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## **Integrating Income, Employment Support and Care in Latin America: A Gender Perspective**

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## **1. Introduction**

The integration of activating measures within unemployment and social assistance schemes has become a key component in fostering decent work opportunities in countries of the Global South.<sup>1</sup> This policy shift is in line with recommendations from international organizations and some streams of the academic literature. It promotes a common framework to address both social and labour market exclusion. However, the potential for these approaches to address gender inequalities remains somewhat unexplored, particularly beyond the Global North. Furthermore, the integration of policies has been implemented through various approaches potentially yielding distinct impacts on poverty, employment and gender equality. Consequently, the examination of both conceptual and practical applications of integrated approaches beyond countries in the Global North is worthy of consideration.

Understanding access to social protection as a human right, this text discusses the challenges and possibilities of integrating active labour market policies (ALMPs) into social protection frameworks. It emphasizes the role of employing an integrated approach in providing women with both protection and opportunities to pursue sustainable ways of living. The reflections presented in this text do not aim to argue for a reduction in income support but rather discuss the need to combine it with quality social services and labour market policies.

To assess the primary challenges and opportunities of integrated approaches, this text first explores the relevance of decent work in fostering social, economic and gender equality (Section 2). It then provides a brief overview of the main conceptual basis for integration (Section 3), followed by a more detailed examination of each component, starting with income support (Section 4) and then exploring active labour market policies (Section 5). The text concludes by presenting first the opportunities of integrated approaches for fostering gender equality (Section 6) and then addressing the main challenges this new approach presents in promoting better and more equal livelihoods (Section 7).

The text focuses mainly on Latin America and draws specific examples from Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. It nonetheless sometimes makes references to countries of the Global South as some of the previous work discussed – for example ILO (2019) and Asenjo and others (2023) – presents findings that expands beyond Latin America.

## **2. Decent work as a driver of social, economic and gender equality**

Access to productive and decent employment during people's working years is crucial for ensuring income security, serving as a key driver of poverty alleviation and potentially fostering gender equality. Increased participation of women in the labour market can enhance economic autonomy,

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<sup>1</sup> *Activation measures* provide assistance and incentives for people to look actively for jobs and find suitable employment. These measures include training schemes, public works, labour market services, micro-entrepreneurship support and employment subsidies (ILO, 2016).

not only through present income but also by providing opportunities for on the job learning and longer job tenure. Furthermore, it facilitates access to and improves the benefits of contributory social security mechanisms, such as unemployment insurance and old age pensions (ILO, 2017). The integration of women into productive and decent employment aligns with gender equity principles (Fraser, 1994), and can play a significant role in challenging traditional gender norms for both present and future generations (Seguino, 2007). Decent work can also promote self-respect and increase the control and self-determination of a woman's own lives (Kabeer, 2012). In essence, the integration of women into decent work can be viewed as an advancement in gender equality.

However, the lack of decent work opportunities – as evidenced by persistently high rates of underemployment and informality that affect countries in the Global South – continues to be a central challenge (ILO, 2018). This characteristic of the labour market is interlinked with gender, as constraints to access decent work among women are significant, and, once in the labour market, employment opportunities are generally of lower wages and lower quality.

The case of Chile serves as an illustration of the obstacles women face to access decent work. Similar to many other countries in the Global South, the labour trajectory of women in Chile is characterized by informality, lower wage levels, segregation in lower quality occupations, and decreased job security (INE, 2012). The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically illustrated the weakness of women's integration into the labour market. Sectors with an overrepresentation of female workers were the hardest hit, and 9 out of 10 unemployed women stopped searching for employment during this period in Chile. In August 2020, female labour participation had returned to the lowest level in a decade, with care responsibilities and domestic work emerging as key factors contributing to these inequalities within the paid workforce (Comunidad Mujer, 2020).

A recent investigation reveals a significant motherhood penalty in the Chilean labour market (Contreras et al., 2023). Twenty months after giving birth, the gender gap in employability increases by 15 percentage points. Additionally, women's labour market income decreases, on average, by 35 per cent in the private sector and 20 per cent in the public sector. These effects persist over time, impacting women's economic autonomy. As the time spent in unpaid work increases significantly after women become mothers, the challenges of balancing paid and unpaid work emerge as the most relevant cause of these enduring disparities.

