# A path to shared prosperity in Mexico: Changing policymakers' mindsets to make economic autonomy policies work for all women

ECHIDNA GLOBAL SCHOLARS PROGRAM
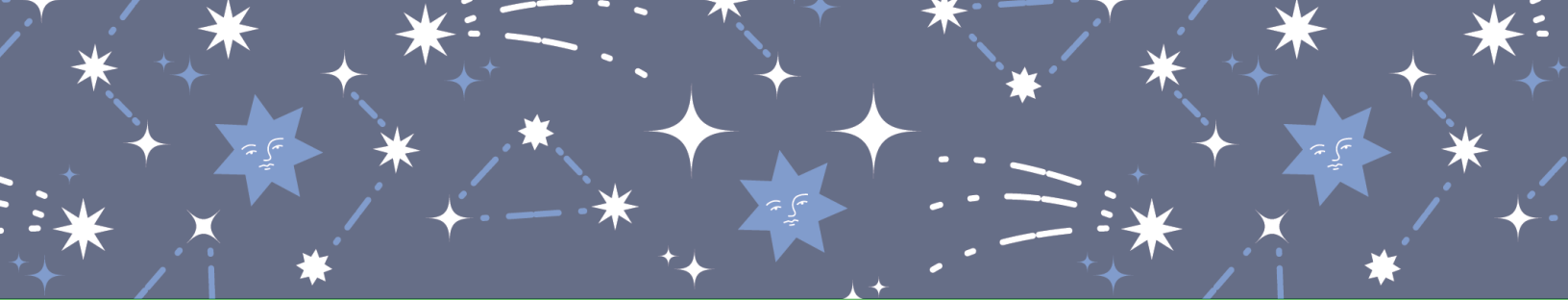


**B** | Center for **Universal Education** at BROOKINGS

ANA MAGDALENA RODRIGUEZ ROMERO

# Executive summary

Theresa (Tere), a 29-year-old **woman from Mexico, has completed secondary school, placing her among the 8 out of 10 young women who reach this level of education, reflecting the current national average (INEGI, 2023).** A mother of three with a talent for design, she enjoys making costumes for her children's school events and occasionally sells them at her local market. Yet, like 15 million other Mexican women[1], she has not been able to translate her education and skills into economic autonomy and overall well-being. Without access to formal employment or sustainable income, her ability to make meaningful life decisions—such as using resources or exiting violent and codependent relationships—remains limited.

In her municipality, as in many urban areas in Mexico, public programs exist to support women's economic participation. However, these pub-lic investments have not yet delivered on their promise for marginalized women. Structural barriers such as poverty, gender-based violence (GBV), and unpaid care and domestic work prevent women like Tere from access-ing and using these programs and services, thus reinforcing cycles of exclusion.

Mexico illustrates that equal access to education and the existence of public programs to support women's economic participation may not be enough to ensure that all women achieve equal life outcomes. These

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1    To estimate the number of women, we used public data from CONEVAL (2024) to calculate the sum of women experiencing poverty, care inequality, and violence. The estimate includes a) women in poverty who are economically inactive and have caregiving responsibilities (e.g., children), and b) women in poverty engaged in precarious employment—working fewer hours than full-time, unpaid, or without a formal contract. Considering that 70% of women in Mexico have experienced some form of violence (INEGI, 2023), we assume a strong correlation between poverty and exposure to violence, reflecting systemic vulnerabilities. However, this estimate does not account for economically inactive women in poverty without children but with other caregiving or domestic responsibilities (e.g., extended family or community care), self-employed women in the informal economy, or women facing other intersecting barriers such as health challenges or disabilities. These exclusions highlight the limitations of available data in capturing the diverse and intersectional experiences of marginalized women, particularly Indigenous women, who face compounded disadvantages due to systemic discrimination, lack of access to care services, and economic exclusion.

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efforts fall short if deeper assumptions about inequality and exclusion aren't considered in policymaking. If Mexico is to achieve shared prosperity, policies and programs must take an intersectional and holistic approach that centers the lived experiences of marginalized women in economic autonomy.

This policy brief argues that the path to shared prosperity in Mexico starts by shifting the way policymakers think. My research shows that the mindsets of local policymakers in Mexico influenced policies related to women's economic autonomy and their outcomes for marginalized women, either by reinforcing exclusion or enabling transformative change. I also demonstrate that policymakers' mindsets can change. The case of Co-meta, a second-chance education program, shows how proximity to marginalized women's lived experiences can shift policymakers' mindsets, helping them design and implement more inclusive, intersectional, and gender-transformative policies for women's economic autonomy.

