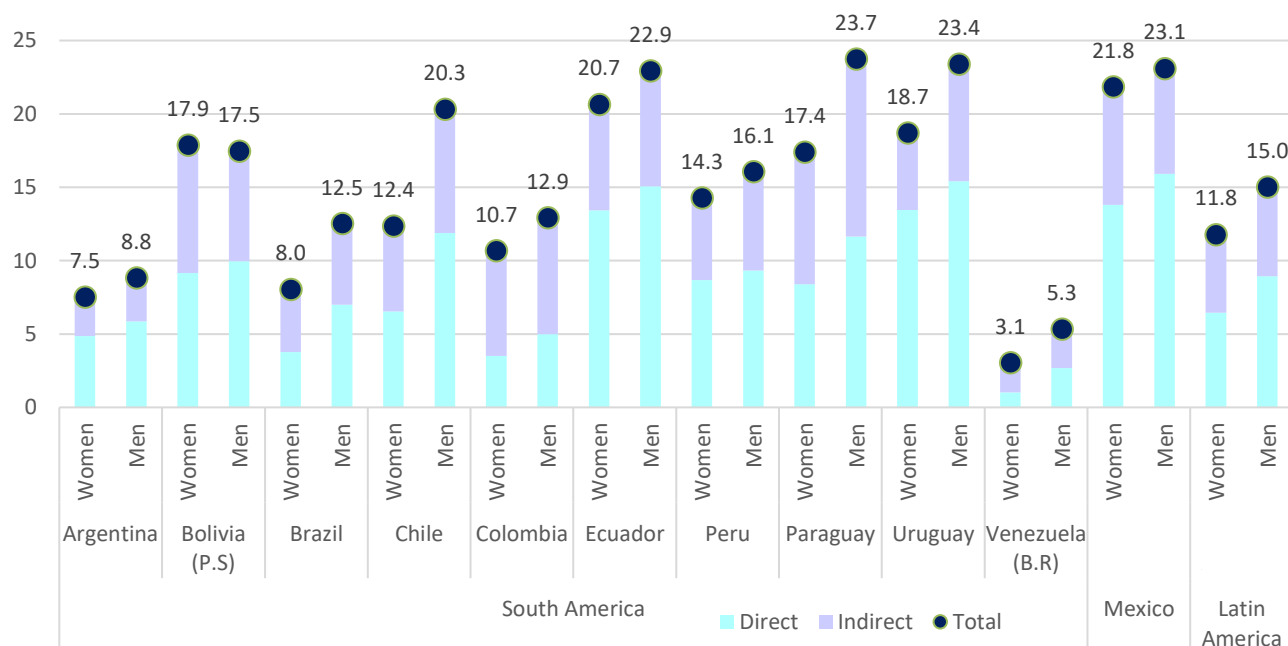


International trade: a means to a recovery with gender equality?

In Latin America and the Caribbean, export-related employment (direct and indirect) represents a small proportion of total employment, although there is heterogeneity among countries and subregions.

South America's export basket is intensive in commodities and natural resource-based manufactures. High-tech manufactures account for only 3% of the subregion's total exports¹. According to information available for 10 countries in South America and Mexico, in 2018, export-related employment accounted for 13.7% of total employment. In 2018, one in ten women in those countries were employed in export-related employment (11.8% of women and 15% of men)².

Latin America (11 countries): direct and indirect export-sector employment as a share of total employment, by sex, 2018
(in percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG) and output tables of the countries.

Central America, Mexico and some Caribbean countries have specialized in tourism and manufacturing oriented to the export of low and medium technology (maquila or assembly industries; textile and garment manufacturing, and electronics). In Central America and the Dominican Republic, the export sector is slightly more employment-intensive for women: two out of every ten employed women were in the export sector in 2014.

Only in two export sectors is the relative share of women in employment higher than that of men: the textile and clothing and other services³. In the latter, the main activity is tourism, with a high participation of women. Men, on the other hand, are more

¹ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Women's autonomy in changing economic scenarios* (LC/CRM.14/3), Santiago, 2019.

² Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *International Trade Outlook for Latin America and the Caribbean 2020: Regional integration is key to recovery after the crisis* (LC/PUB.2020/21-P), Santiago, 2021.