Women also fulfil caregiving responsibilities for their elder parents. According to research by Brito and Contreras (2023), daughters, in particular, experience employment and earnings reductions when caring for sick parents. After five years of a parent's first cancer hospitalization, daughters experience a 5 per cent reduction in employment rates and an 11 per cent reduction in earning compared to sons of sick parents. This caregiving penalty affects women regardless

of their relative income compared to partners or brothers and is concentrated among women who are also mothers.

In light of this, while the labour market can serve as a tool to promote gender equality, inadequate access to quality employment remains a major obstacle. Disparities in access to decent work can exacerbate vulnerabilities for working-aged women, widening gender, social and economic inequalities. Addressing the multifaceted factors constraining women's access to decent work requires comprehensive frameworks that address economic, social, and gender disparities.

### **3. Integration as a new policy concept that addresses multidimensional obstacles to decent work**

In this context, policymakers and international organizations have advocated for integrated approaches that combine social protection and activation measures (FAO, 2017; ILO, 2012; OAS, ECLAC and ILO, 2010; OECD, 2006; World Bank, 2012). These approaches are presented as opportunities to achieve more equal societies by addressing both social and labour market exclusion (ECLAC, 2017). It calls for a common policy framework that addresses social exclusion – through social protection measures of both a contributory and non-contributory nature – while fostering access to quality employment through active labour market policies (ALMPs) (ILO, 2012).

This approach has become even more relevant following the COVID-19 pandemic, as a major challenge for governments during and following the crisis has been to limit the adverse long-term effects on labour markets. Addressing the immediate needs of people most affected, while laying the foundation for sustainable job creation in the medium term, has called for a more comprehensive approach. The synergies between income support and employability-enhancing policies are considered key to breaking the vicious circle of highly informal, low-productivity jobs, which trap workers permanently in poverty (Asenjo et al., 2023).

In this context, governments in the Global South have begun to embrace a policy shift towards the combination of income support measures and active labour market policies as a means of addressing a wide range of labour market and social challenges (McCord, 2012). As a result, these approaches are no longer confined to countries of the Global North: they are becoming a cornerstone of labour market policy in economies of the Global South (ILO, 2019).

Despite the prevalence of these approaches, the conceptual and practical underpinnings of the integration of policies in the Global South remain somewhat unaddressed outside OECD economies. Yet, the labour market conditions are structurally different. For instance, workers in the Global South are more likely to be affected by low productivity and limited access to markets, with in-work poverty being more significant than open unemployment. A simple extrapolation of the conceptual reasoning and practical considerations from OECD countries to economies of the Global South is therefore not sustainable and could potentially have damaging

repercussions. It is thus pertinent to study and adapt these approaches to the local conditions beyond the Global North.

#### **4. Income support policies: definitions and their potential to address gender equality in Latin America**

To explore the opportunities and challenges of integrated approaches in Latin America, I first define both components of integration – income support policies and activation measures – and then I briefly discuss their potential to address obstacles to decent work and gender equality.

Income support policies for the working-age can be categorized into those that seek to mitigate income loss during unemployment – which tend to be contributory mechanisms – and those that support vulnerable households in meeting basic needs, which are generally financed by general government revenues (Berg, 2015). Though both types of income support policies are relevant when discussing integrated approaches in countries outside the Global North, this text focuses on the latter (i.e., social assistance or non-contributory schemes). I chose to focus on non-contributory schemes for two reasons: first, the role of contributory schemes in Latin American countries remains somewhat limited, and second, the integration of women into social protection programs has predominantly occurred through their inclusion in non-contributory schemes.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the integration of women into welfare systems has been mostly through non-contributory mechanisms that seek to address poverty among vulnerable households. The widespread adoption of Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programmes throughout the region, which have been underpinned by a strong maternalistic principle, is an example of the above. This integration has been shaped by women's symbolic and social roles as mothers and not as workers (Molyneux, 2007). This is despite the fact that there is a higher proportion of female-headed households – in which women must both earn sufficient income and provide care for their families – among the impoverished (MDS, 2017). A high proportion of female-headed households thus questions the applicability of a clear-cut distinction between social policies for caregivers and those for workers, as in many cases, women are both. In addition, in countries in which labour market regulations are poorly enforced, and where a large proportion of workers operate in the informal economy, non-contributory schemes are often the only policy instrument available to protect unemployed individuals as well as to supplement the income of low-earning informal workers (Barrientos, 2010). In this context, social assistance programmes serve a role that extends beyond the idea of a “last resort” policy for the long-term unemployed common in matured welfare schemes. The provision of income support is crucial in combating poverty and social exclusion both for the unemployed and employed.

