SIGI 2020 Regional Report
FOR LATIN AMERICA
AND THE CARIBBEAN
Highlights
The Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019

The Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) is a cross-country measure to capture the underlying, often invisible drivers of gender inequality. It measures discrimination in social institutions – formal and informal laws, social norms and practices – in 180 countries to draw attention to persistent structural barriers that women and girls face throughout their lifetime. Comprised of four dimensions, the SIGI spans major socio-economic areas that restrict women’s and girl’s rights, opportunities and access to crucial resources.

The data collection process for the fourth edition of the SIGI in 2019 covered 29 countries in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), which is divided into three major sub-regions: the Caribbean (10 countries), Central America (8 countries) and South America (11 countries).

### Countries included in the SIGI analysis, by LAC sub-regions

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The SIGI in Latin America the Caribbean

The SIGI 2020 Regional Report for Latin America and the Caribbean provides new evidence-based analysis of the setbacks and progress since 2014 in terms of women’s rights in the family, access to resources, public life and fundamental rights, and physical integrity. The LAC region fares well in the fourth edition of the SIGI in 2019 (OECD, 2019[1]). The level of discrimination in legislation, social norms and practices is 25.4, compared with 17 in Europe and 18.1 in Northern America (which does not include Mexico in this instance), indicating that although steps are being taken in the right direction, there is still a long way to go in achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment. The LAC region also fares much better than Africa (40.3) and Asia (35.9) in the SIGI (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1. SIGI scores in the LAC region compared to other geographical regions in 2019

Note: Scores range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination.

The economic cost of discriminatory social institutions

The current level of discrimination in social institutions yields a high economic cost for the LAC region. By limiting the pool of talent available, lowering countries’ capacities to innovate and to accumulate human and financial capital, and reducing the level of education and labour participation among women, discriminatory social institutions impede growth. At the regional level, even before the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, this translated into an estimated USD 400 billion loss in gross domestic product (GDP), which is a loss of USD 1 135 per capita. The SIGI analysis of the LAC region shows that a gradual dismantling of these gender-based discriminatory social norms and practices could yield significant economic benefits and add up to 3.6 percentage points yearly to regional GDP growth. In other words, by 2030, it would represent a potential gain of more than USD 5 000 per capita.

Meanwhile, as the current coronavirus (Covid-19) global pandemic unfolds, the socio-economic consequences for LAC women and girls might jeopardise some of the progress that has already been made, and worsen the situation in other areas, such as violence against women. The long-term implications of the rapid spread of the virus on the LAC region’s economies are still unclear, but women in the region appear particularly vulnerable to the economic consequences of the outbreak.
The impact of the coronavirus (Covid-19) crisis on women in LAC

Health and care workers risk exposure

Nearly 9 out of 10 nurses...  ...and around 5 out of 10 doctors
in the Americas are women

and most care-work at home falls on women, inflating their risks of infection

Economic vulnerabilities

Informality
Women are overrepresented in the informal sector...

Sectoral segregation
...and in sectors such as retail or hospitality, which suffer greatly from general lockdowns

External shocks
International economic slowdown will severely affect LAC’s economies through indirect channels, such as remittances

Unpaid care and domestic work burden

Prior to the outbreak, women already spent
x3 more time on unpaid care and domestic work than men in the LAC region

Increase of violence against women

Uncertainty increases patriarchal masculinities
Lockdowns trap victims with abusers
Economic dependency forces victims to stay
Support services are disrupted

Reduced access to sexual and reproductive health, and reproductive rights

As health resources are diverted towards Covid-19 emergency response...

...supply chains are disrupted...

...threatening women’s access to essential sexual, reproductive and life-saving health services
Progress and challenges

Of the 18 LAC countries classified in the SIGI 2019 Global Report, 15 countries exhibit very low to low levels of gender-based discrimination in social institutions, and no country is classified as having high or very high levels of discrimination (Figure 1.3). Colombia is the LAC region’s top performer, with a very low level of discrimination in social institutions and an overall SIGI score of 15, which ranks the country 13th at the global level. Colombia’s performance is primarily the result of good performance in the “Discrimination in the family” dimension, in which it ranks 3rd globally. Within the LAC region, Colombia is followed by the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua, which also display low levels of discrimination, with scores of 18 and 19, respectively.

