



Labor Observatory of the Americas

SPECIAL ISSUE:

**WORKING CONDITIONS AND THE RIGHTS  
OF WOMEN WORKERS IN FOUR ANDEAN  
COUNTRIES IN THE COVID-19 SCENARIO:  
COLOMBIA, PERU, ECUADOR, BOLIVIA**



CONFEDERACIÓN SINDICAL DE  
TRABAJADORES/AS DE LAS AMÉRICAS



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### **Coordination**

TUCA Advisory Team

### **Preparation of the Report**

Anderson Bernal

Suelen Castiblanco

Santiago Henao

Laura Moisa

### **Revision**

TUCA Advisory Team

### **Translation**

Victoria Brown

### **Graphic design and layout**

María Eugenia Salas.

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# Presentation

Undoubtedly the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been different in each sector. The working conditions and rights of women in Andean countries have been seriously affected, exacerbating the existing conditions from previous stages due to patriarchal structural patterns. As part of the **Labor Observatory of the Americas** - an initiative supported by various donors, including the Danish Trade Union Development Agency (DTDA) through the Program Labor Rights and Regional Integration as part of SDG 8, and developed in conjunction with the trade union federations of Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, the TUCA hired a team of consultants to analyze this scenario and produce a Special Report on the first approach to the pandemic scenario. The report summarizes the impacts of COVID-19 in the Andean region; analyzes the gaps in the labor situation; the impacts in terms of violence and care work; reflects on social mobilizations; and the measures and policies implemented.

The analysis of the differentiated impact of COVID-19 on women workers is one of the report's main contributions. Throughout history women have been affected by the lack of quality of employment. In the last 30 years this has been associated, among other measures, with labor flexibilization promoted by the neoliberal model, which fosters informal employment relationships.

The pandemic led to the closure of care spaces for children and the elderly, and this, in turn, caused a surge in home care work. Women with formal employment were impacted by the distribution of roles that characterizes the region's employment scenario as most women workers are employed in the business and services sectors. Women working informally before the pandemic were not protected by a social security floor to cope with the lockdown, in all cases leading to targeted and insufficient State aid.

In addition, the surge in telework and remote work has impacted the daily lives of working women. As reported by the Study Center for Labor & Agrarian Development (CEDLA), telework offers advantages to employers associated with increased productivity and reduced expenses. For workers, the disadvantages relate to lack of communication, security issues, difficulty to reconcile family life and lockdown, which even makes it harder to take advantage from reduced travel time or flexible work hours. Lockdowns have increased the levels of stress in households, compounded by the absence of income and sexist cultural patterns, leading to a significant escalation in gender and domestic violence.

This report underscores the need of Andean countries to structure and implement public policies that take into account women's unequal working conditions, as well as the differentiated impact of the COVID-19 crisis.

TUCA considers this report as the starting point for an analysis that must continue over time to understand and gauge how women have suffered gender-based consequences, and for affiliated and fraternal organizations in the Andean countries, as well as TUCA, to strengthen their policies on working women.

Rafael Freire Neto  
Secretary General  
TUCA

# 1. Overview

When the COVID-19 pandemic starting to spread, the economy of Latin American region in general, and of Andean countries in particular, had a negative behaviour, conditions were deteriorating and strong social protests were shaking the world of work. Colombia and Peru have been characterized by a tradition of right-wing governments that constantly seek to apply neoliberal measures and include anti-labor biases in their laws. Bolivia and Ecuador experienced a violent breakdown of progressive governments which, for more than a decade, had substantially improved the notably unequal social and economic conditions of the two countries.

Economically-speaking, COVID-19 broke out in Latin America after two years of weak macroeconomic performance characterized by multiple economic contractions and marked deterioration of exchange terms resulting from the drop in international commodity prices. Decreased public spending, reduced exports, rising inflation, decline of private consumption and global economic uncertainty led to economic projections for 2019 indicating an average growth of only 0.5% in the region and 2.6% in Andean countries (ECLAC, 2019).

This behavior of the economy had devastating effects on the employment quality in the region. According to ECLAC (2019), between 2013 and 2017 the urban employment rate decreased from 58.1% to 57.1%, and the unemployment rate rose from 7.1% to 9.3%. In this economic context, the demand of companies for formal workers declined, with the informal sector becoming the largest source of jobs in the region, with high vulnerability and precarious protection. In fact, self-employment accounted for 49% of the new jobs created in the region, in contrast to 37% of wage work.

This scenario led to a deterioration in the quality of employment and working conditions of the economies of the region. This becomes even worse for women, who usually have lower participation and employment rates than men, with lower incomes and wages and facing disadvantages in labor conditions.



# 1.1. Labor Market and Gaps

## COLOMBIA

Colombia is a clear example of worsening working conditions and, especially, of widening gender gaps due to COVID-19. According to data from the Extensive Integrated Household Survey (GEIH) of the National Administrative Statistics Department (DANE), the gap between men and women of the economically active population (EAP) increased by 4.2%, as shown in Table 1 for 2019 and 2020.

The highest drops in women's participation occurred in the employment category of employer-employer labor relations (36.3%), private employment (23.1%), domestic employment (34.3%) and self-employment (14.4%).

