



Towards a care society

The contributions of the
Regional Gender Agenda
to sustainable development



UNITED NATIONS

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Meeting of the
**Presiding Officers
of the Regional
Conference on Women**
in Latin America and the Caribbean
29–30 September 2021

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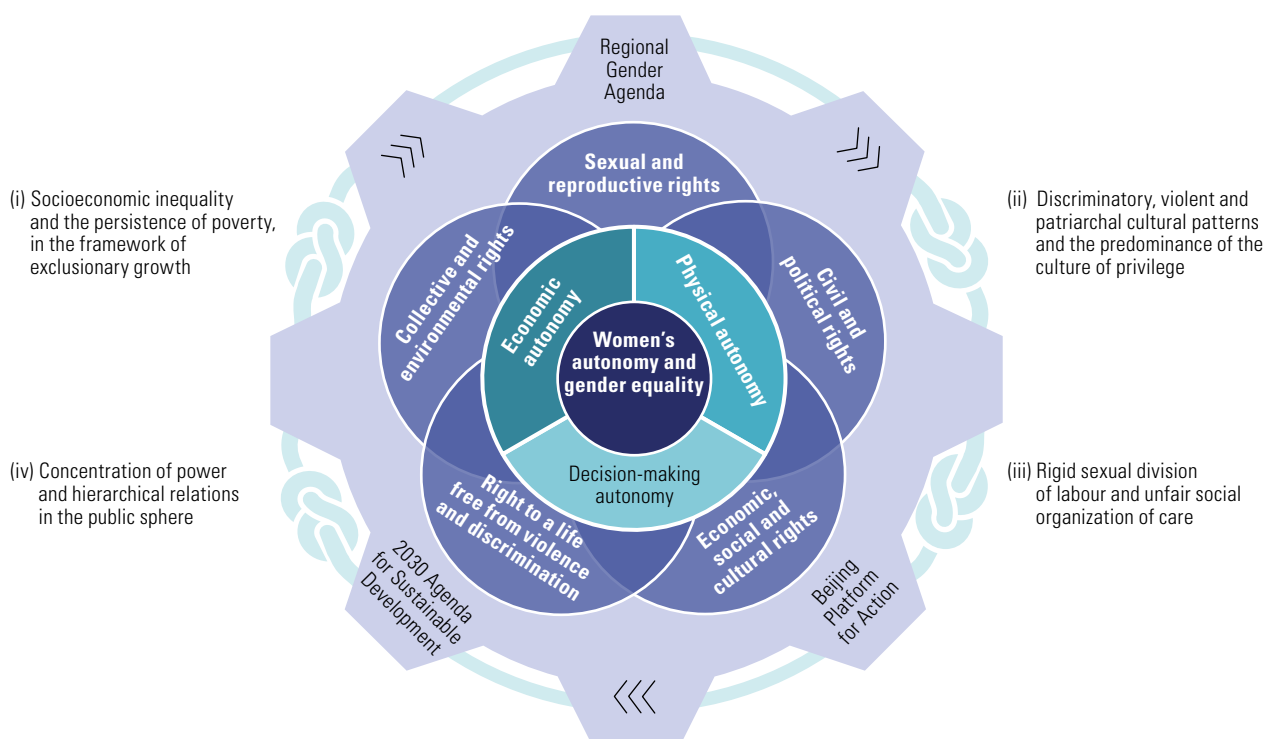
Towards a care society

Gender inequality has historically been a structural feature of Latin America and the Caribbean, which is at the root of the unsustainability of the prevailing development model. In addition to exacerbating the structural challenges of gender inequality, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has highlighted the unfair organization of care within society and the need to put care and sustainability at the centre of the development model. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has therefore called for faster progress towards economic, climate and gender justice and a transition to a care society¹ that prioritizes the sustainability of life and care for the planet and guarantees the rights of people who require or provide care; that takes into account self-care; that works to reduce the precariousness related to the care sector; and that raises awareness of the multiplier effects of the care economy on well-being and its ability to drive a transformative recovery with equality and sustainability.

Over the course of more than four decades, the member States of ECLAC, meeting at sessions of the [Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean](#), have adopted the [Regional Gender Agenda](#),² which aims to guarantee women's rights and drive progress towards their autonomy, laying the foundations for societies with equality, in dialogue with the women's and feminist movements of the region (see diagram 1).

