OCTOBER 2020

Bridging the Gap:

Mapping Gender Data Availability in Latin America and the Caribbean

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

data2X

OPEN DATA WATCH

UNITED NATIONS

ECLAC

Overview

Bridging the Gap: Mapping Gender Data Availability in Latin America and the Caribbean is a regional deep dive assessing the availability and quality of data about women and girls in five countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) increased demand for disaggregated data to support decision makers and implementers. In particular, expectations for the information that data can provide on the lives of women and girls have risen. This report offers insights on where gaps in gender data exist, why gaps occur, and what can be done to fill them and deliver on commitments to improve the lives of women and girls.

This work builds on Data2X's *Mapping Gender Data Gaps* report, first published in 2014 and updated in early 2020, which launched efforts to find and test innovative solutions to fill gender data gaps. In addition, this work is a companion piece to *Bridging the Gap: Mapping Gender Data Availability in Africa*, published in 2019.

This report differs from the Africa regional analysis in three ways. First, the set of gender indicators was updated to include additional SDG indicators for which new methodologies have been proposed.[1] Second, as this analysis was conducted later, an additional year of data was included. Finally, this report includes an extensive discussion of national gender equality plans and policies in the five focus countries, along with an assessment of how the studied indicators can support these plans.

Through this project, we set out to answer the following questions:

- Which domains of women's and girls' lives do we understand well from existing data, and which remain unclear because of lacking or poor quality data?

- What are the sources of available data and where can they be found in national and international databases? What can we learn from these patterns of availability?

- What can we learn from these five countries, including their national policies and programs, about closing systemic gender data gaps?

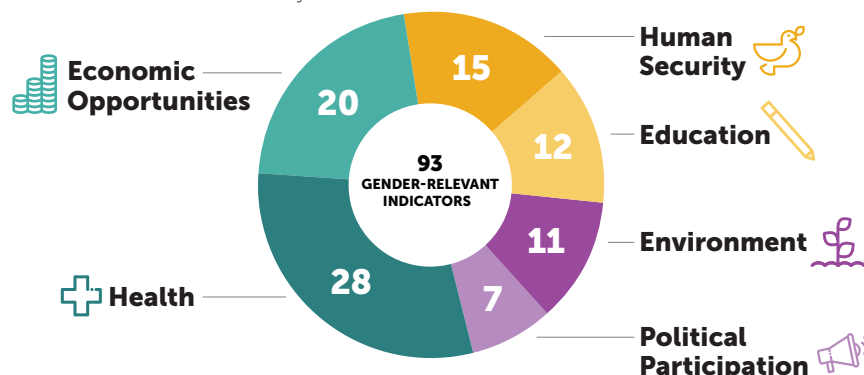**Fig. 1:** The Latin America & Caribbean countries selected for this study.
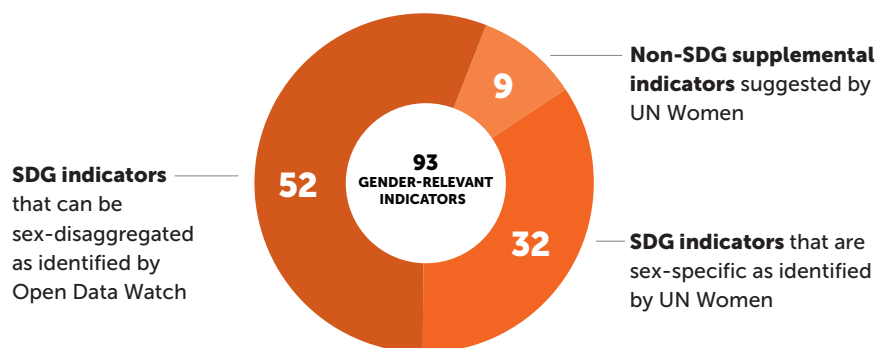

Approach

To answer these questions, we selected 93 gender-relevant indicators covering six domains: economic opportunities, education, environment, health, human security, and public participation.

Fig. 2: Gender-relevant indicators by domain

- Economic Opportunities **20**
- Human Security **15**
- Education **12**
- Environment **11**
- Political Participation **7**
- Health **28**

93 GENDER-RELEVANT INDICATORS

These gender-relevant indicators include 84 SDG indicators and nine non-SDG indicators suggested by UN Women. Producing this set of indicators regularly and to a high standard would support monitoring of and delivering on current commitments for women and girls, but these indicators alone are not enough. Countries need to use this data to adopt policies and implement programs — guided by indicators — to address the conditions of women and children.

