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Tackling gender stereotypes and enhancing policies to help women access decent work in Perú

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Key messages

The main barriers to decent jobs for women are gender stereotypes and a lack of accessible care services

- Particularly for vulnerable women, most of whom are unemployed or employed in precarious (informal) jobs.

To improve women's conditions in the labor market and address persisting gender inequalities, the Government should consider prioritizing the following measures or interventions:

- Carry out awareness campaigns to address sexist gender norms within communities and schools.
- Expand daycare services with innovative approaches to make them more accessible and to further facilitate women's integration in formal jobs.
- Invest in public employment services taking a gender transformative approach.

Investigating the barriers to decent work for women in Perú

Despite years of efforts, and some progress, labor inequality between women and men persists in Perú. In 2022, female labor force participation and informal employment rates were 66% and 73.3% respectively, compared with 79% and 63.8% for men¹.

In 2022, a team of local PEP researchers set out to assess the factors behind this persistent gap, and particularly the context-specific barriers that impede women's access to "decent work" in Perú.

To do so, the researchers used "formal work" as the main indicator of decent employment. They also embedded an innovative indicator of "non-precarious employment", which considers the minimum acceptable working conditions, i.e., a minimum legal salary and maximum working hours. This indicator is relevant in the Peruvian context as less than 25% of women who are employed work in the formal sector.

1. ILO (n.d.) ILOSTAT explorer. <https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorer2/>



Methodology

The study was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques.

- The quantitative data were derived from the National Household Survey (ENAHU, in Spanish).
- To collect the qualitative data, the project team conducted 17 key informant interviews with public officials, civil society representatives, experts, and women beneficiaries of public daycare services, as well as four focus group discussions with employed, self-employed, and unemployed vulnerable urban women.

Key findings

1. Gender norms

- The gender norms and stereotypes that result in women, almost exclusively, assuming the household and care duties within their families severely limits the time women have available to access decent work.
- Women in the focus groups stressed the burden of household and childcare responsibilities while the econometric analysis demonstrated the effect of the care burden on women's work.
 - Having a partner, living with older adults, and having young children reduced the likelihood that a woman would hold a decent (non-precarious) job, by 12.5%, 2.8% and 2.2%, respectively.

2. Unavailability of care services

- Directly related to the gender norms issue, the unavailability of adequate and accessible care services limits women's employment options.
- The quantitative results showed that the presence of an alternative caregiver (i.e., an unemployed, or inactive woman between 12 and 75 years old) increased a woman's chances of accessing a decent (non-precarious) job by 2.5%.

3. Employers' lack of awareness

- A common lack of awareness amongst employers regarding women's labor rights is another barrier associated with the prevailing gender norms.
- This was captured in the focus groups where many participants had experienced or witnessed employers' lack of respect for their rights.

4. Regulation of women's labor rights

- The existing regulations and policies that are intended to protect women's labor rights contain flaws.
- For starters, the costs associated with women's rights (such as maternity leave costs) are completely assumed by employers.
- Measures to enforce these rights are also highly ineffective.

5. Public employment services without a gender transformative approach

- Public labor programs often lack a gender transformative approach. For instance, these programs usually do not consider women's restricted schedules due to their household duties.

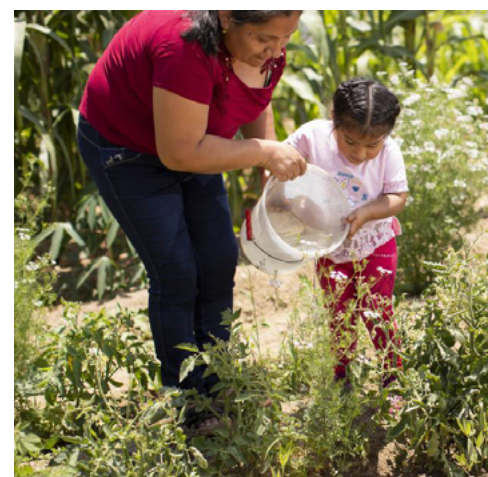
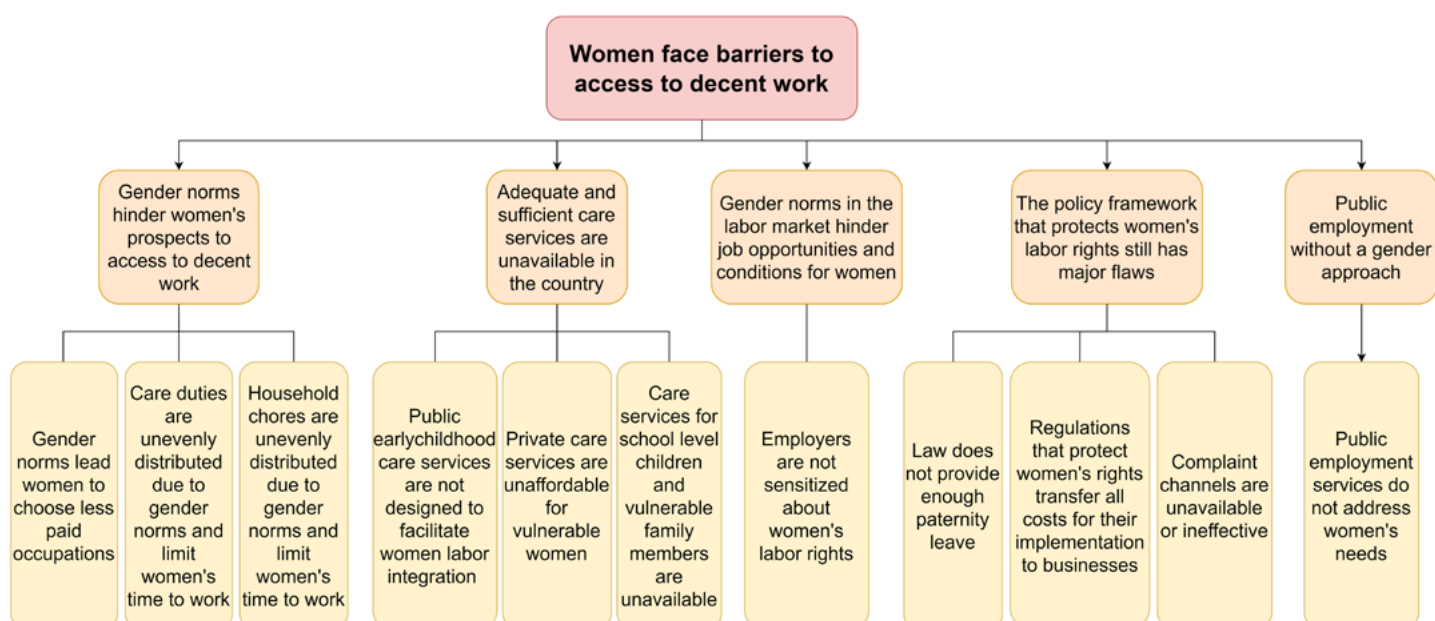