The LAC region’s SIGI scores show the positive effects of enhanced legislative frameworks and holistic approaches. For instance, the LAC region’s legislation on violence against women remains among the most progressive and comprehensive globally. LAC governments have taken steps to update their legal frameworks to cover all forms of violence against women – which include domestic violence, harassment, rape and honour crimes. Alongside these legislative changes, LAC countries have developed national strategies, action plans and protocols to ensure inter-institutional co ordination, and have started to provide a wide range of support services for victims and survivors of violence against women. In 2017, Peru outlined criminal penalties for sexual harassment with aggravating circumstances to cover educational, employment and training relationships. That same year, Paraguay expanded the legal definition of violence against women by including economic, sexual, labour, political and cyber violence, among others, in its legal code. Similarly, special measures (such as political quotas) have started to yield their intended effects: the proportion of women in parliament in the LAC region increased from 26% in 2014 to 30% in 2018, one of the highest shares in the world. Four LAC countries are among the top ten countries globally in terms of women’s representation in parliament.

Source: [OECD, 2019](http://stats.oecd.org).
Nevertheless, the implementation of ambitious laws remains uneven, while discriminatory attitudes and norms persist, perpetuating the violation of women’s basic right to a life free of gender-based discrimination. Across the LAC region, clear gaps continue to exist between ambitious laws and their weak enforcement by governments. For instance, despite recent and renewed efforts from certain governments to strengthen their countries’ legal frameworks in order to punish all forms of gender-based violence, the LAC region continues to have the highest rates of femicide in the world. In 2018, 3,529 women were killed across the region because of their gender (OECD, 2020).

At the same time, persistent discriminatory norms weaken the implementation of existing legal frameworks. Addressing these social norms requires a whole-of-society shift to induce real changes to individuals’ mindsets. For instance, traditional gender stereotypes, harmful masculinities and attitudes in the family sphere contribute to women’s unpaid care burden, and inhibit their economic, political and leadership aspirations. Moreover, in some areas of women’s and girls’ lives, the LAC region continues to suffer from poor legislative protection. The SIGI shows that legal issues are particularly acute in the “Child marriage”, “Violence against women”, “Workplace rights” and “Political voice” SIGI indicators. For example, weak legal frameworks against child marriage contribute to the very high incidence rates in the LAC region.

Overall, the present report shows that “Discrimination in the family” is the most challenging dimension in the LAC region and its sub-regions, underscoring the presence of deep social discrimination governing intra-household dynamics between men and women (Figure 1.2). All three sub-regions tend to score similarly in the other dimensions, with the notable exception of the Caribbean in the “Restricted civil liberties” dimension and South America in the “Restricted access to productive and financial resources” dimension. The Caribbean’s poor performance in the “Restricted civil liberties” dimension is primarily the result of weak legal frameworks governing women’s ability to confer their nationality to their husband or children; establishing incentives for women’s political participation and representation; and guaranteeing equal rights for women to apply for passports and travel documents. South America’s poor performance in the “Restricted access to productive and financial resources” dimension in comparison with the other two LAC sub-regions stems from weak legal frameworks governing women’s rights in the workplace. In particular, many countries in the sub-region continue to prohibit women from entering certain professions.

At the same time, gender-based discrimination and gaps within the LAC region are compounded by intersecting identities that primarily affect indigenous, afro-descendant and migrant women. Women who are at the intersection of multiple discrimination often face increased hardship and various additional obstacles to claiming their rights, perpetuating a cycle of marginalisation, poverty and inequality. Chapter 2 further explores the intersectionality perspective in the context of migration.
Discrimination in the family

Discrimination in the family is the most pervasive form of discrimination in social institutions in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean.

- The LAC region's SIGI score in the “Discrimination in the family” dimension is 31 – compared with a global average of 44 –, denoting a medium level of discrimination in social institutions. While there are no considerable differences among the three LAC sub-regions – the Caribbean and Central America score 31, and South America scores 32 –, important discrepancies exist at the indicator level.