The composition of the employed, the inactive and the unemployed also shows a greater impact on women. According to DANE (2020), the employment gap between men and women increased by 3.20 percentage points from 2019 to 2020, while the unemployment gap increased by 3.50%. Lastly, the gap between inactive women and men also increased by 1.60%, rising from 29.80% in 2019 to 31.40% in 2020.

**Table 1.** Indicators and gender labor gaps in Colombia

Indicator	EAP		Employment		Unemployment		Inactive	
	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020
<b>Men</b>	57.1 %	59.2 %	67.3 %	61.1 %	8.3 %	13.9 %	35.1 %	34.3 %
<b>Women</b>	42.9 %	40.8 %	45.6 %	36.2 %	13.7 %	22.8 %	64.9 %	65.7 %
<b>Gap</b>	14.2 p.p.*	18.4 p.p.	21.7 p.p.	24.9 p.p.	5.4 p.p.	8.9 p.p.	29.8 p.p.	31.4 p.p.

\* Percentage points (measuring the gaps: difference between the percentage of men and the percentage of women for each indicator).

By 2018 the wage gap reached 12% (DANE and UN Women, 2020), i.e. for every COP 100 paid to men for the same job, women usually receive COP 88, amount that decreases with lower educational levels.

According to Becerra et al. (2020), there are two reasons for all these trends: first, the closure of in-person activities in schools and childcare institutions, tasks mostly carried out by women; and second, the concentration of women's employment in the most vulnerable

economic activities that were hardest hit by the crisis, among which DANE (2019) underscores hotels and restaurants, domestic services, apparel, other business activities and retail sales. In the medium and long term, the prospects for women's employment are not encouraging as long as production, reproduction and care work are not recognized as jobs and considered as part of the process to overcome social and gender inequalities.

Informality is cause for much concern in the

midst of the pandemic: historically women have experienced higher rates of work under informal conditions, undermining their financial autonomy. According to DANE (2020) and GEIH data, informality among women declined between 2019 and 2020 and increased among men. However, this may be the result of the disproportionate amount of time women devote to unpaid care work, especially in the midst of the health crisis.

Lastly, the scenario of working conditions continues to be uncertain in relation to work hours and telework, issues that have become more complex during the lockdown. Decree 770-2020 incorporated a new scenario in working days by allowing the flexibilization of work hours due to the health emergency, with the possibility of increasing work hours to a maximum of 12 hours, spread over 4 working days, by mutual agreement. However, employers have a power position that can lead to precarious working conditions, an example of which are the complaints detailed in the TUCA's report ***"Impact of COVID-19 on Labor Rights in the Americas"***, where 39.5% of affiliated and fraternal trade unions report forced increases of overtime.

The issue of additional hours relates closely to telework which, although in Colombia was already regulated by Law 1221-2008 and there were already 122,278 teleworkers by 2018 according to MINTIC (2018), it was necessary to enforce the law immediately without companies being prepared for such change with 98.8% of companies starting to implement some sort of remote work, according to ACRIP, 2020.

## PERU

Based on data from the Permanent Employment Survey in Metropolitan Lima, the EAP declined 12.1% in the third quarter 2020 and, as shown in Table 2, the impact was greater on women with the gender gap rising 4.6%, from 7.2% to 11.8%. Indeed, although the EAP declined for both men and women: for women the EAP decreased by 16.1% and by 8.6% for men (INEI, 2020b). The country's employed population decreased 39.6% and, as with the EAP, the drop was higher for women who experienced a decline of 43.2% while the EAP for men declined by 37.6% (INEI, 2020c), thus widening the participation gap of the employed by 4.4% compared to 2019.

By 2019, women's presence in hourly underemployment was higher, with a participation gap of 22.8% compared to men. By 2020, the gap for men increased by 13.4%. In addition, while income underemployment was higher among women in 2019, by 2020 the gap was almost zero. All the above was due to the increase of formally employed men who became underemployed, as well as to the higher number of women who became inactive in order to perform care work. The national unemployment rate doubled compared to 2018, reaching 9.6% (INEI, 2020; EFE Agency, 2020). The impact was greater on urban areas where, for Metropolitan Lima, the unemployment rate increased to 15.6%, continuing to mostly affect women with a rate of 16.3% (INEI, 2020b).



**Table 2.** Indicators and gender labor gaps in Peru

Indicator	EAP		Employed		Hours-underemployed		Income-underemployment		Unemployment Rate	
	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020
<b>Men</b>	53.6 %	55.9 %	54.1 %	56.3 %	38.6 %	56.7 %	37.5 %	49.7 %	5 %	15 %
<b>Women</b>	46.4 %	44.1 %	45.9 %	43.7 %	61.4 %	43.3 %	62.5 %	50.3 %	6.8 %	16.3 %
<b>Gap</b>	7.2 p.p.*	11.8 p.p.	8.2 p.p.	12.6 p.p.	-22.8 p.p.	13.4 p.p.	-25 p.p.	-0.6 p.p.	-1.8 p.p.	-1.3 p.p.

\* Percentage points (in measuring the gaps: difference between the percentage of men and the percentage of women for each indicator).  
Note: The information is for Metropolitan Lima

According to data from the National Household Survey (ENAHO) of the National Statistics & Informatics Institute (INEI), in 2018 women working as employers, wage workers or freelance workers accounted for 40.2% of the total EAP. Similarly, 68,5% of women perform Unpaid Family Work and 95.4% of women perform Household Work. Of women in the EAP, 82% work in micro or small companies (1 to 5 employees) usually in precarious working conditions (INEI, 2018; Jaramillo & Ñopo, 2020).