Diagram 1

Commitments in the Regional Gender Agenda to overcome the structural challenges of inequality and achieve women's autonomy and gender equality



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

¹ See [online] <https://www.cepal.org/en/news/alicia-barcena-we-must-pick-pace-toward-economic-climate-and-gender-justice-and-transition-care>.

² The Regional Gender Agenda encompasses the agreements relating to women's rights and autonomy, and gender equality, adopted by ECLAC member States at the sessions of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, from the first Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in the Economic and Social Development of Latin America, held in Havana in 1977, to date.

In particular, in the [Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030](#), the governments of the region identified four structural challenges relating to gender inequality, which limit progress towards women's autonomy and substantive equality:

- (i) Socioeconomic inequality and the persistence of poverty, in the framework of exclusionary growth.
- (ii) Discriminatory, violent and patriarchal cultural patterns and the predominance of the culture of privilege.
- (iii) Rigid sexual division of labour and unfair social organization of care.
- (iv) Concentration of power and hierarchical relations in the public sphere.

At the various sessions of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, the governments of the region have committed to overcoming inequality through public policies that guarantee women's rights and contribute to women's physical, economic and decision-making autonomy and to achieving gender equality in legal frameworks and in the results of policy implementation; in short, commitments have been made to achieving formal equality and substantive equality.

The Regional Gender Agenda reflects synergies with agreements adopted by the countries of the region at meetings of other subsidiary bodies of ECLAC, such as the [Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean](#), the [Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean](#) and the [Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean](#). The Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC has been a key forum for conceptualizing gender statistics and developing related methodologies, particularly concerning time use. This has helped to increase the visibility and measurement of care work and unpaid domestic work, laying the foundations for many regional agreements and the public policy agenda. An example of the synergy between the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean and the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC was the creation (in 2007) of the Working Group on Gender Statistics³ and the [Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean](#), within the framework of the tenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Quito in 2007. Both facilitated technical exchanges between data producers and users and fostered discussions of methodologies for indicators that are key to analysing gender inequalities.

Time-use surveys in the region have revealed the significant contribution of care work to the economy and development. By mid-2021, a total of 21 countries⁴ in the region had conducted at least one time-use measurement and the data collected have played a key role in gender analysis, the measurement of all forms of work, the analysis of the link between income distribution and time distribution, and the creation of satellite accounts for unpaid work in households.

The Regional Gender Agenda is also linked to international and regional commitments to protect, respect and guarantee all the human rights of women and girls in their diversity, as well as non-discrimination and the achievement of gender equality, including the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (1979) and the [Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women \(Convention of Belém do Pará\)](#) (1994). The Regional Gender Agenda also confirms the continued relevance of the [Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women \(Beijing, 1995\)](#) and the [Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development \(Cairo, 1994\)](#), and of the resolutions relating to women, peace and security adopted by the Security Council, the