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# I. Progress and paradoxes: Mexico's road from educational gains to persistent economic gaps
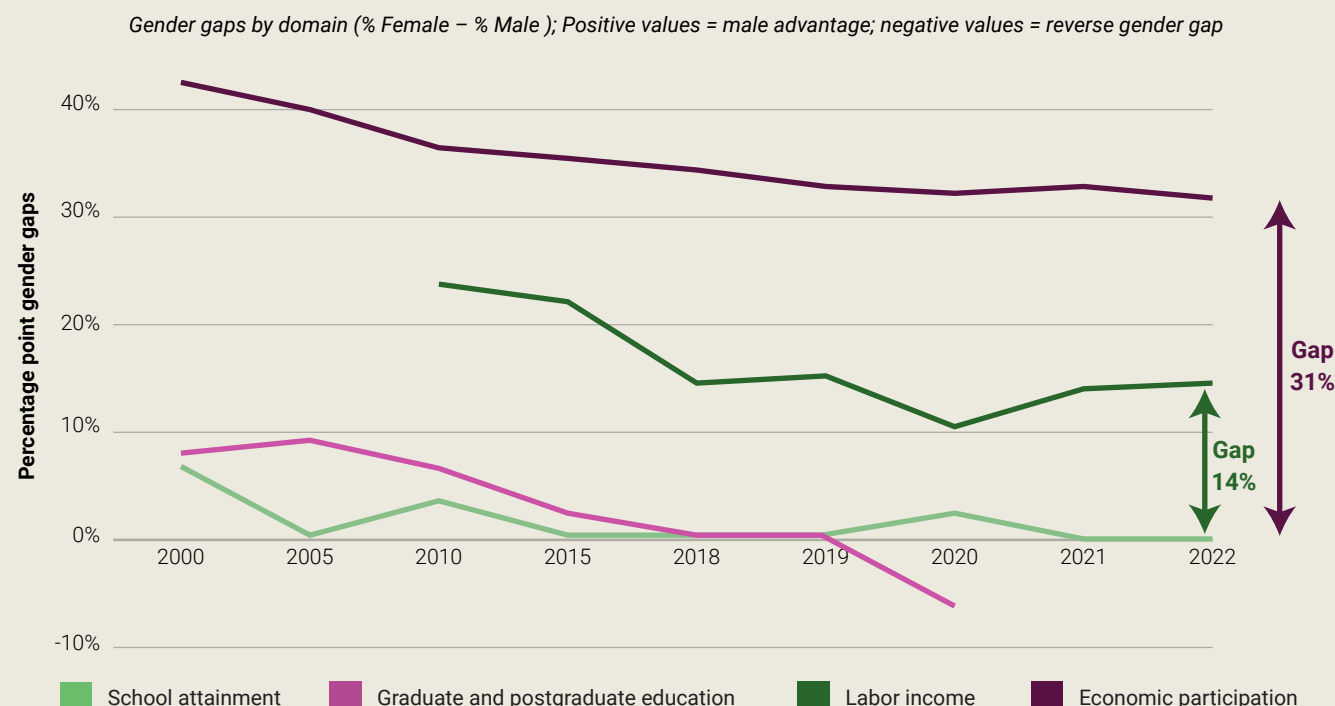
Mexico will only reach shared prosperity when marginalized women achieve greater equality of opportunity, economic autonomy, and well-being. If Mexico reaches the OECD goal of elevating women's economic participation to 67%, the national GDP could grow by an additional 3.7% beyond the regular trend (IMCO 2025). When more women have autonomy and control over financial resources, a multiplier effect accelerates progress toward shared prosperity, as women tend to invest in health, education, and well-being for their families and communities (UN Women (n.d.)).

Over the past two decades, Mexico has significantly promoted the advancement of legal and institutional building blocks for women's rights (UN Women, (n.d.)), World Bank, 2024). This institutional commitment to gender equality has created positive conditions for more equal access to education and economic opportunities for women in general (see Figure 1). Mexico has achieved gender parity in access to schooling, as young Mexican women ages 20 through 29 surpass their male peers in years of schooling and in enrollment in secondary and tertiary education, presenting a reverse gender gap (INGEI 2023).

Similarly, overall Mexican women are participating more in the economy, albeit at a slower rate. Between 2005 to 2023, Mexico has seen an increase of almost 5 percentage points in women's participation in the economy (IMCO 2024a; Mexico Como Vamos 2024; Torres, A. et al. 2022). However, economic gender gaps still affect a large portion of women in Mexico. In 2022, the economic participation gender gap was 31% (INEGI 2023) and the earned labor income gender gap had risen to 14% (CONEVAL 2023). In addition, gender inequalities persist in other labor rights, such as access to social security through formal jobs (CONSAR 2022).

