

# Gender Inequality in Latin America

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Based on joint work with Raquel Fernández & Sonia Krutikova,

***Gender Inequality in Latin America, LACIR (2024)***

LCR Economics Seminar Series

LACGil, Office of the Chief Economist LAC, World Bank

Washington DC, February 24, 2026

# Scope to expand employment & improve job quality in LAC

**I will focus on the potential for improving female labor outcomes:**

- HK, extensive margin (LFP), intensive margin (hours), job quality and wages.

Based on Berniell, Inés, Raquel Fernández, and Sonya Krutikova (2024), *Gender Inequality in Latin America*, Latin America and Caribbean Inequality Review (LACIR)

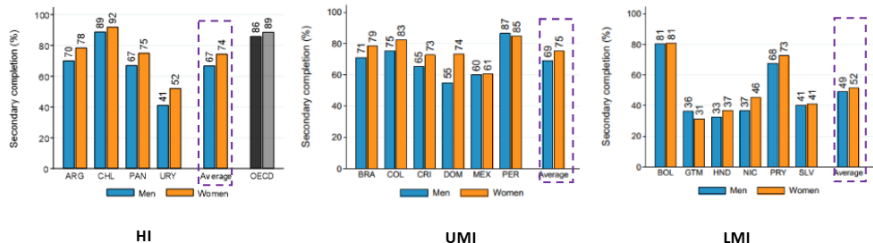
# Sources

- **GenLAC (CEDLAS) Harmonized Household Data:** 17 LA countries (2000–2019)
- **Heterogeneity Analysis by:**
  - **Country Grouping by Income Level**
    - High Income: Argentina; Chile; Uruguay; Panama
    - Upper-Middle Income: Brazil; Colombia; Mexico; Peru; Costa Rica; Dominican Republic; Ecuador
    - Lower-Middle Income: Bolivia; Guatemala; Honduras; Nicaragua; Paraguay; El Salvador
  - **Education Level**
    - **Low:** Incomplete high school
    - **Middle:** High school graduate or incomplete higher education
    - **High:** Higher education completed

# Women are more educated than men

## Secondary School Completion favors Girls virtually everywhere (c. 2023)

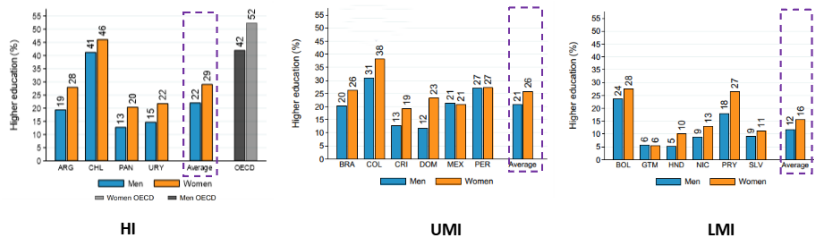
In most LAC countries in our sample, almost no gender inequality in schooling until secondary school completion



*Note:* This figure shows, by gender, the secondary school completion rates. The sample is restricted to individuals aged 20-30 years old, except in the case of OECD where it is restricted to **individuals aged 25-34 years old**. The average bars show unweighted means. *Source:* authors' own calculations based on household surveys (GenLAC-CEDLAS) and OECD STATS. The year used in the calculations is 2024 in the OECD and circa 2023 or the latest available in LAC.

# Women are more educated than men

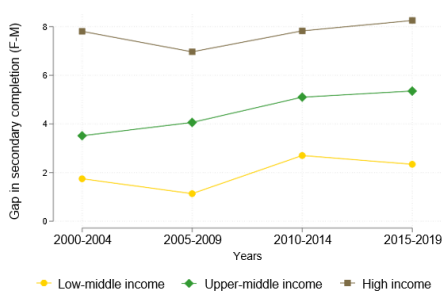
## Tertiary Education (c. 2023): Gender Gap favors Women everywhere



*Note:* This figure shows, by gender, the higher education completion rates. The sample is restricted to individuals **aged 30-40 years old**, except in the case of OECD where it is restricted to individuals aged 35-44 years old. The average bars show unweighted means. Data is from circa 2023 for LAC and 2024 for the OECD. *Source:* authors' own calculations based on household surveys (GenLAC-CEDLAS).