Fig. 3: Sources of gender-relevant indicators examined in this study

- **Non-SDG supplemental indicators** suggested by UN Women **9**
- **SDG indicators** that can be sex-disaggregated as identified by Open Data Watch **52**
- **SDG indicators** that are sex-specific as identified by UN Women **32**

93 GENDER-RELEVANT INDICATORS

We assessed data from both international and national databases in four ways.

AVAILABILITY

Availability examined if the indicators were recorded at all in any form between 2010 and 2019.

ADHERENCE TO STANDARDS

Adherence to standards noted whether indicators were produced following internationally agreed upon definitions and methodologies.

DISAGGREGATION

Disaggregation assessed if reported indicators first were disaggregated by sex, and then by additional characteristics, such as geographic location, age, income level, or disability status.

TIMELINESS & FREQUENCY

Timeliness and frequency checked how regularly and how recently each indicator was reported.

We examined the metadata and the microdata sources (specific surveys, censuses, and administrative data used to calculate the indicators). With this, we established trends in data production to learn from areas where countries are doing well, assess if that success is replicable, and pinpoint strategic opportunities to improve gender data collection for these indicators.

Key Findings: Gender indicators in international and national databases

AVAILABILITY   ADHERENCE TO STANDARDS

Over 50 percent of gender-relevant indicators lack sex-disaggregated data in both national and international databases or are missing entirely.

Fig. 4: Gender-relevant indicators available at the national and international level

NATIONAL DATABASES
31%
22%
47%

INTERNATIONAL DATABASES
25%
45%
30%

Gender-relevant indicators with no data

Gender-relevant indicators with data, but not sex-disaggregated

Gender-relevant indicators with sex-disaggregated data
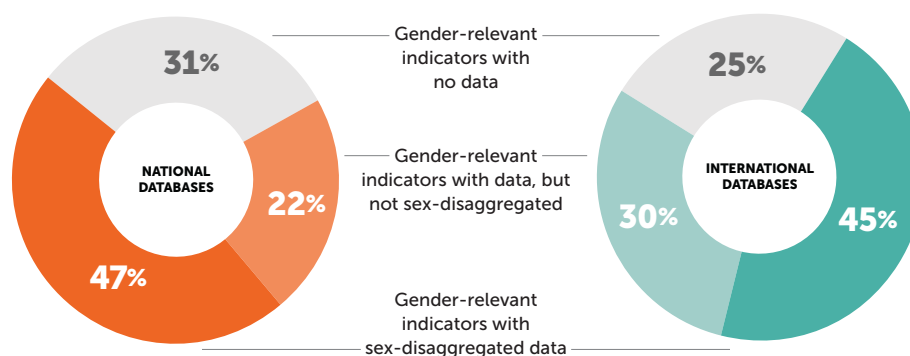
National databases have a higher proportion of gender-relevant indicators with no data than international databases and are more likely to report on indicators that do not exactly conform to international standards. Although international databases report on more indicators, they also include a greater proportion of indicators without sex-disaggregation.

Looking at availability differences between countries' national databases, there is wide variation both on how many indicators are recorded and how many conform to international standards. There may be a trade-off between publishing more non-conforming indicators or publishing fewer indicators following international standards. Regardless, there is significant work to be done at both national and international levels to address both the collection and reporting of gender data.

DISAGGREGATION

Only 34 percent of indicators in international databases have full disaggregation while only 27 percent of indicators in national databases are produced with complete disaggregation.

Sex-disaggregation provides a basic level of information about the lives of women and men and girls and boys, but women and girls are not a homogeneous group and additional disaggregation can provide a more nuanced understanding. For example, outcomes can vary by geographical setting (urban or rural), age, income level, disability status, as well as race and ethnicity. Data producers must expand how they collect and disaggregate data to represent the full spectrum of women's and girls' lives.

DISAGGREGATION

The health domain has the highest number (15) of sex-disaggregated indicators at both the national and international levels. Only one environment indicator at the national level and two at the international level have sex-disaggregated data.