Regarding the wage gap, Peru's unadjusted wage gap was 28.4% in 2017. Although women's participation in the public sector is close to parity (47%), the wage difference continues to be 18%.

The situation is even more critical in the formal private sector, where women's participation is barely 34.8% and the wage gap is close to 30% (SERVIR, 2017). According to INEI's technical report, by March 2020 the gap had increased by 30.5% (INEI, 2020; RPP, 2020).

For Metropolitan Lima, inactivity in the third quarter 2019 reached 2,564,500 people, of which 35.7% were men and 64.3% were women. Inactivity increased as a result of the lockdown, the halt of activities and the subsequent loss of jobs, with an increase of 28.8%.

The increase was 30.9% in the case of men and 27.6% in the case of women (INEI, 2020b). Even if the percentage rise of inactivity had been lower for women than for men, before the pandemic women already had high levels of inactivity and, by 2020, 43.2% more women than men are inactive (INEI, 2020b). Clearly it is an active inactivity due to women's unpaid tasks.

Even though there are no data on Peru for 2020 to visually quantify the effect of the pandemic on the time dedicated by men and women to paid activities, the lockdown forced a surge in the hours of home care work for women, subsequently reflected in a drop in the time devoted to their paid work, thus widening the gap of hours worked between men and women.

According to ENAHO, in 2017 the sectors with highest women's participation were services (40.5%), commerce (25.6%) and agriculture (22.3%) (INEI, 2017). This scenario is particularly discouraging for women given that the two sectors with the highest women's labor participation were reactivated in the last phase (4th phase) of the Economic Reactivation Plan, as defined in Executive Order No. 080-2020-PCM, which details the guidelines and

timeline for the gradual economic reactivation after the strict lockdown caused by the pandemic.

In Peru, when analyzing the population working informally based on ENAHO-INEI data for 2018, 12,152,000 people worked in the informal sector. Of these, 54% are men and the remaining 46% are women. Although this percentage is lower for women, when we compare these data with the EAP for each gender, the percentage rises to 75.3% in the case of women, i.e. of every 10 women, 8 work in the informal sector (INEI, 2018; Jaramillo & Ñopo, 2020).

Lastly, telework has been an emergency measure for formal companies to maintain their workers' productivity, while complying with the mobility restrictions and social distancing mandated by the government due to the health emergency. Thus, estimated data shows that, in 2018 there were 1,515 teleworkers, number that was expected to expand to another 630 workers, according to the Ministry of Labor & Employment Promotion (MTPE) (2019; Torres, 2019). Due to the quarantine, labor relations continued based on the creation of a new figure called "remote work", which was regulated for the first time by the Emergency Decree No. 026-2020, published in the official newspaper "El Peruano" on March 15, 2020. To October 31, 2020, about 250,000 remote workers registered, according to MTPE sources (Parédez 2020).

## ECUADOR

According to data of the National Survey of Employment, Unemployment & Underemployment (ENEMDU) of the National Institute of Statistics & Censuses (INEC), in 2020, in Ecuador women's EAP dropped five percentage points, widening the participation gap between men and women's EAP, as shown in Table 3 (INEC, 2020a). In turn, the gap of the employed increased by 1.6%, as reflected in the women's higher unemployment rate and a wider gap between men and women.

Although in 2019 men accounted for most underemployment, trend which continued in 2020, women show little labor participation even in vulnerable activities, with inactivity data showing the prevalence of women in said activities compared to men, with a gap of 37.4%, which narrowed by 4.6% in 2020.

**Table 3.** Indicators and gender labor gaps in Ecuador

Indicator	EAP		Employed		Underemployment		Unemployment Rate		Inactive	
	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020
<b>Men</b>	57.3 %	58 %	57.8 %	58.6 %	61 %	60.8 %	4 %	5.7 %	31.3 %	33.6 %
<b>Women</b>	42.7 %	42 %	42.2 %	41.4 %	39 %	39.2 %	6 %	8 %	68.7 %	66.4 %
<b>Gap</b>	14.6 p.p.*	16 p.p.	15.6 p.p.	17.2 p.p.	22 p.p.	21.6 p.p.	-2 p.p.	-2.3 p.p.	-37.4 p.p.	-32.8 p.p.

\* Percentage points (in measuring the gaps: difference between the percentage of men and the percentage of women for each indicator).

Based on INEC data for 2018, the unadjusted wage gap between men and women is 20% in Ecuador. The unadjusted wage gap for formal employment declined 2.3%. However, most women workers are underemployed and the underemployment gap increased significantly by up to 29.6% (INEC, 2018; Olmedo, 2018). The outbreak of the pandemic generated massive unemployment, mainly in informal employment and underemployment. The income of women employed in these sectors declined and, even after the implementation of the economic reactivation plans, their income will probably be lower than their income before the pandemic.