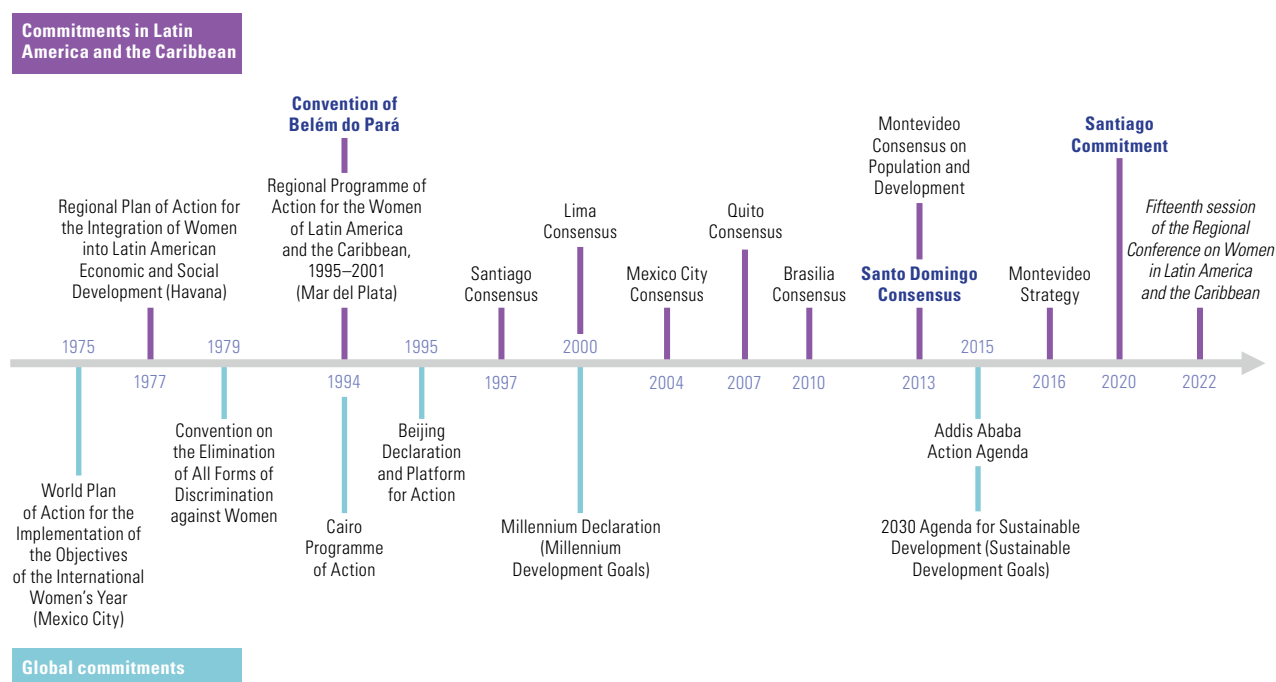
³ At the fourth meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC, the countries approved the creation of the Working Group on Gender Statistics, whose purpose is to pursue the production, development, systematization and consolidation of statistical information and gender indicators for the purpose of formulating, monitoring and evaluating public policies. Mexico has been the coordinating country for the Working Group since it was created, and the Division for Gender Affairs of ECLAC acts as the technical secretariat; The National Institute for Women of Mexico (INMUJERES) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) are advisory bodies. The following countries are members: Argentina, Bahamas, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Plurinational State of Bolivia.

⁴ Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay.

Programme of Action adopted at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (Durban, 2001), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) and the commitments of the International Conferences on Financing for Development (Monterrey, 2002; Doha, 2008 and Addis Ababa, 2015), the sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), among others (see diagram 2).⁵

Diagram 2

The Regional Gender Agenda and global commitments to achieve gender equality



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

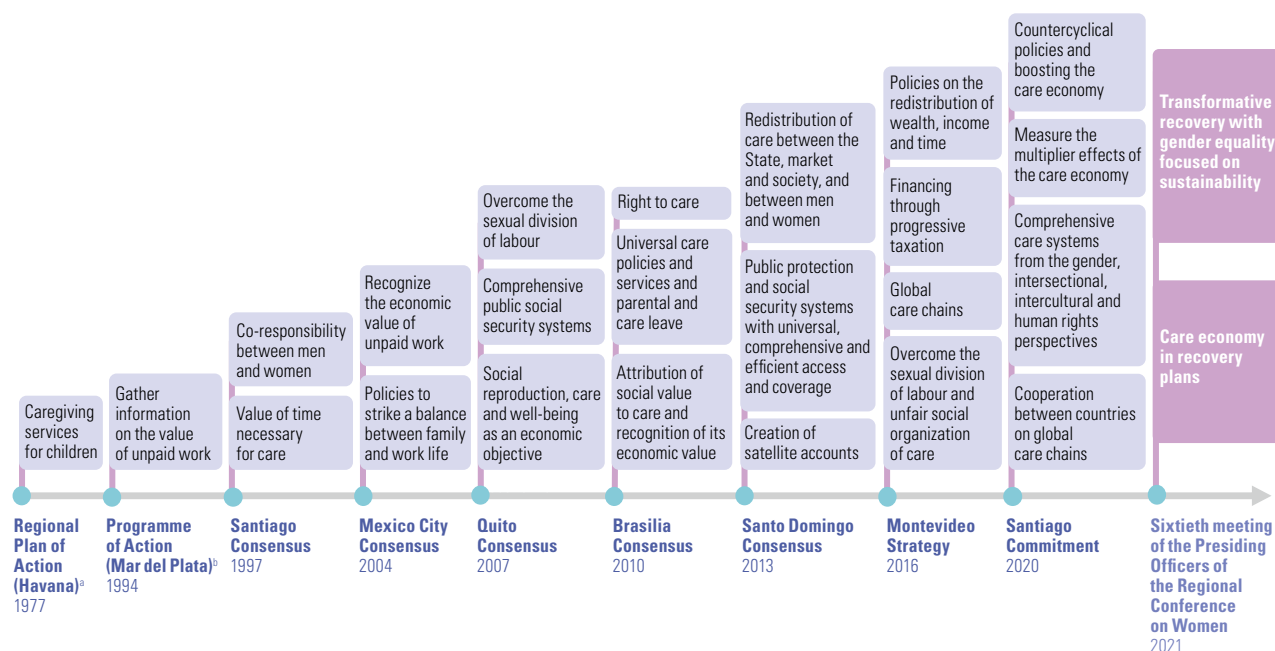
Care work is central to the achievement of several of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) included in the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). Target 5.4 of SDG 5, to recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work, is essential to eradicate poverty and implement appropriate social protection systems and measures for all (SDG 1); end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture (SDG 2); ensure healthy lives and promote well-being (SDG 3); ensure inclusive and equitable quality education (SDG 4); achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (SDG 5); promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (SDG 8); build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation (SDG 9); reduce inequalities (SDG 10); take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (SDG 13); promote peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16) and strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development (SDG 17).

