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Over the past two decades, the presence of women on the executive committees of Latin American and Caribbean trade union centres increased, but it is still far from parity.



The capacity of women to organise has increased. However, the conditions, under which women's secretariats can act still face shortcomings. The practice of marginalizing women in union life persists.



Some improvements can be highlighted, and they were driven by trade union women. Still, as a number of shortcomings have to be dealt with, the issue of increasing the commitment of more union members with the tasks at hand is still pending. This research analyses the challenges that need to be addressed.

GENDER JUSTICE

TRADE UNION CENTRES

Women and the agenda of gender justice in the Latin American and Caribbean trade union movement

REGIONAL REPORT

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FOREWORD

The injustices of the capitalist system have a particularly strong impact on women, who suffer most from labour informality, low wages, underemployment and the overload of hours dedicated to productive and care work. The multiple crises unleashed in the economic and social spheres since the covid-19 pandemic have deepened the structural nodes of gender inequality.

Trade union organisations play a fundamental role in the struggle for social justice and the deepening of democracy. As part of this challenge, the incorporation of a gender justice perspective in union programmes and actions is a central task for the organisations. Full parity in the participation of women in trade union organisations is a question of justice that not only benefits women, but also enriches and contributes to society as a whole in terms of gender justice, social justice and the quality of democracy.

At present, the feminist movement's mobilization power challenges society and trade union organizations with greater and clearer demands for justice in terms of representation and participation in political life. The feminist impulse is also expressed in the field of ideas, where the theoretical and political foundations are strengthened to provide clearer insights into the patriarchal essence of the capitalist system and the interwoven injustices, which must be confronted from a perspective of intersectionality. Women and people with feminized gender identity constitute a profoundly heterogeneous universe, which is subject to multiple discriminations that act in an intersectional manner and require a complex approach based on analysis.

Women trade unionists have been making sure that union organisations move ahead with the programmatic understanding of the need to address the multiple oppressions of the system. Their struggle has played a decisive role in advancing institutional transformations in legal and collective bargaining systems which account for the multiple gender gaps to which they are exposed in the world of work. At the international level, the adoption of the International Labour Organisation's convention 156 regarding workers with family responsibilities, convention 189 regarding domestic workers, and 190 regarding violence and harassment, which has recently come into force, are proof the internationalist efforts of organised women.

According to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), women account globally for 42% of union memberships. However, their participation in the governing bodies of trade union organisations stands at less than 30%, and only 7% hold leadership positions.¹ At a regional level, there is a disparity of situations, with isolated definitions towards parity and some more widespread commitments towards quotas in decision-making spaces.

Recently, the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA) approved the Roadmap for Strengthening and Transforming Trade Unions, in which it recognises gender inequality as a major challenge for trade unionism and defines that "reversing the historical inequalities between women and men in the world of work requires progress towards parity in the leadership and representation of trade union organisations".

This research was carried out in collaboration with the team of the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas, to whom we are grateful

The strength of mobilised women from the trade union movement is growing, but the obstacles that need to be overcome continue to be huge.

The Regional Trade Union Project of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) has as its central task to contribute to the strengthening of the trade union movement as a regional and international subject for the construction of democracy.

¹ International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC, 2022). Final document of the 4th WWC, 2022.

This research aims to contribute to the political discussion and strategic elaboration of trade union organisations. In particular, we seek to contribute to the efforts of women trade unionists who act in various national, regional, continental and global trade union structures in their struggle for gender justice for the strengthening of trade unions.

It is applied to trade union action and situated within the context of the reality of Latin America and the Caribbean. It incorporates the structuring variables of the political and economic history of our region, such as the historical challenge of overcoming dependence, building regional autonomy from the capitalist centres and overcoming the vestiges of coloniality.

We acknowledge the excellent work of Didice Godinho Delgado in leading the research process and preparing the regional document and wish to thank her and the group of researchers who conducted the research processes at the regional and sub-regional levels. The research benefited from the FES offices in Latin America and the Caribbean, whom we thank for their commitment.

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1

INTRODUCTION

This document presents the results of the research “Women and the gender justice agenda in trade unionism in Latin America and the Caribbean”, carried out by the Regional Trade Union Project of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), in cooperation with the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA). The research process was oriented towards the elaboration of a diagnosis of the progress and deficits the trade union centres of the region have achieved with regard to two issues

- women’s participation in trade unionism;
- gender justice mainstreaming in trade union action.

Forty-three national centres from 19 countries were considered² (see Table A1, Annexe 1). The centres were grouped into sub-regions to facilitate the research process: Central America, Andean countries, Caribbean, Southern Cone and Mexico³.

Data sources included:

- two questionnaires to the centres, which were addressed to the executive committees and the women’s/gender bodies;
- interviews with women and men in leadership positions: the woman in charge of the women’s/gender body, as well as two members of the executive committee: a woman and a man;
- the statutes and resolutions of the centres;
- official statistics;
- other sources of information

Of the 43 centres, 24 (55.8%) answered the questionnaire to the executive committees, 28 (65.1%) answered to the women’s/gender bodies. The questionnaires were collected between October and December 2021. 120 interviews were conducted, 90 with women and 30 with men.

We are grateful for the willingness of the people who took an interest in the research, answered the questions,

gave interviews and provided data to the team, as well as for the collaboration of the TUCA and the national offices of the FES.

The data available on women’s union participation in the centres and in official statistics is very precarious. This limitation is reflected in the picture we were able to develop.

It is worth drawing attention to the disparity and heterogeneity of the situations detected, which derived from the specific contexts of the sub-regions and countries, the configuration, structure and power dynamics of the centres and the degree of organisation and influence that women have managed to achieve in the centres. This disparity expresses the diversity and complexity of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The research was initially conducted on a country-by-country basis. Subsequently, the country reports supported the systematisation and analysis of data by sub-regions. The main data references for this regional report are sub-regional reports, questionnaires to the centres and complementary sources. All interview quotations throughout the text are taken from the sub-regional reports.⁴

The institutional coordination of the project was in charge of the overall research coordination. The research team was formed of sub-regional researchers and national research assistants. In Central America, the sub-regional researchers were Yadira Minero (Honduras) and Liduvina Escobar (El Salvador). In the Andean countries, sub-regional researchers Nadia S. Guevara Ordóñez (Bolivia) and Ana Teresa Vélez Orrego (Colombia) were assisted by Liliana Prado Puga (Peru) and Pedro Gómez Machado (Venezuela). In the Caribbean, the sub-regional researcher was Camila Bidó (Dominican Republic). In the Southern Cone, the sub-regional researchers were Cora C. Arias (Argentina) and Marilane Oliveira Teixeira (Brazil), with research assistance from Claudia Donaire (Chile), Ana Paula García Erramuspe (Uruguay), Myriam González Vera and Patricio Dobreé (Paraguay). In Mexico, the research team was formed by Patricia Ravelo Blancas and Sergio Sánchez.

This document includes two main areas of analysis. Area I deals with “Women’s participation in trade unionism” and

² Of the 43 trade union federations analysed, 40 are affiliated to the TUCA.

³ Central America: Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Panama; Andean countries: Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela; Caribbean: Haiti and the Dominican Republic; Southern Cone: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay; Mexico.

⁴ It was a methodological choice not to mention the names of the interviewees. Federation names are only mentioned in specific cases.



consists of seven chapters. The first chapter presents a brief labour overview of the situation of women in the region; the second deals with the impact of the pandemic on women's trade union participation; the third focuses on the general participation of women in the centres analysed; the fourth is dedicated to their participation on the executive committees; the fifth analyses women's self-organisation in the centres; the sixth deals with the obstacles women face in their trade union participation; and the seventh focuses on the strategies, experiences and initiatives of the centres to overcome the obstacles to women's participation in the trade union movement.

Area II deals with "The incorporation of a gender justice perspective in trade union action" and consists of three chapters. The first analyses the narratives and demands related to gender justice in the platforms of the centres; the second looks at the experiences of cooperation between centres and organisations of the feminist movement; and the third deals with the influence of anti-rights groups and organisations in the centres.

The last section, "Final considerations", highlights the most relevant aspects for strengthening the progress made and overcoming the deficits that have been identified, in order to achieve more accelerated and consolidated parity in the trade union participation of men and women and the incorporation of a gender justice perspective in the centres' actions in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Two other issues were also part of the research. One was a survey of the experiences of trade union organisations other than the centres in terms of women's participation and the gender justice perspective. The other, profiles of women trade unionists, highlighting their role in the history of trade unionism and the defence of women workers' rights. They will be included in the sub-regional reports and published as a special separate document.

This regional report, although entirely the responsibility of the overall research coordinator, is the result of the collective work of the research team and the commitment of FES Sindical to the project.

2

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

2.1 REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK AND THE SITUATION OF WOMEN

Although important changes have occurred in recent decades as women have entered new types of jobs and occupations and have attained higher levels of schooling than men, the structural conditions of women's participation and gender inequalities in the labour market have not substantially changed. Women continue to predominate in service and care occupations, hold fewer decision-making positions, predominate in informal work and earn lower incomes than men. In addition, gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices towards women workers persist. In 2020, in the region, women accounted for 72.7 per cent of those employed in the health sector, 69.2 per cent in education and 90.9 per cent in paid domestic work in households (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC], 2021). In 2018, on average, they were 51.0 per cent of public sector employees (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020).

Women working in the informal economy do not enjoy social security and pensions. In general terms, informality is very high in the region: in 2021, one out of every two employed persons worked in this condition (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2021). In highly feminised sectors, such as paid domestic work in households, informality exceeds 80%, despite progress in several countries in regulating the activity (Maurizio, 2021). In rural areas, a significant proportion of women workers are engaged in subsistence and self-consumption agricultural activities, with no labour rights or benefits.

In specific areas, such as the maquilas and rural areas of Central American countries, women workers are subjected to extremely unfavourable working conditions and high levels of violence. Afro-descendant, indigenous, migrant and transgender women face more restrictions and discrimination due to intersecting prejudices and discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, origin and gender identity or sexual orientation.

Data for 18 of the 19 countries included in the research show that women's wages range between 72% and 43% of men's income (gender pay gap) (Statista, 2021). This means that in none of the countries considered women come close to 100% of men's income.

Women continue to be the main providers of unpaid domestic and care work in the family, according to the sexual division of labour still in force. Time-use surveys carried out in several countries in the region confirm the unequal dedication to domestic work between women and men, with more hours spent by women.⁵ This work is not valued socially and economically, although it represents between 15.7% and 24.2% of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Latin American and Caribbean countries, and women contribute nearly 75% of this value (ECLAC, 2022). The burden of domestic and care responsibilities has a negative impact on women's entry and permanence in the labour market and their occupational insertion. Many of them develop fragmented work trajectories with several interruptions and have fewer chances of gaining professional qualifications, which negatively affects their chances of career advancement and future retirement.

The neoliberal policies that predominate in several countries deepen unemployment, labour flexibilisation and precariousness, the loss of social and labour rights, the decrease of wages, and cause setbacks in public care policies, which exacerbate the unfavourable conditions for women. The experiences of progressive governments with an emphasis on more distributive and social policies have been largely interrupted, although new perspectives have opened up recently.

Structural inequalities have a strong impact on women's trade union participation. The fragility and instability of their labour insertion and the accumulation of paid work in the labour market and unpaid work at home keep many women workers away from trade unions or lead to irregular and fragmented participation. Informal work is an obstacle to women's unionisation, as trade unions organise mainly formal workers, although there are initiatives for the incorporation and representation of informal workers.

⁵ Taking some Andean countries as an example, the following disparities can be observed: in Bolivia, women spend 23.5 hours a week on unpaid work at home (domestic work and family care), while men spend 12 hours; in Colombia, women spend 7 hours a day and men 3; in Ecuador, women spend 31 hours a week compared to 11 for men; and in Peru, women spend 39.5 hours a week and men 15 hours. Sources: Bolivia: Oxfam, 2018; Colombia: ENUT, 2019; Ecuador: Cuentas Satélites del Trabajo No Remunerado de los Hogares (CSTNRH) 2016-2017, INEC; Peru: ENUT, 2010 (Andean Countries Report).

The working and living conditions of women workers are at the basis of the need for trade unionism to prioritise women's participation from a gender justice perspective, taking into account the intersections between class exploitation and gender inequalities that impact on women's daily lives, work and trade union participation.

2.2 IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON LABOUR AND WOMEN'S TRADE UNION PARTICIPATION

Prior to the pandemic, women's labour market participation rates had been growing in Latin America (though at lower rates than men's), but this trend was interrupted. In the second quarter of 2020 the female economic participation rate in the region fell to 43.5 per cent, down 9 percentage points from the same quarter in 2019 (ILO, 2021). Female employment has declined more sharply than male employment (18 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively), because women are concentrated in sectors that were hit particularly hard by the crisis, such as hotels, food, retail, tourism and other service occupations, paid domestic work and informal work. According to the ILO (2021), the Americas were the region that experienced the greatest reduction in women's employment as a result of the pandemic worldwide. In Brazil, of the total number of people exiting the labour market in 2020, 58% were women,⁶ whereas in Chile, the participation of women in the labour force fell by more than 12 percentage points since January 2020.⁷ In Central America, 28% of women have lost their jobs compared to 23% of men.⁸ In the Andean countries, female unemployment rates in 2020 were on average 2.5 percentage points higher than those of men, and in Colombia the difference was almost 8 points.⁹ Across the region, a recovery in employment could be observed since 2021, although at a slower pace in sectors with a high concentration of women; on the other hand, in high-skilled service sectors, where an increase is also predicted, women are less represented than men (ECLAC, 2022). The unemployment rate for women remains high at 12.4% since 2020 and has not changed in 2021 (ILO, 2021).¹⁰

Beyond the loss of jobs, many women left the labour market, because they had to take on an even greater burden of unpaid domestic and care work at home due to the closure of educational establishments and the care of elderly and sick family members. Women between the ages of 20 and 59 with children under the age of 5 had the lowest employment rates even before the pandemic and suffered the largest declines in employment (ECLAC, 2022). Those with more legally protected jobs who switched to teleworking accumulated disproportionately long working hours with no separation between salaried work and care work at home. In addition, quarantine and social distancing measures and restrictions on access to support services increased the risks and vulnerability of women and girls to domestic violence. According to UN data for several countries in the region, domestic violence against women increased by between 30% and 50% in 2020 (Jaramillo, 2020).

The pandemic deepened structural inequalities in Latin America and the Caribbean, caused many lives to be lost in a short time and generated shock, sadness and despair. Trade unionism was severely hit. The economic slowdown due to restrictive measures and confinement led to the closure of companies and businesses and a further deterioration of working conditions with the loss of formal jobs in favour of informality. Trade union organisations were faced with the task of defending workers in conditions that abruptly became very atypical, with the closure of their headquarters, the impossibility of holding meetings and meetings of workers' representatives and the need to negotiate under even more unfavourable conditions for the protection of employment and the maintenance of wages. Trade union activities had to be quickly reorganised in a virtual format. Many trade unionists died as a result of covid-19. In some highly feminised sectors, such as health, education, services and informal work, women and men were highly exposed to health risks. All this added to the challenges that already existed before the pandemic.

The general context led numerous women to give up trade union participation.¹¹ One of the reasons for this was the loss of both formal and informal jobs. "The pandemic has hit women very hard, women are unemployed, women are back on the street", said a Central American woman leader in an interview. In addition, the increase in domestic and care work has reduced the availability to continue participating, especially for women with dependants. Fifty-nine per cent of women/gender respondents to the research questionnaire reported that women's care work increased.

⁶ Data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) based on the Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios Contínua (PNADC), comparison between 2020 and 2019 (Southern Cone Report)

⁷ National Statistics Institute (INE) of Chile, 2021 (Southern Cone Report)

⁸ INCAE-CLACDS 2020 (Central America Report)

⁹ Andean Countries Report, with data from the TUCA and ITUC report *Working conditions and the rights of women workers in four Andean countries vis-à-vis covid-19: Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia*, and from the sample survey of the National Statistics Institute (INE) of Venezuela (first half of 2020)

¹⁰ According to the ILO (2021), at 21.4 percent, the youth unemployment rate remains at a record level. Unfortunately, disaggregated information by sex is not available.

¹¹ This was noted by 41% of the women/gender respondents to the research questionnaire.

From the perspective of the work carried out by the women’s/ gender bodies of the centres considered, the move to the virtual format was a multi-faceted experience. On the one hand, the trade unionists interviewed reported that the “digital divide” was evident: it was a barrier for women workers from urban and rural sectors with lower economic capacity (for example, women who do not have a mobile phone or do not have the resources to charge it in order to access virtual meetings) and residents in areas without internet connection, such as certain rural areas, but also urban areas in countries with poor coverage. Furthermore, the virtual format masks the difficulties that women with young children continue to encounter in participating even with this tool, such as the difficulty of concentrating on the meeting or other activities, the need to turn off the camera to focus on care issues, etc.: “This impacts on the attention and the quality of the interventions; being present may not have been compromised, but the level of attention has”, summarised the Southern Cone researchers. The women leaders also reported a conflict with regard to virtual resources when it comes to coordinating their use in families, with women being at a disadvantage. In addition, there are limitations of physical space at home to participate in the activities with relative privacy. On the other hand, despite the limitations, the balance is positive. The leaders of several women’s/gender organisations reported that they did not interrupt their activities during the pandemic, but migrated to the virtual format, where they took on the available tools. They added that such tools had the enormous advantage of making it possible to reach a much larger and more diversified number of women workers and trade unionists in a much wider geographical universe, at a level that would have been impossible in a face-to-face format, and facilitated the participation of many women by not having to travel from their place of residence to the union or another site.

The mobile phone, WhatsApp, the internet and social networks became the main tools for trade union work during the pandemic. Thanks to virtual resources, debates, political meetings and training activities multiplied, women’s meetings and national and local meetings of trade unionists were organised, networks of trade unionists from different centres were kept active or created, and the network of national and international contacts of women trade unionists was expanded. Based on this experience, women leaders in several countries have concluded that the virtual format has facilitated women’s participation, without disregarding the problems identified, and without treating it as a substitute for face-to-face meetings.

2.3 ANALYSIS OF CENTRES AND WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION¹²

Central America

According to the researchers, the economic and social context in Central America was probably not favourable to the growth of unionisation in recent years, due to the implementation of economic policies of trade liberalisation and labour flexibilisation, since the entry into force of the free trade agreement between the United States, Central America and the Dominican Republic (2005), as well as the prevalence of an anti-union culture “that ranges from discrimination and social condemnation, job losses and being part of exclusion lists to murder” (Central America Report). However, up-to-date unionisation data are not available.

The research analysed 16 centres (12 of which provided data) (Table 1).