Regarding work hours, on average men worked 6 hours more than women in 2018, with men exceeding the minimum 40 hours of work per week. For their part, women worked below the labor benchmark, totaling an average of 34.3 hours per week (INEC, 2018; Olmedo, 2018). Based on ENEMDU data, by June 2020 weekly hours of paid work were negatively impacted by the pandemic, with a weekly reduction in working hours of 31.4 hours for men and of 28.1 hours for women (INEC, 2020a). Despite the reduction of the difference between genders, the trend of less time in the paid labor market, for women compared to men, continues.

Regarding formal employment, by June 2019 the formal employment rate for men was 44.8% and 28.7% for women, showing the vulnerability of the Ecuadorian labor market due to the low levels of formal employment, especially among women. The lockdown and the interruption of production activities also affected these indicators: formal employment was negatively affected and dropped to 17.6% for men and to 15.5% for women in June 2020 (INEC, 2020a).

Work under informal conditions in Ecuador is one of the highest in the region reaching 46.7% in September 2019, although it was the same for both men and women and reached 74% (Arias, Carrillo and Torres, 2020). By September 2020, the informality rate increased by almost 2 percentage points, reaching 48.6% (INEC, 2020b).

According to the Minister of Labor Raúl Ledesma, in 2018, 5,516 people worked in the teleworking modality (0.03% of the population) (El Universo, 2018). With the outbreak of the pandemic, many formal jobs that allowed work at home shifted to telework to overcome mobility restrictions and comply with social distancing to combat the virus. On September 14, 2020, the Ministry of Labor issued Ministerial Agreement 181 to regulate this work modality during the COVID-19 health crisis,

The legislation includes labor reforms such as telework, agreements to reduce work hours and conditions of force majeure for dismissals, to manage the consequences of the pandemic. Under this modality, payment to teleworkers cannot be lower than the basic salary equivalent to USD 400 in 2020. This regulation is very important because, according to data of the Ministry of Labor, some 436,000 workers are working at home (GK, 2020), i.e. 79 times more workers at home than in 2018.

The employment categories that include most of the women's population are the most precarious jobs, such as "self-employed women workers" reaching 49.82%, and "Assistant Family Relative or Unpaid Apprentice" reaching 15.06%, both categories seriously impacted by the economic crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, putting women workers at risk of insufficient resources for their subsistence.

In the case of the inactive population, the gap narrowed between 2019 and 2020 (0.92%) because, in many cases, the lack of funds led household women to find a job to cover their expenses. Regarding employment and unemployment rates, in both cases, the gender gaps widened from 2019 to 2020, with the employment gap increasing by 0.88% and the unemployment gap by 0.23% (INE, 2020).

## BOLIVIA

The Bolivian case is similar to other countries. According to the National Statistics Institute (INE) (2020), the 2019-2020 EAP gap reached 1.28% (See Table 4).

**Table 4.** Indicators and gender labor gaps in Bolivia

Indicator	EAP		Employment*		Unemployment*		Inactive	
	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020
Men	54.94 %	56.22 %	74.51 %	65.97 %	3.98 %	10.37 %	35.79 %	36.25 %
Women	45.06 %	43.78 %	58.43 %	49.01 %	4.66 %	11.28 %	64.21 %	63.75 %
Gap	9.88 p.p. <sup>+</sup>	12.44 p.p.	16.08 p.p.	16.96 p.p.	0.68 p.p.	0.91 p.p.	28.42 p.p.	27.5 p.p.

\* Percentage points (in measuring the gaps: difference between the percentage of men and the percentage of women for each indicator).

It is important to underscore that women's work behaviour has been similar across Latin America, and Bolivia is no exception, according to UN Women (2020). 44% of Bolivian women workers are self-employed, with work ranging from

small companies and enterprises, jobs in the services and commercial sectors, even domestic work, which usually do not provide social protection and whose prospects are uncertain in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, coupled with the lower

income paid to women performing these jobs, according to nominal remuneration data of the INE (2020).

These trends of the labor market are compounded by informal work that is the highest in the region, according to the TUCA's report, with 76% of workers in the informal sector, a significantly high percentage when compared to the 50% on average for Latin America, sounding the alarm as this informal economy contributes 65% of GDP (TUCA, 2019). According to estimates of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) based on INE reports, women account for about 45% of total informal workers working mostly in commerce and hospitality, sectors that were most negatively impacted by the lockdown and social distancing, as a result of which Bolivian women will be the most affected.

Even though the Bolivian informal sector weighs so much in the country's economy and has been the most affected by the pandemic, formal work has also undergone changes, among which work hours and telework are the most significant. The spread of the virus led the authorities to decree a quarantine, with Supreme Decree 4196 establishing a flexible schedule of 8 to 5 working hours.

Although this measure sought to protect the working class from dismissals due to business inactivity, it ended up in the arbitrariness of companies reducing wages, which required the intervention of the Ministry of Labor to clarify that the reduction in the hours worked did not involve a reduction in wages.

## 1.2. Care and Violence

The effects of the pandemic are also differentiated and generate gender gaps that go beyond labor indicators. The lockdown created household situations that increased the burden on women such as increased care work and gender-based violence, compared to their burden prior to the health crisis.

