

**Achieving gender equity in the labor market:  
Successes and failures of social policies in democratic Chile**

Teresa Correa  
Graduate student  
Institute of Latin American Studies  
University of Texas at Austin

## **Abstract**

Despite the Chilean economic success and the high number of women appointees in executive positions, a wide gender gap still exists in the political and economic realms, which is even broader than in the rest of Latin America. This study looks at the labor market, an area in which the gender divide is strong and prevents women's progress. It examines (1) the situation of Chilean women at work since 1990, when democracy was reinstated; (2) the reasons that explain the gender gap in participation and wages; and (3) the policies and legislation that have tried to facilitate women's advancement, and their eventual success or failure.

**Current situation of Chilean women at work:** While females represent only 39% of the Chilean labor force, the average for the region in the late 1990s was 45%, a figure that escalates to 60% in developed countries.

**Reasons for inequality:** Scholars have found that cultural obstacles (i.e., *machismo*, conservative values) are twice more important than demographic variables (e.g. education, number of children) at explaining women's low participation rate. Discrimination and the costs for the company also restrict women's entrance into the labor market.

**Policies that address inequality:** The main accomplishment since 1990 has been the creation of a women's state agency. The programs launched by the government (e.g., child care centers, labor force training for low-income women) have not worked as expected. While they have provided assistance in health and childcare, they have failed in providing job training and helping women to organize themselves.

Chile is regarded as one of the most stable liberal democracies in Latin America and one of the region best performing economies. In 2005, the World Economic Forum ranked 27<sup>th</sup> the economic performance of this nation in an overall sample of 117 countries, “surpassing all its regional neighbors by a wide margin” (López Claro, 2006, p. 4)

At the same time, one may conclude that this South American country of sixteen million finally won the battle against gender inequality given the crucial role women have achieved lately in top policy-making positions. In 2006 a woman, Michelle Bachelet, became President of Chile. She not only happened to be the first female leader of this country, but also the first woman president not related to a well-known politician in Latin America<sup>1</sup>. In addition, when Bachelet took office on March 11<sup>th</sup> she appointed 10 women and 10 men as ministers. She also named 15 females and 16 males as vice-ministers, and her local governments’ appointees were also strongly composed by women (Humanas, 2006).

The Chilean economic success and the high number of female appointees in the executive power, however, hide the wide gender gap that still exists in Chile in the political and economic realms. The sex divide in these spheres is even broader than in the rest of Latin America. Notably, Chile ranked 101 out of 117 countries in the indicator “employment of women in the private sector” of the World Economic Forum’s competitiveness ranking (López-Claro, 2006, p. 107).

This study looks at the labor market, an area in which the gender divide is strong and prevents women’s progress. It examines (1) the situation of Chilean women at work since 1990, when democracy was reinstated; (2) the reasons that explain the gender gap; and (3) the public

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<sup>1</sup> Other former Latin American female presidents, such as Violeta Chamorro in Nicaragua, Mireya Moscoso in Panama and Isabel Perón in Argentina, followed what Norris calls the “family mantle route” ( 1997, as cited in Valenzuela & Correa, 2006) or, in the case of Lidia Geiler in Bolivia, were appointed to leadership through patronage.

policies and legislation that have tried to facilitate women's advancement, and their eventual success or failure.

### **Current trends**

**Labor force participation:** In the recent decades, the participation of women in the labor market has steadily increased in Chile. However, it lags well behind other Latin American countries.

Women constitute over 50 percent of the population, according to the last Census (INE, 2002).