Even though the health domain has the highest number of sex-disaggregated indicators at the national and international levels, its 15 sex-disaggregated indicators represent only 54 percent of all indicators in that domain — leaving a sizable information gap in what we know about health. For most domains — except economic opportunities, which are better captured in national databases due to greater sex-disaggregation and conforming to international standards — there is a similar amount of data available in national and international databases. Yet, despite the data that is available, serious data gaps remain: 40 percent of indicators in the economic opportunities domain are missing or not disaggregated by sex in national databases. The environment domain, for which there are only seven gender-relevant indicators, has the least reported data and only one indicator is disaggregated by sex in national databases. While there is variability between them, all domains have significant gaps at both the national and international levels.

Fig. 5: Percent (and number) of sex-disaggregated indicators available in national and international databases (averaged across countries)

TIMELINESS & FREQUENCY
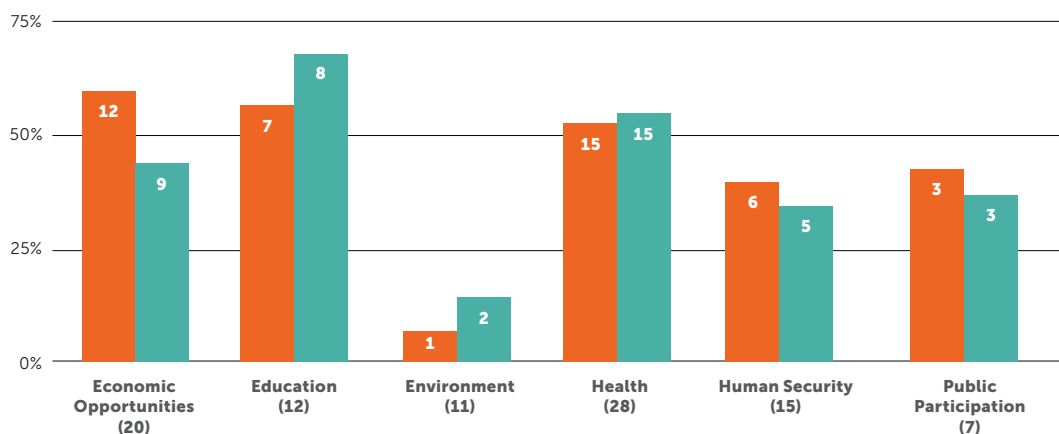
68 percent of gender indicators in national databases have available observations within the last four years, with the largest share occurring in 2017.

Fig. 6: Number of indicators by most recent year of collection in national databases
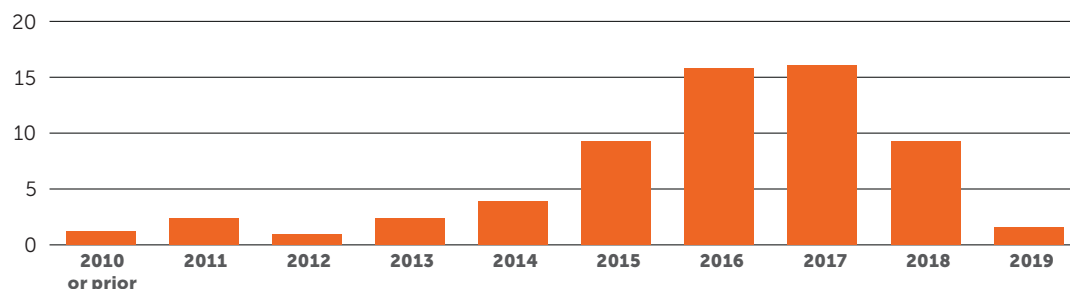
In addition to having recent data available, most gender indicators should be reported every year to better identify trends and assess the impact of policy changes and other relevant initiatives. At the international level, data are collected more often and more regularly. At the national level data are collected less frequently on average.

TIMELINESS & FREQUENCY **Fewer than 60 percent of indicators were reported more than three times over ten years in national databases, limiting the ability to identify trends by sex.**

There is also wide variation in regularity of data collection between countries. In the studied ten-year timespan, Costa Rica collected data on almost half the indicators more than three times; however, Paraguay collected and reported on only five percent of indicators more than three times.