### COLOMBIA

According to DANE and UN Women (2020), in Colombia unpaid care work in the production sector accounts for 20% of GDP, 78% of which is performed by women, equivalent to twice the hours, and sometimes thrice the hours, assigned to these tasks by women compared to men, specifically 7:14 hours for women compared to only 3:25 for men. Consequently, the quarantine implemented in most of the countries of the region, with schools closed and early vacations, increased the volume of household work and the care for children and adolescents. These tasks are carried out in addition to paid work, thereby increasing total work hours and compromising women both physically and psychologically.

The pandemic has also severely impacted healthcare jobs and paid domestic work, where women account for the highest percentage of the workforce. According to studies published by the Colombian Women's Observatory, 65% of the 217,215 health professionals in Colombia are women, and the health crisis has put this population at disproportionate risk due to the treatment of COVID-19 patients and to the precarious conditions that, according to the TUCA, trade unions have been repeatedly denounced (2020). According to said studies, regarding paid domestic work, 6.7% of Colombian workers work in this sector and, of total domestic workers, 94.4% are women, whose income has been reduced to due to mobility restrictions and social distancing.

Lastly, in Colombia, the lockdown has also escalated gender-based violence and UN Women has been warned of the danger of this strategy to contain the virus for the female population. According to the District Women's Secretariat in Bogotá, the calls to hotlines for gender-based violence increased 187% on landlines and 774% on virtual hotlines. The number of femicides totaled 445 to September 2020, according to the Femicide Observatory of Colombia.

### PERU

Prior to the pandemic, women performed 80% of domestic activities in Peru, i.e. of the 30 hours on average per week devoted to the household, 24 are performed by women and the remaining 6 by men (UNDP, 2020a), negatively impacting the hours women can assign to the labor market.

Furthermore, as there is a positive ratio between men and women's employment gap in relation to children staying at home (Jaramillo & Ñopo, 2020), the closing of childcare and educational centers together with the impossibility of hiring to a person to care for the children, has caused a surge in the time women assign to the household which, in turn, impedes the pursuit of opportunities to overcome the economic crisis.



According to the 2018 Demographic & Family Health Survey (ENDES), 2 of every 3 women who admitted having been victims of some form of gender violence: psychological or verbal violence (59%), physical violence (31%) and sexual violence (7%) (Jaramillo & Ñopo, 2020). These percentages rose during the lockdown from March to October 2020, with the Itinerant Emergency Teams (EIU) covering 18,778 cases of violence against women and family members, of which 86.4% (16,223 cases) were specifically against women (Ministry of Women, 2020). It is important to note that these cases originated in the hotline assigned specifically to the issue, whereby the number of cases is probably higher because of women at home with their aggressor did not call the hotline.

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## **ECUADOR**

According to the UNDP, 75% of care activities were performed by women in 2019. The difference in hours of unpaid work between women and men is 22 ½ more hours for women (UNDP, 2020b), i.e. women spend almost four times more time than men in unpaid care and domestic work.

Despite the economic reactivation plan being already underway, according to the ENEMDU of the INEC covering September 2019 to September 2020, women worked one hour less on paid works (Coba, 2020), in part because women quit their jobs to look after their children during the pandemic.

As the UN Women's representative in Ecuador concluded: "Normally women spend three times more than men performing housework, and this gap widened during the health emergency" (Machado, 2020).

In Ecuador, women account for 74% of workers in the healthcare and social work sector, according to a study by Actuaría (Orozco, 2020). In other words, this population is more exposed to infection. This is a clear cause for concern considering that, because of the suddenness of the pandemic, the health sector had to increase working hours to treat COVID-19 patients, and did not have personal protection and biosecurity equipment.

Another important issue is gender violence. By 2019, 20 of every 100 women across of nation had experienced some form of domestic violence. Furthermore, in 2019 and at the national level, 56.92% of women reported having experienced psychological violence in recent months (UNDP, 2020b). The UNDP emphasizes that gender-based violence in emergencies and disasters exacerbates the inequalities between men and women and compromises the physical, psychological and sexual integrity of women.

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## **BOLIVIA**

The Bolivian scenario is undergoing the same trends as the other countries, with the lockdown impacting women who have had to reconcile their already precarious employment with increased household work.

UN Women in Bolivia has identified this situation and warned about it in reports, which discuss unpaid care work and domestic workers, whose employment situation is regulated by Law 2450. However, their conditions are too vulnerable and precarious. This situation gains more importance as 15% of this sector's labor force is made up of women, most of whom have been at risk of dismissal or threatened with wage discounts and reductions.

Gender violence in the country also increased, from January to July 2020, with 15,936 complaints of family or domestic violence filed at the national level, according to data from the Gender Observatory of the Women's Coordinator. Furthermore, 83 femicides occurred between January and August 2020, compared to 80 from January to September 2019. These data are alarming given that, in many cases, said femicides go unpunished and many cases of intrafamily violence are not reported.

## 1.3. Social Mobilizations

Working conditions before and after the pandemic show an unequal and destructive economic system that must be called into question and decent work, based on dignity and equality, needs to be the core pillar. Interestingly, 2019 was a year marked by widespread social discontent materialized in multiple demonstrations against, among others, neoliberal economic measures, the weakening of democracy, corruption, political violence and environmental conflicts.

In late October 2019, mobilizations began in Colombia due to a local issue that ended in a generalized flareup caused by the State's neglect of education, health, and social and environmental issues.