Table 1
Centres analysed, by countries

Costa Rica	Central del Movimiento de Trabajadores Costarricenses (CMTC) Central Social Juanito Mora Porras (CSJMP) Confederación de Trabajadores Rerum Novarum (CTRN)
El Salvador	Central Autónoma de Trabajadores Salvadoreños (CATS) Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras de El Salvador (CSTS)
Guatemala	Confederación Central General de Trabajadores de Guatemala (CGTG) Confederación de Unidad Sindical de Guatemala (CUSG) Unión Sindical de Trabajadores de Guatemala (UNSI TRAGUA)
Honduras	Confederación Unitaria de Trabajadores de Honduras (CUTH)
Nicaragua	Central Sandinista de Trabajadores (CST) Central de Trabajadores de Nicaragua (CTN) Confederación de Unificación Sindical (CUS) Frente Nacional de los Trabajadores (FNT)
Panama	Confederación Nacional de Unidad Sindical Independiente (CONUSI) Confederación de Trabajadores de la República de Panamá (CTRP) Convergencia Sindical (CS)

Source: own elaboration

¹² Although outdated as of 2011, Orsatti’s (2016) survey on union density of waged workers in Latin America and the Caribbean, which reached 25% of total wage employment (unfortunately without disaggregation by sex), is worth highlighting. The following information is limited to those countries which were considered in the research. More than 30%: Argentina and Uruguay; between 30% and 10%: Brazil, Nicaragua, Panama, Chile, Venezuela, Mexico, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Paraguay and Costa Rica; less than 10%: Peru, El Salvador, Colombia, Ecuador and Guatemala.

According to the centres, the majority of women members work in the commercial and services sectors, such as health, education and public administration, followed by the informal or self-employed sector, and to a lesser extent in other sectors, including the maquila industry (which has more weight in some countries than in others). In general, the centres do not have systematised information on women's unionisation and participation.

Andean countries

The Central Obrera Boliviana (COB), the country's only trade union centre, reports that it is made up of 71 organisations, but there was no access to total union membership data or data disaggregated by sex. Women trade unionists can be found mostly in peasant and indigenous organisations and work in the health and education sectors, in the informal economy or as domestic workers.

In the case of Colombia, the analysis covered two of the three existing centres: the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT) and the Confederación de Trabajadores de Colombia (CTC). The CUT has the largest membership, with 62% of its members working in the public sector. According to data provided by CUT, between 31% and 40% of its total membership are women, while in the CTC they represent between 21% and 30%.¹³ Colombia's low unionisation rate - 4.6% of workers with a formal contract (Ríos, 2021) - is explained, among other factors, by neoliberal policies, which generated greater difficulties in accessing jobs with permanent and indefinite contracts, the increase in self-employment, informality, anti-union policies and the armed conflict, which strongly affected trade unionism.¹⁴ Women trade unionists come mainly from the public health and education sectors, the service sector and the informal economy.

Ecuador has six centres, and our analysis covered the Confederación Ecuatoriana de Organizaciones Clasistas Unitarias de Trabajadores (CEDOCUT). According to the centre's report it is mainly made up of peasant and self-employed workers' organisations and public and private trade unions, women account for 31% to 40% of its membership.

Peru has seven centres, of which three were analysed: the Central Autónoma de Trabajadores del Perú (CATP), the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Perú (CUT) and the Confederación General de Trabajadores del Perú (CGTP). CATP reports that it has parity in union membership between men and women in the public sector, but a strong disparity in the formal private sector; women represent between 31% and 40% of union members. According to the CUT leader interviewed, the CUT also includes the self-employed who are not registered as union members with the Ministry of Labour, and women account for 41% to 50% of its membership. The CGTP, according to the leader interviewed, organises almost 95% of unionised workers in the wage sector. The unionisation rate in the country is only 8.1% of the economically active population (EAP) in the formal wage-earning sector, a percentage that drops to 5.2%, if the total wage-earning population (formal and informal) is considered; in the public sector this percentage rises to 16% (Ministry of Labour and Employment Promotion [MTPE], 2019, mentioned in the Andean Countries Report). Women trade unionists mainly come from the education and health, domestic work, telecommunications and the agricultural sectors.

In Venezuela, two of the seven existing centres were analysed: the Central de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras Alianza Sindical Independiente de Venezuela (ASI) and the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (CTV). At the time of the data collection it was not possible to access official unionisation figures. The latest available figure is 0.2% for 2012.¹⁵ According to the National Institute of Statistics (INE, mentioned in the Andean Countries Report), 56.1% of the working population was employed in the formal sector in the first half of 2020, but it is not known what percentage of the working population is unionised. Unionised women workers come mainly from the public education and health sectors. According to ASI information, women represent between 31% and 40% of its members.

Caribbean

In the Dominican Republic, all three centres were analysed: the Confederación Autónoma Sindical Clasista (CASC), the Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores Dominicanos (CNTD) and the Confederación Nacional de la Unidad Sindical (CNUS). According to the Continuous National Labour Force Survey (ENCFT, cited in the Caribbean Report), in 2020 there were more unionised women (53.72%) than men (46.28%). Women union members are predominantly concentrated in the education sector, followed by health and social care, and thirdly, hotels, bars and restaurants, all of them sectors with a strong presence of women. The estimated proportion of women delegates in the last congresses has been taken as an indicator of women's participation in the centres: CASC 43.0%, CNTD 30.0% and CNUS 35.0%.¹⁶

¹³ The percentages of women in the total membership of the federations presented in this chapter are taken from the management survey questionnaire.

¹⁴ According to data from the National Trade Union School (ENS), between 1973 and 2020, at least 15,317 offences against the life, liberty and integrity of trade unionists were recorded in the context of the armed conflict; of those who lost their lives, 2,941 were men and 336 were women (Quevedo-Fique, 2021).

¹⁵ ILOSTAT. Statistics on trade union membership. Retrieved from <https://ilostat.ilo.org/es/topics/union-membership/> [Accessed: 10/02/2022] (Andean Countries Report).

¹⁶ Source: Caribbean Report.

Out of Haiti's four existing centres, the Confédération des Travailleurs Haïtiens (CTH) and the Confédération des travailleurs des secteurs public et privé (CTSP) were analysed. The unionisation rate in the country was 2.5% in 2019.¹⁷ Trade unionism faces difficulties due to a long period of political instability, critical economic and social difficulties, the precariousness of the labour market, high levels of poverty, trade union persecution and insecurity. As the CTH president explained in an interview, several trade union leaders left the country and trade union work is severely hampered by difficulties in mobilising workers due to violence and insecurity on roads and highways. According to the women leaders interviewed, several sectors with a strong participation of women are represented in the CTH, such as education, health, commerce, tourism, paid domestic work, handicrafts and agriculture, as well as cooperatives. The CTSP is affiliated to trade union organisations in the electricity, beverages, vehicle insurance and informal economy sectors.

Southern Cone

In Argentina, total union membership in 2019 was at 26% of the employed population.¹⁸ In 2018, in the private sector, 38% of all employed men were union members and 29% of all women.¹⁹ All three trade union centres of the country were analysed as part of the research: the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT), the Central de los Trabajadores Argentinos (CTAT) and the CCentral de los Trabajadores Argentinos Autónoma (CTAA). The three organisations are open to the unionisation of sectors of the informal economy, and the two CTAs accept individual membership and membership of social movements. In terms of total membership, the CGT reports 31-40% women, the CTAT 41-50% and the CTAA 51-60%.

In Brazil, the total unionisation rate was just 11.2% in 2019, compared to 16.1% in 2012,²⁰ the unionisation rate among all employed men reached 11.4% and among employed women, 10.9%; their share of the total number of union members was 42.5%.²¹ Trade union representation is limited to workers in the formal labour market. The country has 14 trade union centres, of which the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) and the União Geral dos Trabalhadores (UGT) were analysed. In 2020, the CUT, the most representative centre of the country, represented 26.1% of the unionised population and the UGT 10.9%.²² At the most recent CUT and UGT congresses (both 2019), women accounted for 46.5% and 24.0% of all delegates, respectively.²³

In Chile there are three centres, of which the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT) was analysed. According to official data, total union membership in the country amounts to 20.9% of the employed population; in 2018, 57.8% of members were men and 42.2% women. However, between 2010 and 2019 the unionisation rate for women jumped from 13.1% to 22.0%.²⁴ The CUT also affiliates workers in free trade fairs and street vendors who work informally and domestic workers. The CUT estimates that 43% of its total membership is made up of women.

Paraguay has around 10 trade union centres, six of which are active (Bozzolasco, 2020). Four of them were analysed: Central Nacional de Trabajadores (CNT), Central Sindical de Trabajadores (CESITP), Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT) and Central Unitaria de Trabajadores Auténtica (CUT-A). The unionisation rate in the country is 6.6%, according to the Permanent Household Survey 2020 of the National Statistics Institute (INE, cit. in the Southern Cone Report). 52.9% of unionised wage earners are women, a percentage that rises to 56.2% in urban areas, while in rural areas men predominate (58.9%) over women (41.9%).²⁵ The vast majority of unionised workers come from the public sector, where women make up more than half of the staff. According to CUT data, women make up 31-40% of its total membership.

Uruguay has only one centre, the Plenario Intersindical de Trabajadores-Convención Nacional de Trabajadores (PIT-CNT). In 2015, the estimated unionisation rate was 33% of the employed population (Leopold et al., 2016, cit. in the Southern Cone Report). There are no more current official or PIT-CNT data. The last PIT-CNT congress (2021) had 45% women delegates.²⁶

In all trade union centres of the sub-region (with differences in weight) there is a strong participation of sectors with a majority presence of women, such as services, health, education, commerce, public administration, social security, etc. The banking and financial sector is also well represented in some centres and shows a growing presence of women workers. In several centres women domestic workers have their own representation.

¹⁷ TUCA *Trade Union Map 2020* (Sosa, 2020).

¹⁸ TUCA *Trade Union Map 2020* (Southern Cone Report).

¹⁹ Data extracted from the document *Radiografía de la sindicalización en Argentina*, October 2018. www.unsam.edu.ar (Southern Cone Report).

²⁰ There was a sharp drop in unionisation after the 2017 labour reform.

²¹ Data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). (Southern Cone Report).

²² Ministry of Labour and Social Security - Federal Government (3/3/2022). Trade unions registered with the ME. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.br/trabalho-e-previdencia/pt-br/servicos/sindicatos/cadas-tro-de-entidades/arquivos-entidade-sindical-registrada/arquivos-entidade-sindical-registrada> [Accessed 08/02/2022] (Southern Cone Report).

²³ Sources: CUT. Survey among congress delegates by the Centro de

Estudos Sindicais e Estudos do Trabalho (CESIT) and the Rede de Estudos e Monitoramento Interdisciplinar da Reforma Trabalhista (REMIR) of the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP); UGT (Southern Cone Report).

²⁴ Report of the Higher Labour Council of Chile (2020) (Southern Cone Report).

²⁵ Southern Cone Report.

²⁶ PIT-CNT, Udelar and ICUDU (2021) (Southern Cone Report).

México

There are four trade union centres in Mexico, of which two were analysed: the Consejo Nacional de Trabajadores (CNT) and the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores (UNT). In 2020, 12.4% of all paid workers were registered as members of an centre, down from 14.5% in 2010.²⁷ In 2007, the UNT united 200 unions nationwide.²⁸ Its affiliates include important unions such as the Sindicato de Telefonistas de la Republica Mexicana (STRM) and the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (STUNAM), which together with the Asociación Sindical de Pilotos Aviadores (ASPA) form the UNT's collegiate presidency. According to the leader interviewed, the CNT is mainly made up of unions from private sector companies, such as the bakery industry, the hotel industry, restaurants, the automotive industry, and also from federal organisations, such as customs and airports.

2.4 WOMEN ON THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES OF TRADE UNION CENTRES

2.4.1 General overview

62.5% of the trade union centres in Central America, 67% in the Caribbean and 71% in the Southern Cone responding to the leadership questionnaire reported that the participation of women in their executive committees has increased over the last three mandates, while half of the centres in the Andean countries reported that it has not changed. These are indicators of significant progress, which will be discussed below in conjunction with the deficits identified.

Of the 33 centres for which data has been obtained, the current configuration of their executive committees is as follows (tables 2, 3, 4, 5, 6).

Table 2

Composition of the executive committees of the reporting trade union centres. Central America

CENTRAL AMERICA						
Country	Centre	Total positions	Women	%	Men	%
Costa Rica	CTRN	18	9	50.0	9	50.0
EL Salvador	CATS	11	4	36.4	7	63.6
	CSTS	11	4	36.4	7	63.6
Guatemala	CGTG	9	1	11.1	8	88.9
	UNSINTRAGUA	7	1	14.3	6	85.7
Honduras	CUTH	18	5	27.8	13	72.2
Panama	CTRP	15	3	20.0	12	80.0
	Convergencia Sind.	29	8	27.6	21	72.4

Source: survey questionnaire to the executive committees and Central America Report

²⁷ Flores, Z. (2021, May 3). Less workers are affiliated to a union in Mexico. *El Financiero*. Retrieved from <https://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/empresas/2021/05/01/cada-vez-hay-menos-tra-bajadores-afiliados-a-un-sindicato-en-mexico/> [Accessed: 12/12/2021] (Mexico Report)

²⁸ López (2007). It was not possible to find updated figures (Mexico Report).

Table 3

Composition of the executive committees of the reporting trade union centres. Andean countries

ANDEAN COUNTRIES						
Country	Centre	Total positions	Women	%	Men	%
Bolivia	COB	40	3	7.5	37	92.5
Colombia	CTC	38	8	21.1	30	78.9
	CUT	21	4	19.0	17	81.0
Ecuador	CEDOCUT	16	4	25.0	12	75.0
Peru	CATP	22	10	45.5	12	54.5
	CUT	21	7	33.3	14	66.7
Venezuela	ASI	33	12	36.4	21	63.6

Source: survey questionnaire to the executive committees and Andean Countries Report

Table 4

Composition of the executive committees of the reporting trade union centres. Caribbean

CARIBBEAN						
Country	Centre	Total positions	Women	%	Men	%
Haiti	CTSP	23	6	26.1	17	73.9
	CTH	25	6	24.0	19	76.0
Dominican Republic	CASC	10	4	40.0	6	60.0
	CNTD	22	4	18.2	18	81.8
	CNUS	27	10	37.0	17	63.0

Source: survey questionnaire to the executive committees and Caribbean Report

The average number of women who are full members of the most important executive decision-making bodies of the centres is below 30% in Central America (28.0%), the Andean countries (26.8%), the Caribbean (29.1%) and Mexico (26.3%). The most advanced sub-region is the Southern Cone, with an average of 40.1%. Only four centres reach parity and, of these, only one is beyond parity. These data show that, despite the progress made, there is still a clear difference in the proportion of men and women on executive committees.

Inequalities begin with access to nomination. According to data from the questionnaires, there are different mechanisms to gain access to positions on the executive committees of the centres: election by list during congress (50% of responses), individual election during congress (21%), indication of the trade unions (17%), direct election by list (13%), decision of the organisation's executive authorities (8%), other mechanism (13%). Some centres use more than one mechanism. For a number of reasons women have less

chances. According to women trade unionists it is very common that the groups that put together the lists do not consider including women. Even in centres, where lists are formed according to more democratic and broader criteria, the inclusion of women is not guaranteed, except when the statutory quota or parity requirement is in force and is effectively respected.

There are centres where each union/federation indicates their representative on the executive committee, which means that, with some exceptions, the chances of a woman being nominated are limited. On the other hand, women leaders consider that access by direct individual vote favours the nomination of women. In three Andean countries, the women trade unionists mentioned obstacles stemming from the formalities for access to leadership positions ("declarations of deputation"), with procedures that are delayed by the centres when it comes to women, which leads some of them to desist from taking office for fear of losing their jobs while the process between election and taking office continues.

Table 5

Composition of the executive committees of the reporting trade union centres. Southern Cone

SOUTHERN CONE						
Country	Umbrella organisation	Total positions	Women	%	Men	%
Argentina	CGT	166	78	47.0	88	53.0
	CTAA	39	17	43.6	22	56.4
	CTAT	44	17	38.6	27	61.4
Brasil	CUT	28	14	50.0	14	50.0
	UGT	173	40	23.1	133	76.9
Chile	CUT	9	3	33.3	6	66.7
Paraguay	CNT	26	4	15.0	22	85.0
	CESITP	17	9	53.0	8	47.0
	CUT	19	9	47.0	10	53.0
	CUT-A	40	20	50.0	20	50.0
Uruguay	PIT-CNT	20	8	40.0	12	60.0

Source: survey questionnaire to the executive committees and Southern Cone Report

Table 6

Composition of the executive committees of the reporting trade union centres. Mexico

MEXICO					
Centre	Total positions	Women	%	Men	%
CNT	13	6	46.2	7	53.8
UNT	32	2	6.3	30	93.8

Source: Mexico Report

Gender relations intersect with other criteria for the formation of candidacies: the weight of the trade unions, the sector from which a candidate comes, the links with the political currents that dispute power in the centres.

If we take into account the weight of the unions and the sector from which they come, we might expect women to be favoured in centres where there is a predominance of sectors, in which women are the majority. But being a majority in the rank and file does not guarantee them a place on the executive committees. Moreover, with some exceptions, women are often excluded from the negotiations on who will sit on the executive committees. This is how a woman leader from the Andean countries describes it:

--But do it, nobody is stopping you from being part of the organisation's committee. --But that's a lie, they stop us, because who goes to the meetings? Those who go to the meetings where delegates are appointed are

mostly men, and how do they make their connections? Through partying, through sports events. That's, where we women are not present.

She adds that the low value placed on women's paid work and the sectors in which they are a majority contributes to attribute less value to their trade union activities.

The discourse that there are no women to join executive committees simplifies the complexity of the problem and is an excuse for not tackling it. The reasons behind the inequalities in women's and men's participation in decision-making must be uncovered and addressed if parity is really to be achieved.

2.4.2. Quota and parity policies

The adoption of a minimum percentage of women's participation (quota) and parity between men and women in political spaces (parties, parliaments, executive power, trade union organisations) seeks to reduce existing inequality more rapidly and accelerate the achievement of equal participation in these areas.²⁹ These actions have become widespread in recent decades, including in Latin America. They can be established by law or by internal institutional deliberation. They are generally mandatory, although this does not guarantee that they are always implemented. The quota means a minimum percentage of women out of the total number of people in the decision-making space.³⁰ Parity is a step forward, as it represents a participation of 50% men and 50% women. It is important to remember that the TUCA defends parity as the core of its trade union transformation strategy.

Reversing the historical inequalities between women and men, which materialise particularly in the world of work, requires progress towards parity in the leadership and representation of trade union organisations. There are still important deficits, both in terms of participation and in terms of content and transversality in the definitions and actions of the organisations, although the progress made in many trade union organisations on the continent should be highlighted.

From this reality and within the framework of the agreements reached at the TUCA Congresses, the results of the 2019 Women's Conference and the outcome of the Continental Conference on self-reform, a first core area of action on gender issues emerges: to move towards parity (50%) in the different bodies of the trade union structures, in particular the leadership bodies, and to promote it from the grassroots level. (TUCA, 2021).

²⁹ There are marked regional, national and institutional and political discrepancies, but full equality has not yet been achieved in any country on the planet. In the political world, for example, women's representation has doubled in the last 25 years, but is far from equal. In 2020, only 24.09% of the world's parliamentarians were women; in October 2019 there were only 10 women heads of state and 13 women heads of government in no more than 22 countries (UN Women/Parliamentary Union, 2020).

