement and the empowerment of women. In the current decade (2010-2020), IMF data are forecasting good economic performance for the region. Although the LAC region should grow, mainly by virtue of the export of commodities, the prospect is for growth in per capita



income and a reduction in poverty. As women are overrepresented among the poor people in the region, the growth in per capita income tends to favor women more, and may contribute to the continuing reduction of gender inequality.

It is in this context that the policies recommended by the Cairo ICPD PoA need to be updated for the region. A post-Cairo ICPD agenda should consider this favorable scenario and establish more focused targets for dealing with the remaining gender inequalities, reverse inequalities and intra-gender inequalities, that is, inequalities between women and men taking into account other inequalities between regional, generational, and racial groups. Before the process of population aging fully manifests itself, the LAC region needs to move ahead with the construction of a system of social protection, with the improvement in the population's quality of life and the building of more equitable gender relationships.

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