# Women are more educated than men

- In high-income countries, the % of women with completed secondary education is 8 p.p. higher than that of men (3 points in low-income countries).
- Higher education: the gap is 6 percentage points in high-income countries (2 points in low-income countries), and increasing.



Gender Gaps in Secondary School Completion Rates

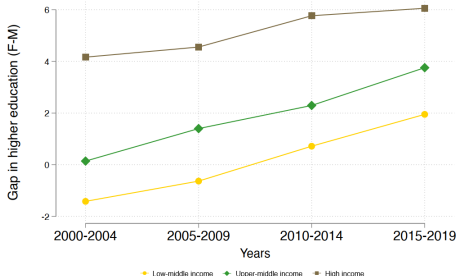


Fig: Tertiary Education

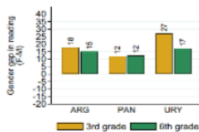
# Gender Gaps in Achievement (Grades 3 & 6, 2019)

## Achievement: Gender gaps in Reading and Math, 3<sup>rd</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> grades, 2019

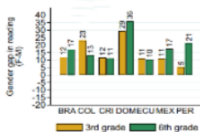
**Reading:** female advantage across all countries (exc. GTM) in both grades.

**Math:** generally favors men (DR an outlier in magnitude in favor of women)

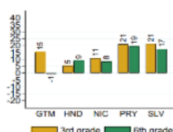
Gender Gaps (F-M) in Reading



HI

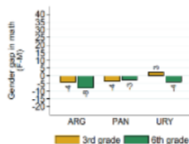


UMI

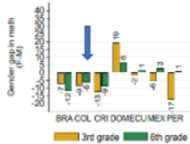


LMI

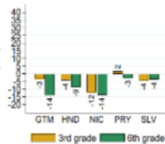
Gender Gaps (F-M) in Math



HI



UMI

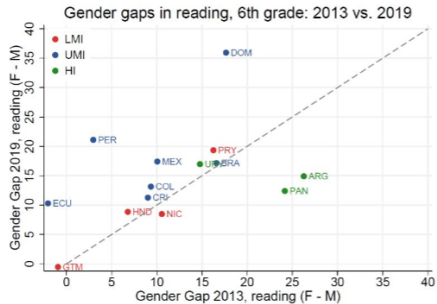


LMI

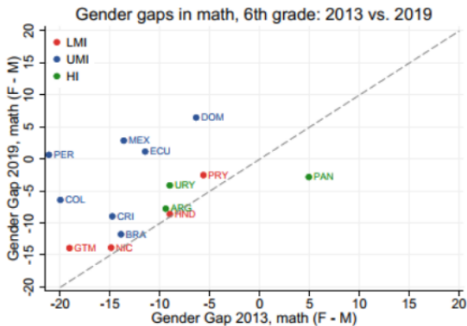
Source: Comparative and Explanatory Regional Study (ERCE) 2019. Gender gaps in reading and math scores (panel b) in 2019, for children in 3<sup>rd</sup> (ochre bars) and 6<sup>th</sup> grades (green bars). The test score scale has a standard deviation of 100 points.

# Change in Reading and Math Gender Gaps (F-M), grade 6, 2013 vs. 2019

*Points below the 45° line indicate gaps became less favorable for girls*

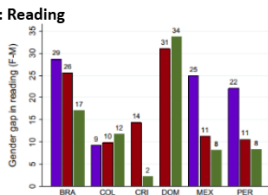
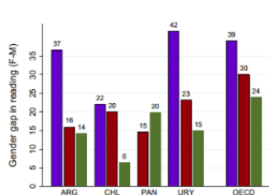


In **6th grade**, reading results became even more favorable for girls and math gender gaps narrowed for almost all countries.

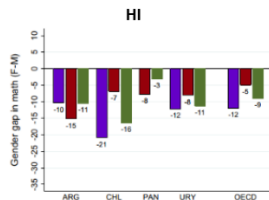


Source: Comparative and Explanatory Regional Study (ERCE) 2013 and 2019.

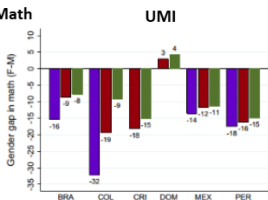
# PISA Scores: The Gender Gap (2009, 2018 and 2022)



In most countries, gender gap in reading scores has fallen over time. Gender gaps in math, however, have remained fairly constant for HI but decreased for UMI, especially in Colombia.