³⁰ The minimum percentage considered capable of having an impact is 30% of women, as it is at this level that their presence makes a real difference in the dynamics of decision-making in male-dominated environments. For more on this subject, see Dahlerup (2021).

Which centres adopt quota or parity policies, which actions do they take?

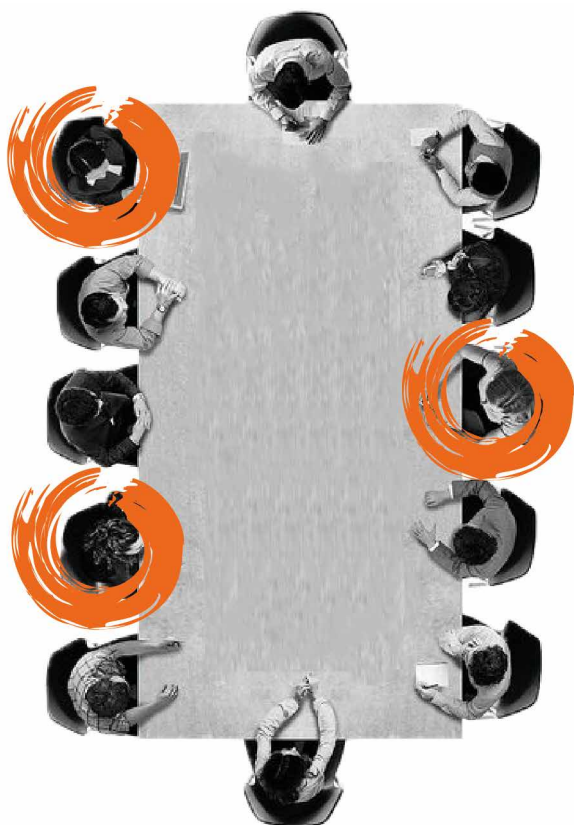
In 31 trade union centres in 15 countries covered by the research, regulations to ensure increased participation of women were identified. There are clear differences between the actions that have been taken, a diversity that can be observed in tables A2-A6 in Annexe 2, which contain the information that could be collected.³¹

In all sub-regions quota or parity policy actions have been introduced. In some centres such actions are the result of an internal decision, although most of the time they respond to demands that were presented by women and approved by congress. They may be incorporated into the statutes, as in the Brazilian CUT and UGT, the Peruvian CUT and CATP, the Panamanian CTRP, the CNUS of the Dominican Republic, or not, as in the PIT- CNT of Uruguay and the CUTH of Honduras. In some centres, the regulations are the result of a national law that obliges the trade union organisations to apply the regulations in some areas, or even to include them in their statutes. This is the case of the Argentinean, Costa Rican, Nicaraguan, Paraguayan, Mexican and Chilean trade union centres. This is not to say that in these cases there has been no struggle and vindication of women within the centres, but rather that the actions came from outside, before the organisations had deliberated on them. Some centres go beyond the law, such as the CUT and the CNT in Paraguay. In most centres the action applies to executive committees and in some also to one or other additional areas, such as the composition of congress delegations, negotiating committees, participation in training activities and/or all activities of the organisation. In others, such as the CUTH in Honduras, it does not apply to the executive committee, but only to some other area. Parity exists only in a minority of organisations, based on a congressional decision like in the cases of CUT in Brazil and CGT in Argentina, or national law, as in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. In Mexico, the Federal Labour Law (2019) introduced mandatory women's participation in proportion to their presence at the trade union grass-roots, i.e. there is no pre-established quota definition.³² The Colombian centres have an internal decision that does not establish a quota as such, but the obligation that there must be a woman on the executive committee and on the lists.

Considering the 24 centres that responded to the questionnaire to the executive committees, the following averages of centres that adopted some kind of action, could be established: Central America 38%, Andean countries 67%, Caribbean 67%, Southern Cone 100%. Half of the centres responded that the percentage adopted was 30% or 33% of women; 25% of them introduced a percentage of 40%, only 12.5% adopted 50%, i.e. parity.

³¹ The data sources used to compile the table were sub-regional reports, questionnaires to the centres, interviews and documents of the organisations.

³² The legal regulation has not yet been implemented in the analysed federations.



Evaluation of quota and parity policies by women and men in leadership positions

When asked in the questionnaire how they evaluate the implementation of quota and parity measures in the centres,³³ the women's/gender bodies gave a positive evaluation while underlining their insufficiencies (Figure 1).

The most frequently reported effect is that it increased the visibility to women trade unionists (69%). Second, the gender agenda gained more space in the centre (59%), while a minority (10%) considered that it has little impact on it. It should be added that in the interviews, women leaders insisted that the space for a gender agenda has expanded, but so far it has not been consolidated in the centres. As a third positive effect it favoured the building of solidarity among women leaders (52%). The building of solidarity was confirmed in the interviews. However, women leaders reported expressions that indicated a lack of solidarity, 28% of the women's/gender bodies stated in the questionnaire that the impact of quota and parity measures is reduced by the lack of solidarity among women leaders. The lack of solidarity stems mostly from mistrust due to the access of "quota/parity" women leaders: the stigma that there are those who supposedly did not join the executive committee based on merit leads to a devaluation of their work by other trade unionists, noted some interviewees.

For 12.5%, no data was obtained. The experience of the Brazilian CUT is the longest and most consistent of all. It began with a minimum quota of 30% in 1993 and in 2012 parity was approved. It is also the broadest, covering several areas. It is the only one where sanctions for non-compliance have been identified. Argentina's CGT parity resolution (2021) preserves the presence of men by defining that positions be held by one man and one woman, and provides an exception for three positions, including the main position (general secretary), to be held by a single person.

There are problems with the enforcement of the actions in all centres. Among the reasons for this are the weak conviction of the action taken and the consequent negligence in putting it into practice, the lack of "sufficient institutionalisation, which leaves its exercise to arbitrary criteria" (Southern Cone Report), resistance in the "chain" of compliance, for example, when it is also applied to the affiliates of the centres, rejection because the measure is considered "imposed". The fact that the rule is statutory or legal favours but does not guarantee its implementation, which can be even more precarious if there are no sanctions for non-compliance. In addition, artifices are often adopted to reduce its negative impact on men's participation, such as blocking women's access to top positions, expanding the number of seats on executive committees so that men do not have to leave when more women enter, and so on. Most of the centres that do not adopt quota or parity reported that the issue was raised in some way. In some centres it was discussed but not voted on, or voted on and not passed, and in others it is a concern, but it is argued that there are other ways of promoting participation that do not necessarily involve formal measures.

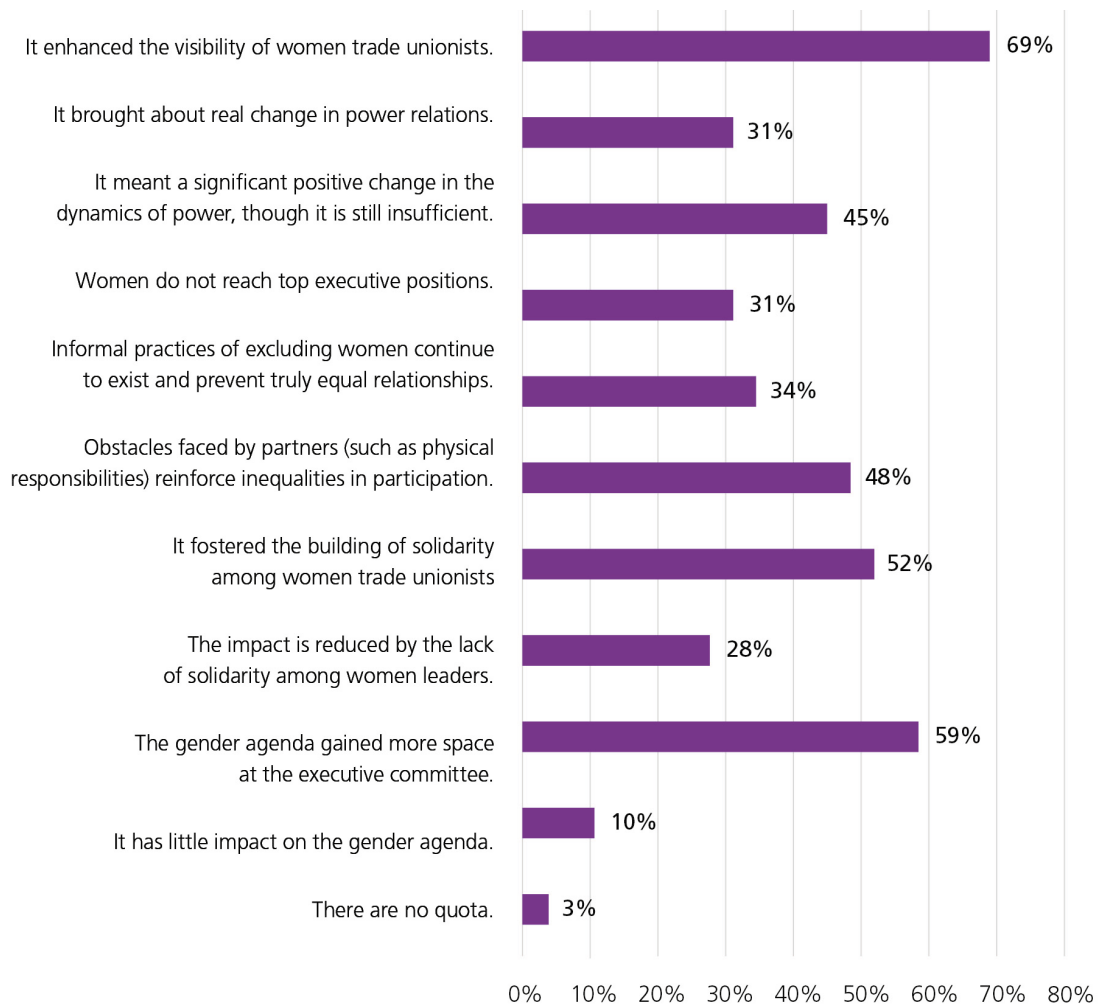
In the interviews, the women leaders emphasised that the most visible positive aspect of the measures is that they have given women a possibility to gain access to the executive committees that they did not have before - in other words, this would not have happened spontaneously. Moreover, they consider this to be a strategic policy to keep them in this space, since the absence of the regulation entails the danger of a rollback with regard to the progress made. For 31% of the answers, the measure has brought about a real change in power relations, but almost half (45%) express that it is not enough. Informal practices of excluding women continue to exist and prevent truly egalitarian relations (34%), and women do not reach top management positions (31%). In addition, obstacles faced by women (such as family responsibilities) reinforce inequalities in participation (48%).

Interviewees highlighted the problem of non-compliance or half-compliance with regulations, as a woman leader from Central America exemplifies:

There is a political decision that participation should be half men and half women in the different training processes and meetings. The organisations do not comply, it is not in the statutes, it is not in writing. Each organisation must elect its representative to the executive committee [of the centre]. If the federation says it sends three men, it sends them and that's it!

³³ This question enabled multiple responses.

Figure 1
Evaluation of the implementation of a quota or parity in the confederation. 2021



Source: own elaboration based on the survey questionnaire to the women's/gender bodies.

When there is a law, the strategy to comply with the measure should simply be to demand that it be implemented, leaders from Central American countries, where national parity legislation has been passed, said.

The expansion of spaces for women takes place in an ambivalent context, which seeks to preserve the privileges of men. According to some interviewees, there are leaders who support the measures, but at the same time feel threatened by the possibility of being excluded. In addition, as mentioned above, trade unionists are looking for ways to minimise the impact of the law on their own participation.

Women trade unionists see the quota and parity measures as a very important step forward, but they do not guarantee their substantive participation, i.e. on an equal footing with men in leadership positions. "We have parity in numbers, but there is still work to be done for real participation", summarises one leader. At the same time, they underline

that women continue to be a minority after the adoption of the quota, which is why they defend parity as the main alternative to achieve equal participation.

Many male trade unionists are in favour of the measures and voted for them at congresses (when they resulted from a decision of the centre), thereby contributing to the majority, as men generally predominate in the total number of delegates. Many of the leaders interviewed, including some general secretaries or presidents, agreed with them and shared the assessment that they represent a certain openness and an incentive for women's participation. However, most of them emphasise the difficulties in meeting the requirement. The most frequently repeated is that women do not have the time and that they are often forced to leave office before the end of the mandate. Family responsibilities appear as the main obstacle, but with a tenor that this is a women's problem that does not concern trade unionism.

Some male trade union leaders argue that quota are not met because women are unwilling or unmotivated to join executive committees. They do not recognise the sexual division of labour, nor do they recognise the obstacles arising from the structure, functioning and power relations within the union, including hostile attitudes towards women. Not feeling welcome, defended and respected, many women workers are reluctant to “confront a trade union structure that is not friendly and empathetic to women’s realities”, as one of the sub-regional reports concluded.

Several leaders admitted that it is not easy to comply with the measure also for other reasons: men do not want to leave their positions, some federations and affiliated unions are reluctant to accept it because they see it as an imposition; women are not trained for the position, which makes it difficult to select them for access to executive committees. In one centre in the Andean countries where there is no such measure, the leader opposes it on the grounds that it contributes to the weakening of the class struggle, which encompasses all “specific” demands, and constitutes a favouring and overprotection of women, which contributes to the division of the working class. The leader of another centre in the same sub-region, where no such measure exists either, argued that it is unnecessary because the composition of the executive committee is based on merit, without gender differentiation. His position is shared by the leader of a centre in the Southern Cone:

Women are elected on the basis of their qualities, not by statutory imposition [...], men do not have quotas either [...] participation is based on capacity and quality, not on patronage or friendship, here people are elected and rotated, and it no longer takes into account whether they are men or women.

However, in the political dynamics of the formation of executive committees, there are factors of exclusion of women trade unionists that have nothing to do with the evaluation of their merits, qualities and capacities to be part of them.

In one Andean country centre that adopted a quota, the male union leader interviewed reported that its adoption was driven by TUCA resolutions; the woman leader of a Caribbean centre advocates a move from quota to parity, in line with the TUCA's trade union self-reform project. The TUCA's push shows its effect, even if it may be uneven at the regional level.

2.4.3 Occupying positions: who holds which position?

En In all sub-regions, the women leaders on the executive committees mostly hold positions that replicate feminised care, service, secretarial and social work, apart from the women's/gender body, which has less decision-making power and hierarchical status. The pattern of gender roles prevailing in society is reproduced in trade unionism. According to the responses the questionnaire to the executive committees received with regard to the positions and thematic specific secretariats held by women (as main or alternate holders) in the current management of each centre³⁴ only 25% of the main positions (presidency or general secretariat, depending on the centre) and no more than 13% of the vice-presidencies are occupied by women.³⁵ Meanwhile, women hold 63% of the bodies concerned with organisational functioning and development, as well as the same percentage of the bodies in charge of social affairs and 42% of those devoted to youth. Twenty-five per cent of the secretariats dealing with training and the same percentage of those dealing with social security are held by women leaders, while only 21 per cent of the bodies dealing with labour issues and a tiny 4 per cent of those dealing with conflicts, struggles and mobilisation are held by women.

There are different methods to define the positions,³⁶ but just as in the nomination of candidates, in any of the scenarios women's chances of gaining access to the most prestigious positions are lower. What one woman leader from the Southern Cone said can be applied to the whole region, with few exceptions: “... at the head is always a man [...] Nowadays, women do participate more, but it is difficult for men to give way to women”. The increase in women's participation “does not necessarily mean that men's willingness to give up positions has increased”, the researchers from the Andean countries added. Many men see the exercise of power as their prerogative and the entry of women as an act of benevolence: “Women don't participate because they don't want to, the spaces are there, we give them to them and they don't want them”, assessed a Central American leader.

Women still do not have the same weight as men in defining the trade union agenda, whether in the formal sphere or in informal spaces for discussion and decision-making. This is due, among other factors, to the fact that they occupy positions of lesser political relevance. As one Caribbean leader concluded, “we women have made progress and we have a certain level of participation, but we are not in power”.

Women trade unionists see the discussion on inequality in office-holding as essential to move towards broader levels of democratisation of trade union power.

³⁴ This question enabled multiple responses.

³⁵ It would be interesting to know the percentage of women holding the top position in the 43 federations that make up the research universe, which is possibly lower than this. Unfortunately, it was not possible to obtain this data.

³⁶ These include being negotiated between the strongest unions and political currents, being the prerogative of those who hold the top job or being indicated by the unions.

2.4.4. The functioning dynamics of the executive committee and women's participation

The executive committees of the trade union centres have fairly similar functioning dynamics throughout the region, with regular weekly, fortnightly or monthly meetings, which were held virtually or in a hybrid form (virtual and face-to-face) during the pandemic. In general, women leaders in all sub-regions felt that the virtual modality facilitated their participation in the meetings by allowing them to overcome some of the obstacles they faced. There are differing assessments among the interviewees, both women and men, as to who dominates and expresses themselves more in the mixed virtual activities and meetings, the women leaders or the male leaders. Some feel that the virtual format favours men and inhibits women, others the other way around, that it favours women; some leaders feel that women show more skill and familiarity with virtual tools than men.

Women leaders in Central America report that face-to-face meetings are generally held during working hours, which makes it very difficult for them to participate, as they often do not have trade union leave. This is a limitation that affects women more than men and, among other aspects, refers to differences in social and labour insertion. Women do less valued jobs, while men are in more senior positions, where it is easier to negotiate leave; women leaders in the informal sector cannot afford to interrupt their work to participate in meetings, as stopping to sell means "not eating that day", as one of them summarised. Also, many live in another city, province or department, and participating in person takes time, money and the need for union leave.

In most of the centres, women leaders have the right to speak and vote in the same way as male leaders. However, despite formal equality, they characterise the leadership spaces as masculinised environments, not only because of the predominance of men, but also because of the way they function, the practices in place and the language usually used. Leaders are used to participating in these environments and are the ones who have constructed the discussion and negotiation dynamics adopted, which include not only what happens directly during meetings, but also the use of informal means and channels from which women are excluded. The result is that the incorporation and acceptance of women implies efforts of adaptation by women and men, as well as a reconfiguration of this space, a process that can be long, stressful and crossed by explicit and implicit conflictive situations. For women, joining executive committees implies a process of "building a place for themselves" within this environment, in the words of a woman leader from the Southern Cone.

2.4.5 Women's participation in negotiating spaces and social dialogue

The participation of women as representatives of the trade union centres in negotiation and dialogue with the government and other social actors is another indicator of their place in decision-making. In the questionnaire to the leadership, only half of the trade union centres reported that at least one woman always participates in their delegations. Some 33.3% reported that there is no rule, but that it depends on the area and the topic in question. Here it is worth underlining the Central American researchers' warning that in this case the inclusion of women is left to chance or in the hands of "those who decide or consider that the topic to be addressed "needs" the presence of a woman". Only 8.3% of the centres said that the delegations are composed according to the quota or parity rule that may exist for the executive committee, and another 8.3% said that they use a different criterion. Fortunately, none of the centres indicated the option that delegations are usually not joined by women.