Nevertheless, they only represent 39 percent of the labor force (see Table 1)

**TABLE 1: *Population and labor force participation***

Year	Population over 15 years old			Labor Force Participation (%)		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
1990	9,225.330	4.501.760	4.723.560	53.0	75.4	31.7
1991	9.398.090	4.587.760	4.810.320	53.0	75.6	31.5
1992	9.573.590	4.675.200	4.898.380	54.3	76.0	33.6
1993	9.748.620	4.762.450	4.986.160	56.0	77.8	35.2
1994	9.920.150	4.847.890	5.072.260	56.0	77.5	35.4
1995	10.092.230	4.933.730	5.158.500	54.9	76.2	34.5
1996	10.269.350	5.022.230	5.247.120	54.5	75.5	34.5
1997	10.442.410	5.108.660	5.333.750	54.4	74.6	35.1
1998	10.613.610	5.194.850	5.418.760	55.1	75.0	36.1
1999	10.782.810	5.280.260	5.502.550	55.0	74.4	36.5
2000	10.960.560	5.369.010	5.591.550	53.6	72.9	35.0
2001	11.153.680	5.465.630	5.688.050	53.3	72.6	34.9
2002	11.346.180	5.561.810	5.784.370	52.9	71.8	34.7
2003	11.535.900	5.656.540	5.879.360	53.1	71.2	35.7
2004	11.723.590	5.750.150	5.973.440	54.2	71.2	37.8
2005	12.307.28	6,040,060	6,267,230	55.3	72.0	39.3

The figures correspond to the IV quarter of each year

Source: Elaborated from Dirección del Trabajo (Labor Agency) and National Labor Survey (INE)

There was a decrease in the labor force participation rate<sup>2</sup> between 2000 and 2002 due to repercussions of the East Asian financial crisis, when people, specially women, quit looking for jobs (Dirección del Trabajo, 2005). When Chile's economy recovered from the financial crisis, the participation rate has progressively increased.

<sup>2</sup> Labor force participation rate is defined as the percentage of women population over 15 years old that participates in the labor market either as employed or unemployed (looking for a job).

In the last decades, the labor participation growth among women has been stronger than among men (Cepal, 2000). From 1990 to 2004, women’s participation rate has increased 50 percent compared to 20 percent of men’s (Dirección del Trabajo, 2005).

However, Chilean figures in this area are lower than in the rest of Latin America.

**TABLE 2: *Urban female participation rate in Latin America***

	1990	2002
<b>Southern Cone</b>		
Argentina <sup>1</sup>	38	48
Paraguay <sup>2</sup>	50	57
Brazil <sup>2</sup>	45	53
<b>Chile<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>35</b>	<b>42</b>
Uruguay	44	50
<b>Andean region</b>		
Colombia <sup>4</sup>	48	57
Venezuela	38	55
Ecuador	43	53
Peru <sup>7/2</sup>	62	54
Bolivia <sup>5</sup>	47	57
<b>Central America and Mexico</b>		
Costa Rica	39	46
Honduras	43	47
Mexico <sup>5</sup>	33	45
Panama <sup>4</sup>	43	54
El Salvador <sup>2</sup>	51	51
Guatemala <sup>5</sup>	43	58
Dominican Republic <sup>6</sup>	53	53

<sup>1</sup> Figures for Greater Buenos Aires; <sup>2</sup> 2001 instead of 2002; <sup>3</sup> 2000 instead of 2002; <sup>4</sup> 1991 instead of 1990; <sup>5</sup> 1989 instead of 1990 <sup>6</sup> 1992 instead of 1990 <sup>7</sup> 1997 instead of 1990

Source: National data published in ECLAC (2004) as cited in Abramo and Valenzuela (2005).

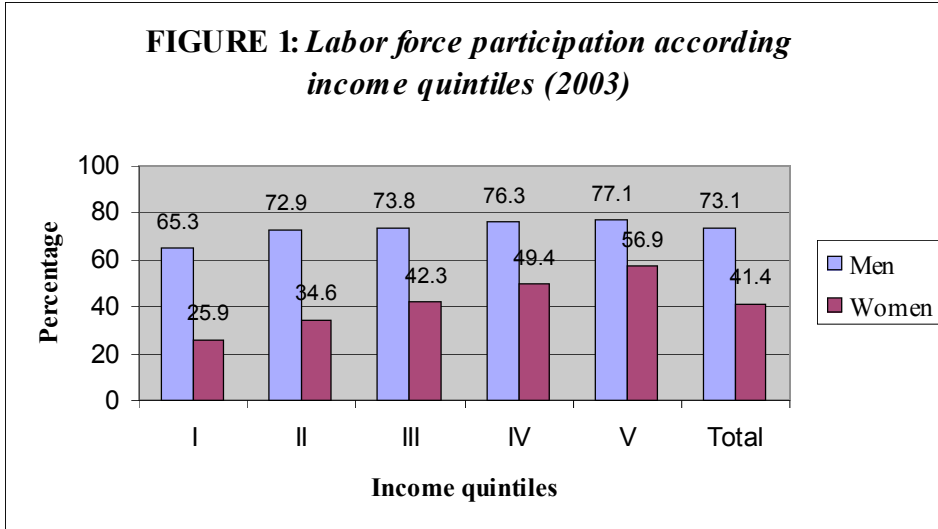
This fact may come as surprise given Chile’s economic performance in the last two decades. According to the World Economic Forum, “during the twenty-year period ending in 2003 Chilean GDP per capita rose by close to 270 percent, three times faster than the average for

Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, the three largest economies in Latin America” (López-Claro, 2004, p. 111).

Although women’s participation rate in Chile is lower compared to the region, the structure of women’s employment is more stable and less vulnerable than in other Latin American societies. While the proportion of women who work in the informal urban sector surpasses 60 percent in countries, such as Paraguay, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Honduras and El Salvador, the figure is lower in Chile, Argentina, Mexico, Uruguay and Panama, hovering around 45 percent (ILO, 2004, as cited in Abramo & Valenzuela, 2005).

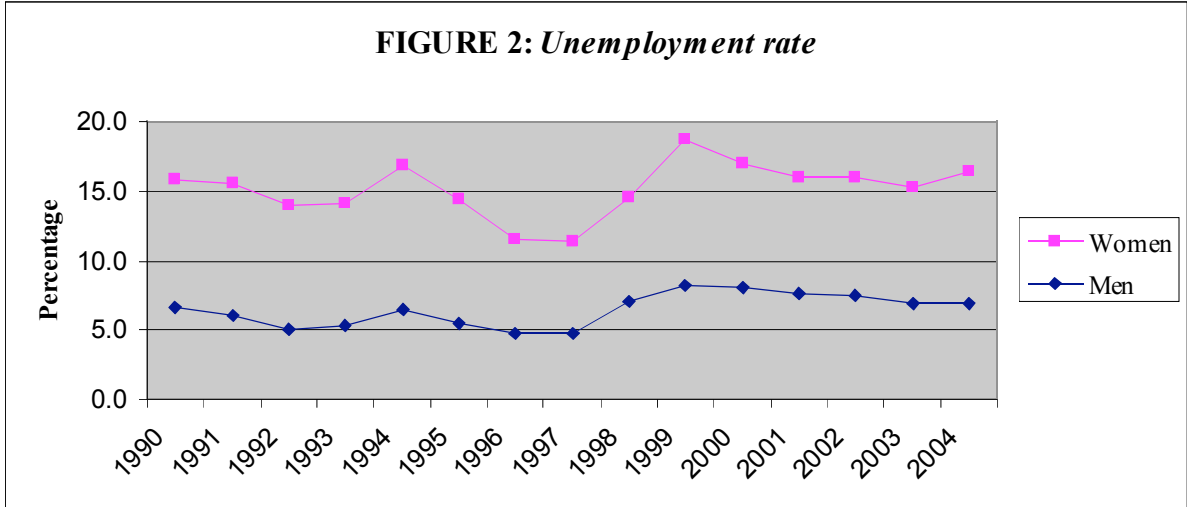
Even though Chile shows higher formal employment rates among women compared with many Latin American countries, it must be acknowledged that within the Chilean informal sector, there is still a broad gender divide. While 34 percent of men worked in the informal sector in 2003, 46 percent of women did (ILO, 2004, as cited in Abramo & Valenzuela, 2005). Additionally, the situation for women in the informal sector is more disadvantaged. According to Abramo and Valenzuela (2005), the quality of employment in this sector—which includes independent work, micro-enterprises and domestic service—is worse for women than for men because their income is lower and the majority is employed in the most precarious areas, such as domestic service.