**Gender Gaps (F-M): Math**



**UMI**

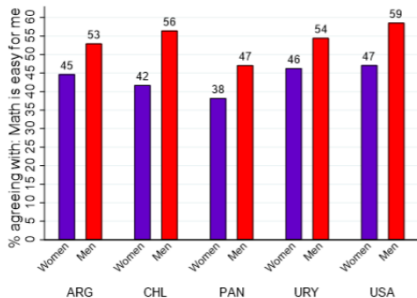
**HI**



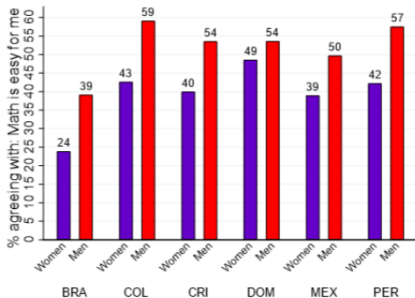
**UMI**

*Note:* The figure shows the gender gaps (F-M) in reading and math scores in 2009, 2018, & 2022, for 15 years old. The test score scale has a standard deviation of 100 points. *Source:* authors' own calculations based on PISA.

# Math Self Confidence (PISA 2022): “Math is easy for me”



HI



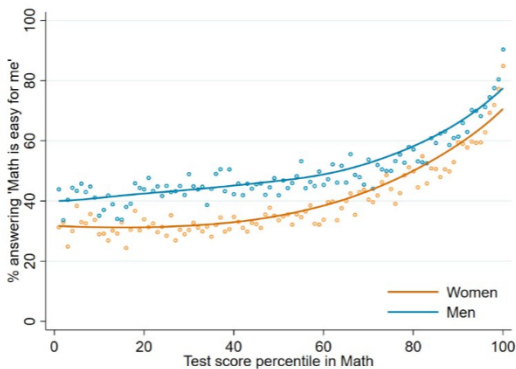
UMI

*Note:* The figure shows, by gender, the % of students agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement “math is easy for me”.

*Source:* authors’ own calculations based on PISA 2022

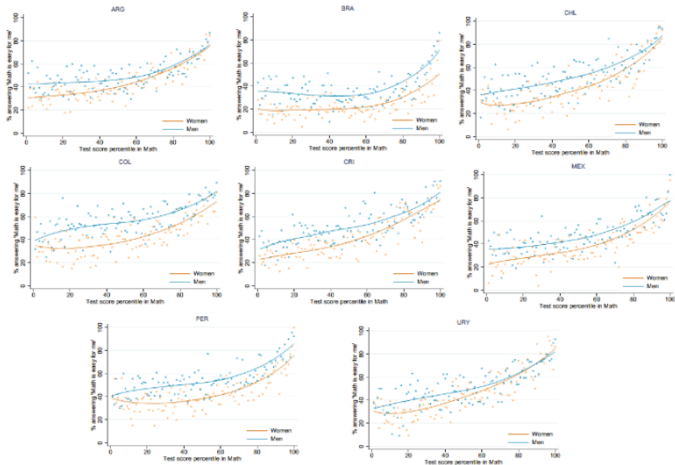
# Boys are more self-confident for each test percentile (PISA 2022)

## “Math is easy for me” and PISA test scores, Latin America



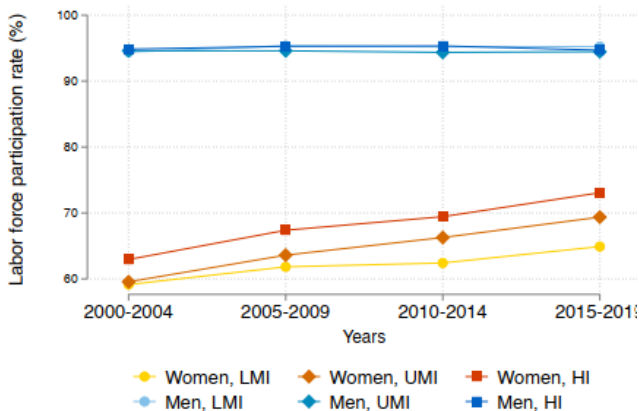
*Note:* The figure graphs the average % of students agreeing with the statement “math is easy for me” against each percentile of the PISA score distribution (x-axis). The relationship is shown separately for boys (blue) and girls (orange) for LAC. Each dot represents a cell defined by country, gender, and percentile of the PISA math score. The blue and orange lines depict the Lowess regression curves illustrating the relationships between the self-perception index and the PISA score percentile for boys and girls, respectively.