Indeed, in countries in which working poverty is prevalent among women, a basic income support is a necessary condition against exploitation and can potentially foster improved livelihood activities. Providing regular and reliable income support can act as a buffer against extremely low

wages and helps to stabilize household consumption (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2015). A small yet predictable income support can also strengthen the productive capacity of women in vulnerable households: it can indirectly encourage the transition from subsistence-level activities to higher productivity activities, as it mitigates the social and economic impact of an economic downturn, and can encourage moderate risk-taking (ILO, 2012; Fisher et al., 2017). Cash transfers have also demonstrated the capacity to empower individuals, enabling recipients to formulate diverse strategies and operational decisions that enhance their livelihood activities (Nnaeme et al., 2020). The provision of a basic income support can therefore serve a significant function in enabling women to access better employment opportunities.

However, providing only income support is insufficient to promote a sustainable integration into the labour market among women. First, it does not tackle economic factors that constrain women's labour market participation, including for example, the mismatch of skills, or lower rates of education. Second, as has been convincingly argued by feminist scholars, the provision of a conditional income support can potentially reinforce traditional gender differences, serving to marginalize women within the domestic sphere by understanding care as a mainly female responsibility (Molyneux, 2007). It can thus hinder women's capacity for achieving economic autonomy through labour market integration, leaving them exposed to reductions in the provision of income support. Unlike contributory schemes of social protection – which are understood as a right and are anchored in the law – access to social assistance tends to be seen as a benefit and can therefore be modified or significantly reduced under changes of government for example.

A brief discussion of conditional cash transfers – which have been widely implemented in Latin America reaching nearly 1 in 4 households (ILO, 2019) – helps illustrate this predicament. These schemes have aimed to support women in their roles as primary caregivers. Under strong maternalistic assumptions, these policies emphasize gender differences, valuing women's traditional gender roles and responsibilities (Molyneux, 2007). The positive effects on short-term household poverty reduction and human capital investments – school attendance and regular check-ups of children – of CCTs are frequently found in the impact evaluation literature (Bastagli et al., 2019). These findings have also suggested that CCTs programmes increase women's access to cash and social services. In conservative societies –in which women have been subordinated to men in economic, social and legal terms – gaining access to a basic income security can be seen as a significant achievement (Ramm, 2020).

However, as has been widely discussed by feminist scholars, CCTs across Latin America have relied on women's non-remunerated work to comply with human capital conditions of their children to receive income support (Molyneux, 2007). Their implementation has therefore served to perpetuate an essentialist view of gender and to marginalize women within the domestic private sphere (Franzoni & Voorend, 2012). CCT programmes can potentially increase the burden and the responsibility of women to lift their households out of poverty, with inconclusive effects on gender equality (Tabbush, 2010). Under these conditions, providing regular income support can

effectively alleviate poverty. However, solely offering income support can also reinforce traditional gender norms, perpetuating the perception of women as the primary (and sole) responsible for housework and care. Thus, while income support is a necessary condition, it may be insufficient in itself to achieve gender equality.