The women’s labor force participation in Chile progressively decreases according income quintiles. In other words, the poorer the women, the less they participate in the labor market. Notably, the participation of women of the richest quintile more than duplicates the participation of women of the poorest quintile (see Figure 1).



Source: Elaborated from Casen 2003 and Dirección del Trabajo (Labor Agency)

The unemployment rate<sup>3</sup> also reflects the disadvantaged situation of women. For all years under study, the women unemployment has been greater than men's (see Figure 2).



Source: Elaborated from Dirección del Trabajo (Labor Agency)

<sup>3</sup> The unemployment rate used by the Labor Agency is based on the National Labor Survey conducted by INE (National Statistics Institute). According to this survey, someone is unemployed if: the last week didn't work, does not have a business or a job, and in the last two months has looked for a job (Kowan, Micco, Mizala, Pagués, & Romaguera, n.d.).

**Wage gap:** The income inequality<sup>4</sup> between women and men in the labor market has been significant during the 1990s and 2000s, although it is slowly being reduced (Montenegro & Paredes, 1999; Ñopo, 2006). However, as Table 3 shows, the waning tendency of the wage gap stalled between the years 2000 and 2002 because of the economic crisis.

Although there is a positive relation between years of schooling and income among both men and women, the higher level education of women does not mean a reduction of the wage gap. In contrast, the earning divide is progressively greater as women reach more level of education. The widest gap is seen among people with 16 or more years of education.

**TABLE 3: *Proportion of women's average monthly income compared with men, according to level of education***

<b>Education level</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2003</b>
No formal education	70.6	71.5	82	78.2
Uncompleted Primary	71.6	72.7	77.4	75.0
Completed Primary	68.9	69.8	67.9	67.8
Uncompleted Secondary	71.9	65.6	69.3	66.4
Completed Secondary	65.3	66.3	66.7	68.4
Uncompleted Tertiary	71.6	70.3	57.4	56.8
Completed Tertiary	39.4	47.3	43.8	49.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>66.6</b>	<b>69.8</b>	<b>64.3</b>	<b>67.4</b>

Source: Dirección del Trabajo (Labor agency) based on Casen 1992, 1996, 2000 and 2003

This tendency is similar in every Latin American country. However, in Chile -- along with Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala and Nicaragua-- the gap is particularly strong. Women with more than 12 years of education earn only around half as much as men (ECLAC, 2004, as cited in Abramo & Valenzuela, 2005).

The income gap also varies according occupations. Among mechanical factory workers the gap narrows because their wages hover around the minimum salary. But, similarly to the level of education indicator, the wage gap widens in the professionals and high public and private positions (see Figure 3).

<sup>4</sup> The wage gap is showed as the proportion of women's income compared with men's.



**FIGURE 3: Proportion of women's average monthly income compared with men according occupations (2003)**



Source: Dirección del Trabajo (Labor Agency)

The most revealing figure is the income gap among the members of executive power, Legislature and public companies: the proportion of women's income hardly reaches 40% that of men. This phenomenon should be a cause of concern because the public sector, which supposedly has to address the gender inequality, shows the greatest income gap.

The phenomenon that income gap is broader with more years of education might be influenced by occupational segregation in the labor market. Women with tertiary education usually are concentrated in occupational branches with lower salaries, such as nurses or school teachers. However, Ñopo (2006) found systematic gender wage differences even matching females and males by age, years of schooling, marital status, full-time or part-time workers, occupational category and occupational experience.

**Glass ceiling effect:** Although entry incomes can be similar among men and women, the gap widens as men have more opportunities to move up “the career ladder” than women. For example, in most Latin American countries the widest gap between sexes reaches its highest point in the 45-54 age group, when a person's earning capacity is the highest (Abramo &

Valenzuela, 2005). Ñopo (2006) also found that in some cases it is not possible to make gender comparisons in Chile. “Married, older males (beyond their forties) with more than 10 years of occupational experience are more likely to have no female counterparts actively working. These males are more likely to work in managerial positions, and their wages can account for between 5 and 8 percentage points of the gender wage gap in Chile” (p.41) .