## Boys are more self-confident at each test score (PISA 2022)



## Over the last 20 years, FLFP has significantly increased

- In upper-middle and high-income countries, the gender gap has narrowed by 10 p.p.
- In lower-middle-income countries, the gender gap decreased by 5 p.p.



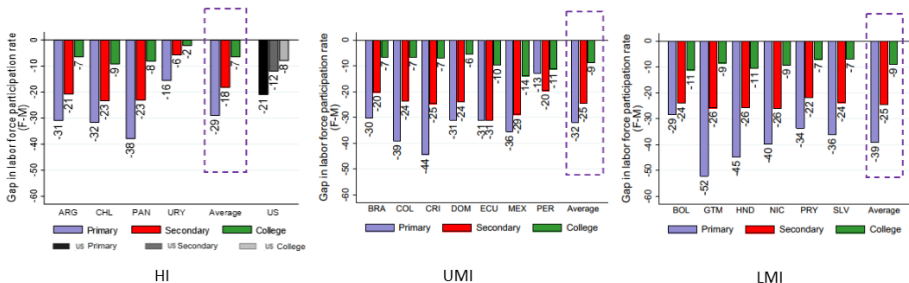
(a) Evolution of Labor Force Participation in LAC

(population aged 25-55 years old)

## But still low FLFP (key in LMI & low educ women)

- There is scope to increase FLFP which remains low in several countries, especially in low-income ones.
- And particularly among women with lower education levels.

### Gender Gaps in LFP (F-M) by Education (population aged 25-55 years old)

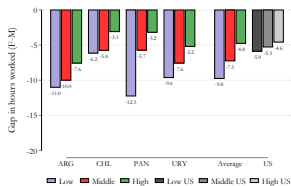


*Note:* This figure shows, by education level, the **share of the female population aged 25-55 years old that is economically active**, as defined in the text. Primary refers to less than complete high-school; secondary denotes high school graduates without higher education; and college indicates completed tertiary education. The average bars show unweighted means. *Source:* LAC household surveys (GenLAC-CEDLAS) and the American Community Survey. Survey year is 2023 or the latest

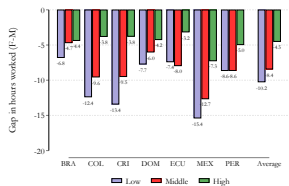
# Scope to increase LFP intensity (hours)

- Steep education gradient in the gender gaps in hours worked (steeper than in US).

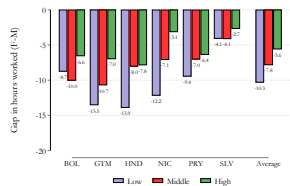
## Gender Gaps in the Number of Hours Worked (F-M) by Education (population aged 25-55 years old)



High income



Upper middle income



Lower middle income

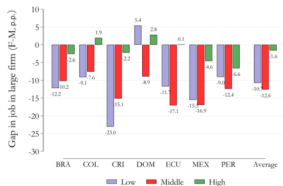
# Scope for improving job quality of female workers

- Women tend to work less in large firms and more in the informal sector than men.
- Larger gender gap among those without a tertiary education.

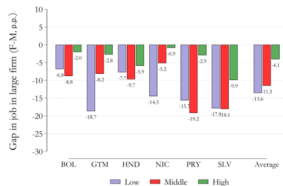
## Gender Gap in Working for Larger Firms



High income

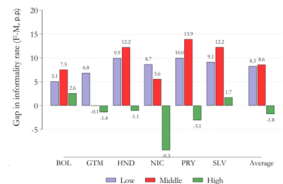
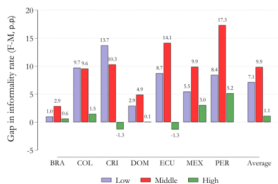
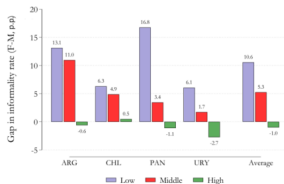