## **5. Integration of active labour market policies: Definitions, institutional frameworks and examples in Latin America**

In this context, activation policies or ALMPs – which seek to promote and improve attachment in the labour market – could potentially overcome gender differences supporting women in their role as workers. ALMPs provide assistance and incentives for people to look actively for jobs and ultimately – and as soon as possible – find suitable employment. The main categories of ALMPs can be categorized as (ILO, 2016):

- Training: aims to improve employability and enhance future career paths through acquisition of skills. For example, *Autonomía Económica de la Mujer (+ Capaz)* in Chile which provided training opportunities for vulnerable women.
- Public works: looks to compensate shortcomings in private sector job creation in order to alleviate poverty and promote community development, as for example the *Programa Empleo Emergencia* in Colombia which provided temporary formal employment opportunities for individuals most affected by environmental crises.
- Employment subsidies: provides incentives for hiring new staff and maintaining jobs by reducing labour costs. For example, the *Bono al Trabajo de la Mujer* in Chile, which provides an additional income to the employer and the female employee, is one of the few employment subsidies targeting explicitly vulnerable women.
- Self-employment and micro-enterprise creation: provides both financial and logistic support for self-employment or micro-entrepreneurship. The *Programa Nacional de Financiamiento al Microempresario* (PRONAFIM) in Mexico which supports micro-entrepreneurships of vulnerable women is an example.
- Labour market services: connects jobseekers with employers through career advice, job-search assistance and other measures promoting reintegration into the labour market, such as *Seguro de Capacitación y Empleo* in Argentina.

These policies aim to overcome barriers to decent work, fostering access to higher-quality and more sustainable income-generating activities. Activation policies could enhance gender equality by facilitating the integration of women into the productive sphere. However, according to this definition of ALMPs, initiatives supporting households in caring and housework responsibilities – while crucial for women’s integration into quality employment – are not explicitly categorized as issues to be addressed by activation policies. This highlights one of the first challenges presented by integrated approaches through a gender perspective which will be discussed below.

Latin America and the Caribbean stands out as the region in which the implementation of activation measures within non-contributory cash transfer schemes is most widespread (ILO, 2019). Ten countries in the region combine cash transfers both with public works and/or micro-entrepreneurship support, while eight other countries have integrated at least three types of ALMP intervention into their CCTs. This reflects a strong tradition in the region of implementing employability enhancing policies. In particular, since 1990 the number of ALMPs has continuously increased and such policies now account for a larger share of public spending than ‘passive’ income support through unemployment insurance (ILO, 2016).

Furthermore, the implementation of integrated approaches has taken different forms, with varying institutional arrangements, and design characteristics (ILO, 2019):

- In some countries, there is compulsory participation in activation programmes organized as part of income support schemes. The unemployment benefit scheme of Chile is an example: it comprises a range of activation measures for the unemployed while providing a reliable source of income during the unemployment spell.
- Elsewhere, beneficiaries of conditional cash transfers may participate on a voluntary basis in activation measures. For example, Uruguay’s public works programme, *Trabajo por Uruguay*, was implemented between 2005 and 2007 as part of a broader cash transfer programme, the *Plan de Asistencia Nacional a la Emergencia Social* (PANES). The *Trabajo por Uruguay* programme, was designed to increase the employability of PANES beneficiaries.
- Sometimes, programmes are launched to make it easier for the beneficiaries of income support to participate in existing activation measures. An example of this indirect approach is the programme *Seguro de Capacitación y Empleo* that was implemented in Argentina in 2006 and was directed at beneficiaries of the existing conditional cash transfer programme *Plan Jefe*.
- Other initiatives have involved the use of single-window services (i.e., “one-stop” shops) to integrate the delivery and access of both social protection and activation policies. Though this framework is not common in Latin America, it can be found in other countries of the Global South. For example, since 2012, all 21 provinces of Mongolia have *One-Stop Shops*, where individuals can submit social insurance claims and register for activation programmes (Peyron Bista & Carter, 2017).

The question now addressed is if the inclusion of activation components within social protection schemes can foster a better integration into the labour market and advance towards gender equality.

## **6. Integrated approaches: An opportunity...**

This section discusses the opportunities of integrated approaches for women’s integration into the labour market. It delves into the potential of this approach to leverage complementarities



between activation and income support policies, and to mitigate the challenges posed by these policies when implemented in isolation.