The mobilizations lasted for about a month and expressed the discontent against the so-called "Paquetazo del Presidente Iván Duque" which, according to the organizers of the protests, included a labor reform advocating the per hour hiring system, greater labor flexibility, and the elimination of the minimum wage and the public pension system.

In Peru, social mobilizations did not escalate to the magnitude of the mobilizations in Colombia, Chile and Bolivia, despite the institutional crisis experienced in the country as of March 2018 when former president Pedro Pablo Kuczynski resigned amid accusations of corruption. Due to a governability crisis, the last precedent of which occurred in 1992 with Fujimorism in office, the new president Martín Vizcarra, with an opposition majority, dissolved the Parliament on October 3, 2019, upon which the country's political crisis escalated and deeply affected the balance of powers in the Executive Branch.

Of the four Andean countries, Bolivia is a special case where a coup d'état overthrew the legitimate president Evo Morales. This coup led to social uprisings that were harshly repressed and the lockdown implemented for COVID-19 was used to control the discontent of the population and apply neoliberal measures. However, in the face of social pressure, elections were held in October 2020 for president, senators and deputies, with strong social support to the MAS and the victory of the MAS presidential candidate, Luis Arce, in the first round, with majority in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies and a notably high representation of women in the latter.

Lastly, Ecuador is a complex case given that, in the 2017 elections, the Alianza País Party presented Lenin Moreno as their candidate with a continuity and progressive program. However, once elected, President Moreno changed his program and initiated a series of right-wing economic, political and social measures, betraying his voters. This caused social mobilizations that have been harshly repressed. The result of the next elections in February 2021 will determine the political future of Ecuador which, in over a decade of progressive social policies, succeeded in improving its social and economic indicators, which are now being reverted due to President Moreno's swerve to the right.

## 2. Measures and policies implemented

One of the consequences of the deterioration of social protection systems is the surge in the number of people dependent on cash transfer programs and non-contributory social pensions. According to estimates of Cejudo, Michel & de los Cobos (2020), 60% of Bolivians, 26.9% of Colombians, 12.1% of Ecuadorians and 10.8% of Peruvian women live in a household that receives some type of transfer. This was the tool used most by the governments to address the crisis.

However, these were not very ambitious as most of the amounts handed out were less than the monthly minimum wage in each country. In Bolivia, aid was a single payment of about USD 72; in Colombia, the funds averaged USD 134 divided into three payments; in Ecuador, USD 120 in a single payment (May-June); and in Peru the four programs targeted different demographics that were given USD 210 in five deferred payments. In this regard, the countries did not take advantage of the opportunity to strengthen their social protection systems with a gender-based approach.

In terms of protecting jobs, despite minor differences in the measures implemented by these governments, the general trend was to prioritize the protection of companies rather than workers. The measures applied by companies focused on: reducing work hours, reducing wages, using unpaid leave, suspending extralegal benefits, and laying off workers, among others.

Although these governments implemented containment measures and lockdown against the pandemic, unlike the Brazilian or Mexico and governments, most of the measures had an anti-labor bias and zero gender approach. As the two most affected sectors in times of crisis, the already existing scarce control of protection in labor regulations, low unionization rates in most Andean countries, and the impossibility of protesting in public spaces was devastating for workers in precarious conditions and women in general.

# 3. Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic and the social and economic measures, implemented in different countries to reduce the spread and mortality rates, exacerbated the existing economic, social and political crises. The pandemic raised awareness on the weakness of social protection systems, the increasing precarity of working conditions and the inequities of wealth and income distribution resulting from the neoliberal measures implemented in Colombia and Peru in the 1990s, and resumed in the late 2010s in Ecuador and Bolivia.

**Women have carried the heaviest burden. Three aspects depict the negative consequences for women in terms of work:**

**1** The pandemic led to the closing of care spaces for children and the elderly, leading to a surge in care work at home. Due to cultural patterns and the scarce redistribution of this sort of task, women were forced to play these roles, reducing their time available for paid work and for leisure.

**2** Women have also been affected by the loss of quality work in the last 30 years. The Andean labor structure is highly informal as a result, among others, of the labor flexibilization promoted by neoliberalism. As women are the demographics that work mostly in the informal sector, the slowdown in economic activity led to cancellation of their contracts without compensation or to the suspension of their self-employed activities, exposing women to more vulnerability than before the pandemic.

**3** Women with formal employment were impacted by the distribution of roles that characterizes the region's employment scenario as most women workers are employed in commerce and services. These sectors will take longest to recover and have caused a greatest loss of jobs.

Consequently, the income of both formal and informal workers has been negatively affected.

The **TUCA** takes into account the characteristics of informal work, such as low productivity, low technology, low educational level, instability, low income and absence of social protection.

Furthermore, poverty is closely related to informality as it is not possible to be unemployed without an income, hence, informal and low-income jobs are accepted. Women account for a higher percentage in the informal market and in lower income segments.

Thus, in periods of crisis, and more so in a crisis such as the existing one, the most precarious sectors and women are the most affected. Women working informally before the pandemic were not protected by a security floor during the lockdown with targeted and insufficient State aid in all four countries. This forced the reactivation of the economy in the face of social and economic pressure.