**Figure 1: Despite educational parity, economic gender gaps in Mexico remain wide**

*Gender gaps by domain (% Female − % Male ); Positive values = male advantage; negative values = reverse gender gap*



Source: Author's analysis based on INEGI, 2023; CONEVAL, 2023; and Rocha, et.al 2022.

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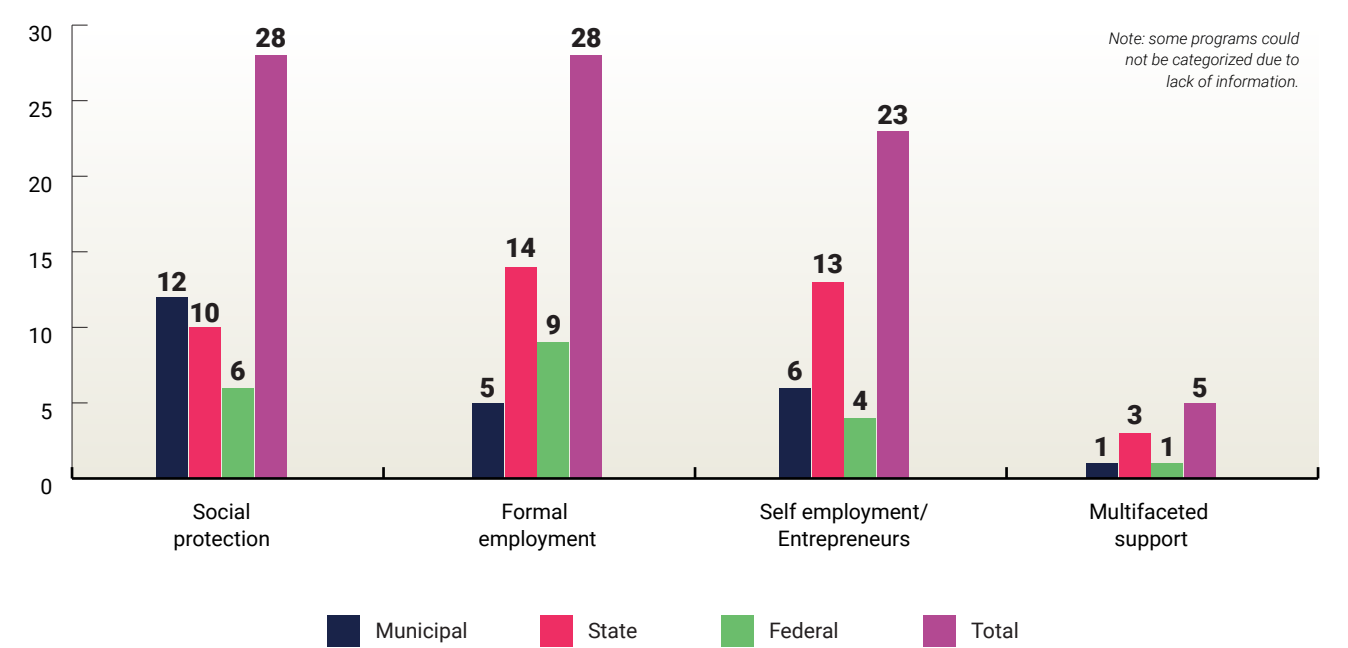TO MAKE ECONOMIC AUTONOMY POLICIES WORK FOR ALL WOMEN

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Correspondingly, the Mexican government has also made substantial investment in women's economic autonomy (WEA) (see Box 1), which has led to the creation of many public programs throughout the country. An analysis of public programs[2] implemented by three levels of government (federal, state, and municipal) in Zapopan, Jalisco showed that in this territory alone, 89 public programs operate to tackle women's economic autonomy (see Figure 2). These programs relate to WEA through

poverty reduction and social protection (mainly via direct cash transfers and food support) and the promotion of women's economic participation (mainly self-employment, entrepreneurship, and formal employment programs). Only a small portion of them provide holistic, multifaceted support, like programs for women victims of gender-based violence that work as a system to prevent violence, support victims, and punish perpetrators.

**BOX 1**
**Defining women's economic autonomy (WEA)**

Women's economic autonomy (WEA) is understood as "the sense of women's capacity to generate income and personal financial resources, based on access to paid work under conditions of equality with men" (ECLAC, 2024). WEA refers to a set of outcomes that include economic participation and income generation, women's control over resources and decisionmaking. Importantly, WEA also recognizes that addressing structural conditions is necessary for substantive equality, such as eliminating the feminization of poverty, ensuring social protection, and achieving equality in the use of time, with an emphasis on equality in care and unpaid domestic work.

**Figure 2: Public programs for WEA in Mexico, Jalisco and Zapopan, 2024**



Note: some programs could not be categorized due to lack of information.