Figure 1: Barriers faced by women to access decent work in Peru



Policy options

As shown above, multiple factors contribute to the precarious labor situation of women. As such, the issue must be addressed from multiple angles. The project team's analysis identified the following policy options:

1. Awareness program for parents to change gender norms.
2. Basic education with a gender transformative approach.
3. Expand the coverage of existing public daycare services & create new ones with innovative approaches.
4. Women's labor rights awareness campaigns for businesses.
5. Legal and regulatory reforms to protect women's rights within the workplace.
6. Public employment services with a gender transformative approach.

Table 1: EVALUATION OF POLICY OPTIONS

Policy options	Description	Priority level analysis
Awareness program for parents to change gender norms	Implementing awareness campaigns for parents within communities and schools.	Highly feasible and could be implemented soon, although the effects would show in the long term. While it could be challenged by the political will of the Ministry of Education, it may reach a large population. Priority: High
Basic education with a gender transformative approach	Incorporating a gender transformative approach within the national basic education curriculum (e.g., addressing gender stereotypes and norms in relevant courses).	This option would be costly and, currently, generates great resistance from the Ministry of Education. It is worth trying nonetheless, due to its great coverage and the scale of potential impact. Priority: Medium
Expand the coverage of existing public daycare services and create new ones with innovative approaches	Improving daycare services to facilitate women's insertion into the labor market. Some innovations for this include extended operating hours and creating community-based daycare services.	The option is very costly. However, the option could have a high impact on vulnerable women. Building it upon existing efficient innovations could help to reduce its cost. Priority: High
Women's labor rights awareness campaigns for businesses	Implementing awareness campaigns within companies to encourage improvements in gender equality policies and practices.	This option is feasible and cost-effective, but it would have a small coverage since it only addresses women with formal jobs (the minority of working women in Perú). It would receive medium political support and be implemented in the medium term. Priority: Low
Legal and regulatory reforms to protect women's rights within the workplace	This option imply a set of reforms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a parental leave scheme • Create a subsidy to support businesses in the implementation of regulations in favor of women's labor rights • Strengthen the office that oversees the enforcement of the regulations. 	This option is very important in the long term when women finally get more integrated into the formal labor market. It is, however, very costly both in political and economic terms, and could only be implemented in the long term. Priority: Low
Public employment services with a gender transformative approach	Adapting public employment services with more flexible schedules and provision of training focused on women's specific capacity-building needs (e.g., soft skills). Also, continue connecting them with other services/programs that support women – e.g., daycare services or programs addressing gender violence.	While this option addresses a limited number of women, it is not very costly to implement and is highly feasible considering that a program seeking to articulate public employment services with other key programs for women already exists. In addition, there is good political will for its implementation. Priority: High

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on literature review and key informant interviews. Options were evaluated on their feasibility, (political) acceptability, economic cost, expected coverage and impact, and potential implementation and effects period.

Conclusion

From a long-term perspective, all options identified above should be considered as relevant and necessary measures to promote women's integration into the formal labor market, as they tackle different barriers or dimensions of the issue.

An analysis of each option's feasibility and potential impact on the most vulnerable women, however, leads to prioritizing the following options for immediate policy intervention:

- Awareness programs in schools and communities for parents to change gender norms.
- Expansion of existing public daycare services' coverage, and creation of new ones with innovative approaches.
- Incorporating a gender transformative approach to public employment services; i.e., adapting them to address women's specific needs and connecting them to others that support women (such as services that address gender violence).

Roadmap

To initiate and facilitate the implementation of these priority options, the first step would be to identify the existing programs or legislative frameworks that could be used as the basis for their implementation. This would also help avoid the multiplication of programs with overlapping objectives while improving coordination in implementation.

For the options that more likely to face significant resistance (like the creation of new daycare services) important advocacy work must be undertaken with key stakeholders such as the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion, and the Congress. This work should be done in close collaboration with civil society and international organizations.

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The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of PEP.

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