Fig. 7: Frequency of data collection varies significantly from country to country in national databases

Observations available in national databases by country
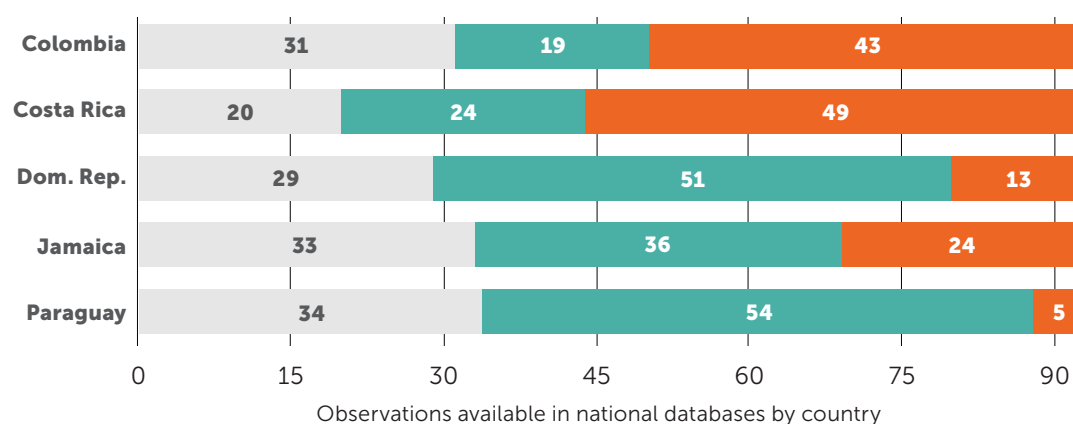
Key Findings: Microdata Sources

This persistence of large gaps in both international and national databases points to the need for a mix of microdata sources.

A balanced mix of microdata sources is key to ensuring high-quality and frequent gender indicators. Economic indicators are primarily drawn from survey data, although some labor force indicators are collected through both surveys and administrative records. Education measures, on the other hand, generally come from administrative records that are sometimes supplemented by surveys. Many of the human security indicators require individual surveys that can be difficult to collect.

Available administrative sources and surveys are not achieving their potential value for insights into the lives of women and girls.
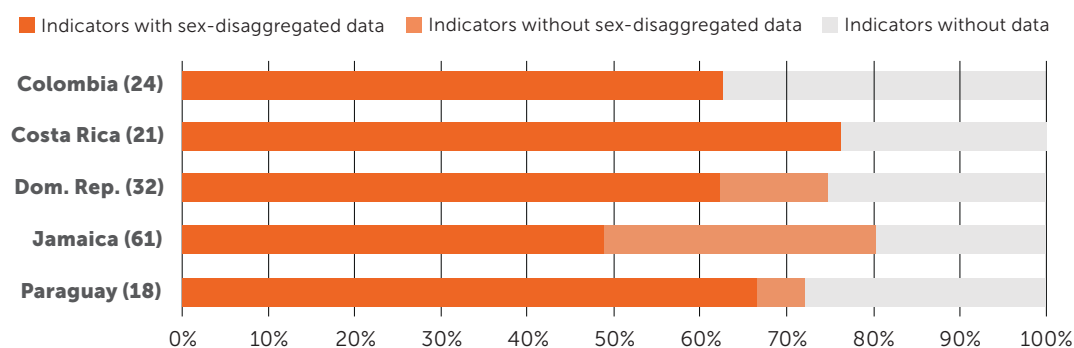
Not all data gaps require entirely new data sources or data collection efforts. Administrative records have the potential to provide more complete gender data than surveys and do so more frequently. Administrative sources are lower cost and can provide more resolution at a smaller scale than surveys. By tapping into existing sources with additional analysis or the inclusion of a question on sex, we can significantly expand our knowledge base of gender indicators.

Key Findings: Gender and Data Policies

Incorporating specific targets tied to measurable indicators in national gender equality plans could improve decision-making, increase public awareness, and provide important evidence of progress.

The *Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030* was adoped in 2016 to guide implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda and support the SDGs. A key pillar of it is "transforming data into information, information into knowledge and knowledge into political decisions," including establishing and strengthening national statistics systems to regularly collect and report sex-disaggregated data. To this end, countries in the region are constructing data repositories, strengthening administrative records, and creating information systems, gender observatories, and atlases. The Montevideo Strategy has guided at least seven countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to develop gender equality plans and policies, including Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay. Other countries are currently drafting or updating their plans and policies referencing the Montevideo Strategy as well. A subset of the studied indicators can provide the data required to implement and monitor these national initiatives. Using data to monitor against national targets is an important step to integrate data throughout the policymaking process.