### **Reasons for inequality at work**

**Socio-demographic factors:** Scholars have found that socio-demographic factors play a role in the female labor force participation in Chile (Contreras & Plaza, 2004; Muchnik, Vial, Struver, & Harbart, 1991). In contrast to countries such as Bolivia, Guatemala and Paraguay, where there is no negative link between the supply of women workers and the presence of children in the household (Abramo & Valenzuela, 2005), in Chile there is a clear negative relationship among both factors. As the number of children increases, the probability of women’s labor participation decreases (Contreras & Plaza, 2004). The marital status also has a negative impact on the labor force entrance. Years of education and age have a positive relationship with women participation in the paid workforce (Contreras & Plaza, 2004; Muchnik, Vial, Struver, & Harbart, 1991).

**Cultural obstacles:** Besides socio-demographic factors, Contreras and Plaza (2004) provided evidence that there are strong cultural obstacles that impede women’s participation. The authors concluded that if a woman’s environment is more *machista*<sup>5</sup>, her chances for entering the paid labor force decrease significantly. In addition, they found that the more conservative values<sup>6</sup> a woman shares, the less she participates. The explanatory power of these cultural variables was two times stronger than the socio-demographic variables.

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<sup>5</sup> In order to identify *machista* attitudes, Contreras and Plaza (2004) constructed an index from survey’s responses. They used statements such as: “Men’s job is to earn money, women’s job is to take care of the family and the household;” “Men should be more responsible for child care than they are now.”

<sup>6</sup> Contreras and Plaza (2004) constructed a value index. They used statements such as: “People who want to have children should get married;” “Divorce is the best solution when a couple cannot resolve their problems.”

A world survey revealed that Chile is a country that does not encourage women's paid jobs. From 24 countries, Chile ranked 23rd in proclivity of women entering the labor market (Lehmann, 2003)<sup>7</sup>. In Chile, 81% of the population consider that "the family life is affected when a woman works full time" (Lehmann, 2003, p. 1), and 83% agree with the statement "a preschooler is likely to suffer if his/her mother works" (p. 1).

Another study (Henochoa, 2005) conducted in seven *campamentos* (squatters) in Santiago confirmed that the main costs of women's entrance into the labor market are family-related and cultural obstacles. Furthermore, women do not have strong support from their partners to look for a paid job, although they need money. Men's monthly average income in the studied *campamentos* hovers around US\$250. But "the majority of women recognized that they quit their jobs because their partners order them to do so" (Henochoa, 2005, p. 31). The testimony of Gina, housewife with preschooler children who lives in a *campamento* in Santiago, is revealing: "I won't work anymore, although I would like to. My husband does not want to. In part, I do agree with him because women are supposed to be at home, not working" (Sabatini, 1995, p. 27).

According to the investigation, the factors that would facilitate women's participation are (1) childcare, (2) labor market flexibility, and (3) stronger support from their partners. Anti-discrimination legislation is not a priority.

**Discrimination:** The discrimination against women in the labor market (i.e. different treatment based purely on gender) can be present in four stages: job entrance, job assignments, promotion and wage. Regarding the job entrance, employers can legally ask applicants to supply a photo in the CV, and information about their sex, age and marital status. However, a field experiment conducted by Bravo, Sanhueza and Urzúa (2006)<sup>8</sup> found that "men and women have the same probability of getting called to interview." However, it has not been tested whether the employer

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<sup>7</sup> In the ranking, while Canada, former East Germany and Sweden are the most proactive to encourage women's paid jobs; Russia, Chile and Filipinas are the less proactive.

<sup>8</sup> The experiment consisted of sending 6.300 fictitious CVs for real job vacancies published weekly in El Mercurio newspaper of Santiago. A range of strictly equivalent CVs in terms of qualifications and employment experience of applicants were sent out, only varying in gender, name, last name and place of residence. The authors measured the response rates for the various demographic groups (Bravo, Sanhueza, & Urzúa, 2006).

do not discriminate against women in the subsequent application stages, in the job assignments and/or promotion. As for the wage gap, scholars have found that part of the differences can be explained by observable factors (e.g. hours of work, experience, years of schooling, occupation), but some parts remain unexplained. They can be attributed to the existence of gender differences in unobservable characteristics or discrimination (Montenegro & Paredes, 1999; Ñopo, 2006). Furthermore, although the gender wage gap has been falling in Chile, the unexplained component of it has been increasing (Montenegro, 2001).