Non-contributory schemes are crucial for offering basic income security to working-age individuals in countries with high rates of informal employment and social insurance systems with limited reach. Nevertheless, depending solely on this support might not be enough to enable women to access better employment opportunities. While income support safeguards women's income and basic consumption, it may be insufficient for fostering access to better jobs and improved livelihood conditions in the long run. Income support fails to address underlying economic factors that hinder women's integration into the labour market and may potentially reinforce traditional gender norms that marginalize women in the domestic sphere.

On the other hand, activation measures can enable women confronted with exclusion from productive labour to find more sustainable and stable sources of income in the long run and enter formal employment. For example, training policies improve sector-specific skills, equipping beneficiaries with skills demanded by the market, and enhancing their labour market integration (J-PAL, 2017). Targeting disadvantaged groups, including the youth and women, has shown positive impacts in diverse contexts (Alfonsi et al., 2020; Escudero et al., 2019).

Furthermore, in countries in which informal and low-productive employment is prevalent, in-work poverty reduction and improving work quality might be the most relevant and challenging objectives of activation measures (ILO, 2016c). This differs from contexts with matured social insurance systems, in which activation measures seeks primarily to counteract long unemployment. Indeed, reducing in-work poverty and increasing work quality is a key for fostering gender equality in countries in which the integration of women into the labour market continues to be characterized by informal and low-quality employment. In this context, the role of ALMPs can also be significant. Micro-enterprise creation programmes, employment subsidies and public works reduce in-work poverty through participation, provided the income received while participating is sufficiently high. Empirical evidence also shows positive longer-term post participation effects of active measures (ILO, 2019). Training policies lead to better quality employment as workers improve their skills during participation, while employment subsidies allow workers to gain valuable experience in the formal sector (Escudero et al., 2019).

However, participating in ALMPs can be costly and time-consuming. Integrating income support measures is essential to ensure access to activation measures for low-income individuals. In addition, activation policies, like training, generally take time to materialize their positive effects (Asenjo et al., 2019). Income support is necessary during the period when the effects are realized. In countries without a matured and universal social protection system, relying solely on activation policies is thus ineffective. Instead, the focus should be on mutually reinforcing strategies for poverty reduction and productivity improvement. Integrated approaches can enable women to better adapt to the changing demand for skills – caused for example by structural

transformations – while protecting them from poverty and material deprivation. When combined with income support, ALMPs have supported transitions towards higher-value jobs (de Mel et al., 2014; Martinez et al., 2018). These approaches have helped address labour demand shocks caused by economic crises (Asenjo et al., 2019) and extreme weather events (Macours et al., 2012). These shocks disproportionately affect women in economies of the Global South due to the lack of universal social protection and structural inequalities.

For example, an impact evaluation of a cash transfer programme in Nicaragua revealed that participants who received vocational training or an investment grant in addition to a cash transfer, were more resilient to environmental shocks and had higher incomes and consumption rates in the two years following their programme participation (Macours et al., 2012). Research has also identified favourable outcomes in different institutional and social settings, indicating the capacity of integrated approaches to assist households even in fragile and conflict-affected regions. In Afghanistan, the joint provision of assets, cash grants and skills training through the Targeting the Ultra Poor programme yielded significant positive results on consumption, financial inclusion and women’s empowerment (Bedoya et al., 2019).

This approach has also shown potential for supporting women’s livelihoods and opportunities over the longer term. In Niger, providing training and lump-sum capital grants to female beneficiaries of a national cash transfer programme resulted in positive impacts on consumption and food security for income and active support recipients six and eighteen months following participation (Bossuroy et al., 2021). Likewise, a micro-entrepreneurship scheme implemented within a social protection programme in Chile, in which the majority of participants were unemployed or underemployed women, improved business practices, employment rates and labour income over 45 months after participation (Martinez et al., 2018).

All in all, integrated approaches could be seen as reflecting a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by vulnerable populations, with a focus on enhancing human capabilities. This approach fosters transitions to decent employment not only as a means to higher incomes – thus allowing households to escape poverty – but also as a fundamental human right for individuals (Barrientos, 2010). By encouraging participation in activation measures, integrated approaches can empower vulnerable women to break free from poverty sustainably, potentially mitigating some of the underlying factors hindering long-term social inclusion. The synergies between income support and activation components can be key to breaking the vicious circle of highly informal, low-productivity jobs, which trap workers and specifically women permanently in poverty. This approach nonetheless also presents new challenges for women’s well-being and economic autonomy which will be discussed in the next section.