- The “Child marriage” and “Household responsibilities” indicators constitute the most salient issues in South America and the Caribbean, respectively. This is largely due to high rates of child marriage among girls and the persistence of legal loopholes governing the role of women and men within the household. Conversely, the “Inheritance” indicator stands out as an area of concern in Central America due to the existence of practices that discriminate against women’s rights.

Since the third edition of the SIGI in 2014, legal frameworks have continued to protect women’s inheritance and divorce rights.

- Discrimination towards women in terms of divorce is low. The majority of LAC countries formally guarantee equal divorce rights. In addition, 25 LAC countries provide women with the same rights as men to be the legal guardians of children after divorce.

- Women in the LAC region enjoy equal inheritance rights. All 29 LAC countries grant female surviving spouses and daughters the same legal rights as their male counterparts to inherit land and non-land assets.

Despite progress and governments’ efforts, hurdles remain in two key areas affecting women’s and girls’ empowerment:

- The LAC region is the only region in the world where the prevalence rate of child marriage among girls has stagnated since 1995. At the current prevalence rates, it is estimated that 20 million more girls will become child brides in LAC countries by 2030 (UNICEF, 2018).

  - Some countries have made progress in putting an end to this practice. Countries such as Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, and Trinidad and Tobago have strengthened their laws on the minimum legal age for marriage by eliminating legal exceptions that allowed children to get married.

- Traditional gender roles with regard to household responsibilities have been remarkably persistent, confining LAC women to their domestic and reproductive roles.

  - LAC women continue to bear most of the burden of unpaid care and domestic work. Women spend, on average, three times more time on unpaid care and domestic work than men do. This includes raising children, caring for sick or elderly family members, and managing household tasks.

  - On average, 52% of respondents believe that children will suffer when a mother is in paid employment outside the home, and 51% consider being a housewife to be just as fulfilling as working for pay.
**Restricted physical integrity**

In Latin American and the Caribbean, violence against women and reproductive autonomy are the most salient issues.

- The SIGI score of the LAC region in the “Restricted physical integrity” dimension is 22, denoting a low level of discrimination, in line with the global average. However, the LAC sub-regions’ scores vary, ranging from 18 in South America to 24 in Central America, and to 27 in the Caribbean.

- While the “Violence against women” indicator emerges as an important issue in the Caribbean and South America, with scores of 38 and 34, respectively (denoting medium levels of discrimination against women in social institutions), the “Reproductive autonomy” indicator stands out as an area of concern in Central America, with a score of 52 – highlighting a high level of discrimination –, due to restrictive laws on abortion.

- Intersectional discrimination that minority, impoverished, rural and young women suffer makes these women more vulnerable to violence and reproductive health issues.

**Female genital mutilation and missing women are not considered areas of concern in LAC countries.**

- There is no statistical indication that the practice of female genital mutilation is common in the LAC region.

- All LAC countries display a natural sex ratio at birth, demonstrating an apparent absence of any systematic undervaluation of female children.

**Legal frameworks continue to restrict women’s physical integrity in the LAC region and access to family planning remains an issue.**

- No LAC country provides women with comprehensive legal protection from all forms of violence, despite some progress made since around 2017.

- Laws that prevent the termination of an unintended pregnancy continue to threaten women’s health and reproductive autonomy. In the LAC region, four countries entirely ban and criminalise abortion.

- On average, 11% of women of reproductive age who are married or in de facto unions report having an unmet need for family planning, slightly above the OECD average of 10%. This is the result of the lack of information about and access to modern contraceptives and of inadequate healthcare infrastructure.

**Social norms related to women’s physical integrity continue to justify harmful practices in the LAC region.**

- In the LAC region, 11% of women believe that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances.

- Domestic violence against women is becoming progressively less tolerated. Between 2014 and 2018, on average, the percentage of women who declared that domestic violence was acceptable under certain circumstances declined from 15% to 11%.
Restricted access to productive and financial resources

Restricted access to productive and financial resources is the second most pervasive form of discrimination in social institutions in the Latin America and the Caribbean.