**Costs for the company:** One of the most common arguments against women's recruitment is the higher costs they represent for the company given the laws that mandate child care services, protect them against dismissal during pregnancy periods or the substitution's costs when they are on maternity leave. These kinds of arguments usually justify the wage gap among females and males. Regarding the salary during maternity leave and medical expenditures associated with it, the Chilean state subsidized 100 percent of that cost. Regarding child care services, the company has to provide them when it employs more than 20 female workers. A study conducted by the International Labor Organization (Abramo, 2003) revealed that child care services represent the major cost for companies. However, the same investigation concluded that the additional costs paid by the employers when they hire a woman represent 1.8 percent of the female's gross salary in Chile. This figure is slightly higher compared with Brazil and Argentina (1.2 percent and 1.0 percent of female's gross salary, respectively), although it is much lower than the current wage gaps observed in the labor market. It must be acknowledged; however, that the figures do not represent indirect costs associated to the women's substitution and the lower productivity, but it is difficult to calculate them.

### **Policies that address inequality at work**

In terms of public policy, the main accomplishment for women equity was the creation of a women's state agency when democracy was reinstated in Chile. In 1991, the center-left

coalition Concertación established by law<sup>9</sup> Servicio Nacional de la Mujer (National Women's Service), Sernam, which is "responsible for working with the Executive to devise and propose general plans and measures designed to ensure that women enjoy the same rights and opportunity as men" (Sernam as cited in Franceschet, 2005, p. 120).<sup>10</sup>

Although Sernam's national director is member of the president cabinet, it is not a ministry. The women's agency is housed within the Ministry of Planning and Cooperation (Mideplan), which is responsible for Chile's social programs. Therefore, Sernam can only implement pilot programs, which must be turned over to the appropriate ministry or *municipio* (municipal government) after a period of time (Richards, 2004). However, Sernam has successfully promoted legislation that addresses women's rights. In addition, it has also devised a number of programs.

**Laws:** The most important laws that address inequality at work approved since 1990 are put forth<sup>11</sup>:

- 1) Reform to the Labor Code (1993): This reform includes removing the prohibition on women taking certain jobs (such as underground jobs), providing time away from work to take care for sick children (a benefit that can be claimed by both parents), and a minimum salary for domestic service's employment.
- 2) Law to calculate the salary when women are at maternity leave (1994): Chilean state offers paid maternity leave to women working in the formal sector. They have the right to six weeks leave before and twelve weeks after the birth of the child (Pribble, 2006), which is the

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<sup>9</sup> In other Latin American countries, women's state agencies have less prominence and are more unstable. For example, Argentina's Consejo Nacional de la Mujer was established through presidential decree –not by law-- during Menem's administration. When controversy over women's rights emerged in Argentina because of 1995 Beijing Conference, President Menem drastically curtailed Consejo's activities and budget (Waylen, 2000, as cited in Franceschet, 2003)

<sup>10</sup> In practice, Sernam achieve its objective through inter-sectoral coordination, legal reforms, training public servants as a gendered perspective on public policy, designing social policy, strengthening participation at the community level, and producing research that reveal women's situation (Franceschet, 2003)

<sup>11</sup> Although Sernam and parliamentarians have introduced bills to legislate about women's inequality, the executive power has been more successful. In the Chilean presidential system, the executive dominates the legislative agenda through attaching levels of "urgency" to the bills or by calling to extra Legislature sessions. Notably, between 1990 and 1995, only one third of legislative bills related to women's issues were successful compared to over two thirds of executive bills (Baldez, 2001, as cited in Franceschet, 2005).

longest period compared to other Latin American countries.<sup>12</sup> This law guarantees a subsidy similar to her salary.