## **7. ... Or a truncated support for gender equality?**

A review of the empirical literature emphasizes that the positive impact of these approaches relies on specific implementation and design characteristics (Asenjo et al., 2019). Specifically,

the integration of policies presents certain challenges in improving the livelihoods of women and advancing gender equality in countries of the Global South. I will discuss three of these challenges below.

First, as mentioned above, improving work quality – and not only reducing open unemployment – should be a key policy objective of activation measures in economies of the Global South. Indeed, in countries of the Global North, a clear division exists between individuals with strong connections to the labour market, which tend to be integrated into social insurance schemes, and those without ties or in prolonged unemployment, which are part of social assistance programmes. This demarcation becomes less apparent in some nations of Latin America where informality and limited social protection schemes prevail. In some cases, individuals receiving income support engage in informal work and categorize themselves as part of the working poor, likely to be affected by low productivity and access to markets, rather than being unemployed. Unlike in higher income economies, there is no significant evidence suggesting adverse employment effects among income support recipients in lower income countries (Banerjee et al., 2017).

Furthermore, improving work quality and addressing working poverty demands comprehensive and costly policies. While training and employment subsidies demonstrate positive effects on work quality, the impact of other activation measures remains disputed (Asenjo et al., 2019). The effectiveness of activation measures in enhancing work quality is contingent upon institutional frameworks and labour market conditions. For instance, in some countries of Latin America, public employment services face challenges in its capacity and reach, limiting their ability to deliver efficient services. Thus, compulsory activation mechanisms with workfare characteristics (Dingeldey, 2007) – which have been implemented widely in OECD countries as a means to reduce open unemployment – risk pushing households prematurely out of the programme without effectively addressing the challenges women face in accessing decent work opportunities. This in turn, could hinder a successful and sustainable exit from poverty and run counter to a rights-based model of social protection. Ensuring a nuanced and context-specific approach to policy design and implementation is thus crucial.

Second, adapting integrated approaches to gender-specific constraints is also fundamental for improving the livelihoods of women. One of the key objectives of incorporating activation measures in social protection schemes is allowing and fostering access among vulnerable groups who would otherwise not be able to participate. Yet, the provision of a regular basic income support is not always sufficient to ensure participation. Research has shown that it can be challenging to ensure that targeted groups within social protection schemes have the opportunity and incentives to actually benefit from activation components (ILO, 2016c). This is particularly the case among low-income women who cannot participate in activation components due to care or time constraints that are not addressed within integrated approaches. Self-selection into programmes without activation components is an initial concern. An evaluation

of an integrated approach adopted in Uruguay revealed that family responsibilities decreased the likelihood that cash transfer beneficiaries would self-select into the programme's activation programmes (Escudero, López Mourelo, and Pignatti, 2020). Similarly, an evaluation of the Argentinian *Seguro de Capacitación y Empleo* – a set of ALMPs offered to beneficiaries of the prominent CCT programme, *Plan Jefes y Jefas de Hogar Desocupados* – illustrates the need for activation programmes to incorporate formats that enable women to participate. The analysis reveals that while women were *under*-represented in the programme's activation components, they were *over*-represented in the income support component (called *Plan Familias*) tailored to individuals considered less likely to find a job (López Mourelo and Escudero, 2017).

A potentially more significant challenge is the risk of overburdening women and exacerbating time poverty. Worldwide, the rise in women's participation in paid work has not been matched by a corresponding increase in men's contributions to unpaid work. Women are often earners and caregivers. The time women have to allocate to paid work is constrained by their caregiving responsibilities. Integrated approaches sometimes assume that underemployed or unemployed women have ample free time, yet this assumption overlooks the unique challenges faced by women, especially those who are mothers to young children (UN-Women, 2020). As such 'care blind' activation policies can potentially exacerbate their time poverty as women are expected to continue caring, on their own, while also earning sufficient income for their household. Activation policies that demand longer shifts or extensive travel can make it challenging for women to balance caregiving and housework.