Similarly, the nuances of telework and remote work in the daily lives of workers are becoming apparent across the region. The Study Center for Labor & Agrarian Development (CEDLA) proposes different approaches to analyze the effects of telework, both the advantages and disadvantages for employers associated with increased productivity and reduced expenses, vis-à-vis lack of communication and security issues; as

well as the advantages and disadvantages for workers with less time commuting, flexible schedules vis-à-vis the impossibility of reconciling family life with isolation. The most noteworthy issue is the precarious trajectory that this modality could adopt, with deregulated conditions in Andean countries compounded by the possibility of imposition and abuse by employers (CEDLA, 2020).

Lockdowns have increased the stress in households, aggravated by the absence of income and sexist cultural patterns, leading to an escalation of gender and domestic violence. The approval of emergency measures and restrictions on the freedoms of assembly and public mobilization could compromise the demand for social transformations expressed in the region since 2018.

As indicated above, the measures targeted spending on cash transfer programs with low coverage, and designed, implemented and assessed disregarding gender inequities and women's rights. This kind of program is criticized due to its maternalistic outlook that considers women as instruments to benefit their children; increases unpaid care work (Bárcena & Montaña, 2013); hinders the entry of women into the labor market; and perpetuates negative socio-cultural norms related to the primary role of women in caregiving. (Peterman, Yablonski & Natali, 2016; Sepúlveda, 2018)

The allocation of funds a CCT program focuses on the family as the sole decision-maker with equal interests and bargaining power. This assumption of a functional family unit could lead to deterioration in the quality of life of women and girls, as stated by Sepúlveda (2018) based on the impact assessment of the "Familias en Acción" program in Colombia.

Lastly, the need of Andean countries to structure and implement public policies that take into account the unequal working conditions of women, as well as the differentiated impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, is unrelenting.



## Annex 1. Summary of measures implemented to address COVID-19



MEASURE	DESCRIPTION
<b>Circular 0021-2020</b>	More than a measure to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, this circular detailed the mechanisms generating what the situation would be after the lockdown and that were already stipulated by law. Among them, work at home, telework, flexible work hours, early vacations, paid leave, salary without provision of the service.
<b>Circular 0031-2020</b>	This circular expanded the mechanisms to be used by employers to protect employment during the crisis, including compensable paid leave, modification of work hours, modification or suspension of extra-legal benefits, agreement on conventional benefits.
<b>Decree 771-2020</b>	The purpose of this decree was to transfer workers' transportation benefits to a benefit to cover access to connectivity services, wherever required.
<b>Decree 448-2020</b>	This decree contemplates the possibility of withdrawing discharges to use them for the health emergency.
	No notification from employers is required to terminate contracts.
	Increase of the payments of programs such as Familias en Acción, Jóvenes en Acción and Adulto Mayor.
<b>Decree 770-2020</b>	Pension savings to invest in health.
<b>Decree 770-2020</b>	This decree adds an income to workers worth COP 160,000 depending on the number of months with suspended contract. It also adds mechanisms to protect the laid off workers by expanding the unemployment benefit provided by the family allowance funds (cajas de compensación).
<b>Decree 518-2020</b>	This decree creates the solidarity income to help meet the needs of poor and vulnerable households across the country in the framework of the health emergency.
<b>Decree 538-2020</b>	Like the previous decree, this one seeks to use budgets allocated to other areas to meet the needs of the pandemic. It also forces health workers to be available and recognizes COVID-19 as direct occupational disease.
<b>Decree 558-2020</b>	In addition to seeking to reduce contributions to the general pension system, this decree aims at ensuring the stability of private pension funds through the figure of scheduled withdrawal.
<b>National Guarantee Fund</b>	Through the national guarantee fund, the national government facilitates access to credit for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, extending credit lines to June 2021 due to the health crisis.
<b>Decree 467-2020 and External Circular 007-2020 (Financial Superintendence)</b>	This decree and this circular describe the financial relief to be granted for consumption in general, and specifically for students of the higher education system.