The central role of care in advancing towards gender equality has been a priority in the discussions and agreements of ECLAC member States at the sessions of the Regional Conferences on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, starting with the first Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean (Havana, 1977).

⁵ See the detailed list of relevant conventions and treaties, which establish an international legal framework to protect, respect and guarantee all the human rights of women, adolescents and girls in all their diversity, as well as non-discrimination and the achievement of gender equality, in the preamble of the [Santiago Commitment](#).

In the last 15 years, the governments of the region have adopted a series of agreements fundamental to the design and implementation of care policies. They reaffirm the principles of universality and progressivity for access to quality care services and the importance of co-responsibility between men and women, and between the State, the market, communities and families, as well as the importance of promoting the financial sustainability of public care policies aimed at achieving gender equality. The agreements adopted by governments also emphasize the importance of the role of the State, the essential coordination between its institutions and between national, subnational and local entities, and the intersectional approach (see diagram 3).

Diagram 3
The central role of care in the Regional Gender Agenda



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

^a Refers to the Regional Plan of Action for the Integration of Women into Latin American Economic and Social Development.

^b Refers to the Regional Programme of Action for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995-2001.

Care policies must respond to the growing demands of people in their diversity and of the countries of the region in demographic and epidemiological terms, from an intercultural perspective. The approach to care must therefore be multidimensional if the aim is to eliminate the sexual division of labour and transition towards a care society.

The Montevideo Strategy is a regional political commitment that aims to guide the full implementation of the agreements of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, and to ensure that they serve as the road map for achieving the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the regional level from the perspective of gender equality and women's autonomy and human rights.

To overcome the structural challenges of gender inequality, including the sexual division of labour and the unfair social organization of care, the governments of the region committed themselves in the Montevideo Strategy to designing and implementing comprehensive public policies based on measures in 10 pillars of implementation (see diagram 4).

Diagram 4

Pillars of implementation of the Montevideo Strategy as a road map for building the care society



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of *Montevideo Strategy for the Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030* (LC/CRM.13/5), Santiago, March 2017.