- The LAC region scores 23 in the “Restricted access to productive and financial resources” dimension, denoting a low level of discrimination. While below the global average of 27, the region’s score is well above the OECD average of 13.

- Important discrepancies exist across LAC sub-regions. Scores in this dimension range from 18 in the Caribbean to 20 in Central America and 27 in South America. Geographical discrepancies also exist for the “Secure access to land assets” and “Secure access to non-land assets” indicators, which constitute particularly salient issues in South America.

Since 2014, access to financial services and workplace legal protections have improved.

- Since the third edition of the SIGI in 2014, many LAC countries have progressively strengthened their legal frameworks to improve the protection of women’s workplace rights. New laws now cover harassment in the workplace, discrimination in employment and parental leave.

- The LAC region has also experienced an important increase in women’s financial inclusion, primarily in terms of absolute level of coverage. The share of women who have an account at a financial institution increased in 16 LAC countries between 2014 and 2017; in four countries, it increased by more than 14 percentage points. However, the gender gap remains significantly large.

- The region has a good score in the “Secure access to financial services” indicator because of strong legal frameworks and improving financial inclusion. Almost all LAC countries’ laws provide women with the same rights as men to open a bank account and access credit. Financial inclusion – particularly for rural, poor and indigenous women – is supported by numerous microfinance initiatives that cover individuals who often lack the necessary collateral to obtain credit.

Yet, limitations in the “Workplace rights” indicator continue to affect women’s empowerment.

- Legal provisions prevent women from entering certain professions and hinder equal remuneration, while some legal frameworks fail to comprehensively address employment discrimination. A direct result is women’s limited labour force participation and a large regional pay gap (ILO, 2019).

- Negative attitudes towards women working for pay outside the household are less common in the LAC region than at the global level. Nonetheless, the shift in this social norm has yet to translate into real change in the labour market, with the gender gap in labour force participation standing at 24 percentage points.

- Indigenous women face important intersectional discrimination in laws, social norms and practices. They suffer from a double burden, as their right to own the land they have traditionally occupied is not recognised in 15 LAC countries (ILO, 1989).
Restricted civil liberties

The Caribbean is the sub-region with the highest level of discrimination in relation to civil liberties in Latin America and the Caribbean.

- The LAC region scores 20 in the SIGI “Restricted civil liberties” dimension, compared with a global average of 29 and an OECD average of 17, denoting a relatively low level of discrimination.
- Important regional variation exists, with scores ranging from 18 in Central America and South America, to 30 in the Caribbean. For example, eight out of the ten Caribbean countries included in the SIGI analysis have neither legal quotas nor special measures to promote women’s equal political participation. Conversely, the Central America and South America sub-regions have more favourable legal frameworks in these areas, with few exceptions.

Since 2014, LAC countries have made progress in terms of the number of legal quotas in place to promote women’s equal political participation.

- Since the third edition of the SIGI in 2014, the number of LAC countries with legal quotas to promote women’s equal political participation at the national level increased from 15 to 19 across the region. The proportion of women in parliaments also reached 30% in 2018. This is similar to the OECD average of 29% and higher than the world average of 24%. In addition, four of the top ten countries globally with the highest proportion of female parliamentarians are in the LAC region.

Discriminatory social norms and practices persist towards female political leaders regarding women’s access to public spaces, and towards indigenous women.

- Challenges remain regarding the “Political voice” indicator. Persistent negative attitudes and practices continue to be an obstacle for women who wish to engage politically: across the LAC region, 27% of the population thinks that men are better political leaders than women, but this figure reaches 35% in the Caribbean (OECD, 2019).
- The “Freedom of movement” indicator is another important challenge. While women are able to move freely in the LAC region, they face some legal discrimination regarding passport applications. In seven LAC countries, married women do not have the same rights as men to apply for a passport, as their legal status is still acquired through their relationship with a man.
- Discriminatory practices exist for women wishing to access public spaces which stem from a high perceived sense of insecurity. For the 21 LAC countries with available data, 66% of the people who declared they did not feel safe walking alone at night were women.
- Additional efforts are needed in order to establish a more inclusive and intersectional approach to civil liberties. Women from minority groups face a higher rate of discrimination and, at the same time, belong to racial, religious and ethnic minority groups that are themselves discriminated against. This particular situation limits women’s capacity to participate in politics or access the justice system. Brazil is the only LAC country whose Constitution recognises and prohibits multiple and intersectional discrimination.
### A path towards gender equality: Key policy recommendations