Upper middle income

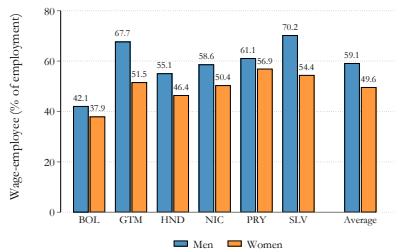


Lower middle income

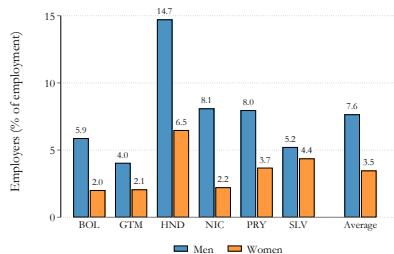
## Gender Gap in Informality



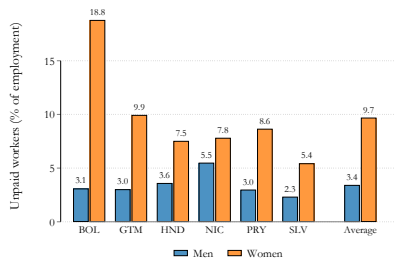
# Scope to improve job quality, especially in LMI countries



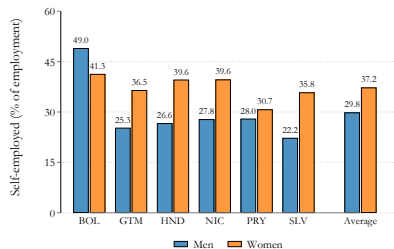
Wage employee



Employer



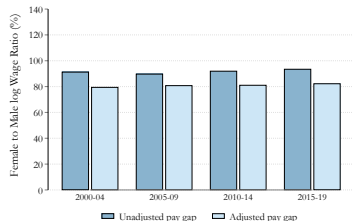
Unpaid worker



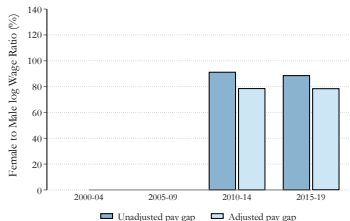
Self-employed

# Scope to improve allocation, productivity

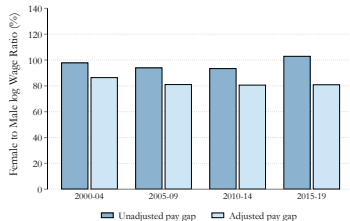
- Women earn less than men and when adjusted for age, education, and type of employment, the gap widens further.
- The wage gap has changed little over the last two decades.