MEASURE	DESCRIPTION
<b>Article 14.1 of Emergency Decree 033-2020</b>	The State will cover 35% of the salary of workers who earn up to USD 435
<b>SUPREME DECREE No. 004-2020-MIDIS</b>	Users of national programs (social programs) of the Ministry of Development & Social Inclusion will receive cash transfers in advance to respond to the emergency.
<b>Emergency Decree 042-2020</b>	Transfer of funds to households living in poverty or extreme poverty through the Household Targeting System.
<b>Article 9.1 of Emergency Decree 033/2020</b>	Workers may withdraw in advance from the Term of Service Compensation (CTS), which is the annual benefit equivalent to a salary.
<b>Emergency Decree No. 098-2020</b>	Cash transfers to 800,000 families of independent workers.
<b>Article 13 of Emergency Decree 033-2020</b>	Suspends contribution to AFPs (Pension Fund Administrators) for one month.
<b>Supreme Decree (DU 026-2020)</b>	Remote work in the public and private sectors, without affecting employment, remuneration or other economic conditions. Also regulates remote work as exceptional measure to avoid infection. Workers at risk should be prioritized for remote work. If not possible, there must be given leave with possible compensation.
<b>Law 5039/2020-CR</b>	There can be no layoffs. The National Labor Inspection Superintendence will audit and penalize the violation of workers' rights.
<b>Emergency Decree No. 029-2020</b>	Financing measures for SMEs: Approval of the Business Support Fund for MSEs and other complementary measures.
<b>Resolution of the Superintendency No. 054-2020</b>	Measures in favor of tax debtors. Postponement of deadlines for the payment of the income tax and the financial transaction tax.
<b>Supreme Decree 203-2020-EF</b>	Supplementary credit of USD 29 billion for investment in health. Transfer to EsSalud to be used for the Pan American Village, where COVID-19 patients are treated. Transfer of USD 58 billion to municipalities for the purchase of basic products.
<b>The "Reactiva Perú" Program, Legislative Decree 1455, modified by Legislative Decree 1457</b>	<p>Seeks to respond quickly and effectively to the liquidity needs of companies in the face of COVID-19, so they can meet their short-term obligations with their workers and goods and service suppliers.</p> <p>Through the Ministry of Economy &amp; Finance, the National Government guarantees the credits placed by Enterprises of the Financial System (ESFs). The program began with 30 billion soles in guarantees; later, through Legislative Decree 1485, another 30 billion soles were added to the amount of the guarantees, reaching 60 billion soles.</p>
<b>Subparagraph 3.2 of Article 3 of Emergency Decree 038-2020</b>	Employers unable to implement telework or some measure to preserve their job, and are seriously compromised economically, can apply for full labor suspension..
<b>Supreme Decree 054-2020-EF</b>	Promotes financing for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises that are economically compromised by the spread of COVID-19 through the CRECER FUND factoring companies.
<b>Emergency Decree No. 077-2020</b>	Granting and financing of provisional pensions under the regime of Decree-Law No. 19990.

MEASURE	DESCRIPTION
<b>Organic Humanitarian Support Law</b>	Guaranteed access to basic services. Price control and guaranteed food supply.
	Possibility of refinancing SME debts, extension of loan payment terms for BanEcuador clients. Announcement of a credit line of USD 50 million for SMEs.
	Postponement of 90 days for social security payments, in addition to the extension of the IESS coverage (Ecuadorian Social Security Institute) for an additional 60 days.
<b>Organic Humanitarian Support Law</b>	Special emerging contract: For a predetermined period to sustain production and sources of income in emerging situations or for new investments or lines of business, products or services, expansions or extensions of business, modification of the business line, increase in the supply of goods and services by new or existing individuals or legal entities, or in the event of needs due to greater demand for production or services in the employers' activities. Maximum duration: one year and may be renewed only once for the same term.
<b>Organic Humanitarian Support Law</b>	Emerging reduction of work hours: duly justified acts of God or force majeure. Employers may reduce work hours up to a maximum of 50% and workers' salary will correspond proportionately to the hours actually worked, and will not be less than 55% of the amount determined prior to the reduction. Contributions to social security will be paid based on the reduced work hours. Maximum duration: one year and may be renewed only once for the same term.
<b>Organic Humanitarian Support Law</b>	Telework: consists of the performance of remunerated activities or provision of services, as determined in the Labor Code, based on Information & Communication Technologies for contact between workers and their company, without requiring workers to be physically present in a specific workplace.
<b>Organic Humanitarian Support Law</b>	Creation of a special account for humanitarian aid and to boost the economy. The funds may be used to provide public aid to companies of the affected sectors and for them not to lay off their employees.
<b>Organic Humanitarian Support Law</b>	In agreement with their employer, workers may modify their working conditions, in which case employers must inform workers of the company's financial situation. The agreements reached must be communicated to the Ministry of Labor. For the duration of the agreements, companies will not be able to distribute dividends, lay off employees, or use company funds for luxury items and unnecessary expenses.
<b>Organic Humanitarian Support Law</b>	A measure is implemented to obtain funds from employees of the private and public sectors earning more than USD 500 per month, in addition to resources from companies with large profits and that have not been affected by the pandemic.
<b>Organic Humanitarian Support Law</b>	Family Protection Bonus: provision of a USD 60 bonus to 400,000 families with a budget of USD 50 million. The goal is to reach one million families with a budget of USD 150 million financed by the State, and to reach another million families with the funds obtained from the abovementioned contributions.

MEASURE	DESCRIPTION
<b>Decree 4199</b>	This decree mandates a Family Bonus for low-income families with children in public primary schools, consisting of bolivars 500 per child.
<b>Law 1294</b>	This Law prohibits the suspension of basic services, with deferral of their payment without fines or penalties for the duration of the emergency.
<b>Supreme Decree 4215</b>	This decree mandates the provision of a Universal Bonus equivalent to bolivars 500 to all Bolivians from 18 to 60 years of age.
<b>Supreme Decree 4196</b>	This decree declares the national health emergency and quarantine across the Plurinational State of Bolivia, which includes an article on the exceptional working day that reduces working hours from 8 to 5 hours.
<b>Law 1309-2020</b>	This law stipulates complementary measures in the framework of the declared national Covid-19 emergency, and prohibits dismissals and releases.
<b>Supreme Decree 4216</b>	In addition to establishing support for micro, small and medium enterprises, this decree also establishes an emergency plan to support employment and job stability in legally incorporated companies. The purpose is to grant credits to be used to finance operations, as well as to pay salaries.
<b>Supreme Decree 4218</b>	The main objective of this decree is to regulate telework as special modality for the provision of services that use Information & Communication Technologies (ICTs).

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