

**The Gender Equality Seal: A Certification Programme
for Public and Private Enterprises supported by UNDP**



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UNDP's Gender Equality Seal Certification Programme for Public and Private Enterprises: Latin American Companies Pioneering Gender Equality



With 1400 public and private companies in 11 countries engaged in the Gender Equality Seal (GES) — and many more expected to participate — this innovative programme has taken off in Latin America. Designed as a means for the private sector to embrace gender equality and enhance women's economic and social empowerment, the Seal offers help to a growing number of corporations to make their human resources management systems more equitable and gender sensitive.

Launched by national governments that then partner with public and private companies, the Gender Equality Seal works towards eliminating gender inequalities in the workplace, while at the same time improving the lives of all employees and their families. Increasingly, the Seal represents a company strategy that equates striving for gender equality with good business. Ending discriminatory practices in the workplace not only has multiple benefits for the companies, but it is essential to building stronger economies. According to the International Monetary Fund, achieving gender equity can lead to a rise in national GDP of up to 34 per cent.

The Seal's implementation has strengthened organizational structures and human resource processes, mitigating subjective elements that generate discrimination. It has established formal protocols for preventing and addressing labour and sexual harassment in the workplace; promoted work-life balance actions; and improved the quality of the work environment, which has enhanced productivity and employee satisfaction. The model's success has made the region a pioneer in the design and implementation of public gender policies, and an architect of innovative tools and methodologies tailored for companies.

Since 2009, the Hub Regional the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has supported governments and companies participating in the Gender Equality Seal programme. Beginning with Costa Rica, Uruguay, Brazil and Chile, the Community of Practice of the Gender Equality Seal is now composed of 11 countries from Latin America and the Caribbean; they have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) formalizing their will to build south-south cooperation scenarios to close the gender gap in the labour market.



International Human Rights Instruments and Standards

The **Gender Equality Seal** is founded on internationally accepted principals, ideals, and agreements regarding human rights and gender equality, including the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions and:

The UN Global Compact Ten Principles: Launched in 2000, the Ten Principles convenes businesses, UN agencies, labour unions, civil society, and governments to promote universal principles reflecting human rights, fair labour and anti-corruption practices, and environmental sustainability. With over 4,100 participating companies from more than 100 countries, the UN Global Compact asks companies to uphold internationally proclaimed principles and standards, such as the elimination of discrimination regarding employment and occupation (<https://www.unglobalcompact.org>).

The Women's Empowerment Principles (WEP): A product of a partnership between UN Women and the UN Global Compact, the WEP helps the private sector promote gender equality in the workplace, marketplace, and community. Included among the WEP's recommendations are:

1. Establish high-level corporate leaderships for gender equality.
2. Treat all women and men fairly at work, and respect and support human rights and non-discrimination.
3. Ensure the health, safety, and well-being of all workers, regardless of gender.
4. Promote education, training, and professional development for women.
5. Implement enterprise development, supply chain engineering, and marketing practices that empower women.
6. Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.
7. Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

Why Companies are Supporting the Gender Equality Seal

While participation in the programme is voluntary, companies are attracted by its benefits, which include higher productivity and a positive corporate image. According to the Chilean pharmaceutical company Bago, participating in the Gender Equality Seal Certification Programme has led to many measurable corporate improvements, including a better work environment, lower employee turnover and absenteeism, increased productivity, and a significant rise in sales.

Throughout Latin America, corporations, government institutions, and the UNDP are joining forces to promote the Gender Equality Seal Certification Programme. This partnership convenes the necessary political will, resources, and capacities of all stakeholders to create an independent process for companies to implement, and be recognized for, improving gender equality in the work-place. After meeting clear and transparent standards for compliance, companies are awarded the Gender Equality Seal, a reflection of its commitment to and concrete actions towards equitable employment and more decent working conditions for all staff. The Seal is awarded by the governmental bodies responsible for ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment.

Achieving recognition under the Gender Equality Seal requires a serious commitment on the part of the business, one that takes time to achieve the necessary changes in the company's organizational structure and culture. The Seal is granted when, according to an external assessment, a company reaches a certain level of compliance with the programme's principles and standards. To gain this recognition, a participating enterprise must go through a series of ten steps, outlined below .