- 3) Labor reform that protects maternity (1998): This law protects women from being dismissed or not promoted for becoming pregnant (it includes women who work in the domestic service). It prohibits the administration of pregnancy tests as condition of employment. In addition, it extends the mandate that companies that employ more than 20 female workers must provide childcare service to companies' chains. For example, a mall that house many small stores with less than 20 workers should provide childcare.
- 4) Constitutional reform that explicitly establishes women's and men's equality before the law (1999).
- 5) Law that criminalizes sexual harassment at work (2005).

All these laws (Sernam, n.d.) have been a great achievement to encourage gender equity and facilitate women's labor access. However, many of them cannot be enforced or monitored due to lack of resources or little political will (Franceschet, 2005, p. 128). For instance, according to a labor survey conducted in 1998, 30 percent of the companies with 20 or more female workers recognized that they do not provide neither childcare service nor childcare bonds (Malva & Damianovic, 1998). In the case of sexual harassment, the law just criminalizes this behavior at work, not taking into account other situations in which it might happen.

**Main programs launched by the public sector:** In Chile, many social programs are targeted using the ficha CAS<sup>13</sup> (Socio-economic Characterization Form), a questionnaire administered by the government, which among others indicators determines the eligibility of a household to a number of governmental programs (Clert & Wodon, 2001).

1) *Child care centers:* Although before 1990 the government provided subsidized childcare to poor women, this service has become a priority of the Chilean governments in last years.

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<sup>12</sup> The maternity leave covers 12 weeks in Argentina, Mexico and Uruguay and 16 weeks in Brazil (Abramo, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Ficha CAS was introduced by the Military Regime (1973-1989) and modified by the democratic governments after 1990.

Through JUNJI (Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles, administered by the Ministry of Education) and Fundación Integra, the Chilean government provides care for children whose mothers are working. They provide education and wholesome meals to preschoolers in the poorest *municipios* of the country. However, child care programs in Chile face an important coverage problem. Only 28 percent of eligible children under six years of age attend a pre-school institution (Integra, n.d). In addition, the recipients of the benefit are working mothers who qualify through ficha CAS. The system, therefore, excludes four categories of women: teenage mothers who wish they could complete their schooling instead of entering the labor market; women working in the informal sector such as cleaners and domestic workers; women who are employed, but not by contract<sup>14</sup>; and female who are looking for a job (Clert & Wodon, 2001; Pribble, 2006). This obstacle is a big problem in Chile because, as aforementioned, poor women who live in *campamentos* –and are more likely to be employed in the informal sector— named child care programs as first priority to facilitate their labor participation.

2) *Programa de capacitación laboral para mujeres de escasos recursos preferentemente jefas de hogar (Labor force training program for low income women, preferably heads of households):*

Launched in 1992 as a pilot program, now it is a national program that covers more than 84 municipal governments. In 2001, it had reached 4,000 beneficiaries (García-Huidobro, 2002). It is by far the most publicized governmental program.

Sernam coordinates the activities and financial support of over ten state agencies in order to provide, besides job training, health, childcare and legal aid to young single mother's head of households. The project has been successful in targeting the female-headed households, with very few leakages to the non poor and women who are not the facto heads. To avoid screening errors, the project use a very operational definition of female headship, require significant commitment of women, and encourage social control because participants assume responsibility for identifying other female heads (Buvinic & Gupta, 1997). In addition, the participants

<sup>14</sup> According to Pribble (2006), low-income women who work in the formal sector in Chile are unlikely to be employed by contract.

benefited from access to health and child care, and they recognized they have gained self – esteem. According to the implementers, greater self-esteem may increase the likelihood that female heads, especially the young ones, will form stable partnerships (Buvinic & Gupta, 1997; Richards, 2004). However, the program is failing in achieving its main objective: women have hardly obtained jobs in the area that they were trained, and there are no major differences in access to formal employment after the training course. Studies have found that the ineffectiveness of this part of the program is due to the lack of professionals who know the labor problems at the local level (Richards, 2004; Sernam, 2004) and because “they teach women traditionally ‘feminine’ skills, such as hairstyling or sewing” (Franceschet, 2005, p. 126). In addition, the coverage is very low, and the program currently depends on the municipal governments. Thus, it strongly relies on the level of commitment of the mayor and other local officials. If the mayor is not committed to women’s issues the *municipio* does not inform about the services available to them (Franceschet, 2005).