Legend: Municipal, State, Federal, Total

Source: Author's analysis based on CONEVAL, 2024; Government of the State of Jalisco, 2024; and Government of the Municipality of Zapopan, 2024.

2 The sample included public programs operated by the Federal Government, the State Government (Jalisco), and the municipality of Zapopan, located in the Metropolitan urban area of Guadalajara. For more information on the analysis of policies and programs, refer to Appendix 2.

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As will be outlined more fully below (see Context section), despite Mexico's strong legal and institutional commitment to advance women's rights, the policy and programmatic responses specifically aimed at WEA remain fragmented, partial, and inadequately equipped to address the systemic barriers marginalized women face. Intersecting barriers such as poverty, gender-based violence, and care and domestic burdens continue to block their pathways to greater economic autonomy and well-being. For example, the economic participation rate of women with small children experiencing intersectional barriers—such as poverty—is 15.1 percentage points lower than that of women not living in poverty (INEGI 2023).

Why is there a disconnect between policy intentions and the actual design, implementation, and outcomes of WEA programs in Mexico? Previous research underscores the critical role of policymakers' assumptions and mindsets in shaping policies (UN 2021; Schneider and Ingram 1990; Schneider and Ingram 1993). Specific to WEA policy, how policymakers perceive gender and position themselves in relation to equality goals significantly influences policy design and effectiveness (Kabeer & Subrahmanian 1996; OECD 2017). These mindsets often lead to gender mainstreaming efforts that fail to challenge structural inequalities or include the voices of marginalized women in meaningful ways (Debusscher 2012; Howard 2002).

Given the gap between stated policy goals and concrete policy actions and outcomes, research is needed to better understand how policymaker mindsets inform policymaking and its impact on marginalized women's economic autonomy.

This brief uses Jalisco, a State located in the central-west coast of Mexico, as a case study to examine the role of local policymakers' mindsets in policy design and implementation of WEA, offering insights into how these can better align with the needs of marginalized women, dismantling intersectional inequalities rather than perpetuating them, and catalyzing more transformative and inclusive policy responses.

> Mindsets "are habits of thought—deeply held beliefs and assumptions and taken-for-granted ways of operating that influence how we think, what we do, and how we talk." (Source: Kania, Kramer and Senge (2018:4))



El autocuidado como parte esencial del emprendimiento
Marie Dieguez

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## II. When good intentions fall short: Gaps in WEA policy design and delivery

To analyze how policymakers' mindsets might impact WEA policy in Jalisco, it is important to first examine three key elements: (1) the structural and intersectional barriers that limit marginalized women's economic autonomy; (2) the existing policy frameworks and programmatic responses from three levels of government aimed at promoting WEA; and (3) the gaps between policy intent and their outcomes, particularly on marginalized women.

### UNPACKING BARRIERS TO MARGINALIZED WOMEN'S ECONOMIC AUTONOMY IN MEXICO

In addition to gender inequalities, marginalized women in Mexico face three prevalent structural and intersecting barriers that limit their economic autonomy[3]: (1) poverty and economic dependence; (2) gender-based violence; and (3) unpaid care and domestic work (see Figure 3). These barriers limit their ability to participate fully in the economy, generate income, and exercise decisionmaking power that comes with financial independence.

Poverty restricts women's ability to participate in the labor market, access public services, and make autonomous decisions about their lives, such as how to use resources, pursue personal or professional goals, or exit conditions of economic or emotional dependency. In Mexico, women living in poverty have a 9% lower economic participation rate compared to those not living in poverty (IMCO 2024b). Many women facing poverty are forced to depend on partners, relatives, or government support for basic needs such as housing, healthcare, and food (ECLAC 2004). For example, over 90% of Mexican women in poverty rely on partners or family members to access health services—compared to only 20% of men in poverty (CONEVAL 2023).

Gender-based violence is both a cause and consequence of women's limited autonomy. Economic dependence increases women's vulnerability to violence. Violence restricts their mobility, erodes their self-determination, and limits their ability to engage in work or pursue income-generating opportunities (Aguirre, E. 2023). Seven in ten Mexican women have experienced violence at some point in their lives, primarily psychological or sexual, with partner violence being the second-most prevalent form (INEGI 2023).

Deeply entrenched gender norms position women as primary caregivers, placing a disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic and care work on them (ECLAC 2022). Mexican women dedicate, on average, 23.4 more hours per week to unpaid care and domestic work than men (INEGI 2023), and nearly 48% of women cite caregiving responsibilities as the main reason they are not seeking employment (CONEVAL 2023).

The lack of accessible care infrastructure not only limits whether women can work at all but also affects the type of employment they can access and their prospects for job stability and career growth. This often means informal or intermittent employment, and precarious working conditions. These effects are particularly pronounced for women in poverty raising young children. For instance, Mexican women aged 26–35 with children under the age of five living in poverty have a 36.3 percentage point lower economic participation rate compared to women of the same age without children and not living in poverty (INEGI 2023).

