



THE NETWORK OF GENDER FOCAL POINTS

WITHIN THE INTER-AMERICAN NETWORK FOR LABOR ADMINISTRATION (RIAL)

RIAL/GENDER

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1. BACKGROUND

Between 2020 and 2021, the Organization of American States (OAS) promoted hemispheric dialogues between the gender units or areas of the Ministries of Labor of the Americas through the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL) and with the support of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM). These dialogues are added to the multiple actions that the OAS has carried out to strengthen the institutionalization of gender in the Ministries of Labor and, through this, contribute to gender equality in the world of work. This is a regional commitment, as labor authorities have stated at the OAS Inter-American Conference of Labor Ministers (IACML).

During three hemispheric dialogues (November 2020, May and November 2021), the importance of having a cooperation network between the gender units or areas of the Ministries was evident and, specifically during the 3rd dialogue, the participants explicitly expressed their interest in formally forming this network. Based on this, the IACML Technical Secretariat presented the idea to the Conference authorities at its Planning Meeting in February 2022, which was well received. Therefore, the Work Plan 2022-2024 of the IACML contains as one of its concrete actions: “Establish a network of gender focal points within the Ministries of Labor, as a specialized network of the RIAL”.

The decision to incorporate the constitution of the network of gender focal points in the Work Plan 2022-2024 responds, among others, to the following commitments assumed by the Ministries of Labor in the Declaration and Plan of Action of Buenos Aires, adopted at the XXI IACML in 2021:

“We commit to continue promoting and deepening gender mainstreaming in labor and employment programs and policies, and ministerial structures” (Art. 12 of the Declaration of Buenos Aires)

“Continue deepening the institutionalization of gender in the Ministries of Labor as a means to achieve gender equality. This involves institutional strengthening of gender units” (Art. 7, i) of the Plan of Action of Buenos Aires

During the 4th Hemispheric Dialogue, held on March 15, 2022, RIAL/GENDER was formally launched. The gender units discussed the objectives and main lines of action for the network under the premise of collectively building its foundations. After the dialogue, they revised a first draft of this document and sent comments in writing to the Technical Secretariat. This document collects all the comments provided by the focal points and incorporates good practices in the management and governance of networks. It is the foundational document of the Network, setting the framework for its operation.

2. OBJECTIVES

The Network of Gender Focal Points in the Ministries of Labor is a specialized community of practice of the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL); as such, it will be denominated RIAL/GENDER.

Purpose: Contribute to achieving full gender equality in the world of work.

General objective: Strengthen the gender units or areas within the Ministries of Labor of the Americas.

Specific objectives:

- Share best practices, experiences, lessons learned and evaluations on gender mainstreaming from Ministries of Labor.
- Share relevant information and resources to keep the Units updated on different topics of interest, this includes specialized publications, training offers, and advances in public policies and/or legislation, among others.
- Discuss and analyze priority issues and relevant trends for gender equality in the world of work.
- Have a permanent channel of support, consultation and communication between peers.
- Share legislation and regulation, and work to strengthen national and regional legal frameworks on gender equality at work.

3. TOOLS

To achieve the stated objectives, the Network will have the following tools:

Portfolio of Programs: The Portfolio is an information bank that systematizes the programs on gender equity that the Ministries of Labor wish to share with each other. Programs must have shown results, have lessons learned and, ideally, have been positively evaluated.

The Portfolio, which includes a database and a search engine for programs, is now available within the RIAL website (www.rialnet.org) and has a section designated for programs on “Gender Equity”. The RIAL/GENDER will nurture and update this section of the Portfolio; to this end, each focal point has a personalized username and password. The Technical Secretariat is responsible for reviewing and translating the programs.

Hemispheric Workshops: Spaces to analyze and exchange experiences on specific issues related to the work of gender units or areas. They are generally held in person with a duration of 2 or 3 days. They allow for the involvement of more actors, including workers’ and employers’ organizations, and allied international organizations. The objective of the Workshops is to identify lessons learned and policy recommendations on the subject matter.

Bilateral cooperation: Bilateral cooperation activities allow the Ministries to provide and receive direct and personalized technical advice among themselves, they are planned and developed according to the particular interests, strengths, and needs of the Ministries involved. The activities are selected through open calls of the RIAL at the beginning of each year and can be virtual or face-to-face.

Virtual dialogues: Spaces for interaction between gender focal points with very specific purposes; for example, in one of the dialogues held prior to the creation of the Network, the units spoke about their situation in the face of the pandemic. They allow for an agile exchange limited to a specific purpose and have a maximum duration of 4 hours.

Dedicated channel of communication: It is imperative that the Network has a dedicated channel of interaction. During the 4th Dialogue, the participants expressed a preference for having a mailing list and a WhatsApp Group. The Secretariat recommends advancing along these two paths, using the mailing list for formal communications and invitations, while the WhatsApp Group would be used for more informal communications and rapid exchange of information.