Participation in these spaces generates conflicts among leaders. In one Southern Cone centre, for example, the women's/gender body developed a set of gender clauses to contribute to the negotiations, but the negotiators were all men. The head office did not include women in the tripartite and wage rounds on the grounds that they were "not trained" to negotiate. The response of the women's/gender body was to offer specific training to women trade unionists, thus forcing their incorporation into the negotiating commission.

International representations tend to be headed by women only when the issue is related to the gender agenda or if the centre has a woman general secretary or president. Where quotas are limited, priority is given to the participation of the presidency or general secretariat, which are mostly men. Women's participation has been expanded in forums of TUCA and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), in the case of affiliated centres, following a demand from the centres. International pressure is also coming from aid organisations that support trade unionism. The woman leader of a trade union centre in the Andean countries describes the case of her trade union centre, which was invited to send a delegation abroad and initially proposed only men:

We went to ask for support, then the head of the organisation said: "a woman must go" and she gave a gender talk for a while, we went back to the executive and nothing about a woman going [...] And if it is not because in this organisation they tell everyone who asks for support: "if a woman goes, we support you, if not, we don't". It was because they were told at the international level, so they had to choose, because a woman will go.

In delegations to ILO conferences, 54% of centre respondents reported that women's participation is always ensured, but a quarter of them responded that gender composition is not a criterion.³⁷

³⁷ No data was obtained for 21% of the federations.

The situation is more favourable where there is a law mandating women's representation on trade union negotiating committees, as in Chile. In Brazil, the absence of women in the top position excludes them from the Forum of Trade Union Centres, which brings together the country's trade union centres to coordinate their intervention on issues of interest to the working class and to define strategies for joint action: representation in the Forum is by the presidents of the centres, who are all men.

The participation of women trade unionists in delegations and representations is part of building greater equality between men and women, as well as helping to ensure that a gender perspective is present in these spaces. Men must be able to advocate for the gender justice agenda, but experience shows that if women are not present, these demands are either invisible or dismissed at the first sign of problems in negotiations. This has been confirmed by a Caribbean leader's account of a high-level event to review his country's Labour Code:

One of the observations I made about this code is that there were no women at the trade union table, we were all men. There were no women at the business table either, and there were no women at the governmental table either. Many of the shortcomings of the code in relation to women's issues can be attributed to the lack of women's presence during the discussions. Why were there no women at such an important event.

2.5 WOMEN'S SELF-ORGANISATION IN TRADE UNION CENTRES

2.5.1. Women's/gender bodies. Location within the structure. Forms of organisation

The trade union centres have a variety of structures, but in general they have an executive committee (which may have different names depending on the centre) composed of the main positions and with thematic secretariats that vary from one centre to another. Ninety-five per cent of the centres for which data were available have what is known as a women's/gender body. This body has different names depending on the centres: secretariat, department, presidency, vice-presidency, directorate, commission, bureau, among others, and refers to women, gender, gender equity, equal opportunities, gender and diversity and other formulations (see tables A7-A11 in Annexe 3). Most of them are statutory, they are part of the executive committee structure and the woman leader in charge participates in the executive committee with the right to speak and vote.

In the Andean countries, the Bolivian COB does not have such a body. In the Peruvian CUT, there are two bodies: the Secretariat for Salaried Women and the Secretariat for Self-Employed Women. In the Southern Cone, the CGT of Argentina also has two bodies: the Secretariat for Gender and the Secretariat for Equal Opportunities. Brazil's UGT has a woman leader and two sub-secretaries. In the sub-region, only in Uruguay's PIT-CNT is there no statutory body and in principle, its leader does not have the right to vote in the executive committee (the union member currently in charge does because she also represents her union in the executive committee). In Mexico, it is compulsory by law for trade union (and other) organisations to have a women's/gender body; in the UNT the existing body is not statutory. In general terms, the tasks of this body include the organisation of women, the formulation of proposals for gender equality policy, the implementation of the corresponding measures and the representation of the trade union centre in government or civil society bodies dealing with issues which are related to women's rights, particularly those of women workers. In some cases, it is specified that these bodies have functions that in a way reproduce traditional roles and gender stereotypes, such as providing assistance to vulnerable groups or liaising with bodies dealing with education and youth, among other examples, which reinforces roles linked to assistance and care as women's tasks and not as political tasks in general.

The bodies have different ways of organising and functioning. In some centres, they have a structure that extends throughout the country. The national body is supplemented by corresponding bodies at state, provincial or regional branch level, all of which operate in a coordinated manner. In addition, the existing bodies in the affiliated federations and confederations are involved, thus constituting a national coordination or collective. In other centres, the body is made up of representatives who

participate at the suggestion of the affiliated unions and federations. There is also the experience of forming provincial women’s committees under the guidance of the national body, although the provincial bodies are not statutory. Another experience is the formation of a women’s committee with trade union representatives to support the national leader in charge. Generally speaking, the central bodies encourage and support the creation of similar bodies in the affiliated organisations. A common thread that could be identified throughout the region is that these bodies seek to build a democratic and representative form of organisation, which extends beyond the national headquarters and the figure of the leader in charge, as well as to constitute collective spaces and dynamics of operation.

2.5.2. Resources for its operation. Union leave for the leaders in charge

According to the data from the questionnaire to women’s/ gender bodies, in Central America 54% of them receive resources that had been set aside in the centres’ budgets against 31% indicating that this was not the case (15% of the centres in the sub-region did not answer); in the Caribbean 67% of the organisations reported receiving such resources against 33% who said they did not.³⁸ Meanwhile, in the Andean countries 83% of the organisations reported not receiving budgetary resources and only 17% said they did; in the Southern Cone 86% of them reported not receiving them against 14% who said they did. In the interviews, the leaders of some bodies that do not have a budget reported that this is a similar situation to that of other secretariats. However, one interviewee from the Southern Cone noted that “money circulates through the secretariats run by men”. Women trade unionists pointed out that there are tensions with the areas that handle finances - which are usually run by men - when it comes to requesting resources.

Leaders mentioned different sources for funding, including specific contributions from the centres for campaigns and activities, support from international trade union organisations, specific resources for the implementation of the work plan through projects from external national and international institutions, coordination with other areas of the centre, and the inclusion of the gender agenda in projects that receive funding. In one case, the body has already been financed by the fees that its members received as lecturers at the federatio’s training institute. Funding of some bodies depends entirely on external support. In terms of personnel, some of them reported having a technical, administrative or advisory support person. There is no doubt about the insufficiency of available resources: 90% of the women’s/ gender bodies reported that the resources available to them are not sufficient. Only 7% said that they are sufficient and 3% did not respond.

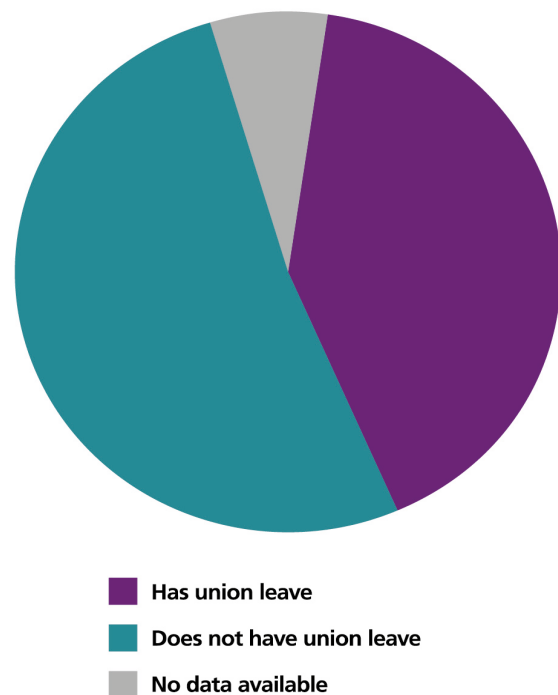
³⁸ In none of the cases was information available on the proportion of resources received.

Women leaders said they were aware of the economic difficulties facing trade unionism due to the reduction in wage employment, with the subsequent drop in membership and other factors affecting fundraising.³⁹ However, on the whole they are critical of how women’s/ gender issues are affected. A woman leader from Central America summed it up:

“For trade union organising, resources are scarce, let alone for women”. Another, from the Southern Cone, pointed out that there is an ambiguity, for while the bodies are becoming institutionalised and gender equality policies within the trade union movement are being strengthened, in times of crisis they are the first to lose the resources they need to function.

Another important deficit is the lack of union leave for women leaders in charge. More than half of the bodies reported that the leaders were not granted union leave (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Trade union leave for the trade unionist in charge of the women’s/ gender body at each centre. 2021



Source: own elaboration based on the questionnaire to the women’s/ gender bodies.

³⁹ In Brazil, the 2017 labour and trade union reform drastically reduced the resources of trade union organisations. In Haiti, the leader of one of the trade union federation says that the financial shortfall of the federation is dramatic as a result of the situation in the country and that there is a lack of resources to fund all activities.

The lack of union leave is a major constraint on the task of coordinating the organisation of women workers and the implementation of gender equality policy in the union. It also has a significant political effect, which is to make the integration of women leaders into the dynamics of power relations within the union even more precarious, which in itself is already more difficult for women trade unionists. Add to this the family and care responsibilities that women leaders may have, and the picture becomes very unfavourable. In Central America, cases were reported in which the bodies have been able to function because the women leaders in charge are retired or pensioned women, who can devote more time to union activities.

In each case, it would be necessary to evaluate why the leader does not have union leave, whether this is a situation common to all incumbent leaders of the different thematic areas or whether it is specific to the women's/gender body, whether or not there is an effort by the centre and the union to which the leader belongs to negotiate her leave, and what can be done to overcome this deficit.

2.5.3. Core areas of the women's/gender bodies' proposals for action

The women's/gender bodies develop an internal agenda in the centres and are generally involved in the struggles for women's rights that are being carried out in their countries. Various core areas of their proposals for action were mentioned:

- Gender-based violence in all its expressions.
- Maternity rights, the sharing of family responsibilities, care and the use of women's time; the visibility of inequality in the distribution of care tasks; demands such as childcare and nurseries. The issue of care gained a lot of visibility during the pandemic and was intensively addressed by the women's/gender bodies of several centres through virtual activities.
- Training.
- Equal pay for men and women/equal pay for work of equal value.
- Rights and organisation of waged domestic workers.
- Combating racism and ethnic and racial discrimination.
- Advocacy to incorporate gender demands in centre resolutions.
- Systematisation of gender clauses for collective bargaining or other areas of negotiation.
- Promotion of meetings and forums to define the women's agenda in the preparation of the congresses of the centres.

Networking is highly valued by the centres in those countries that have more than one trade union centre. The existence of such a network was mentioned in Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Haiti, Peru, Dominican Republic and Venezuela, and it is in the process of being set up in Paraguay. The bodies act in a unified way to promote and defend the agenda of women workers' rights in the various

spheres where it is being debated and fought for, concentrating on common platforms to act together and strengthen their advocacy beyond their centres. The leaders point out that coordination can be complex due to the differences in union conception and political perspective among the unions, but it contributes to strengthening and empowering them, as well as broadening their capacity for action and advocacy.

Interactions with women's and feminist movements, which occur from very heterogeneous experiences, are analysed in Chapter 2 of Part II.

Sexual diversity and the rights of LGBTIQ+ people were mentioned by some bodies. Sexual and reproductive rights and the right to abortion are addressed in the bodies of some centres of the Southern Cone and one in the Caribbean.

Most of the Andean countries reported being strongly influenced by TUCA and ITUC guidelines with regard to the definition of their agendas.

2.5.4. Political influence on the decisions of the centre and impact on women's empowerment

Women leaders are unanimous in affirming the importance of women's/gender bodies. In response to the questionnaire's question on changes in the way women's organisations have been organised in the centre in recent years,⁴⁰ three main achievements were identified. 59% responded that the body managed to incorporate gender agenda issues into the centre's resolutions; 55% that it gained more visibility in the centre; and 45% that it gained the participation of more women. However, only 24% said that their position in the structure had changed for the better. For 14% there was no change. The action of these bodies promotes the strengthening and participation of women and contributes to their self-recognition as valid actors to make concrete demands and proposals. This is how a woman leader from Central America put it:

For women trade unionists, these spaces are extremely important, because they generate stronger and more supportive relationships between them, but also allow them to empower themselves and gain strength to participate in decision-making spaces.

In the Southern Cone, this "is a space that enjoys broad legitimacy", the researchers noted. In addition, they stressed that "an issue that stands out in all centres of the countries of the sub-region is the capacity of women to generate activities, to set up debates and to put pressure on certain positions within the trade unions.

⁴⁰ This question enabled multiple responses.

Positive assessments came also from some male leaders, such as this one from Mexico:

It helps women colleagues to know their rights and to influence their male colleagues to respect them. Before, they participated less, but now they come prepared with their proposals. And although sometimes they still don't take them seriously, they have begun to respect women more and more. So they start to participate more.

An important factor in the strengthening of women that was mentioned by women leaders is the search for building a unity of action within the body, without denying the differences between women. This commitment was summed up by a woman leader from the Southern Cone: "when it comes to act as a secretariat, we are the secretariat".

They also recognise the limitations that accompany the work of these bodies. In addition to those mentioned above, they added that their influence does not always translate into sufficient decision-making power within the centre. In some centres in the Southern Cone and the Andean countries, women trade unionists feel that the political influence of the body has so far been stronger on external issues, such as contributions to laws and public policies, in action with other organisations to put pressure on the executive and legislative powers, or that they more easily obtain the backing of the general secretary or president for external demands on which they are obliged to express themselves publicly at the institutional level. However, there are also bodies in the Southern Cone that managed to achieve significant successes in their demands for internal changes in power structure and relations.

The existence of women's/gender bodies and their inclusion in the statutes and executive committees of the vast majority of trade union centres show that in recent decades women trade unionists have built up organisational strength and advocacy capacity, amidst many obstacles in an area where the correlation of forces is often unfavourable to them. Ultimately, it is through women's actions that trade union centres have been able to incorporate the gender justice agenda.

2.5.5. Networks of women trade unionists and workers

In some countries there are networks of women trade unionists that exist independently of the trade union centres. They are usually formed to compensate for the lack of spaces for participation that women trade unionists find in trade union organisations and to strengthen the women who are active in the unions and centres. The relations they establish with the trade union centres vary from case to case.

In Argentina several networks of women trade unionists are successfully influencing the national trade union dynamic.

The most significant example is the Intersindical de Mujeres Sindicalistas Argentinas (Interunion Committee of Argentinean Women Trade Unionists), which is a space made up of women leaders from the executive committees and the women's/gender bodies of the three existing trade union centres, but which also includes women trade unionists who do not occupy these positions. The actions of the interunion committee date back to 2016, when the first women's strike took place in the country. The three trade union centres supported the strike, and most of the unions of the two CTAs called a work stoppage from midday so that their members could participate in the mobilisation. Since this founding milestone, the interunion committee continued to carry out coordinated actions. Although all women leaders interviewed said that this coordination was not easy given the political and ideological differences between the different currents, they agreed on prioritising common causes and highlighted the power of the union of all women trade unionists, as well as the importance of this space for training, empowerment and security. They also emphasised the impact that the interunion committee has in building solidarity between the trade union centres and women trade unionists in general in the face of certain conflictive situations.

The Bolivian Network of Women Workers and Trade Unionists was formed following an initiative of women trade unionists precisely because of the lack of a statutory space for the organisation of women workers within the COB structure. Created in 2004, it is an umbrella organisation for salaried and non-salaried women workers, where issues such as called *Germina*, with content related to the struggles of Bolivian women workers in their trade unions and in the social environment, which stimulates reflection and debate and makes these struggles visible, as well as addressing other issues of interest to women. Its contributors include women members of the Network and invited guests. Women's employment situation and their integration into the trade union world are discussed. One of its main objectives is to achieve decent work for women workers and to promote the empowerment and full participation of women in trade unions. To this end, one of the mechanisms used is trade union training under the principle of learning by doing. Since 2008, the Network has been publishing a quarterly Bulletin.

In El Salvador, two initiatives were identified that were created with the aim of promoting the empowerment of women in trade unions, which are not part of the trade union centres analysed: the *Coordinadora de Mujeres Sindicalistas*, created around 2009, and the *Asociación de Mujeres Sindicalistas Febe Elizabeth Velásquez* ("Las Febes"), founded in 2015. The main aims of both organisations, each according to its own context, character and style, have been to promote the organisation of women in trade unions, mainly in female-dominated sectors (informal sector, domestic workers, sex workers and the public sector), to provide women trade unionists with tools to facilitate their access to leadership positions, and to generate alliances between women trade unionists and between them and feminist movements.

The Network of Mexican Women Trade Unionists was created in 1997 by women who wanted to work on the eradication of gender inequalities by promoting the leadership of women trade unionists.⁴¹ One of its objectives is to assist women in organising their unions. The Network works with women union organisers in specific regions, such as the maquiladoras, as well as with other unions in rural areas. It provides information and training on labour, trade unionism and feminist issues to women, thus bringing about favourable changes for them. The knowledge passed on helps them to develop their leadership, promote better practices and develop better conflict resolution strategies to win gender demands, all of which results in the empowerment of women. The network has four other regional networks that have managed to sustain themselves over 20 years. It maintains a fraternal relationship with the UNT.

2.6. OBSTACLES WOMEN ARE FACING IN THEIR TRADE UNION PARTICIPATION

In general terms, the trade union participation of many women workers is hampered by the fragility and intermittency of their labour insertion, the risk of dismissal in the midst of the anti-union culture present in several countries and their high share of informal work, which is still not sufficiently addressed by trade unionism. Certainly, there are situations that affect workers equally, but they are aggravated for women because of their greater vulnerability in the workplace and gender discrimination. Trade unionism is embedded in a social order that is structured on gender, class, race, ethnic and other inequalities in patriarchal contexts.

One of the main obstacles has been machismo and patriarchy, which sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly inhibits women's participation in the trade union movement, which is basically a men's movement, led by men and created by men. (Caribbean leader).

Obstacles to women's full trade union participation are found in all sub-regions, even in countries where there has been more progress in women's participation in general and in the institutionalisation of their rights, as well as in centres that have a more consistent level of insertion of women workers and the construction of a gender justice policy than others. As in other aspects, there are disparities between sub-regions and centres. The obstacles revealed in the questionnaire to the women's/gender bodies and in the interviews were systematised in three aspects: those derived from women's living and working conditions; those derived from the structure, functioning and power relations within the trade union movement; and those specific to women trade unionists who are members of the executive committees.

2.6.1. Obstacles arising from the sexual division of labour and women's living and working conditions

The main obstacle to women's trade union participation is the sexual division of labour, a finding that cuts across the entire region. When asked in the questionnaire about the obstacles to women's participation generally, and particularly in the decision-making spheres of trade union centres and affiliated unions,⁴² 90% of women's/gender bodies pointed to women's lack of time due to family/care responsibilities and lack of support in caring for them. In the interviews, women trade unionists from all sub-regions emphasised the primacy of this factor over others that also hamper women's participation. It is an intersection between capitalist culture and patriarchal culture that doubly harms and violates women trade unionists, defined one leader.

