

Working women changing traditional roles in Latin America and Caribbean: UN report



11 June 2009 – An increase of Latin American and Caribbean women in the workforce is challenging the traditional interplay between work and family life, a joint United Nations report said today, adding that responding to this phenomenon is an essential step towards gender equality and more productive economies.

The [report](#), “Work and Family: A new call for public policies of reconciliation with social co-responsibility,” prepared by the International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)) and the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)), calls for better representation of women in labour negotiations, day care, and flexible hours.

The report said that in Latin America and the Caribbean, the number of women active in the labour market rose from 32 per cent in 1990 to 53 per cent in 2008. Today, more than 100 million women throughout the region work.

It said the reconciliation between work and family is “one of the greatest challenges of our time (and) a fundamental aspect for promoting equality in the world of work and for reducing poverty.” Tensions between work and the family entail a high cost not only to women and those to whom they provide care, but also to countries’ economic growth – to the proper functioning of labour market and companies’ productivity, it said.

“Today, women and men work, but there has been no similar process of change in redistribution of domestic workload. Nor have public services that support such duties been improved significantly – and there has been little change towards reorganization of social life,” according to the publication.

“The mindset that the household duties are part of women’s roles has obstructed improvements in quality of life,” it added, since “caring for family members is also the responsibility of men.”

UNDP’s Rebecca Grynspan said government should learn from the best practices of some countries that are already in place. For example, she said, Costa Rica offers day care plans for almost all workers; Brazil has a pension plan for workers in the informal economy, which often includes more women than men; and Chile has paternity leave as well as maternity leave.

Ms. Grynspan also praised Brazil for recent efforts to expand the powers of women at labour negotiations.

“Women can present an agenda with a gender point of view,” she said. “The negotiations should not include only men.”

Ms. Grynspan also suggested countries might consider setting school hours for small children in a scheme which would be more in conformity with the needs of working women.

The report also says wage discrimination is one of the consequences of the sexual division of labour. As a result, in Latin America, women's wages on average amount to only 70 per cent of those of men.

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