

Struggling economies endanger one of Latin America's most vulnerable groups

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The gender pay gap in Latin America has narrowed, but the distance between men's and women's pay under equal conditions remains substantial, [according](#) to a UN commission.

The pay gap for the most well-educated women (who have more than 13 years of education) has closed slowly, narrowing by 9% between 1990 and 2014, [according](#) to the UN's Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

The least educated women, those with a maximum of five years of education, saw the pay gap [shrink the most](#), going from earning 58% of the pay of men doing comparable work in 1990 to earning 80% in 2014.

Since 1990, ECLAC has [evaluated](#) wages of men and women in 18 Latin American countries, between the ages of 20 and 49, living in urban areas, and working 35 or more hours a week.

In that time, the overall pay gap between men and women has narrowed by 12%, boosted by legal protections and minimum-salary laws for workers.

Overall, however, women still earn 26% less than men doing comparable work.

'It can be dangerous being a woman'

Recent economic developments in Latin America and the Caribbean don't bode well for continued reduction of the pay gap between men and women.

An ECLAC report released earlier this year found the region's largest socioeconomic group, people earning between \$4 and \$10 a day, was considered "[vulnerable](#)" and at risk of slipping back into poverty as the region's economic growth continues to struggle.

“It seems the recovery from the international financial crisis was not taken advantage of sufficiently to ... reduce vulnerability from economic cycles,” [said](#) Alicia Barcena, the head the ECLAC, in January 2015, according to Reuters.

Further economic stagnation, and inequalities in wages and income that could come with it, could also spur a rise in violence in the region, which is already one of the most violent on the planet.

“In the most unequal economies, poor people tend to receive fewer benefits from economic growth,” [according](#) to El Daily Post.

Moreover, in a “more unequal setting, the higher the rates of violence,” America’s Quarterly [notes](#).

The link between economic vitality and violence is an especially important one for women in Latin America.

Latin America and the Caribbean is home to more than half of the 25 countries that have very high rates of femicide — the gender-based killing of women — [according](#) to the 2012 Small Arms Survey.

Femicides are often perpetrated by husbands or boyfriends, [according](#) to The New York Times.

Central America in particular has some of the [highest femicide rates](#) in the world, but it is not limited to that area.

In Mexico, six women are killed each day, Al Jazeera [reported](#) in early 2015, citing local organisations.

“Over 70 per cent [of femicide victims] are killed by their husband or ex-husband, boyfriend or ex-boyfriend. It can be dangerous being a woman in Argentina,” Fabiana Tuñez, the director of a women’s shelter in Argentina that keeps statistics on violence against women, [told](#) Argentine writer Uki Goñi.

While [legal](#) and [social](#) factors likely contribute to the region’s high rate of femicide, falling wages and increased inequality — affecting not just women but their male partners as well — could exacerbate the problem in coming years.

A [2010 report](#) from the US National Institutes of Health on US households found that “decreases in the wage gap reduce violence against women.” If a growing wage gap increases violence against women, and if that finding holds true for Latin America, then the region’s current economic struggles could make life even worse for the region’s women.