This is what women trade unionists said:

Women don't have time, and how would they have it if they are full of tasks of caring for children or sick people and/or the elderly? (Woman leader from Central America)

It is very difficult, because you have to be a mother, you have to be a wife, you have to be a grandmother, you have to be a worker, and you have to comply with the timetable given to you by the State, the private employer [...] the woman is the one who does everything in the house, she has to wash, cook, look after the children, take the children to school, the man only works and comes and lifts his feet, he does not have those obligations, that is, he also has those obligations, but he does not do them. (Female leader from the Southern Cone)

Restrictions are exacerbated in the case of women with small children, who are the most disadvantaged in the labour market due to the lack of childcare services. Family support resources, public services and measures won through collective bargaining are insufficient. Researchers from the Andean countries analyse that:

... a vicious circle is created in which women do not participate because they do not have support in caring for children and the household, and by not participating, issues that could feasibly be changed are not even put on the agenda, ensuring that women's conditions do not improve, and therefore they remain disengaged.

Union involvement often results in the explicit or veiled blaming of women for supposedly "abandoning" their family; this social pressure is observed in all sub-regions. As one interviewee reflected, by identifying women as the "fundamental pillar of the family", they are assigned responsibility for the very existence of the family. Women trade unionists experience ruptures in their personal and family lives due to jealousy from their partners and resistance from their fathers, mothers, sons and daughters when they break with their traditional role and seek to insert themselves

⁴¹ López, 2007 (Mexico Report).

⁴² This question enabled multiple responses.

into a space outside the family. But the pressure comes not only from the family, but also from the trade union movement, which discourages women's participation, as they do not feel supported by their peers:

... the comrades also instil fear and guilt in the women who want to run for office: "You are going to leave your home, your family, your children. Are you ready? Are you willing to? And with this, the comrades are moved by fear and guilt, and many stop participating because of this. (Woman leader from Mexico)

As already mentioned, male trade unionists approach the sexual division of labour as an individual women's issue, outside of men and trade union politics:

Sometimes, in all sincerity, we want to appoint a woman and often the women have to work, they have to go home to carry out the activities at home. (Central American leader)

Women have a lot of responsibilities, they do not feel seduced by trade union politics. (Leader from the Southern Cone)

As Caribbean woman trade unionists observe, the trade union environment reproduces employers' practices of discrimination against women because of maternity:

Those same limitations [that are present in the world of work] that [for example] you cannot be employed because you are going to give birth, or you cannot be employed because you are of childbearing age, those same limitations are present in the trade unions. (Caribbean leader)

The conflict between family responsibilities and trade union involvement puts women's time priorities under debate:

We should discuss how we want to use our time, how much of our life we want to dedicate to trade union activity, because otherwise everything seems to have to do with the conflict with men and with questions that have to do with the gender order, and this also has to do with the politics of care, for example, do we really want to stop taking care of our families? Or do we believe that caring for life is the most important thing? That the conflict is not between capital and labour but between capital and life? Do we really want to leave our children at night, our families, to dedicate ourselves to trade union activity? In other words, what are our priorities? (Southern Cone leader)

This position questions the dedication to militancy, a debate that is normally not present in trade unionism. What is considered "legitimate" time to devote to trade union activity? Is it a time without limits, where there is no room for personal and family life, the right to enjoy time for oneself? If so, militancy and personal and family life become irreconcilable in principle, when they should not be, but everyone should be able to live these two worlds in balance. Whatever the perspective from which one looks at the problem, the gender order or gender relations are present in the background, because this is where it becomes clear why there is a different use of time for women and men.

2.6.2. Obstacles arising from the structure, functioning and power relations within trade unionism

The research team found that "union structures are marked by masculinity and machismo" (Central America); "the male figure is still dominant, machismo and the tradition that men have held power, and many women maintain an attitude of subordination" (Mexico); there are "patriarchal forms of establishing power" (Andean Countries); "trade union structures and dynamics were built and are still dominated by men who impose their own conception of how power is accessed, exercised and accumulated" (Southern Cone); "it is important [. ...] to respond to the need to deconstruct the machista patterns that are present in trade union action" (Caribbean).

The view of women trade unionists that the structure "is made by and for men" cuts across the region. Most of the women interviewed in Central America reported that it was very difficult for them to become part of a trade union dynamic that ignores the situation of women, such as meeting times and the time expected to be allocated to trade union activity. In the Southern Cone, many women leaders said that meetings are set without prior consultation, and that women have to adapt to the timetable, regardless of their family situation. In the questionnaire to women's/gender bodies, the response that there are no concrete measures to facilitate the participation of women who are mothers, such as childcare during events/meetings/congresses, etc., was reported as an obstacle by almost half (45%).

Women feel under pressure to prove that they are capable of being there, their presentation and participation is always questioned in some way, and they are explicitly or covertly required to "prove their ability" on a daily basis. In the questionnaire, 38% of the respondents agreed with the statement that many of the women workers and activists are not prepared to take on leadership responsibilities because they are not supported and encouraged and their colleagues have made them feel that they are not prepared. Testimonies such as these were repeated in the interviews:

I have had to make a great effort to be able to adapt, to show that I am capable, because we women have to show that we can do it so that they don't ignore us. (Woman leader from Central America)

We women are still seen as beings who do not think, we have few opportunities and we are very limited. (Southern Cone leader)

Some leaders acknowledge the existence of these practices:

[...] in general, [women] do not have confidence in male union leaders, because they then make fun of them when they treat them as inept, so they get self-conscious and become apathetic. (Woman leader from Mexico)

Women are rarely listened to or not listened to at all: their opinions are not adequately taken into account in executive committee meetings, assemblies and other spaces of union life. This response was given by 28% of the women/gender bodies, but was strongly reiterated by respondents in all sub-regions. In order to be listened to, women often have to adopt radical attitudes, as a trade unionist from the Andean countries reported:

When I spoke they didn't give me anything, when I tried to speak they didn't give me the floor. I had a hard time getting them to give me the floor. I had to climb on the desks and windows. I would say, look, I'm asking you for the floor and if they don't give it to me, I won't get down from here, so of course, these were demonstrations.

In the questionnaire, 17% of the respondents reported that there are/have been cases of gender-based violence in the centre and in affiliated unions (e.g. sexual harassment, moral harassment, political harassment, physical aggression, among others). A woman leader from the Andean countries described the effects of the violence of sexist language:

This sexist language, which mocks women's bodies and women's sexuality, is terrible. Because they have to live it on a daily basis, every day they have to laugh, but inside they are crying or suffering from the mockery that is made of them.

An interviewee from Central America was not very optimistic, when she summed up the effects the attitudes of many trade unionists had on women in everyday trade union life: "... you cannot devote your time and energy to the trade union movement, but rather to defending yourself against your comrades.

The lack of union responsiveness to the needs of women workers in the workplace is another factor that keeps women away from participation and adds to the others in a spiral from the grassroots organisations to the centres. Women leaders are confronted with the demotivation of rank and file workers:

It's like there is no reason for me to be there, if I don't manage to make progress for my colleagues. The women colleagues also see that in any case it is better to fight for wages, which is fair, fair in principle, but there are also other demands. So this failure to include women's demands has also weakened participation. (Leader of the Andean Countries)

The lack of renewal of leadership was mentioned by interviewees from centres in the Andean countries and the Southern Cone as a factor that distances young women workers, who do not always feel identified with the style and discourse of the older generations.

2.6.3. Specific obstacles faced by women trade union members who are members of steering committees

Women trade unionists in leadership positions face the above-mentioned obstacles and others specific to this position. A first challenge is to gain access to the nomination process, as has already been discussed. Next, it is worth reiterating the sexual division of labour. The tendency is for women without young children to become board members, although they may have teenage or adult children or older women and older and sick family members. In some countries, the way to establish leadership is to tour the regions, which is more difficult for women because of family responsibilities and lack of resources. There is an uneven starting point.

There is no level playing field, because women and men occupy unequal social positions. The burden that women carry, given their role in patriarchal society as those responsible for the sustainability of life, and for the productive world itself, means that women leaders are in a different position for their performance in a decision-making space. (Female leader from the Southern Cone)

Many women who are leaders now say, yes, but I have to take care of the children, these working days are very long and exhausting, that's not what happens to men, they can afford to arrive, and their wives are in charge of the children, men don't have to think about that. (Woman leader from the Andean Countries)

The conclusion of the Southern Cone Report can be extended to the whole region:

Meeting the demands in terms of time, energy and mental and emotional fortitude required to be a trade union leader is very difficult to reconcile with social expectations in relation to fulfilling domestic, family and care responsibilities.

As a result, women find it more difficult than men to develop a long-term trade union career, often even to the end of a term of office.

Men in leadership positions often criticise their fellow executive committee members for "neglecting" their family responsibilities. In addition, they are expected to fulfil serving and caring roles. One woman leader experienced this combined with discrimination for being young, because of which she was even less taken seriously:

I was discriminated against because I was a woman and young [...] We didn't have a secretary in the office, so why don't you take on the activities of the centre's administrative secretariat? So I turned round and looked at them and said no, but that's not my job. (Leader of the Andean Countries)

As explained above, some leaders who were interviewed consider lack of training as an obstacle to women's incorporation into executive committees. The explicit or subtle practice of disqualifying them as untrained persists when they are in office. In the questionnaire, 45% of the

women/gender bodies pointed out that women workers and activists who take on responsibilities feel that they have to prove all the time that they are qualified for the role, something that does not happen with men, which causes stress and frustration, and some of them give up applying again. Women leaders feel constantly questioned, under scrutiny: the slightest mistake costs them dearly, summarised one interviewee from the Southern Cone. For a woman leader from the Andean countries, this is strategy of men to resist the access of women:

“When women demand more space or to be listened to, men’s reaction is to tell them to train or learn first.”

However, some women trade unionists said that they lack political training and feel insecure. But they see this as a recognition of the unequal starting conditions that women have in relation to men, which generate disadvantages for them in the exercise of their leadership role. This is how the women leaders from the Southern Cone summed it up:

You acquire that trade union training in your relationship with others, in discussion and debate, beyond the workshops you can do; conversations, exchanges and experience also play a role. The fact of being there gives you a number of elements when it comes to debate. And we women colleagues often don’t have that, because historically we were not involved in this, historically we are the ones who do other things, so it’s very difficult for us.

... because you get home and maybe you have to cook, and maybe there is another colleague who is reading a document, who is studying or learning. This also makes it difficult for us when it comes to participation.

In all sub-regions, the persistence of informal practices of excluding women in decision-making spaces, of *micromachismos*, which are forms of gender-based violence and political harassment, could be observed. They do not feel welcome and welcomed, they are viewed with distrust, as if it were not their right to occupy these spaces, and this is reflected in the dynamics of decision-making. In the questionnaire, 41% of the women/gender bodies agreed that men coordinate and decide beforehand in informal spaces in which women do not participate (in the “inner circle”). This situation was insistently reiterated by the interviewees. Many decisions are “chewed up” at the meetings without the women leaders having had access to information that was relevant to the decision-making process. And having information (or not) means having power (or not), the women trade unionists warn.

Not only women in general, but also women leaders are rarely, if ever, listened to. They take a stand, but this does not mean that their opinions are taken into consideration. A female leader from the Southern Cone interprets that this is not only due to the different way of expressing themselves compared to men’s oratory, but is more serious: “the lack of listening is also caused by the lack of interest of men in the contributions or opinions of female colleagues”. The virtual format does not prevent women leaders from being ignored:

In the last few days, because of Zoom, they say that they don’t see our raised hand, so when we start to say “see, half an hour ago I raised my hand, what’s going on? What’s going on?”, then they say they don’t see us. (Leader of the Andean Countries).

It is more difficult for women leaders to impose their proposals:

“... if a man puts forward his work plan, no one questions what he puts forward, but if a woman puts forward the women’s work plan, there are many questions, many observations” (Caribbean leader).

Some women leaders pointed to subtle manoeuvres by men to financially prevent meetings and activities proposed by them from taking place, citing lack of resources. They also mentioned that different forms of harassment and sexist language are practised in the decision-making spheres.

Women often do not fit the “ideal model” of a trade unionist, which is based on the male figure. Researchers in the Southern Cone found that “masculinised attitudes of power and negotiation are still seen as a prerequisite for union leadership”. One woman leader from the sub-region reported that in her centre “if a woman asks for the floor, in order to get the attention of the leaders, she has to act like a man”. Another, from the Andean countries, added that based on her experience “the trade union leader who fought the most, who opposed violence the most, or who struck the most blows at some table, was seen with more respect, it was as if he was seen as having more fighting spirit”. Women leaders in several sub-regions mentioned the risk of masculinising themselves in order to be accepted:

I have often been told: “your discourse has been masculinised”. The issue is that when you are in environments that are all men, if you don’t get tough, if you don’t get really demanding, if you don’t have an imprint of appropriation of places, you are not taken into account either. (Leader from the Southern Cone)

However, the challenge is to deconstruct the dominance of a single, homogenised trade unionist profile, instead of incorporating women into men’s power, argued other interviewees.

Some women leaders spoke critically of those who do not incorporate the gender perspective and distance themselves from the issue because they do not agree with it or because they see it as an obstacle to their acceptance in the trade union environment. But they agreed that it is necessary to approach them and seek to involve them in the debate and understanding of this perspective.

The leaders emphasised the importance and necessity of solidarity among themselves in order to be able to be in this place where they face various hostilities and prejudices. In the words of one interviewee: “Going it alone is impossible”..

2.7 STRATEGIES, EXPERIENCES AND INITIATIVES TO OVERCOME THE OBSTACLES TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

After identifying the obstacles to women's participation, the next step was to analyse how the centres and their women's/gender bodies act to overcome them. The commitment and support of executive committees and other parts of the structure is often limited, reducing the impact of initiatives, which are proposed and implemented almost exclusively by women's/gender bodies. The chapter is organised on the basis of the commonalities between the centres and sub-regions, whose characteristics are also taken into account.

Training

Training is the most widespread strategy. The agenda indicated by the sub-regions covers issues of the trade union agenda in general and the gender agenda,⁴³ the development of skills such as public speaking, negotiation, leadership and cooperation strategies, as well as the empowerment and strengthening of women, which has a prominent place. The training activities offer women a meeting space where common narratives are constructed and unity and solidarity among women is strengthened, as noted by the researchers from the Andean countries and confirmed by a woman leader from Mexico:

"... you meet women colleagues and learn, and then you enrich your vision, definitely the training part is very important for how one can perform internally...". According to a leader from the Caribbean, training serves the function of recruiting new workers. Bringing all the elements together is what the trade unionists from the Andean countries called multidimensional and comprehensive training, which is what seems to be being sought in all sub-regions.

The Caribbean women leaders also carry out vocational training. Although it is not a trade union task *stricto sensu*, they include it in order to provide women workers with skills that increase their employability in contexts of unemployment, insecurity, informality and difficulty in finding work, especially for the youngest women.

Different types of activities and methodological resources are used: workshops, talks, seminars, internal and public forums and debates, courses, study circles, awareness-raising and communication activities, etc. In Ecuador's CEDOCUT, the most experienced women leaders provide support and

training for women who were elected to leadership positions. Several centres carry out activities at their headquarters and in a decentralized manner in their branches.⁴⁴ Some centres have a minimum quota of women in their activities, others negotiate union leave in their collective bargaining agreements so that women can participate in training and other events.

Women leaders of all sub-regions stressed that gender training should reach out to men, but their response was largely inexpressive. Leaders interviewed from one Central American country explained that gender training activities are extremely important to strengthen the centres, but, according to the researchers, "they consider that sometimes these actions can generate division in the centre and this is what they believe should be controlled". This is a fear and rejection that is certainly repeated in other countries. In the PIT-CNT in Uruguay, the organisation seeks access to men - and also to women who do not share the feminist perspective of analysing gender inequalities - by organising a daily conversation or action on a specific issue, such as, for example, the problematisation of sexist and prejudiced jokes that are common in trade unionism. Women trade unionists from Argentina's trade union centres are seeking to apply a strategy in trade unionism that would be similar to the Micaela Law (Law 27.499/2018), which obliges all those working in the three branches of the national government to receive training on gender issues and violence against women. The "Micaela sindical" would oblige leaders of all positions to undergo training in gender perspective.

In all sub-regions, the bodies are supported by national and international partner organisations (trade unions, international cooperation, NGOs and others) to carry out training activities. But it is not only financial resources that are a deficit, but also structural and institutional ones. In the Southern Cone, for example, alongside the centres that have a more established training structure or network that favours the development of a long-term training process, there are others that lack a structure that would allow them to move from isolated and poorly articulated activities to a more consistent and sustained process over time. The leaders warn that without a certain level of continuity and depth, the training processes lose their potential to be more effective and lasting, and this is true for the whole region.

Despite the limitations, positive results of the training processes are mentioned in all sub-regions, within a framework of heterogeneity and disparity in the scope of successes. However, women leaders from Central America warn that training is not enough, but that "a more comprehensive approach to the labour, social and economic problems limiting women's participation is needed", which is valid for the entire region.

⁴³ These include: concept of gender, women's rights and needs, national legislation, unionisation, violence against women and tools for women workers to defend themselves against different forms of violence, economic issues, care economy, feminism, history of the trade union movement, health and labour issues, etc. Brazil's CUT specifically addresses the intersection of gender, class and race inequalities. Haiti's CTH includes guidance on HIV-AIDS and during the pandemic has conducted training activities on covid-19.

⁴⁴ The possibility of carrying out decentralised activities depends on the conditions and resources available in each case. Women leaders in Haiti emphasised that they do so in the context of many constraints due to the insecurity and violence in the country, which make it difficult for them to travel frequently around the country, as well as for women workers to access decentralised activities.

Increasing women's participation in trade union life. Transformation of trade union structures and forms of operation

Increasing women's participation in all areas of trade union life was mentioned as a crucial strategy for tackling the obstacles to their participation: in the executive committees of trade union centres and unions, in collective bargaining and social dialogue, in training processes, in collective decision-making and action spaces such as congresses, assemblies and street demonstrations, in everyday trade union militancy, as delegates in the workplace. Women's progress is not only individual, but collective, said women leaders from the Southern Cone. To achieve this, it is necessary to transform the trade union structures, ways of functioning and practices that marginalise them. One tool for this is the adoption of the quota and parity policy, which has already been analysed. In Mexico, after taking action to make it compulsory by law to increase the number of women on executive committees, women trade unionists invest in the design of strategies to enable women workers to take ownership of the law: running for election, proposing statutory reforms and promoting changes to collective bargaining agreements. Other tools adopted in the sub-regions include negotiating union leave in collective bargaining agreements so that women can participate in union activities, promoting the participation of young women workers, installing childcare spaces during activities and nappy-changing facilities in the toilets of union premises, and defining more accessible working hours for women.

In the Southern Cone, the researchers underlined the role played by the women's/gender bodies: "the possibility of having a place of reference to which women have access and from which they can put forward their demands was a very fruitful strategy for overcoming some obstacles". Despite the difficulties they face in taking action, the forums are fundamental to building women's power and boosting their participation.