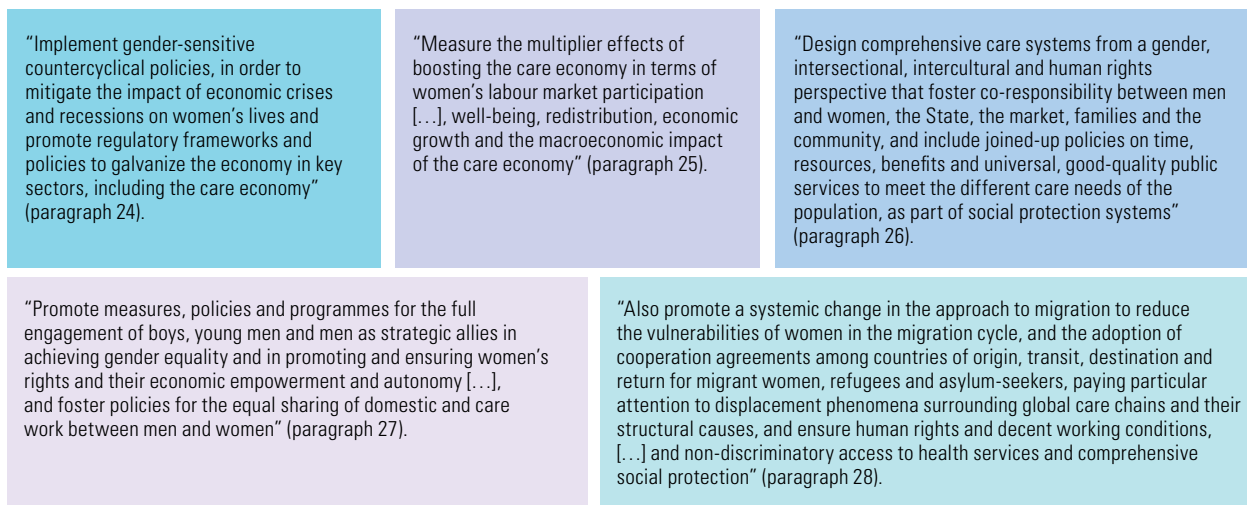
The design and implementation of comprehensive care policies is a clear example of the need for a coordinated organizational structure (Institutional architecture pillar). Furthermore, these policies should be implemented through a multiscale approach and should be adapted to different territories and socioeconomic contexts. With a view to fostering care policies to overcome gender inequalities, it is essential to implement participatory processes that include women's and feminist organizations along with organizations representing caregivers and paid domestic workers, among others (participation pillar), which give priority to communication strategies and campaigns aimed at transforming gender roles in care and promoting co-responsibility (communication pillar). In addition, for the implementation of a normative framework and the building and strengthening of State capacities (normative framework and capacity-building pillars), it is essential to allocate sufficient budgetary resources to guarantee the financial sustainability of policies (financing pillar).

The implementation of these policies will require accountability and follow-up strategies (monitoring and evaluation pillar), which in turn will benefit from a robust information system that provides inputs for the construction and continuous improvement of public policy (information systems pillar). Innovative solutions are also needed that link statistics with geography and make it possible to visualize in the territory those areas affected by inequalities and where it is necessary to prioritize action. Moreover, although the issue of care in general could benefit from coordinated action at the regional level, a universal approach is needed, which requires coordinated action in areas such as the dynamics associated with migratory movements and global care chains (cooperation pillar).

Towards the fifteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean

At the [fourteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean](#), held in January 2020, ECLAC member States adopted the [Santiago Commitment](#), which includes a set of agreements relating to care (see diagram 5).

Diagram 5
Care in the Santiago Commitment



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of "Santiago Commitment", 2020 [online] https://conferenciamujer.cepal.org/14/sites/crm14/files/20-00087_crm.14_santiago_commitment.pdf.

The [sixtieth meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean](#) was held in February 2021. Within that framework, a special regional consultation session with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) was held ahead of the sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. At the meeting of the Presiding Officers, the governments of the region discussed the central role of care for a transformative recovery aimed at the sustainability of life and the importance of promoting a regional compact on care.⁶ The agreements adopted at the sixtieth meeting of the Presiding Officers included the following:

"Emphasize that the current situation must be taken as an opportunity to ensure, through affirmative actions, women's full participation in sectors of the economy that are strategic for a transformative recovery with gender equality aimed at the sustainability of life and, in particular, to promote recovery plans that strengthen the care economy as a dynamic sector of the economy as a whole."⁷

This initiative was developed in the framework of the Generation Equality Forum (held in Mexico City from 29–31 March 2021 and in Paris from 30 June–2 July 2021), where the National Institute for Women of Mexico and UN-Women promoted the creation of the Global Alliance for Care.

This Alliance is part of the Action Coalition on economic justice and rights and is based on four principles: the responsibility of the State as the primary guarantor of care; care as a public good; care as a right (to care

⁶ See [online] <https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/womens-affairs-ministers-commit-furthering-care-society-and-full-digital-inclusion>.

