**Equal participation in political and public affairs**

The Regional Review and Appraisal of Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Outcome of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000) in Latin American and Caribbean Countries summarizes the achievements and challenges of the region in terms of the decision-making autonomy, the presence of women in all decision-making spheres.

Over the past 20 years progress had been made in Latin America and the Caribbean in enshrining equality in constitutional terms, eliminating direct forms of discrimination, adapting legal frameworks and creating innovative legislation on issues such as electoral quotas. As a result, there have been positive changes in the electoral behaviour of the people and in recent years the number of female legislators, judges and mayors has grown. The number of women in cabinet positions has not been without setbacks and that the gains made are not guaranteed.

Fourteen countries in the region have laws that set quotas for the registration of candidates running for the national legislatures. Special measures —quotas— have particularly boosted women’s representation in the region. In 2014, Latin America and the Caribbean had the highest proportion of women in parliament, at 26,4 per cent (compared with 12,5 per cent in 1995). Argentina set the standard for positive action policies by enacting the quota law (1991) for elections and achieving an important milestone in legislative representation, which coincides with the advances reported by other countries that have succeeded in increasing the participation of women.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Although many countries in Latin America have enacted quota laws to promote the participation of women in decision-making (especially in political spaces), the same has not occurred in the Caribbean. Guyana is the only Caribbean country that has a quota law to ensure that at least one third of the candidates on the lists presented to the Guyana Elections Commission are women.

Over the past 20 years, six democratically elected women have served as presidents or heads of State —four in Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Costa Rica) and two in the Caribbean (Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago)— and three have been re-elected to that office, which suggests another positive cultural change, namely, of an electorate far removed from stereotypes associated with the political participation of women, whether of conservatism or strong-arm leadership.

The increase in the proportion of female mayors has been smaller and progress slower, so most countries fall below 20% and the regional average is just 11.7%, only 1.7 percentage points higher than the average for 2011 (10.0%).

The reports on Beijing+20 review mentioned the importance of women’s political participation and access to decision-making spaces, not only in the public sector but also in the world of private business, a priority that goes hand in hand with the demand for political parity in the countries, both nationally and locally

Despite the difficulties America Latina and the Caribbean there has been progress in terms of women in decision-making. Deepening and expanding women’s political participation, the issue of parity, financing for women candidates and incentives for participation are some of the challenges involved in fine‑tuning electoral laws.

1. See the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)