A crucial strategy of the bodies is to advocate for the implementation of resolutions on gender equality and women's participation.

To increase the unionisation of women workers, working with trade unions to develop initiatives in this regard and promoting union organising in feminised economic sectors, including the informal economy, aimed at gaining female membership and new support for the gender agenda, were mentioned.

Women trade unionists from the Southern Cone insist on the need to design strategies to build a different way of exercising leadership, calling for the valuing of links established through empathy and respect for the times and circumstances experienced by people, which in the trade union environment are often seen as weaknesses.

Combating harassment and gender-based violence

The fight against harassment and gender-based violence is tackled on several fronts: training, awareness-raising campaigns, participation in the struggle for legislative measures and public policies to combat domestic violence and femicide, advocacy and public demonstrations in specific cases of violence against women, etc. The fight against workplace and trade union harassment was boosted by the achievement of ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment (2019) and then by the advocacy of trade union centres for countries to ratify it, a process in which women trade unionists were (and continue to be) heavily involved. Addressing gender-based violence in the trade union environment is crucial to creating favourable conditions for women's participation. The Southern Cone has made progress in strategies to deal with the problem through the approval of internal protocols for dealing with situations of violence in various centres. However, a leader from the sub-region warns that such protocols are not enough, that it is necessary to continue investing in training on the issue and, furthermore, that above all the leadership, but also the militancy, should assume the responsibility of addressing the issue of violence in the centres and trade unions.

Building networks and alliances

Building networks and alliances with other organisations is a strategy that is highly valued by women trade unionists in all sub-regions. In addition to the aforementioned networks of the women's/gender bodies of the trade union centres and the networks of trade unionists and autonomous women workers of the trade union centres, there is a wide variety of other links, for example, with the leadership and other areas of action of a trade union centre in search for support; with national and international organisations within and outside the framework of trade unionism; with other social movements; or with women's and feminist movements. These cooperations and alliances are not limited to the search for resources for women's/gender bodies, but are part of the strengthening of struggles for gender justice at national and international level. While relevant in all sub-regions, this strategy is particularly welcomed by women leaders in some of the Southern Cone centres.

Quest for unity

The quest to build unity among women trade unionists is a strategy highly valued by women leaders. Its aims are to strengthen women's ability to confront the obstacles they face and to enhance the possibilities of advancing their proposals. It is a complex process that involves respecting the differences between women and seeking to define common interests. It means opting for a dynamic of political coexistence that is different from the bitter dispute over positions that usually takes place within the centres.

Other strategies, experiences and initiatives

- Visibilisation of women workers' struggles through the commemoration of key dates in the calendar, such as 8 March and 25 November. Other dates are incorporated in a variable way depending on the centres.
- Dissemination of protest movements and actions for women's and women workers' rights promoted at all levels (trade union, feminist, social movements, other civil society actors, etc.) and support for ongoing initiatives.
- Communication strategy: use of social networks and own and external media for visibility, dissemination and debate of issues and struggles; participation in debates outside the centres.
- Encouraging the participation of women trade unionists as negotiators; inclusion and expansion of demands in favour of women and gender equality in collective bargaining and social dialogue.
- Awareness-raising and dissemination campaigns on different issues (unionisation, violence against women, ILO Conventions, among others).
- Individual strategies to gain space and visibility within trade unionism, regardless of holding office.⁴⁵

The strategies, experiences and initiatives presented are implemented in a framework of great diversity and disparity of conditions according to the centres. In Central America, for example, the researchers observed a general picture of fragility, including one centre that reported not having any initiatives, another in which the work stalled with the pandemic and had not been resumed at the time of the research, and two that reported not having the resources to promote programmes. In some federations, women leaders have political and material support to carry out actions, but in general the backing of the executive committees is weak. According to the researchers, the results achieved so far from the strategies, experiences and initiatives carried out are limited: participation of women in trade union actions and in the executive committees continues to be low, most of the centres do not have resolutions on quota or parity or a platform for women trade unionists' demands, and the majority of the centres do not have a platform for women trade unionists' demands.

The researchers from the Andean countries observed that, despite the work carried out by the women's/gender bodies, it seems that out of the actions they propose leaders are prepared most to accept the commemoration of the dates in the women's calendar: "when women propose to go beyond these commemorations, men's discomfort is evident".

In the Southern Cone, women trade unionists managed to overcome some of the obstacles that limit their participation in trade union life and to achieve a significant presence and performance in the trade union centres, but this is not a homogeneous situation in all countries or in all centres.

The researchers pointed to the favourable socio-political context of the last decade, in which in several countries sexual and reproductive rights were discussed and won, public policies on care were incorporated, and the expansion and visibility of the feminist movement could be verified.⁴⁶ Another favourable factor is the degree of organisation and influence achieved by women trade unionists, which in several cases is the result of a long history of participation and the construction of strategies to expand the space of women in trade unionism. The researchers consider that it is possible to take an optimistic view of the sub-region, while the women leaders recognise that they accomplished many achievements, but at the same time they are aware that they need to continue fighting to expand and consolidate them. In comparative terms, it is the sub-region where most successes are observed both in the implementation of the strategies and initiatives proposed by the women's/gender bodies and in the level of consolidation of the experiences carried out.

In Mexico, the research team found that women trade unionists gained significant support from some men in leadership positions to implement the proposed initiatives.

⁴⁵ Women trade unionists from the Andean countries highlight women's flexibility, adaptability and responsiveness as an advantage over men.

⁴⁶ However, there were setbacks such as in Brazil, where a national government hostile to feminist demands and gender equality, LGBTQI+ rights and racial equality took office in 2018.

3

INCORPORATION OF A GENDER JUSTICE PERSPECTIVE IN TRADE UNION ACTION

3.1 NARRATIVES AND DEMANDS IN THE PLATFORMS OF TRADE UNION CENTRES

3.1.1 Resolutions regarding issues on the gender justice agenda and women's demands

In the questionnaires to the women's/gender bodies, the resolutions of the centres regarding issues on the gender justice agenda and women's demands were surveyed.⁴⁷ These resolutions are presented below, following the subjects that were proposed in the questionnaire. It is worth noting that 7% of the centres reported that they did not adopt any resolutions on gender justice issues.⁴⁸

Violence against women (harassment at work and in the trade union, domestic violence, etc.)

This is the issue that has been taken up most by the centres: 86%. Labour and trade union harassment was already included in the resolutions, but gained prominence in the last period thanks to ILO Convention 190 (ratified to date by Argentina, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay). With regard to gender-based violence in the trade union environment, in the Southern Cone five of the 11 centres analysed approved internal protocols to deal with these situations: the three centres of Argentina, the CUT in Brazil and the PIT-CNT in Uruguay. The CUT in Chile is in the process of discussion. In Argentina, the CTAT protocol includes the discrimination of LGBTIQ+ people. Uruguay's PIT-CNT protocol, which was approved as early as 2010, addresses situations of gender-based violence at home and in trade union life and was recently reformulated to incorporate issues related to digital violence. In Central America, the protocol is currently under discussion at the CTRP in Panama.

Equal pay for work of equal value

This is a traditional demand on the women's agenda, and the women trade unionists managed to transform it into a resolution in 83% of the centres. The wage gap between

men and women persists, as we saw in the initial chapter, which is why the demand is still relevant and topical, even though we do not know of many concrete achievements in reducing the gap.

Maternity protection and measures against discrimination against women on the grounds of maternity. Shared family responsibilities; right to childcare and nurseries

Maternity protection and measures against discrimination against women on the grounds of maternity have been incorporated as resolutions by 69% of the centres, and shared family responsibilities/right to childcare and kindergartens by 55%. Demands linked to maternity, paternity and care are those that predominate in the demands and collective agreements in Latin American countries (Abramo and Rangel, 2005). One of the centres' main references with regard to the issue of shared family responsibilities is ILO Convention 156 on workers with family responsibilities (1981).

Advocacy for public policies aimed at gender equality in society

Beyond being a resolution that has been incorporated by 76% of the centres, their involvement in the struggle for public policies aimed at gender equality varies according to the centres, the countries and the issues. There is a long list of issues such as those specifically on the labour agenda (minimum wage, equal opportunities, vocational training and others) or in other areas (violence against women, care policies, sexual and reproductive rights and others). In general, these struggles are carried out together with other social actors, such as civil society organisations and social movements, above all the women's and feminist movements.

Combating racism and ethnic and racial discrimination

The issue was taken up by 59% of the centres. The fight against racism is gaining prominence in countries where it is one of the structural core factors of social inequality. At the same time, the growth of migration within Latin America in recent years has led to an increase in discriminatory situations against migrant workers. Some centres created a body in the executive committee (secretariat, department or other, depending on the denomination adopted) dedicated to the fight against racism and/or the issue of migration.

⁴⁷ This question enabled multiple responses.

⁴⁸ No data could be obtained for 3% of the federations.

Women workers' access to vocational training

This issue was taken up by 59% of the centres. What needs to be investigated is how the centres are working to broaden this access beyond training activities.

Defending LGBTIQ+ and sexually diverse workers and action against discrimination based on sexual orientation

The issue has been incorporated into the resolutions of less than half (45%) of the centres. Argentina's CTA T includes such discrimination in the protocol for addressing gender-based violence in the trade union environment, while Brazil's CUT and Venezuela's ASI produced educational manuals on sexual diversity to encourage the addressing of discriminatory work situations and the inclusion of demands in collective bargaining.

Right to abortion

The defence of the decriminalisation of abortion has been supported by only 24% of the trade union centres. These are the CTA A and CTA T in Argentina, the CUT in Brazil, the PIT-CNT in Uruguay and the CNUS in the Dominican Republic.

Other resolutions incorporated by the centres⁴⁹

- Defending the rights of waged domestic workers.

The issue is widespread among the centres. In several countries, domestic workers' organisations are affiliated to or supported by a trade union centre. In much of the region, the ILO Convention 189 on Domestic Workers (2011) is the main reference for trade union centres.

- Defending the rights of rural women workers and family farmers

In general, centres with affiliated rural workers' organisations adopted resolutions that refer specifically to the rights of rural women workers.

- Commemoration of key dates in the Women's Calendar

8 March (International Women's Day) and 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) are incorporated by the centres. Some centres also include other dates.

- Mainstreaming gender-inclusive language

In some centres, the incorporation of gender-inclusive language has been verified in their official documents, such as statutes and resolutions.

- Campaigning on gender agenda issues

In some cases, campaigns proposed and promoted by women's/gender bodies became resolutions of the centres.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Refers to resolutions that were not included in the options of the questionnaire and that were retrieved from the interviews and from the documents of the federation offices.

⁵⁰ Examples are the campaigns of ASI in Venezuela entitled "Mujer,

3.1.2 Core elements of the gender narrative

Generally speaking, the centres defend gender equality, women's rights and the demands of women workers and take a stand against discrimination. Few of them do not have any corresponding resolution or principle. However, there is a disparity regarding the level of incorporation of these issues, which can be perceived, among other indicators, by the number of resolutions passed, by the number of issues that were transformed into resolutions and by the very formulation of these resolutions (whether their argument and justification are more elaborate or more succinct). There are still very outdated narratives in some centres. There are leaders - and also women leaders - who consider measures such as the quota/parity and even the setting up of women's/gender bodies to be unnecessary because in their view men and women act as equals under the guarantees of the existing national legislation. Another argument referred to the hierarchy between the main contradiction (class) and the secondary contradiction (gender), whereby the inclusion of the gender perspective and the differentiated treatment of men and women through the aforementioned measures would contribute to dividing the trade union movement and distancing it from its higher goal, class equality, which would solve all other oppressions.

The conflict of visions, perspectives and narratives on gender justice is present in all centres, but with many nuances depending on the context of each centre. It is influenced by several factors, including the more open or more conservative characteristics of the societies where the centres are established; the history and constitution of each centre (some have a more progressive background, while others go back to more traditional trade union roots); the level of organisation of women trade unionists and their capacity to lobby for and bring about change in the centre; the openness of male trade unionists to the demands and pressures of women trade unionists and their capacity to lobby for and bring about change in the centre; the openness of men trade unionists to the demands and pressures of women trade unionists and their capacity to lobby for and bring about change in the centre; and the gendered nature of women trade unionists' demands and pressures; the openness of men trade unionists to the demands and pressures of organised women; the influence of external social actors such as women's and feminist movements and other social movements and civil society initiatives; the influence of international trade union organisations such as the TUCA and ITUC, bodies such as the ILO and organisations allied to trade unionism such as the FES and others. Leaders of some centres noted that international pressure plays an important role in mainstreaming the gender justice narrative and issues.

organizate, sindicalizate y affiliate para conquistar trabajo decente" (Women, organise, unionise and join to win decent work) and the CUT in Brazil entitled "Igualdade de oportunidade na vida, no trabalho e no movimento sindical" (Equal opportunities in life, at work and in the trade union movement).

3.1.3 Gender mainstreaming in the approach and implementation of resolutions

Mainstreaming the gender perspective throughout trade union policy is necessary because gender inequalities are a structuring factor in social organisation and permeate all its areas. It means incorporating this perspective into the analysis of socio-political contexts and the world of work, as well as into the definition of trade union policy strategies, in order to achieve more effective results in overcoming inequalities. Moreover, as stressed by women leaders from the Caribbean, mainstreaming is necessary because the factors that keep women away from trade union participation are present in all day-to-day activities of the trade union movement. The entire trade union structure should be committed to the implementation of the policy of gender equality and justice. However, this is not the case. In all sub-regions, this policy is treated as the exclusive responsibility of women and women's/gender bodies: "almost as an individual responsibility", summarised a woman leader from the Southern Cone.

There are experiences of mainstreaming, but most of them are specific and tend to take place in a particular area, such as, for example, the bodies that deal with trade union training. According to the women leaders interviewed the debate on ILO Convention 190 had a cross-cutting impact in some of the Southern Cone centres. In Mexico, the issue of labour violence favours some progress, according to the research team:

"There are no elements to fully identify the mainstreaming, but there is a sense from the interviews that it is being traced from the issue of violence and harassment at work".

Male trade unionists have little or no interest in the gender agenda. A woman leader from the Southern Cone demonstrated this through a recent experience in her trade union centre:

Two days ago we held a very basic workshop to try to open up the discussion about what work and care implies in the centre as a whole, to take it out of the gender secretariat, to see if the comrades also begin to understand this as a working class problem, not a problem of women workers. Seventy people participated in the workshop and there were four men, although we invited everyone. That's the situation we are in.

Men predominate on executive committees and hold the most senior political positions in the vast majority of trade union centres. Their non-commitment has a decisive impact on the possibilities of mainstreaming a gender perspective in trade union policy.

3.1.4 Intersectionality in the approach and implementation of resolutions

According to the Mexican research team:

Class, gender, ethnicity, race, age, sexual diversity, etc. are all elements of a complex crossroads, especially in a country like ours, with so many cultures, languages, ethnicities, etc. This is what our centres face, a cultural, labour and trade union diversity that ranges from the south to the north, with their own customs, habits and beliefs. Their value systems change by region and by area.

Intersectionality implies recognising that the working class is heterogeneous and that various forms of exclusion and discrimination occur simultaneously in the situations experienced by men and women workers. The vast majority of women leaders of women/gender bodies understand that the intersection between class and gender is essential for looking at the labour market and defining trade union strategies. Race and ethnicity are more integrated into the labour debate in centre, which are located in societies where these are structural factors of inequality. The intersection between labour exploitation and sexual diversity is less of a reference. The intersection with the generational issue is more fluid in centres with youth organisations. In general, and with a few exceptions, there does not yet seem to exist a systematic approach to issues from an intersectional perspective.

3.1.5 Implementation of resolutions. Coherence between discourse and practice

It is becoming increasingly difficult to deny legitimacy to the denunciation of gender inequalities and the struggle to overcome them, but the transposition of this acceptance and recognition into trade union practice, not only for women, but also for men and the entire trade union structure, is far from being a reality. This is shown by the responses of the women's/gender bodies to the questionnaire's question on how they assess the incorporation and implementation of the resolutions on gender equality and women's participation at the centre (Figure 3).⁵¹

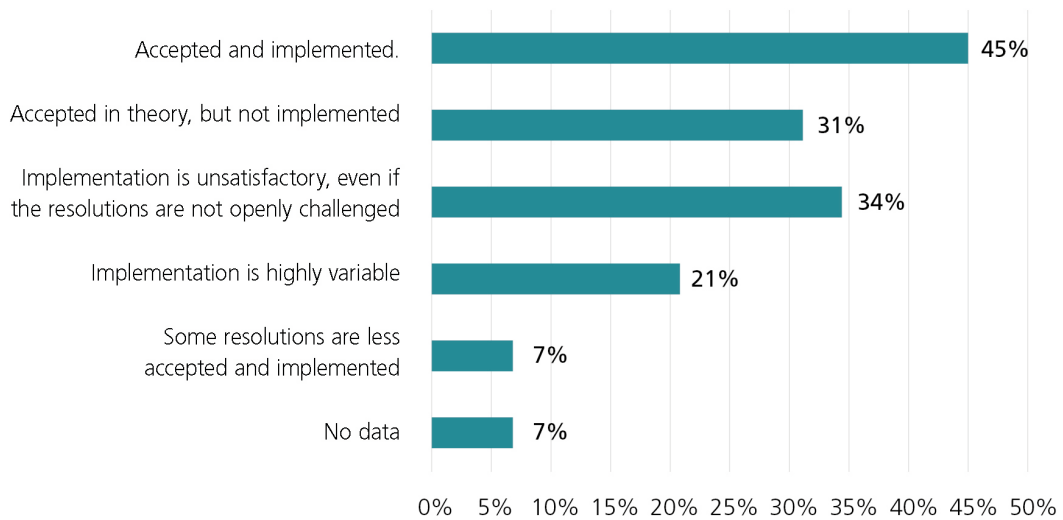
Less than half of the bodies (45%) considered that there is acceptance and implementation, 34% indicated that implementation is unsatisfactory, although the resolutions are not openly questioned, and for 31% there is theoretical acceptance but they are not implemented. For 21%, incorporation is very variable, and 7% indicated that some resolutions are less accepted and implemented than others. There is definitely a problem of implementation of the resolutions.

In Central America, the findings revealed that the centres lack strategies, agendas or plans to promote gender equality,

⁵¹ This question enabled multiple responses.

Figure 3

Evaluation of mainstreaming and implementation of resolutions on gender equality and women's participation in the centre and its trade unions



Source: own elaboration based on the survey questionnaire to the women's/gender bodies.

and generally act spontaneously rather than through permanent processes. In the Andean countries, the researchers highlighted the difficulties in implementing gender resolutions in some centres. According to one woman leader from the Caribbean, "many of our male colleagues, even though they say they accept the gender policy of the centres, this is not the case, they do not accept the gender policy in its entirety, they accept what the papers say, but in practice this is not the case". In the Southern Cone, despite the differences between the trade union centres, the trade unionists identify that the trade union discourse related to gender justice has become "politically correct", which does not necessarily translate into actions by the structures as a whole that cause a substantial impact on the issues that the trade unionists have been formulating. In one of the centres of the sub-region, the older women trade unionists maintain that the issue of women is taken into account in activities, negotiations, delegations and political discussions - "not in the way we would like perhaps, but it is raised" - while the younger ones define as "hypocrisy" the difference between discourse and practice, which results in formal advances that do not guarantee women's equal participation or effective political influence. In Mexico, the research team observed in their interviews that "there is still a long way to go between discourse and practice".