Gender equality and women’s empowerment cannot be achieved unless further attention is paid to discrimination in laws, social norms and practices. While the current coronavirus (Covid-19) crisis can put a hold on existing gender-transformative policies and programmes, this is also the time to gear up the efforts towards SDG 5 and put women at the centre of the crisis’ policy responses. The following table describes the most urgent actions to be taken by governments in the LAC region.

| Legal frameworks | • Update laws according to the best international standards in order to remove discriminatory laws and/or legal loopholes. Reforms are needed across all SIGI dimensions, but policy makers in the LAC region should particularly focus on the laws covered by the following SIGI indicators:  
  • “Child marriage”: set 18 years as the minimum legal age for marriage for girls and boys with no exceptions.  
  • “Violence against women”: build legal frameworks that cover all forms of violence – sexual harassment, domestic violence, rape (including marital rape) and honour crimes.  
  • “Workplace rights”: remove all legal barriers that restrict women’s labour force participation, develop parental leaves and mandate equal pay for work of equal value.  
  • “Political voice”: put in place transitional or corrective measures to promote women’s equal political participation in all LAC countries, such as legal or voluntary quotas (preferably at both national and subnational levels), parity laws, or alternating the sexes on party lists, as well as providing financial incentives for political parties. |
| Enforcement mechanisms | • Build public and legal capacities to ensure adequate enforcement of the law and guarantee legal redress. Make sure that administrations, companies, organisations, associations, etc. abide by the law and cease any gender-based discriminatory practices.  
  • Develop infrastructure and service provision in remote areas in order to ensure that all women, including rural women and poor women, have access to services and benefit from public programmes.  
  • Design and scale-up programmes, training and workshops aimed at:  
    • helping girls and women claim their legal rights  
    • creating free spaces and support networks to discuss the various forms of discrimination and violence that women and girls experience  
    • developing community-level initiatives to address discriminatory social norms. |
| A holistic and intersectional approach | • As the challenges women and girls face in the LAC region cannot be dealt with in isolation, include a holistic approach in programmes, including the socio-economic measures taken to address the consequences of the coronavirus (Covid-19) crisis which disproportionately affects vulnerable women.  
  • Systematically adopt an intersectional approach when designing and implementing laws and programmes in order to ensure that all women are considered, especially the most vulnerable (indigenous, afro-descendant, rural and low-income women).  
  • Engage men and boys as positive agents of change in order to transform discriminatory social norms that are harmful to everyone. |
| Data collection and dissemination | • Invest in the production of more and better sex-disaggregated data. In particular:  
    • Ensure that reliable data are produced at various geographical levels: local, sub-national, national and regional levels.  
    • Ensure that reliable data are produced in order to capture intersectional discrimination.  
  • Design national and subnational dissemination strategies to raise awareness of the most pressing issues and to keep policy makers well informed.  
  • Ensure the comparability of data across the LAC region and the accurate monitoring of SDG 5 through increased statistical co-ordination among countries. |
| Communication and awareness | • Increase awareness through campaigns to sensitise all stakeholders to gender inequality and gender-based discrimination, insisting on the human, social and economic consequences for the society as a whole.  
  • Develop communication and awareness campaigns to inform women and girls about their rights and the opportunities offered by non-discrimination law. |
Notes

1. SIGI scores range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination.

2. Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay.


4. Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela.

5. Bolivia, Honduras, Uruguay and Venezuela.

6. Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay.

7. Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Cuba, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago.

8. These LAC countries are, from the highest to the lowest proportion of female parliamentarians: Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua and Mexico.

9. Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, and Trinidad and Tobago.
References


To learn more about the SIGI Social Institutions and Gender Index

www.genderindex.org

Gender, Institutions and Development Database

oe.cd/ds/GIDDB2019

SIGI Policy Simulator

oe.cd/sigiSIM

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