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3    There are many additional intersecting barriers that specific groups of Mexican women face—such as racism (particularly affecting indigenous women), disability, age discrimination, rural-urban disparities, mental or physical health conditions, sexual orientation, gender identity, and migration status, among others. This research focuses on the three barriers that emerged as most prevalent across a broader population: poverty, unpaid care and domestic work, and gender-based violence. While these do not capture the full complexity of every woman's experience, they provide a common lens through which to analyze policy effectiveness in Mexico. Future research should explore how additional and compounding barriers—such as those affecting indigenous women, women with disabilities, or younger and older women—interact with existing policies and might require more targeted and differentiated approaches.

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## POLICY FRAMEWORK: WHAT HAS BEEN DONE IN MEXICO TO PROMOTE WEA?

WEA can be understood as an umbrella concept encompassing a broad set of policies and programs that span multiple sectors of public administration (see Figure 3). As such, institutional and programmatic arrangements related to WEA vary across contexts, geographies, and over time. In Mexico, the WEA policy framework is shaped by three main policy streams: (1) social development, care systems, and education; (2) economic development and labor; and (3) gender equality and gender-based violence. These policies—and the programs derived from them[4]—are implemented by a range of ministries and public agencies at the federal, state, and municipal levels. This is often done with limited coordination, as will be discussed in the sections that follow.