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“We at Codelco are convinced that gender diversity adds value to the business. It promotes innovation and generates better working environments.”

Claudia Vargas, corporate director of recruitment and selection at Codelco, the national copper corporation in Chile

How the Gender Equality Seal Boosts Business and Adds Value

Increasingly, companies in Latin America recognize that promoting gender equality makes good business sense. At the same time, a rising number of companies view the Gender Equality Seal Certification Programme as having added social value. They are witnessing a broad range of benefits, including a better work environment, greater productivity and efficiency, and improved relationships among staff members. Furthermore, companies report that adopting measures related to the Gender Equality Seal has resulted in an increase in employee commitment, a reduction in absenteeism, attracting a greater diversity of talent, and the promotion of organizational learning. Furthermore, earning the Seal represents a valuable opportunity to be recognized for good labour practices, boosting a company's public image and contributing to its competitive edge.

The Colombian company CAFAM, a national family compensation fund, established a corporate policy of equal pay for equal work, regardless of the employee's position. Reported benefits for the company include attracting and retaining a greater diversity of talent, which has contributed to increased competitiveness. And from the employees' perspective, staff members are reporting greater job satisfaction.

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“At first, some colleagues resisted the change; over the 40 years working at the port, they had never worked with a woman. Working with nine men all alone was a challenge for me, but now we complement each other very well.”

Fernanda Rodo, National Port Authority (ANP), Uruguay



Ten Steps to Earn the Gender Equality Seal



Why Governments Embrace the Gender Equality Seal Certification Programme

Why are governments eager to participate in the Gender Equality Seal Certification Programme? It presents a comprehensive platform to reduce inequalities in the workplace and engage in a constructive dialogue with the private sector on good labour practices. Public institutions promoting gender equality can benefit from the Certification Programme, which ensures government leadership in defining the necessary steps required to earn the Seal.

The partnerships with private companies developed through the programme are also beneficial to public institutions. Using the data on gender gaps gathered by the participating companies, governments are able to better analyze and understand the underlying causes of inequality, and assess how they affect both men and women. This helps to identify policies and strategies that are necessary to protect the rights of workers.

How UNDP Assists Governments Implementing the Gender Equality Seal Certification Programme

UNDP plays several important roles in support of Gender Equality Seal Certification Programme at the national and regional level. At the national level, UNDP is an advocate for equality, convening key stakeholders from the government, the private sector, and civil society to work towards equality.

In addition, UNDP provides technical assistance to public and private companies that wish to develop and put into practice their own Gender Equality Management Systems (GEMS). Participating enterprises also benefit from UNDP support when conducting internal assessments and analyses, or developing external communication strategies that are gender sensitive. The UNDP is frequently called upon to provide gender training for government representatives and private sector senior management and staff.



The Gender Equality Seal Certification Programme for Public and Private Enterprises Promotes Peer-to-Peer Learning and South-South Cooperation

A number of governments in the region committed to promoting gender equality have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to strengthen collaboration and South-South Cooperation to promote the programme. The MoU is a formal commitment demonstrating strong political will from high levels of government to implement the Gender Equality Seal. It also indicates their intention to institutionalize these policies and programmes and establish a solid partnership among the parties. The signatories to the MOU form part of the regional Gender Equality Seal Community of Practice. All country members exchange information, knowledge, and experience, as well as the tools and methodologies to implement the Gender Equality Seal for Public and Private Enterprises. Biannual regional forums have been organized as part of this cooperation among governments to facilitate the exchange of good practices, establish common goals among members and strengthen their networks. Some examples include:

- UNDP convened experts from Uruguay, Chile and Mexico to evaluate the national technical capacities and train government teams in Colombia to strengthen government capacity building.
- The second Forum of Private Enterprises with the Gender Equality Seal, which convened representatives from public and private companies from over 20 countries. Unilever, Manpower, Nutresa, Telefonica, Codelco, Coopertec and Bayer, among others, shared their expertise and concrete actions taken to achieve gender equality.

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