It is recommended that the WhatsApp Group be made up of no more than three people per country. Participation in the WhatsApp Group will be completely voluntary.

Membership database: The Secretariat will maintain an updated database with names, titles and contact information, which will be available to members of the Network in order to streamline and optimize their communication.

Documentation Center: The RIAL website will have a dedicated space to share publications, training offers and other relevant information. The members of Network will send the Secretariat the information they

consider relevant to share through the Documentation Center. The Steering Committee and the Secretariat will define the parameters for the inclusion of resources in this Center.

Informative Newsletter: All the activities of the Network, relevant updates in the Portfolio, news from the Units, and initiatives published in the Documentation Center will be included in the biweekly RIAL/OAS Newsletter.

4. AREAS OF ACTION

The Network will act on different priority areas and themes for its membership. These areas of action will be adjusted over time, as needs and emerging issues arise or as substantial progress has been made in matters that no longer require the same attention.

The Network will address issues from an intersectionality perspective, understanding that gender is a social variable that intersects with other variables, such as race, ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic status, and place of residence, among others; and that there are various dynamics of discrimination and exclusion that can manifest themselves simultaneously and be mutually reinforcing.

The areas of action mentioned in the Dialogues and, therefore, the Network's focus in the short term (3 years) are the following:

- Domestic work
- Violence and harassment in the world of work, including gender-based violence and harassment
- Unpaid and paid care work
- Institutionalization of gender in the Ministries of Labor
- Recognition of enterprises committed to gender equity (seals or badges)
- Inspection with a gender approach
- Collection of statistics for gender analysis
- Telework
- Public policies to increase the employability of women

5. COMPOSITION AND OPERATION

Composition: The Network will be made up of the gender focal points of the Ministries of Labor of the OAS member states. These are: 1) directors and officials from the gender units, offices or areas within the Ministries, and 2) officials who have some relationship or responsibility for gender issues in those Ministries where there is no specific gender unit or area.

Technical Secretariat: The Secretariat is the OAS Department of Human Development, Education and Employment (DHDEE), which will coordinate the technical and logistical operation of the Network and will maintain its institutional memory. The DHDEE will work in collaboration with the Inter-American

Commission of Women (CIM), which will support the Network in the specific technical issues of its competence.

Steering Committee: A Committee composed of 4 Ministries of Labor is proposed to guide the work of the Network and define annual plans of action.

One of these 4 members must be permanently the Chair of the Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML), in order to guarantee coherence between the Network and the priorities and orientations of the IACML.

It is proposed that the first Steering Committee be composed by the Chair of the IACML and the Ministries elected as Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Working Group 1 (WG1) during the XXI IACML. It is worth mentioning that the Plan of Action of Buenos Aires, adopted at the XXI IACML in 2021, entrusted Working Group 1 with following up on the issue of “gender equality and mainstreaming of the gender perspective in labor and employment policies”.

Currently and for the period 2021-2024, the Ministries of Labor that hold these positions are: Argentina (Chair of the IACML), Chile (Chair of WG1), Costa Rica (Vice-Chair of WG1) and Trinidad and Tobago (Vice-Chair of WG1).

It is proposed that this first Committee performs functions for a period of 1 year, until June 2023, and subsequently be selected from among the members of the Network, with the exception of the Chair of the IACML.

Budget: During the first three years, the Network has a budget assigned by the RIAL, according to the IACML Work Plan 2022-2024, which will allow it to cover some activities.

Periodicity: According to the agreements reached during the dialogue, the members of the Network will hold meetings minimum every 6 months, in addition to the other activities determined by the Steering Committee (cooperation activities, hemispheric dialogues, studies, among others).

6. ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN AND NEXT STEPS IN 2022

- **March 15:** RIAL/GENDER launched during the 4th Hemispheric Dialogue on Gender of the RIAL. The gender units discussed the objectives and main lines of action for the network under the premise of collectively building its foundations.
- **April - May:** The Technical Secretariat produced the first draft of this foundational document. The gender units or areas reviewed the document and sent comments to the Technical Secretariat.
- **May - June:** The Technical Secretariat prepared the final version of this document and will convene the first meeting of the Steering Committee. The objective of this meeting will be to define the Work Plan for the first year of the Network, in accordance with the guidelines provided in this document, as well as discussions and recommendations of its members during the four Hemispheric dialogues held.

- **July to December:** Development of activities defined in the Work Plan.

***It should be noted that, although a Work Plan will be developed, the Network is already in operation thanks to the exchange that is taking place between gender units and areas within the RIAL/OAS. During the 15th Call for Bilateral Cooperation, two bilateral cooperations were selected on the matter: between Bolivia and Panama on the strengthening of women's cooperatives, and between Uruguay and Argentina on gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace.*