High income



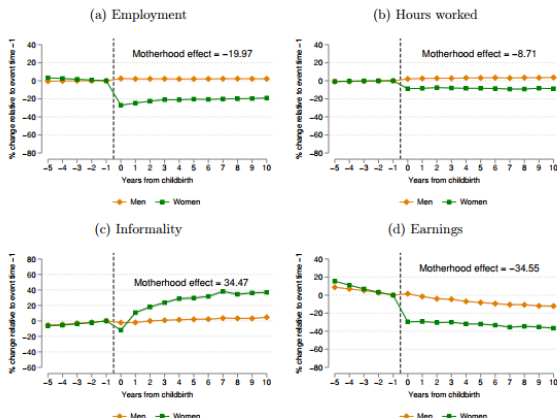
Upper middle income



Lower middle income

# Gaps as a result of childcare relying mostly on women

Figure 1: Effects of the first childbirth on employment and earnings

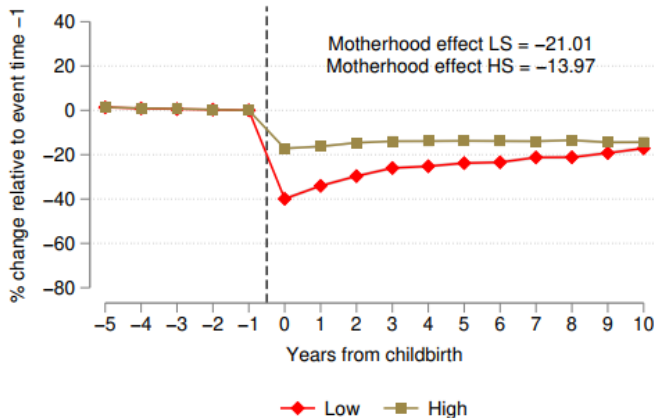


Note: These figures report the standardized estimates of the  $\beta_{\tau}$ s from Equation 1 for fathers and mothers, separately. Since the omitted category is  $\tau = -1$ , the standardized coefficients measure the impact of children as a percentage of the counterfactual outcome absent children relative to the year before the first childbirth. Controls include year, age-in-years, and country fixed effects. The effects on hours worked and informality are estimated conditional on being employed. The motherhood effect reported is the average motherhood effect from  $\tau = 5$  through  $\tau = 10$ . Data cover the 14 Latin American countries from 2000–2021, except when estimating the effects on labor informality, where Panama is excluded from the sample. The sample is restricted to mothers and fathers whose age at first childbirth is between 25 and 45 years old. The figure also displays the 95% confidence intervals based on robust standard errors, although they are typically so narrow that are usually not perceptible.

Source: Calculations based on SEDLAC (CEDLAS and The World Bank, 2022) and LABLAC (CEDLAS and The World Bank, 2021) datasets.

# More relevant for low educated women

(a) Employment



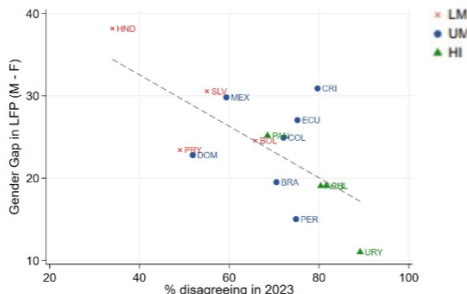
Marchionni & Pedrazzi, 2025

# Why does childcare fall primarily on women? 1) Norms

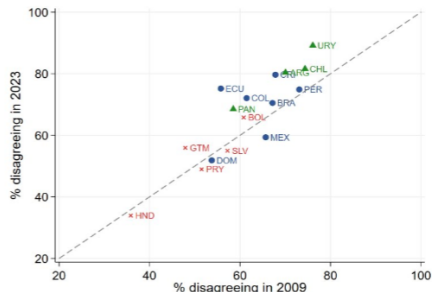
- Attitudes about women's roles as workers strongly correlate with their LFP.
- The good news is that these attitudes have become more egalitarian.

*"Es mejor que la mujer se concentre en el hogar y el hombre en el trabajo"* (% disagreeing in 2023)

**Negative correlation** between the % who disagree with the statement and gender gap (M-F) in LFP in 2023



**Greater disagreement** almost everywhere over time

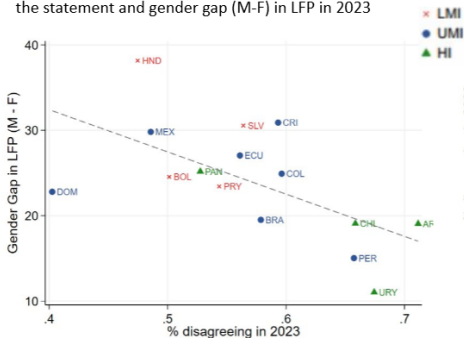


Source: authors' own calculations based on Latinobarometro 2023.

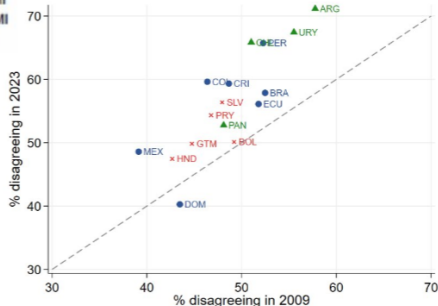
# Why does childcare fall primarily on women?: 1) Attitudes towards Women Working

*"Si la mujer gana más que el hombre es casi seguro que tendrá problemas"* (% disagreeing in 2023)

**Negative correlation** between the % who disagree with the statement and gender gap (M-F) in LFP in 2023



**Greater disagreement** almost everywhere over time



Source: authors' own calculations based on Latinobarometro 2023.

## Why does childcare fall primarily on women? 2) Absent or insufficient public policies regarding childcare

Evidence shows that access to childcare can significantly boost mothers' employment.