**Figure 3: WEA Policy landscape in Mexico**
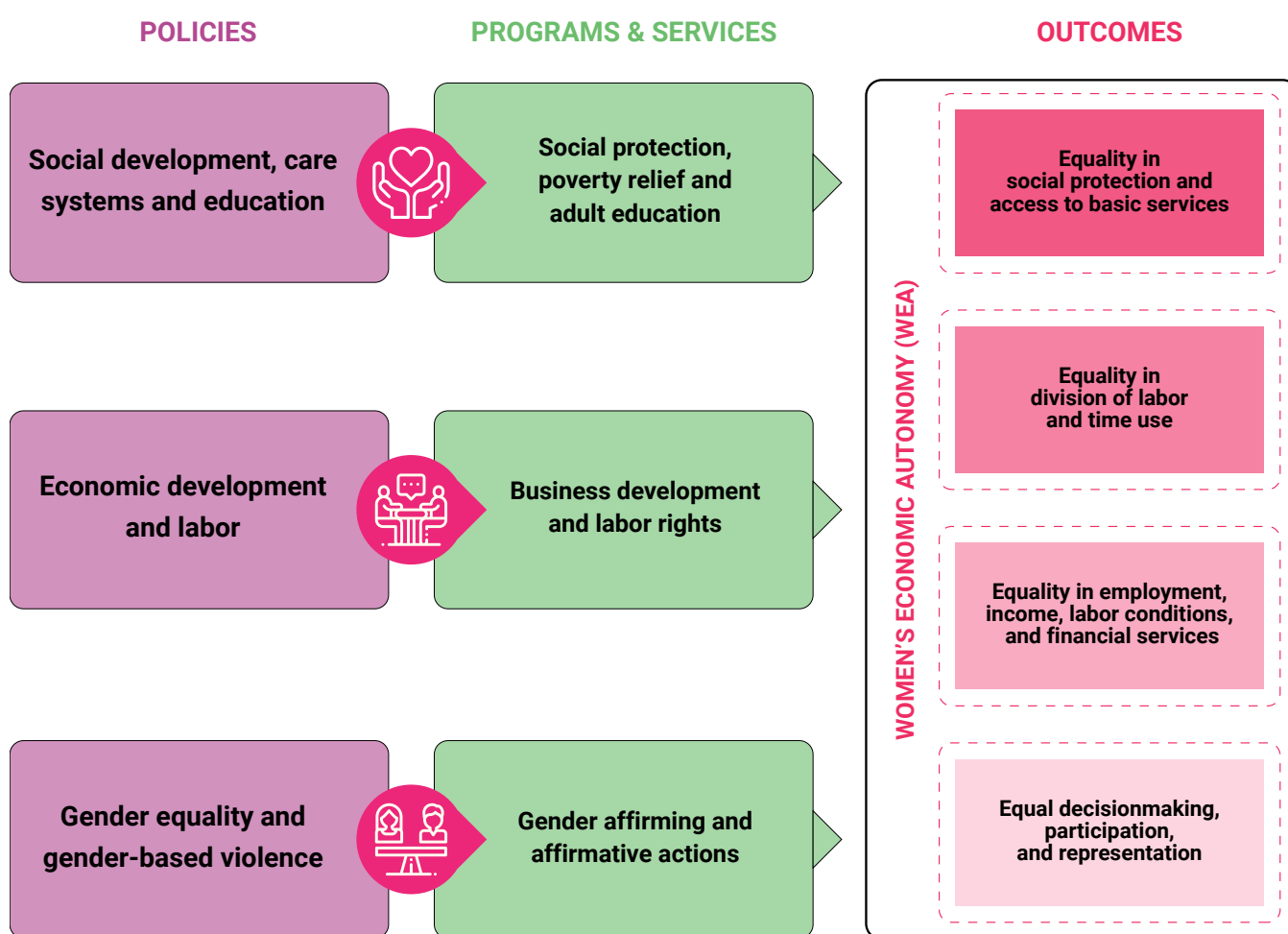


Source: Author's analysis based on ECLAC, 2024; CONEVAL, 2024; Government of the State of Jalisco, 2024; and Government of the Municipality of Zapopan, 2024.

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4    In this brief, *policy* refers to formal frameworks, mandates, and institutional priorities that guide public decisionmaking—for example, the State Plan for Governance and Development (PEGD) or the PROIGUALDAD gender equality strategy. *Programming* refers to the implementation of these policies through specific actions and services—such as training programs (IDEFT, CREA), cash transfers (Fuerza Mujeres, Sembrando Vida), or job placement efforts. While distinct, policy and programming are closely linked: policymakers' mindsets influence both high-level policy design and the operational decisions that shape how programs are delivered and experienced by women.

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## A.    Social development, care systems, and education policy

Social development policies can be understood as those that aim to improve well-being, redistribute resources and ensure rights and opportunities for citizens, (Sinclair, S. & Baglioni, S. (Eds.) 2024). They also shape women's economic autonomy. In Mexico, these policies are led by the Ministry of Welfare and the National System for Family Development (DIF). These programs primarily address poverty through cash transfers and social services provided through social infrastructure. The social infrastructure consists mainly of 1,300 community centers that target vulnerable groups in extreme poverty, indigenous populations, rural communities, and female-headed households (Sistema Nacional DIF 2024).

Moreover, education and training initiatives by the Ministry of Education (such as CONOCER, CECATI, or IDEFT) provide skills certification and vocational training. This supports the population's access to formal employment and entrepreneurship.

In parallel, in recent years, the care agenda has gained prominence in Mexico. In 2024, Jalisco became one of the first states to approve a law establishing a Jalisco State Care System, recognizing care as a shared responsibility between the state, community, families, and private sector.[5] At the national level, however, the creation of a national care system remains under legislative review and without approved funding (INMUJERES 2024a).

## B.   Economic and labor policies

Economic and labor policies also influence WEA by supporting population employability and entrepreneurship. Programs such as *Jóvenes Construyendo el Futuro* and *Sembrando Vida* provide vocational training, stipends, and pathways to employment, particularly in rural areas. The National and State Ministries of Economy complement these efforts by offering subsidies, training, and credit to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with the goal of enhancing productivity, self-employment, and job creation (CONEVAL 2024a; CONEVAL 2024b; Government of the State of Jalisco 2024).

At both national and state levels, efforts have been made to promote gender equality in the workplace through public recognition and voluntary compliance mechanisms. Examples of these are the Mexican Norm on Labor Equality and Non-Discrimination (CONAPRED 2019), the *Jalisco Sin Brechas* Award (STPS 2025) and the *Pactemos por la Igualdad* program (SISEMH (n.d.)).

## C.   Gender equality and gender-based violence policy

Because most social development, education, economic and labor policies in Mexico precede gender equality policies and programs, over the past two decades Mexico has developed a robust policy framework to mainstream gender in public policy and administration—particularly through the Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women, the Program for Gender Equality 2020-2024 (PROIGUALDAD), and the Systems for Gender Equality as interagency coordination bodies. These efforts are monitored nationally by INMUJERES via the *Mexico Rumbo a la Igualdad* platform and aim to integrate gender perspectives across all levels of government, though their tangible impact on equality remains uncertain (INMUJERES 2024b).

PROIGUALDAD—elevated to Presidential Decree and led by the National Institute for Women (INMUJERES)—focuses on ensuring women's participation in income-generating activities, fostering equitable work conditions, challenging stereotypes, and supporting women-led entrepreneurship, alongside expanding social protections and promoting ownership of productive assets (INMUJERES 2020).

States like Jalisco have localized these frameworks. Led by the Secretary for Gender Equality (SISEMH), Jalisco's PROIGUALDAD program emphasizes strengthening women's economic autonomy by addressing discrimination,

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5    Ley del Sistema Integral de Cuidados para el Estado de Jalisco

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income generation, and shared work and family responsibilities through an intersectional lens (SISEMH 2020).