In 2001, this program was complemented with other social program that emphasized women’s labor participation as independent workers. It is focused on low income women in general (García-Huidobro, 2002). This program promotes the participation in the informal economy, and it has had a greater success compared to the training program for women head of households because one third of beneficiaries were operating microprojects after the program (García-Huidobro, 2002).

3) *Programa para mujeres trabajadoras temporeras de la agroexportación (Program targeted to women seasonal workers in the agricultural industry)*: Launched in 1991, this program intends to promote *temporeras*’ association, and provides childcare service during harvest time, using schools campuses in vacation periods. Currently, there are 127 child care centers that attend around 100 children each one from 6 to 12 years old in 43 municipalities. The child care centers have been the most successful part of this program. However, it lacks coordination to boost the participation of women and agricultural companies. Beneficiaries show a passive



stance and are reluctant to participate, and companies are unwilling to provide funds (Cid, 2001; Sernam, 2004).

4) *Labor Good Practices Manual about Non Discrimination*: One of the Bachelet administration's first policies was the elaboration of a new labor manual for the public sector that promotes gender equity. The government also encourages private employers to use the guide. This guide makes recommendations about the recruitment and selection processes, such as the elimination of sex, address, age, photo and marital status from job applications. The manual also encourages employers to promote and increase the participation of women in the executive and board positions.

Although it is soon to evaluate the impact of the government's commitment to gender equity in the private sector, the first effect was the manual's adoption by the main business organization of the country, Confederación de la Producción y el Comercio (Confederation of Production and Commerce), which assembles the main production sectors of the country, such as mining, commerce, agriculture, financial, manufacturing and construction. Whether the recommendations about the recruitment policies and the women's promotion to decision-making positions are going to take effect in the public and private companies remain to be seen.

## **Conclusions**

Gender inequality at work includes the intervention of three main actors: women, government and the private sector.

From the women's point of view, their low participation in the labor force and their passive stance towards governmental programs should be cause a concern for two reasons: women's income contribution is key to overcome poverty, and at the same time, participation complements state efforts to alleviate poverty, especially now, when "the state is reducing its size and is targeting its social spending" (Sabatini, 1995, p. 15). As Roberts (2002) put it: "The new

policies advocate providing welfare and combating poverty through programs are less directly reliant on the state and more open to citizen participation” (p. 1).

Although it is hard to change cultural values, I argue that as Chile pursues its development path, the cultural obstacles that prevent females’ incorporation into the labor market will change progressively.

From the government’s point of view, I think that strong symbolic policies, such as the high participation of women in policy-making positions, may accelerate these changes. I do not think that affirmative action policies in the private sector are a good mechanism to achieve gender equity because, as Víctor Tokman (2004) said, they incorporate a bias in the labor market. In addition, they do not eliminate the root of the problem. However, I argue that in the case of Chile, a drastic symbolic policy sent by the public sector might have been necessary to make people reflect about the problem. At the same time, the programs launched by government have not been successful because they have merely provided assistance in health and childcare, but they are not succeeding in their main objectives, which are to provide job training and help women to organize themselves. The most important problem is that the government is not taking into account the local needs.

In addition, legislation towards labor flexibility may facilitate females’ incorporation into the labor market. Although women may have a paid job, society still regards them as the primary family care-givers. However, there is a lack of governmental support towards this type of laws.

Finally, from the private sector point of view, it must be acknowledged that they also face cultural obstacles to incorporate more women. However, there are certain steps that might help. First, they can change the recruitment process. A field experiment found that women and men have the same probabilities of getting called to a job interview in Chile. This is a positive finding, but we cannot be confident whether those findings necessarily generalize to the population. Therefore, although the companies are free to select the most appropriate employees, eliminating barriers at the beginning of the selection process may give more opportunities for

women to show their capacities. Second, companies can change their organizational routines: they can have more flexible work shifts and avoid meetings in evenings. And third, they should respect and implement current laws related to women and family. If the rule of law cannot be monitored, then it is necessary for the private sector to exhibit a greater social will in order to overcome the wide gender inequality that Chile faces.

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