### **Effects of access to childcare and preschool on mothers' employment**

- Brazil: +9–17%;
- Ecuador: +22 pp;
- Colombia: +12–37%;
- Mexico: +18%;
- Argentina: +7 pp. (infrastructure expansion), +19 pp in full-time work (mothers with children born before cutoff day)

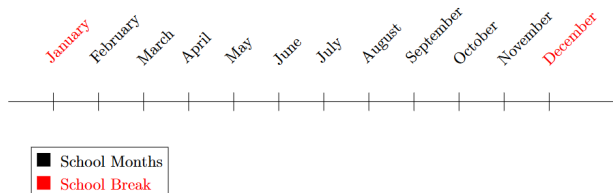
### **Extending School Hours: Key to Increasing Full-Time Employment**

- Chile: ↑ 3 daily hours (ages 6 to 13) increased employment by 5%.
- Mexico: ↑ 3.5 daily school hours increased employment by 7%.

## Why does childcare fall primarily on women? 2) Childcare

*Working Paper: The School Break Effect: Temporary Caregiving Constraints and Female Employment* (Inés Berniell, Mariana Marchionni & Julián Pedrazzi)

Figure 1: Colombian school calendar.



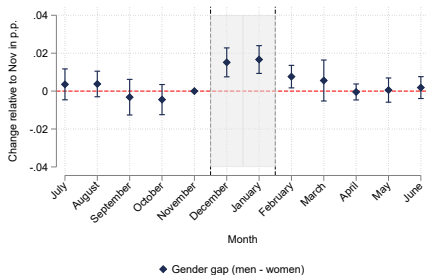
$$Y_{it} = \sum_{m \neq \text{Nov}} \delta_m \mathbf{1}[\text{Month}_t = m] + \sum_{m \neq \text{Nov}} \beta_m \mathbf{1}[\text{Month}_t = m] \cdot \text{Male}_i + \Gamma_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}, \quad (1)$$

- $Y_{it}$  denotes individual  $i$ 's labor market outcome in month  $t$ .
- $\Gamma_{it}$  includes an indicator for  $\text{Male}_i$ , as well as region, year, and age-group fixed effects and their interactions with  $\text{Male}_i$ .

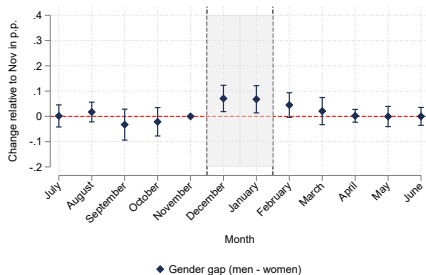
# Effect of school break on employment & earnings: COL

## Change in the gender gap compared to November

(a) Gender gap in LFP laboral



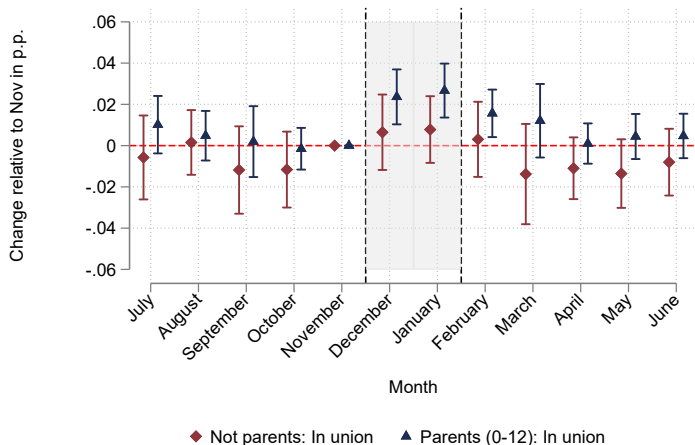
(b) Gender gap in labor income



The effect is substantial: during the December–January break, the participation gap rises by 1.6 p.p. relative to November (aprox. 6% of the baseline gap).

# School Breaks and gender gaps GG in LFP: role of children

## Change in the gender gap compared to November



**Implication:** Addressing predictable childcare shocks can reduce cyclical female labor force exits and contribute to narrowing gender gaps (beyond the short run).

# GenLAC: CEDLAS's Initiative to Promote Gender Equity

- GenLAC is the CEDLAS initiative to promote gender equity through the generation, analysis, and dissemination of evidence for LAC.
- We seek to contribute with evidence to the debate, design, and evaluation of public policies with a gender perspective.
- We produce the GenLAC database, and do research, teaching and dissemination on Gender Economics.