In terms of affirmative actions and targeted services, national and state gender equality programs like Economic Empowerment Nodes, Women Development Centers, *Fuerza Mujeres, Emprendedoras de Alto Impacto*, and the Center for Reunion and Attention to Women[6] (CREA) provide training, financing, and entrepreneurial support to women (INMUJERES 2024a; SISEMH 2021). Additionally, programs like *Mucpaz* engage women in rebuilding social cohesion and support networks for women. Moreover, national and state efforts have prioritized prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) and economic support for survivors through Women's Justice Centers (CJM), which offer legal, psychological, and economic assistance.

WEA can be understood as an umbrella concept encompassing a broad set of policies and programs that span multiple sectors of public administration In Mexico, the WEA policy framework is shaped by three main policy streams: (1) social development, care systems, and education; (2) economic development and labor; and (3) gender equality and gender-based violence.

## WEA POLICIES, PROGRAMS, AND SERVICES ARE NOT WORKING FOR MARGINALIZED WOMEN

Despite Mexico's structured commitment to gender equality—with dedicated institutions and mandates to mainstreaming gender across public administration and policies nationally and locally—WEA policies and programs still fall short in addressing marginalized women's needs.

Analysis of 89 public programs related to WEA operated by the national, state (Jalisco) and municipal (Zapopan) levels showed three main limitations that systematically exclude marginalized women from accessing and using programs and services meant to help them achieve economic autonomy:

- Universality overlooks specific barriers marginalized women face

- Fragmentation of programs burdens and excludes marginalized women

- Lack of gender-transformative and intersectional approaches reinforce inequalities

These limitations lock marginalized women in vicious cycles of poverty and economic dependence.

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6    Centro de Reunión y Atención para las Mujeres (CREA), operated by the Secretaría de Igualdad Sustantiva entre Mujeres y Hombres de Jalisco, is a public space designed to support women living in or passing through the state. It offers services aimed at promoting economic empowerment and preventing and addressing violence against women, adolescents, and girls. CREA provides health services, job placement support, and activities to strengthen women's autonomy—all under a shared vision of ensuring that women in Jalisco live free from violence.

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### A. Universality overlooks specific barriers marginalized women face

Most WEA programs in Mexico adopt a universal approach, aiming to serve everyone but failing to address the specific challenges marginalized women face. While universal policies provide a foundation, research underscores the importance of targeted interventions to address intersectional inequalities effectively (Ake, W. & Menendian, S. 2019).

In my analysis of 89 public programs related to WEA, only 25% targeted women, while the rest seemed to ignore the inequalities and discrimination that keep women from learning about, accessing, or benefiting from these programs (see Figure 4). Even women-targeted initiatives often neglect intersecting barriers like care responsibilities, transportation costs, and systemic discrimination. For example, subsidies for women entrepreneurs often overlook barriers like limited access to financial services, (i.e., bank accounts) that hurt the most marginalized women (Saluja, O. B. et.al 2023).