It is therefore important that the various components of integrated approaches are not only adapted to local market conditions but also to the needs of its participants. Structural gender inequalities shape the opportunities women have to participate in activation policies. These should be considered in the design and implementation of these approaches. Recognizing women as both carers and earners is an initial step to address these inequalities. Integrated approaches can also serve to challenge traditional gender norms. An additional step is to propose policies that challenge traditional gender norms and the gendered nature of the labour market, fostering a more equitable distribution of care responsibilities and elevating the value of care. For instance, increasing access of women to traditionally male-dominated occupations and improving the compensation of caregiving professions.

Lastly, a third challenge is the prevalence of self-employment initiatives. These initiatives – integrated into social protection programs such as Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) – have become increasingly prevalent in many countries in the Global South as a means to foster women's employment. Indeed, micro-enterprise creation could be considered a key policy aimed to support female labour market integration in countries of the Global South, yet its effects on gender equality are inconclusive. Self-employment, as opposed to traditional wage-based employment, can establish income-generating opportunities in regions lacking access to formal jobs, while offering flexibility for women to balance caregiving responsibilities and earnings. However, as self-

employment in many of these countries continues to be characterized by informality, working poverty and vulnerability (Maloney, 2003), it is doubtful whether such approaches could provide an effective route out of poverty and towards sustainable employment.

A positive effect on work quality can only materialize if the remuneration obtained by the owners of the micro-enterprise is above poverty level with adequate access to social protection mechanism. The local market conditions and the characteristics of women's integration into employment thus questions the capacity of micro-enterprise creation programmes to support an effective transition towards formal and better work. The effects on gender equality are also dubious as despite increasing access to paid work, it does not address inequalities in unpaid work. Furthermore, the implementation of self-employment schemes could potentially absolve governments of the obligation to address structural obstacles to decent work – including the lack of formal employment opportunities – an effort that would normally require an ambitious policy agenda (McCord & Slater, 2015).

All in all, the potential positive effect of integrated approaches on women's lives rests first, on the conditions under which they access paid employment, and second, on the type and quality of employment obtained. Though the provision of a basic income support acts as a buffer against lower wage and precarious employment, the sexual division of work and the multiple areas within the labour market that disadvantage women question the extent to which an integrated approach is sufficient to foster gender equality. The integration of activation components within income support schemes – and their focus on individual and predominantly economic constraints – can risk hiding an intensification of the exploitation of women's labour both in the domestic and in the public realm through the “feminization of responsibility and obligation” (Chant, 2008; Tabbush, 2010). Activation components demand an increasing number of inputs from women to surpass poverty.

As care continues to be a domestic (i.e., private) issue, the successful integration of women into the labour market hinges on the individual and domestic solutions of women to address care and household demands (Undurraga, 2013). Time use studies in Latin America reveal that increases in women's paid work are not compensated by an increase in men's unpaid work. Indeed, the structurally ingrained barriers – which assign care and household responsibilities predominantly to the domestic (female) sphere on the one hand and reproduce the (male) labour market characteristics which place higher value on long working hours and competitive arrangements on the other – remain unaddressed by this approach. As such, unless redistribution of unpaid work within the household becomes an explicit policy objective it is difficult to see this social order change soon. For women with children, access to quality early childhood education and care services – which can be understood as a redistribution of care responsibilities with the state – is, therefore, a necessary condition for taking advantage of activation programmes and for reducing gender gaps in the labour market (Amarante et al., 2023).

Recent approaches of policy integration have focused on fostering the complementarities between income support and activation measures. As this text discussed, integrated approaches can potentially have positive effects in fostering access to decent work among vulnerable individuals and women. However, these approaches will fall short of addressing gender equality unless care responsibilities are redistributed more equally, both within the household and with the state. Access to childcare is a first step. These approaches can also transform the opportunities both women and men have to develop under more equitable conditions. Promoting quality employment in social infrastructure, expanding access to occupations traditionally dominated by men, improving employment conditions of caregiving work, and encouraging men to participate in employment fields dominated by women, are just a few designs of integrated approaches that can contribute to a more balanced distribution of care work while also recognizing and valuing care.

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