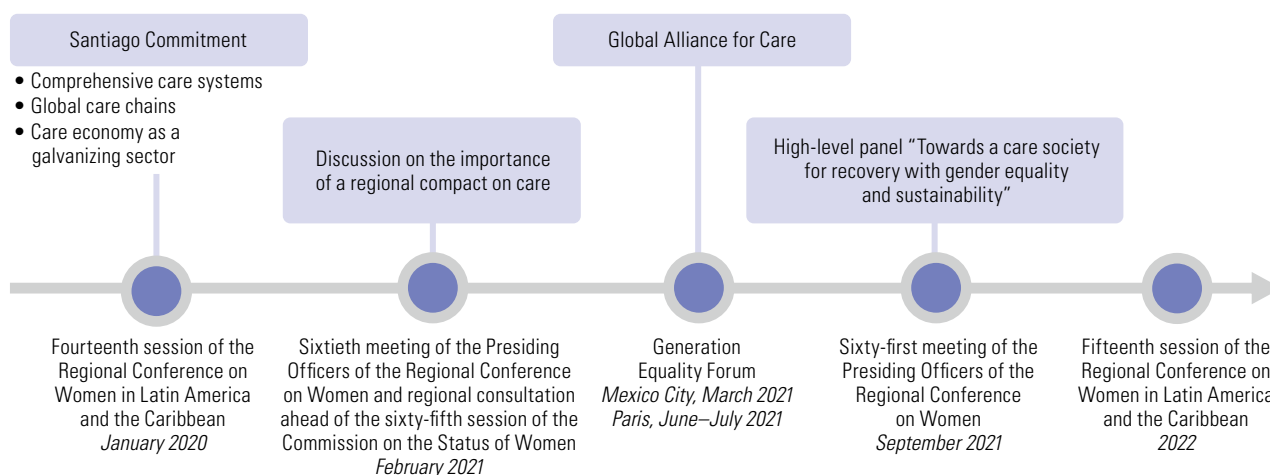
⁷ See "Agreements", Sixtieth meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2021, paragraph 22 [online] https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/events/files/21-00097_mdm.60_agreements.pdf.

and to be cared for) and the availability, accessibility, affordability and quality of care services, including their monitoring and evaluation.⁸ These principles coincide to a large extent with the agreements of the Regional Gender Agenda, reached by the governments of the region.

The sixty-first meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean will include a high-level panel to address the challenges and opportunities of moving towards a care society for recovery with gender equality and sustainability in Latin America and the Caribbean, and discussions on the issues to be addressed at the fifteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean (Argentina, 2022) (see diagram 6).

Diagram 6

Towards the building of a care society within the framework of the Regional Gender Agenda, 2020–2022



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

In short, the Regional Gender Agenda provides a robust framework of agreements adopted by the governments of Latin America and the Caribbean aimed at guaranteeing women’s human rights, preventing setbacks and advancing towards the achievement of women’s autonomy and substantive equality.

This Agenda, from a comprehensive perspective, complements the commitments made at the global level and advances in agreements aimed at overcoming the sexual division of labour and the unfair social organization of care, implementing comprehensive care policies and systems, promoting the redistribution and recognition of care work, and strengthening the role of the care economy as a dynamic sector in the movement towards a transformative recovery with equality.

In addition, the agreements of this Agenda constitute the foundation for strengthening the role of States from a feminist perspective, through the implementation of universal, intersectoral, comprehensive, co-responsible and sustainable care policies and systems.

The structural problems of regional development and the structural challenges of gender inequality are visible when analysing the fissures in social, political and economic systems, which have become especially noticeable in the context of the pandemic and which must be addressed through agreed and coordinated action at the regional level.

This crisis is an opportunity to affirm the commitment and will of society as a whole and to build consensus among ECLAC member States with a view to the fifteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in order to achieve an equitable distribution of power, resources and time between women and men, and to move towards a new development model based on equality and sustainability.

⁸ National Institute for Women (INMUJERES)/United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), *Alianza Global por los Cuidados: un llamado urgente a la acción 2021* [online] http://cedoc.inmujeres.gob.mx/documentos_download/GAC-CN-Esp-101351.pdf.



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