3.2 EXPERIENCES REGARDING THE COORDINATION OF TRADE UNION CENTRES WITH ORGANISATIONS OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

During the 21st century so far, women's and feminist movements in Latin America and the Caribbean have become highly visible and turned into social actors with a great capacity for mobilisation and political advocacy. This phenomenon is more powerful in some countries than in others, but it is reproduced throughout the region. There are an enormous number and diversity of women's groups and organisations and the feminist perspective is spreading throughout the social fabric.

The research sought to identify the extent to which trade union centres in the region coordinate with feminist organisations, what experiences exist and what potential there is for the construction of interactions between trade unionism and feminism.⁵² When asked in the questionnaire to the women's/gender bodies whether the centre participates in joint actions with women's and feminist movements, a surprising 76% answered yes and only 10% said no. In 7% of the cases, women trade unionists participate individually, without the support of the centre, while for another 7% no data were available. When asked about the level of acceptance of feminism within the centre,⁵³ just over half (52%) of the respondents answered that it is accepted, while 24% indicated that some trade unionists accept it, but the majority do not, and the same percentage indicated that the prejudiced view of feminism also comes from some trade unionists. However, the positive data should be taken with caution. According to the questionnaire, only 21% of the trade union centres are slowly adopting the view of feminism as a legitimate trend in the defence of women's rights and gender equality. Moreover, as will be seen below, joint actions between the centres and the women's and feminist movements in most of the centres are ad hoc, in several organisations they do not have the support or commitment of the executive committees, and the interviews revealed numerous expressions of resistance to the feminist movement.

⁵² The rapprochement between some federations and feminist movements in the contemporary period predates the current feminist wave. The experiences of the Dominican Republic's federations, the CUT in Brazil and the PIT-CNT in Uruguay date back to the 1980s. In the first two cases, feminist activists and academics collaborated with trade unionists and contributed to strengthening them within the trade union movement. As a female leader from the Dominican Republic says: "... Let's say that before, one considered oneself an undeclared worker, but the awareness of my role as a working woman began to grow when we started to get support from the feminist movement". This is also true for the women trade unionists of the CUT in Brazil. A pioneer of women's organisation in the PIT-CNT vindicates the body then created "as a process and a space that sowed the seeds of the possibility of feminist trade unionism" (profile by Moriana Hernández Valentini, edited by Ana Paula García Erramuspe for this research). The CTA of Argentina was founded in 1992 with the participation of activists from the feminist movement, after which an organic coordination developed that was maintained when the federation split into CTAA and CTA T (2011). The trade unionists from Mexico who joined together to found the UNT (1997) report coming from feminist experiences acquired in seminars and from their closeness to feminist academics.

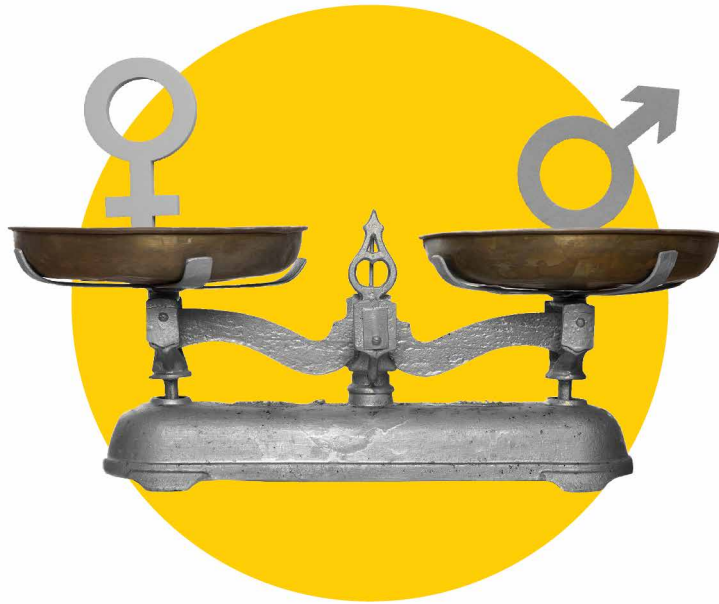
⁵³ This question enabled multiple responses.

In almost all Central American countries, the centres coincided at some point in specific activities with feminist organisations through the women's/gender bodies, but there is no evidence of political and strategic alliances assumed by the centres. Those interviewed from different centres mentioned as reasons for this the lack of time and interest due to excess of internal work in the centre, the weakness of organisational work with women, the discordance in relation to issues such as the right to abortion, the dispersion of the feminist movement and its refusal to work with trade unions. In the interviews some male leaders expressed their disagreement with the women's movement for attacking their religious beliefs and those of their confederations. In some countries, such as Nicaragua, relations are very polarised. Researchers concluded that in the sub-region there is a distance between the two movements: the trade union movement considers feminists to be very radical and the feminist movement considers trade unionism to be highly patriarchal and incapable of solving women's problems.

In the same way, most of the Andean country federations establish some form of relationship with women's and feminist movements, but not as an explicit positioning and support of the executive committees. The exception appears to be the Venezuelan ASI, which develops a strategic area of work with feminist collectives and women's movements (except on the issue of abortion rights, which it does not share), within the framework of what it calls trade union citizenship or service trade unionism. According to the researchers, the centres are under pressure from trade unionists identified with feminism and from feminist movements and women's social movements, which highlights their shortcomings in the struggle for women's rights, while at the same time supporting those who try to incorporate this perspective in the centres. In the centres there is resistance against the feminist movement, also from some woman trade unionists. The reasons mentioned were: discrepancies in the understanding of the role of each movement in social transformation, prejudices against feminism, the radical nature of the feminist movement, its bourgeois character which does not consider class issues and the interests of working women, because it provokes disputes and division between men and women, because it is about "foreign ideas". In one of the centres, tension can be found between younger trade unionists who tend to be closer to feminism and the older women leaders in charge of women's activities.

Furthermore, in the Caribbean, the links between the centres and the organisations of the women's and feminist movement are generally sporadic, with the exception of the CNUS in the Dominican Republic, where a more developed and systematic relationship has been established, including the centre's participation in the struggle for the decriminalisation of abortion in the country.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, there is a certain distance between the two movements, as expressed by one leader:

⁵⁴ Abortion is prohibited in all circumstances, and there is a struggle for decriminalisation in cases of danger to the woman's life, pregnancy due to rape or incest, and foetal non-viability.



“We connect, we show solidarity, but the feminists here have not yet taken on the discourse of defending women’s labour rights.”

The Southern Cone is the sub-region with the most consolidated levels of articulation between the centres and the feminist movements, especially in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, without ignoring the disparities between the centres.

In Argentina, this alliance expanded in the last decade, during which the feminist struggle, whose significant presence led to repercussions throughout the region. Its frameworks are the massive protests carried out under the slogan “Ni una Menos” (Not one woman less) (2015) against feminicides and structural inequality suffered by women, and the First International Women’s Strike (2016), under the slogan “If our lives are worthless, produce without us”, carried out against the neoliberal national government (2015-2019) and which had women trade unionists as its main protagonists. In Brazil, there is a disparity between the two federations under consideration. While the CUT has been actively involved in joint actions with feminist movements since the mid-1980s, the trade unionists of the UGT participated individually, because, according to their leaders, although the majority of the centre accepts without resistance the struggles for equal rights and against violence against women, they understand that some demands are contrary to family and religious values.

In Paraguay, feminist demands are highly visible in almost all areas of society, including in the trade union movement, which generally supports gender equality and the struggle for women’s rights, but resists issues such as abortion rights and sexual diversity.

In Uruguay, the women trade unionists of the PIT-CNT were among the founders of the Intersocial Feminista (ISF),

a broad alliance of organisations and movements involved in the feminist struggle and a point of reference for the PIT-CNT within the feminist movement. According to its leaders, relations between the two movements are marked by tensions and divergences between men and women and between women of different generations over the understanding of the social role of each, their forms of organisation and functioning, the possibilities of combining their practices and the hierarchy between trade unionism and feminism and, ultimately, between the categories of class and gender.

In Mexico, the cooperation between the two movements mainly revolves around struggles against gender-based violence, especially in the workplace. One of the trade unionists interviewed spoke of the mobilisations against sexual violence at UNAM, where the student, trade union and feminist movements worked together. In addition, the UNT participates in national and international forums, networks and coalitions on issues on the gender agenda on the basis of the international agreements ratified by Mexico.

In all sub-regions, joint actions between the two movements include seminars, debates, training workshops, marches, commemorations of 8 March and 25 November, meetings of women in general and of women workers, advocacy to win public policies over, among others. Among the issues on which there are interactions, the most frequently mentioned were violence against women, feminism, feminist economics, care, women’s rights in general and those of specific groups (peasant women, indigenous women, domestic workers, women of African descent) and public policies. There are specific issues according to sub-regional and national realities. The most controversial demand is the right to abortion. In Central America, it is an issue that alienates the centres from feminist organisations. In the Andean sub-region, it is little

or not at all discussed.⁵⁵ In the Caribbean, only the CNUS of the Dominican Republic is involved in the struggle for the decriminalisation of abortion. In the Southern Cone, in Argentina, the CTAA and CTAT took a position in favour of the demand that culminated in the enactment of the Law on Access to the Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy (2020), while the CGT did not express formal support, so its trade unionists participated in the campaign on a personal level. In Brazil, the CUT supported the decriminalisation of abortion since its 1991 congress; it is a member of the National Front Against the Criminalisation of Women and for the Decriminalisation of Abortion, created by feminist organisations (2008), while the UGT does not address the issue. In Chile, trade unionists supported the demand that resulted in Law 21.030 (2017), which regulates the decriminalisation of the voluntary interruption of pregnancy on three grounds, but the CUT stopped short of taking a formal position. In Paraguay, according to the women leaders, the demand for the right to abortion is not accepted even by many women. In Uruguay, the PIT-CNT supported the struggle for the decriminalisation of abortion that resulted in the Law on the Voluntary Termination of Pregnancy (2012).

3.3 INFLUENCE OF ANTI-RIGHTS GROUPS AND ORGANISATIONS ON TRADE UNIONISM

In Latin America and the Caribbean, recent decades have seen a strong growth of conservative and fundamentalist currents, mostly linked to the Evangelical Pentecostal churches and the Catholic Church, as well as other social sectors, which contest cultural and legislative advances in terms of gender roles and sexuality and enter politics to put into practice a conservative and retrograde project of society. This is not a localised phenomenon, but a broader strategy, whereby “transnational alliances and coalitions were created with ultra-conservative religious ideology, and with a strong desire for direct influence in politics” (Morán and Peñas, 2020, p. 224, quoted in the Mexico Report). These currents oppose women’s rights from a feminist perspective, sexual diversity, equal marriage, sexual and reproductive rights, in particular abortion rights, sex education in schools, depathologisation of transgender identities and rights for transgender people. They combat what they call “gender ideology”, allegedly aimed at destroying the Christian family and discriminating against the heterosexual population. Due to their power strategy, they managed to achieve a strong presence in the governmental politics of some countries, such as Honduras,⁵⁶

⁵⁵ In Colombia, trade unionists were personally involved in the struggle for abortion rights, which resulted in the Constitutional Court’s decision to decriminalise abortion up to 24 weeks of pregnancy (2022). In Ecuador, the Frente Unitario de Trabajadores (FUT), which brings together the country’s trade union centres, supported the struggle to extend the decriminalisation of abortion in cases of rape, which was approved by the Constitutional Court (2021) after strong feminist mobilisations.

⁵⁶ In November 2021 in Honduras a left-leaning woman was elected president, raising expectations of changes for the better in policies towards women.

El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, where governments implemented harsh policies against women’s rights, and in Brazil, where a far-right president was elected (2018) with the support of these groups. On the other hand, in other countries, such as Argentina and Uruguay, although these groups are present and active, they have so far not succeeded in preventing advances in women’s and sexual diversity rights or in rolling back existing achievements.

The research sought to find out whether these groups and currents have influence on the centres and cause a negative impact on women’s participation and the incorporation of a gender justice perspective in trade union action.

According to the researchers on Central America, the structural factors of inequality and violence that characterise the sub-region contribute to the success of such groups. The region has high rates of violence against women, and the traditional image of women as the pillar of the family and men as the head of the household prevails in society, albeit to varying degrees and with different nuances. Generally speaking, despite of the centres’ declarations that there are no anti-rights practices, the researchers found that, when addressing issues such as the rights of LGBTIQ+ groups, the male leaders in particular were explicit in saying that this is one of the issues that the unions need to analyse more closely and that not all their members view it “favourably”.⁵⁷ They believe that in the long run the difficulties of participation of women, young people and LGBTIQ+ people in the centres are largely due to the anti-rights thinking and practice of, for example, pro-life groups,⁵⁸ which are an expression of the Catholic Church and the various strands of evangelical cults or sects. Their messages and practices are not controlled in any way, as they are taken up by the states and rulers themselves as part of their discourse and forms of government.

In the Andean countries, the researchers found that there is no pressure from anti-rights groups within the centres. However, in some countries the general context of very conservative societies, with a strong influence of the Catholic Church and Evangelical churches, makes it difficult to debate issues such as abortion, the role of the family and women, and LGBTIQ+ rights.

In the Caribbean, the leaders of one of the centres considered in the interviews that there are manifestations of anti-rights thinking and practices related to women and gender equality, LGBTIQ+ people, as well as discrimination against Afro-descendants and indigenous populations. They are expressed through prejudicial comments, judgements, dismissive attitudes, as well as criticism of those who promote these issues. In some cases, this has an impact on resolutions and practices concerning women and their organisation, and setbacks are observed. This centre seeks

⁵⁷ Costa Rica is the only country in the sub-region that allows same-sex marriages.

⁵⁸ *Provida* is used to refer to those who defend the right to life from the moment of fertilisation and oppose the legalisation of voluntary terminations of pregnancy under any circumstances.

to counteract such expressions through awareness-raising meetings with leaders, but reported that it does not have the capacity to monitor this on an ongoing basis. Another centre raised the point that although there are no anti-rights practices, the machista culture promotes a traditional way of thinking that reinforces conventional gender roles, which can create scenarios and discussions that indirectly reject the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people.

As mentioned before, in the Southern Cone the reactionary forces achieved their most important political success in Brazil. However, the Brazilian leaders declared that there is no evidence of the presence of anti-rights groups or movements in the centres, but rather resistance to the backward movements in society, although in one of the centres there is a rejection of demands that confront religious values. In Argentine trade unionism, there are some personal positions based on conservative discourse on issues such as abortion rights. The CTAA leader interviewed describes how this was expressed in the campaign for legal abortion:

The abortion issue was also quite controversial, especially in some provinces. We took a decision as a centre and from there we took a stand, but that doesn't mean that all our centre as a whole was in favour of it. There were men and women comrades who were not, but not as an anti-rights movement.

Meanwhile, the leader of the CTAT's women's/gender body pointed out that the emergence of anti-democratic expressions in society internally generated more solidarity and empathy with feminist causes. In Uruguay, trade unionists do not observe expressions of such groups within trade unionism. On the contrary, they argue that the trade union movement has gradually incorporated the feminist agenda and the struggle for diversity, in the understanding that these are popular causes that any social movement should support. The PIT-CNT supported the Comprehensive Law for Transgender People (2018).⁵⁹ The persistence of a certain homophobic or transphobic discourse in male spheres, especially in the form of jokes, is seen by women leaders as a cultural practice that needs to be deconstructed.

The women's/gender body of the PIT-CNT is called the Secretariat for Gender, Equity and Diversity, which indicates that the issue of sexual diversity is taken up at a structural level. In Paraguay, according to the research team, it can be interpreted that some ideas and approaches that are characteristic of anti-rights groups are present in the imaginary.

In Mexico, the research team noted that conservative and neo-conservative thinking permeates the whole of society, obviously including trade unions. There is no formal evidence of their influence on the centres that were analysed, but based on the interviews it was possible to observe the ways of relating, living together and conceptualising women and

the idea of feminine in order to maintain the dominant sex-gender system. However, according to the team, the interviewees were in favour of equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people at work, such as maternity leave, hiring, wages and other benefits.

⁵⁹ The law establishes policies to guarantee the human rights of transgender people and reduce their structural discrimination.

4

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The overview of the trade union centres' situation in terms of women's participation and the incorporation of a gender justice perspective in trade union action drawn up by the research is not exhaustive, but by including 43 centres, generally the most representative ones, from 19 countries, it can be considered representative of regional trade unionism. As noted at the outset, progress and deficits were found. Progress needs to be consolidated, while the deficits will have to be overcome. Disparities between the sub-regions were also noted, as well as common situations with differences in degree. This heterogeneous panorama needs to be problematised in order to design strategies aimed at advancing a process of trade union transformation that will duly integrate women workers and accelerate the path towards gender justice.

What is most important is the need to include an analysis of women's insertion in the world of work and the intersections between class exploitation and gender inequalities as one of the basic references for the definition of trade union policy in general.

It is therefore essential to collect systematised data on women's union membership and participation in order to make the women represented visible and to compose their profile, just as it is important to identify who and where the non-unionised women workers are in order to try to bring them closer to union life. There is a clear lack of information in regional trade unionism on these aspects.

There is a strong gap in participation between men and women in decision-making spheres. Although there have been important improvements in the last two decades, which were driven by quota and parity policies, parity experiences are still very rare. However, the inadequacies in the implementation of these measures and the asymmetry in the occupation of positions have adverse effects on their positive impacts.