Fig. 8: Indicators in national databases that can be used to monitor national plans and policies

■ Indicators with sex-disaggregated data   ■ Indicators without sex-disaggregated data   ■ Indicators without data

2. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework* by 2030 (LC/CRM.13/5), Santiago, 2017. https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/events/files/montevideo_strategy.pdf.

3. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Regional progress report on the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030* (LC/CRM.14/5), Santiago, 2019, https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/44957/S1900847_en.pdf.

Recommendations

1. **Prioritize closing gender data gaps.** Our top recommendation mirrors the top recommendation from *Bridging the Gap Africa: Key Findings and Recommendations:* national statistical offices, international custodian agencies, and technical experts who support statistical development should work together to strengthen the quality of existing gender data and prioritize new production and reporting to close gaps.

2. **Increase disaggregation beyond sex.** Disaggregating data along multiple dimensions provides a more detailed understanding of the range of experiences and outcomes for women and girls. The benefits of addressing this limitation would go well beyond gender and provide critical insight in other areas as well. As was recommended in *Bridging the Gap Africa: Key Findings and Recommendations*, countries should prioritize the disaggregations that are most appropriate for their national context. This includes both collecting this data and reporting it with key disaggregations.

3. **Collect, publish, and disseminate data more often and at more regular intervals.** While data collection can be resource intensive, databases at the national level could be improved by including data published in international databases. International databases could be expanded by including proxy measures in the short-term — as many national databases do — to provide a more complete picture. With more complete data, trends over time and the impact of policy changes could be better assessed.

4. **Incorporate targets for key indicators into national gender equality policies and plans.** Countries could improve their decision-making process by creating new gender equality national plans and policies or updating existing ones with specific targets tied to measurable indicators. Providing easy access to this data through data portals would increase public awareness and provide important evidence of progress toward targets and goals. By increasing the frequency of data reporting, countries would be able to further integrate data into national policymaking.

Next Steps

The accompanying technical and methodology reports are a summary of the knowledge generated by the *Bridging the Gap* study. Individual country profiles were also produced and will be shared with the relevant national statistical offices and other stakeholders. These profiles outline ways to support data production and encourage its use. Additional products for the data and policy communities will be produced to serve as a basis for discussions on future plans for filling gender data gaps. These will include:

- Summary pages for each of the 84 gender-relevant SDG indicators offering targeted and specific insights into what should be done to improve data collection and production for each gender-relevant SDG indicator and;

- A similar analysis for the Asia-Pacific region, including focus countries Armenia, Bangladesh, Mongolia, Philippines, and Samoa, in partnership with the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

About Data2X

Data2X is a technical and advocacy platform dedicated to improving the quality, availability, and use of gender data in order to make a practical difference in the lives of women and girls worldwide. Working in partnership with multilateral agencies, governments, civil society, academics, and the private sector, Data2X mobilizes action for and strengthens production and use of gender data.

About Open Data Watch

Open Data Watch is an international, non-profit organization of data experts working to bring change to organizations that produce and manage official statistical data. We support the efforts of national statistical offices (NSOs), particularly those in low- and middle-income countries, to improve their data systems and harness the advancements of the data revolution. Through our policy advice, data support, and monitoring work, we influence and help both NSOs and other organizations meet the goals of their national statistical plans and the SDGs.

About UN ECLAC

The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) is one of five regional commissions of the United Nations. It was founded with the purpose of contributing to the economic development of the region, coordinating actions directed towards this end, and reinforcing economic ties among countries and with other nations of the world. The promotion of the region's social development was later included among its primary objectives. The ECLAC Division for Gender Affairs plays an active role in gender mainstreaming and advancing women's autonomy within regional development in Latin America and the Caribbean. It works in close collaboration with the national entities for the advancement of women in the region, civil society, the women's movement, feminist organizations and public policymakers, including national statistics institutes. Learn more about ECLAC at www.cepal.org/en.

#BridgetheGap

Find out more at: **bit.ly/BridgingtheGapLAC**.