³ Other services include activities such as tourism, postal and telecommunications services; and financial, business and personal, social and cultural services.

evenly distributed in the export sectors as a whole. This information highlights the persistence of gender labor segregation patterns in the employment of women and men.

The impacts of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have not been the same for all exporting sectors, implying that employment, particularly that of women, has been affected differently. In the case of trade in agricultural and livestock products and medical equipment, for example, these showed an increase in contrast to the rest of the exports of goods in the first half of 2020. Nonetheless, employment of women in the sector of these goods⁴ is very limited and lower than that of men.

On the other hand, in the first half of 2020, regional exports of services fell in value terms by 30%, this is explained mainly by the halt in tourism from April onward, which resulted in a 53% decrease in income on the region's travel account⁵. In Latin America, the accommodation and food service sector accounts for 9.2% of women's employment and 4.2% of men's employment. Although at the regional level women are in the majority in this sector, they are more likely to be concentrated in seasonal, informal, low-paying and low-skilled jobs. In addition, 69.5% of women in this sector are employed in companies with fewer than five people and only a quarter of the women employed in this sector have access to social security. This situation increases women's exposure to job and income loss and results in less access to social protection in the context of the pandemic.

The situation is particularly serious for Caribbean countries, and affects women to a greater extent as 11.9% of women were employed in the tourism sector pre-pandemic, compared to 5.7% of men. When analyzing the employment structure, women account for 62% of employment in the accommodation and food services sector in the Caribbean, with countries such as Barbados, Suriname and Guyana having a proportion higher than the average⁶.

In the current global context, regional integration must play a key role in Latin America and the Caribbean's exit strategies from the crisis and can be the basis for reorienting international trade towards a transformative socioeconomic recovery with gender equality. The incorporation of a gender perspective in trade policies contributes to a more complete understanding of the distributive impacts of exports and imports on societies and provides new paths for the design of policies aimed at sustainable development with gender equality.

In the short term, it is necessary to ensure that women, particularly those working in the tourism sector, entrepreneurs and women involved in exporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), have equal access to the different instruments and mechanisms of employment support and financing for response and reactivation. In addition, regional productive integration and complementarity must be strengthened and the participation of women workers and entrepreneurs in production chains in dynamic sectors must be promoted through affirmative measures. The regional market supports progress towards more efficient production scales and the advantages offered by the pursuit of complementarities between the various economies. Intra-regional trade also contributes to densifying the productive fabric and helps to reduce dependence on exports of raw materials, because it is intensive in manufacturing and has a greater share of SMEs⁷.

At the XIV Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, the governments of the region approved the [Santiago Commitment](#), which calls for the following:

- To implement policies and mechanisms to promote, strengthen and increase production and international trade, with a gender approach, as a pillar of countries' economic development
- To pursue programmes to foster the creation of quality employment for women and female-led enterprise in international trade
- To conduct assessments of the impact on human rights of trade and investment policies and agreements from a gender equality perspective
- Promote the adoption of legislation on labour and taxation in order to operate in a coordinated manner at the regional level, avoiding harmful competition among countries, in order to prevent taxation, wagecutting and gender inequalities being used as adjustment variables to increase exports and attract investment

<https://www.cepal.org/en/work-areas/gender-affairs> ; <https://conferenciamujer.cepal.org/14/en/documents/womens-autonomy-changing-economic-scenarios> ; <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/46614-international-trade-outlook-latin-america-and-caribbean-2020-regional-integration>

⁴ Women have a lower share than men in export sectors linked to traditional services (electricity, gas and water, transport and construction), metals and metal products, agriculture, livestock, forestry and fishing, and mining and quarrying.

⁵ ECLAC, *International Trade Outlook for Latin America and the Caribbean 2020* (LC/PUB.2020/21-P), Santiago, 2021.

⁶ ECLAC, *International Trade Outlook for Latin America and the Caribbean 2020* (LC/PUB.2020/21-P), Santiago, 2021.

⁷ ECLAC, *International Trade Outlook for Latin America and the Caribbean 2020* (LC/PUB.2020/21-P), Santiago, 2021.