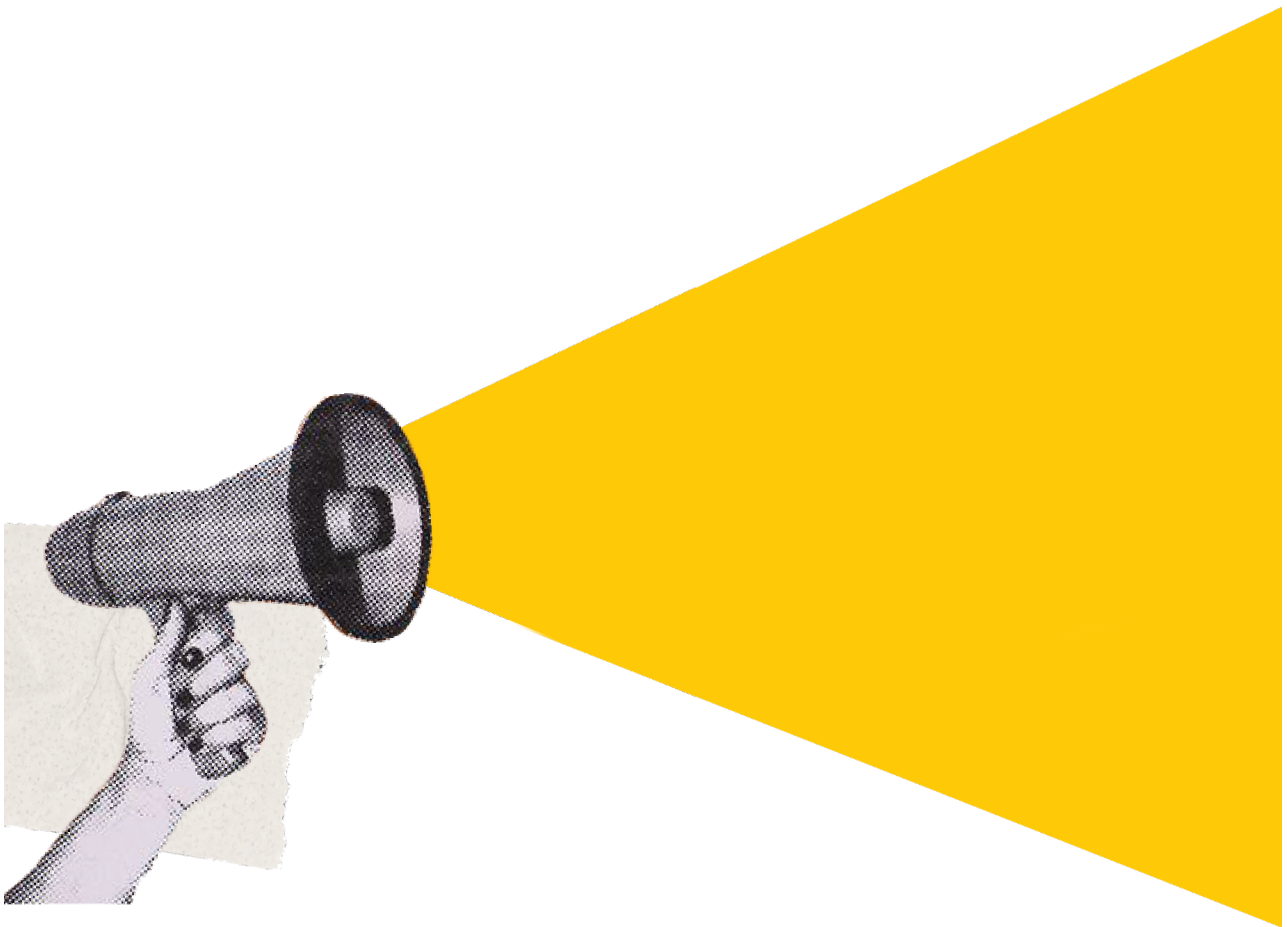
The existence of women's/gender bodies within the executive committee, in most federations as statutory bodies, is a powerful result of the organisation and demands of women trade unionists. But existing weaknesses limit their political potential and impact. One of the most serious deficits is the lack of trade union leave for the women leaders in charge, which extends to more than half of the trade union bodies.

Gender equality policy is also understood to be the responsibility of these bodies alone, in short, of women alone, and the incorporation of the gender justice perspective as a cross-cutting issue in all areas of trade union policy is weak, almost absent. Many centres include resolutions on women workers' rights and gender equality in their resolutions and platforms, which is a step forward. However, they are not satisfactorily implemented or taken up by the centre as a whole, so there is a gap between discourse and practice.

The double working day for women is the main obstacle to their trade union participation. Then there are the obstacles arising from the structure, functioning and power relations in the centres, as well as the subtle or explicit practices of marginalising women leaders from decision-making. Male trade unionists' approach to the obstacles to women's participation points to a lack of responsibility for trade unionism as such: overcoming the sexual division of labour seems to depend only on the will of women, overcoming internal practices unfriendly to women is not a priority, and women leaders are often treated as if they were out of place. This makes it difficult to build a women-friendly union environment and exacerbates tensions in gender relations.

Women's/gender bodies are developing multiple strategies, experiences and initiatives to tackle these obstacles, and their leaders report positive results within their possibilities for action. However, the weaknesses observed compromise the implementation, continuity and sustainability of the actions, which in many cases end up being individual, not guided by a structured and long-term action plan. Without external national and international support, it would be almost impossible for some bodies to carry out activities in a sustainable manner.

The kind of coordination between the centres and feminist organisations highlights the strong tensions between the two movements. At the same time, a convergence of trade unionism and feminism is developing through women's/gender bodies and individual trade unionists. Centres with more dynamic experiences of such alliances see the recognition of other social actors grow and gain more legitimacy. Those that resist are seen as backward-looking for rejecting a social actor that is gaining increasing visibility and political relevance and an agenda that also affects women workers.



The anti-rights currents are not active in the centres as organised groups fighting for power to define trade union policy, which is very positive. However, in many centres a conservative mindset can be found that is derived from the conservative nature of the societies in which they operate and which influences the acceptance of the women's and sexual diversity rights agenda.

Women are undoubtedly the engine of progress. Women trade unionists are the mainstay of the gender policy that is possible in the centres under the existing conditions. They do not give up in the face of obstacles. They are guided by the strategy of insisting in order to have more and more influence, which was formulated by a woman leader from the Southern Cone and which applies to all women leaders in the region. They demand the commitment of male trade unionists to gender policy, which has so far been a serious deficit in general terms.

The progress made cannot be considered a point of arrival, first of all, because it is not consolidated. In the research questionnaire, 31% of the women's/gender bodies indicated that the fact that a centre does not have a consolidated gender policy discourages women's participation. Secondly, because the progress made starts from a very precarious situation in most centres. There are

many deficits, and some of them are very basic. The conclusion is that there is still a long way to go before trade union policy oriented towards a gender justice perspective acquires the relevance it needs to have. The strong disparity between the contexts and experiences of the sub-regions and the centres points to the convenience of devising specific strategies to overcome the deficits that take into account sub-regional and national particularities. But the commonalities, even if they have differentiated levels of development, suggest the need for regional level strategies that each centre can adapt to its own reality.

The research was carried out with the aim of constituting a tool for trade union work. This will be achieved when the trade union centres and the TUCA appropriate it as a contribution to the design of strategies that lead to the effective transformation of Latin American and Caribbean trade unionism into a space of equality.

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ANNEXES

ANNEXE 1

Trade union centres selected for research

Table A1
Centres analysed

CENTRAL AMERICA	
Costa Rica	Central del Movimiento de Trabajadores Costarricenses (CMTC) Central Social Juanito Mora Porras (CSJMP-ANEP) Confederación de Trabajadores Rerum Novarum (CTRN)
El Salvador	Central Autónoma de Trabajadores Salvadoreños (CATS) Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras de El Salvador (CSTS)
Guatemala	Confederación Central General de Trabajadores de Guatemala (CGTG) Confederación de Unidad Sindical de Guatemala (CUSG) Unión Sindical de Trabajadores de Guatemala (UNSI TRAGUA)
Honduras	Confederación Unitaria de Trabajadores de Honduras (CUTH)
Nicaragua	Central Sandinista de Trabajadores (CST) Central de Trabajadores de Nicaragua (CTN) Confederación de Unificación Sindical (CUS) Frente Nacional de los Trabajadores (FNT)
Panamá	Confederación Nacional de Unidad Sindical Independiente (CONUSI) Confederación de Trabajadores de la República de Panamá (CTRP) Convergencia Sindical (CS)
ANDEAN COUNTRIES	
Bolivia	Central Obrera Boliviana (COB)
Colombia	Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT) Confederación de Trabajadores de Colombia (CTC)
Ecuador	Confederación Ecuatoriana de Organizaciones Clasistas Unitarias de Trabajadores (CEDOCUT)
Peru	Central Autónoma de Trabajadores del Perú (CATP) Central Unitaria de Trabajadores del Perú (CUT) Confederación General de Trabajadores del Perú (CGTP)
Venezuela	Central de Trabajadores/as (Alianza Sindical Independiente [ASII]) Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (CTV)
CARIBBEAN	
Haiti	Confédération des Travailleurs Haïtiens (CTH) Confédération des Travailleurs et Travailleuses des Secteurs Public et Privé (CTSP)
Dominican Republic	Confederación Autónoma Sindical Clasista (CASC) Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores Dominicanos (CNTD) Confederación de Unidad Sindical (CNUS)

SOUTHERN CONE	
Argentina	Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina (CTA Autónoma) Central de Trabajadores de Argentina (CTAT) Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT)
Brazil	Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) União Geral dos Trabalhadores (UGT)
Chile	Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT)
Paraguay	Central Nacional de Trabajadores (CNT) Central Sindical de Trabajadores (CESITP) Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT) Central Unitaria de Trabajadores Auténtica (CUT A)
Uruguay	Plenario Intersindical de Trabajadores-Convención Nacional de Trabajadores (PIT-CNT)
MEXICO	
Mexico	Consejo Nacional de Trabajadores (CNT) Unión Nacional de Trabajadores (UNT)

ANNEXE 2

Centres adopting quotas or parity, kind of action taken

Table A2

Modalities of quota or parity action

Quota by national legislation		
Country	Quota legislation	Union centres
Argentina	Female Trade Union Quota Law 25.674 (2002): establishes that trade union organisations have to incorporate a minimum of 30% women, if female membership exceeds 30%; if it is less, representation shall be proportional.	The CTAA and CTAT incorporated the legal regulation in their statute in 2010, when they were still a unified trade union centre. The quota applies to both lists and positions. The CGT approved parity in 2021 (see below).
Chile	Law 20.940 (2016): establishes that the statutes of trade union organisations must include a minimum quota of 33.3% for grassroots unions, federations and confederations, and 30% for centres. Unions that do not have women on the executive committee, but women members, must elect one of them to the union negotiating committee for the sole purpose of participating in the union's collective bargaining. It also mandates the participation of women in the negotiating committees. The law did not establish sanctions for non-compliance, in the name of trade union autonomy.	In CUT, the lists for the election of the National Executive Council (CDN), the permanent collegiate leadership body, must present a minimum of 30% women candidates. The Executive Committee, the governing body in charge of implementing and executing the decisions of the CDN, is composed of at least 30% women.
Paraguay	Electoral Code (1996): establishes a minimum quota of 20% for the selection of candidates for elective office, also applies to unions and must be included in the statutes. The rule requires one female candidate for every five places on the list.	The CUT reports a 30% quota for women in the executive committee. The CNT established 33% in the statute.
Mexico	Labour reform (2019): establishes that trade unions have to include in their statutes the proportional representation of men and women on executive committees.	Both CNT and UNT have not yet implemented the rule.

Table A3
Parity by national legislation

Parity by national legislation		
Country	Parity legislation	Union centres
Costa Rica	Law 8.901 (2010): introduces mandatory parity in the executive committees of trade union organisations. Its regulation includes not only vertical but also horizontal parity. ⁶⁰ The Ministry of Labour cannot register and grant legal status to trade union organisations that do not comply with the requirement, apart from exceptional cases.	The CTRN applies parity in the current executive committee (members and alternates).
Nicaragua	Law 648 on Equal Rights and Opportunities (2008): obliges trade union centres to implement parity.	

⁶⁰ "Horizontal parity: A mechanism that seeks not only numerical parity and alternation in the nomination of candidates, but also gender parity in the election results, requiring that women also be at the top of the lists, which are the ones with a real chance of being elected. It is measured by the final result or the parity composition of the body for which the election was held, and not only by the composition of the lists of candidates in the election" (Reglamentation of the law) (Central America Report).

Table A4
Quota based on centre decision

Parity based on centre decision		
Country	Centre	Type of action
Brazil	UGT	Minimum quota of 30% women on the executive committee. Statutory. Approved in 2007
Haiti	CTH	Minimum quota of 30% women on the executive committee; 40% women and 30% youth in all activities. Adopted in 2019.
	CTSP	Minimum quota of 30% women on the executive committee. Adopted in 2008.
Panama	CTRP	Minimum quota of 30% women on the executive committee and in training activities. Statutory. Adopted in 2009.
Paraguay	CNT	Minimum quota of 33% women on the steering committee. Statutory.
	CUT	Minimum quota of 30% women on the executive committee.
Peru	CATP	Minimum quota of 30% women on the executive committee. Statutory. Approved in 2016.
	CUT	Minimum quota of 30% women on the executive committee. Statutory. Adopted in 2012.
Dominican Republic	CASC	Minimum quota of 35% women in congresses. Statutory. Approved in 2014.
	CNUS	Minimum quota of 40% women in all decision-making bodies. Statutory. Adopted in 2005.
Uruguay	PIT-CNT	Minimum quota of 30% women in the executive secretariat, which is appointed by the representative board elected at the congress and composed of representatives of trade union organisations. Not statutory, but subordinate to the decision of each congress. Implemented since the 2018 congress and reaffirmed at the 2021 congress.
Venezuela	CTV	Minimum quota of 30% on the executive committee. Statutory. In the review of its last board of directors (2001), of the 70 positions listed as executive components, only 12 were held by women (17.1%). To date, no information is available on how the board is constituted.

Table A5

Parity based on centre decision

Parity based on centre decision		
Country	Centre	Type of action
Argentina	CGT	Parity in the positions of the executive committee, with the exception of three secretariats specified in the statute: "The fifty (50) positions of the Executive Committee, with the exception of the General Secretariat, the Deputy General Secretariat and the Finance Secretariat, shall be composed of two persons of different genders". Statutory. Approved in 2021.
Brazil	CUT	Parity in the lists and positions on the national and 27 branch executive committees, in the national executive committee (responsible for implementing and executing the congress decisions), and in the delegations to congresses and plenary sessions (decision-making bodies between congresses). Federations and centres must have a minimum of 30% women. Sanctions: If the body does not comply, the elected leadership cannot take office; if delegations to congresses/plenary meetings do not comply, they are not registered. Minimum quota of 30% also for training activities, representation and delegations. Statutory. Adopted in 2012 and implemented in 2015. Previously there was a minimum quota of 30% women, approved in 1993.
Honduras	CUTH	Parity in the representation of delegations and committees, training processes, the consultative council and assemblies. Adopted on the basis of an agreement of the Executive Committee. Not statutory. Equal Opportunities for Women Act (2000): establishes a 30% quota for political parties, which will increase progressively until parity is reached; however, it does not include trade union organisations.

Table A6

Other situations

Other situations		
Country	Centre	Type of action
Colombia	CUT	Statute: "The electoral cards or lists submitted for consideration in the election debate must contain the nomination of a woman in one of the first three lines, a procedure that will be used for the election processes of the National Executive Committee and the Sub-directorates".
	CTC	One of the vice-presidencies of the executive committee is on women workers and must be held by a woman. Statutory. Minimum quota of 40% women in education/training spaces. Not statutory.

ANNEXE 3

Women's/gender bodies in trade union centres

Table A7:

Women's/gender bodies in trade union centres. Central America

Country	Centre	Name
Costa Rica	CMTC	Secretariat for Gender Equality
	CSJMP-ANEP	Directorate for Gender Equality
	Confederación de Trabajadores Rerum Novarum	Gender Secretariat
El Salvador	CATS	Gender Secretariat
	CSTS	Women's and Youth Secretariat
Guatemala	CGTG	Commission on Women and Gender Equality
	UNSI TRAGUA	Women's Desk
Honduras	CUTH	Women's Secretariat
Nicaragua	CST	Women's Secretariat
	CTN	Women's Secretariat
	CUS	Women's Secretariat
	FNT	Women's Committee
Panama	CONUSI	Women's Secretariat
	CTRP	Gender Secretariat
	Convergencia Sindical	Women's Committee

Source: survey questionnaire to the women's/gender bodies, and Central America Report.

Table A8

Women's/gender bodies in trade union centres. Andean countries

Country	Centre	Name
Peru	CAPT	Secretariat for Gender and Vulnerable Populations
	CGTP	Department of Women Workers
	CUT	Secretariat of Waged Women Secretariat of Self-Employed Women
Venezuela	ASI	Rights of Women Workers, Gender Equity and the Family
	CTV	Department of Women Workers and Family
Colombia	CTC	Women's Department
	CUT	Women's Department
Ecuador	CEDOCUT	Vice-Presidency for Gender

Source: survey questionnaire to the women's/gender bodies, and Andean Countries Report

Table A9

Women's/gender bodies in trade union centres. Caribbean

Country	Centre	Name
Haiti	CTH	National Commission of Women Workers
	CTSP	Women's Commission/Women of Courage
Dominican Republic	CASC	Gender Secretariat
	CNTD	Gender Secretariat
		Gender Secretariat

Source: survey questionnaire to the women's/gender bodies, and Caribbean Report.

Table A10

Women's/gender bodies in trade union centres. Southern Cone

Country	Centre	Name
Argentina	CGT	Gender Secretariat
		Equal Opportunities Secretariat
	CTAA	Secretariat for Gender Equality and Opportunities
	CTAT	Secretariat for Gender Equality and Opportunities
Brazil	CUT	National Secretariat for Women Workers (SNMT)
	UGT	Women's Secretariat
Chile	CUT	Vice-Presidency for Women and Gender Equality
Paraguay	CNT	Gender Secretariat
	CESITP	Women's Secretariat
	CUT	Women's Secretariat
	CUT-A	Women's Secretariat
Uruguay	PIT-CNT	Secretariat for Gener, Equity and Divesity

Source: survey questionnaire to the women's/gender bodies, and Southern Cone Report.

Table A11

Women's/gender bodies in trade union centres. Mexico

Centre	Name
CNT	Women's Presidency
UNT	Vice-Presidency for Equity and Gender

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The main objective of the FES Regional Trade Union Project (FSR) is to work together with the trade union movement in Latin America and the Caribbean and thus contribute to strengthening its capacity to design proposals and strategies to address the multiple challenges at a national, regional and global level.

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CENTRES

Women and the agenda of gender justice in the Latin American and Caribbean trade union movement



In the trade union centres of Latin America and the Caribbean a great disparity and heterogeneity of situations in terms of women's participation and the incorporation of a gender justice perspective into trade union action can be observed. It derives from the socio-economic and political contexts of each country, the structure and power dynamics of the centres and the degree of women's organisation and influence. The disparity expresses the diversity and complexity of the region. Women's trade union participation is affected by the fragility and precariousness of their labour insertion, the double workload -wage-earning and family care work-, and the high percentage of women workers in the informal economy, among other factors. At the same time, many sectors where women workers are concentrated in the labour market (education, health, public administration, etc.) are increasingly represented in the centres.



Women's presence on the centres' executive committees increased lately, driven mainly by the adoption of a minimum quota for women and parity in several centres. As a result, women trade unionists gained visibility, the gender agenda gained more space and solidarity among women trade unionists was strengthened. Nevertheless, women are still a minority in decision-making positions. Moreover, very few occupy the most powerful positions, most are concentrated in the social and administrative areas of trade union policy, which reproduces conventional gender roles.



Women's organisation has grown thanks to women's secretariats, and the centres incorporated gender agenda issues into their platforms. But gender equality policies are still seen as the sole responsibility of women trade unionists and not of the centre as a whole. There is a gap between the discourse of gender equality and its actual implementation. The progress that has been made needs to be consolidated and many deficits still need to be overcome. Women trade unionists do not give up. They follow a strategy of insisting on more and more influence, with the goal of achieving a trade unionism with full parity.

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