**Figure 4: Population focus of WEA in Mexico, 2024**
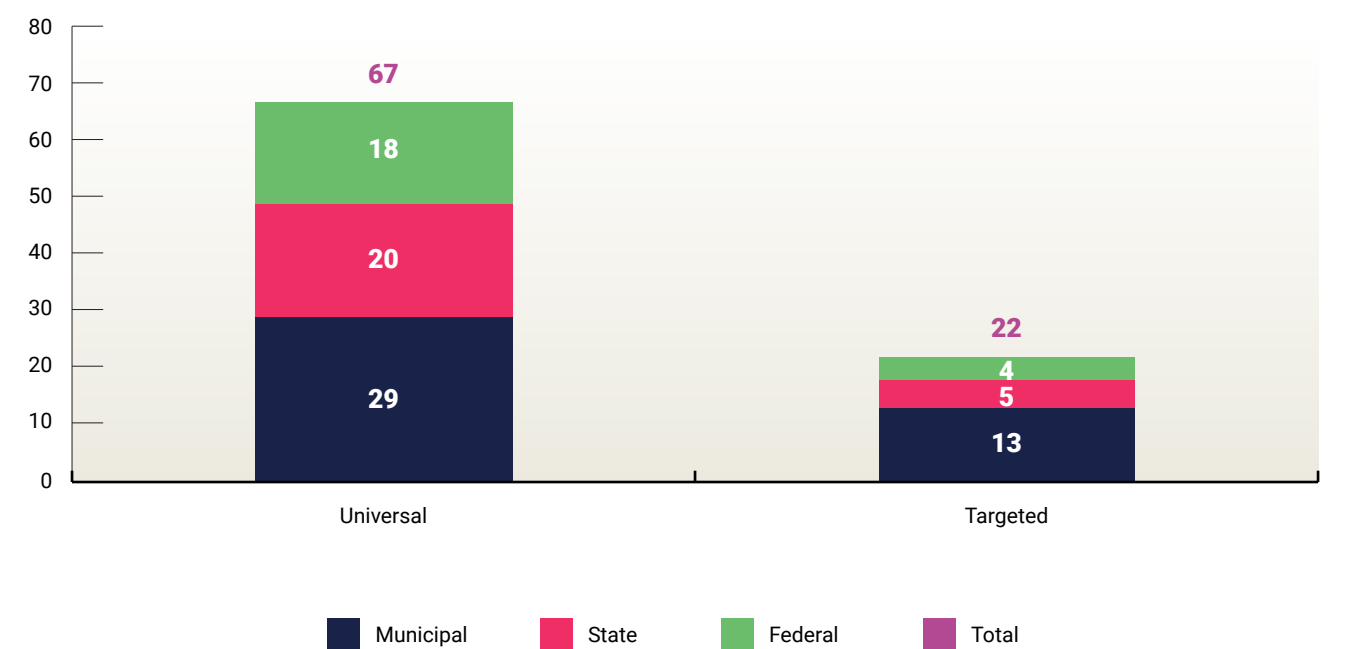


Source: Author's analysis based on CONEVAL 2024; Government of the State of Jalisco 2024; and Government of the Municipality of Zapopan 2024.

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## B.  Fragmentation of programs burdens and excludes marginalized women

Research highlights the need for tailored, multifaceted interventions to effectively break cycles of poverty and inequality (Banerjee, Duflo & Sharma 2021). Yet the analysis of WEA programs in Mexico found that most programs are single-component. 44% of these programs offer subsidies, 38% offer services like training and job placement. Only 14% of these programs combine components like training with follow-up support (see Figure 6).

Single-component programs fail to address the multiple intersecting barriers marginalized women face, such as lack of capital or unpaid care burdens, leaving many of them behind. Additionally, territorial fragmentation—understood as the dispersion of services and responsibilities across different government levels and locations without coordination—exacerbates these challenges. WEA programs are often delivered by multiple agencies operating independently, in different offices or jurisdictions, with little-to-no interagency collaboration. My analysis of WEA programs in Mexico showed that only 20% of WEA programs demonstrate coordinated action with other levels of government. This fragmentation results in high transaction costs for marginalized women, who must navigate complex bureaucracies, cover transportation expenses, and invest significant time—further limiting their ability to access economic autonomy opportunities.

## C.  Lack of gender-transformative and intersectional approaches reinforce inequalities

Despite gender-mainstreaming mandates, most WEA programs still fail to adopt a gender-transformative or intersectional approach , leaving systemic barriers to marginalized women's economic autonomy unaddressed (CONEVAL 2023). Women in poverty, facing gender-based violence or encountering caregiving burdens, often remain excluded from accessing information about programs, transport or bureaucratic obstacles hinder their participation (Unies, N. 2009, UN Women 2019). Even when marginalized women overcome these barriers, many WEA programs reinforce gender biases by channeling women into stereotypical, precarious, and unstable self-employment activities (e.g., retail, consulting, food service) with lower profitability and limited scalability. This limits women's chances of economic mobility (ASEM 2024). Skills training in feminized sectors perpetuates gender stereotypes, while formal employment programs fail to address intersecting barriers like inflexibility and insufficient support (INMUJERES 2004). Although innovative programs in Jalisco are aiming to support women in non-traditional sectors, these efforts remain small-scale and isolated (Gobierno de Jalisco 2025).

When public programs ignore intersecting inequalities—such as poverty, gender-based violence, and unpaid care work—they tend to reproduce exclusion rather than resolve it.

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**BOX 2**
**Marta's story, exemplifying the limitations of existing policies and programs for marginalized women**
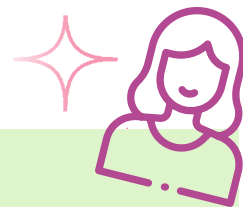
Marta's journey highlights the systemic barriers that prevent marginalized women in Mexico from fully benefiting from existing WEA policies and programs. Without sustained support, accessible services, and tailored opportunities, her path to economic autonomy remains distant. Marta, a mother of three, lives in an urban neighborhood. She dreams of contributing financially to her family, but is constrained by poverty, violence, and caregiving responsibilities. Her care and domestic workload and limited transportation options prevent her from even imagining pursuing income-generating opportunities. Despite her challenges, Marta is inspired by a friend who recently benefited from a community entrepreneurship program and motivates her to attend information sessions. However, these sessions often conflict with her other commitments, such as attending mandatory meetings at the community center for the food assistance program she participates in. Determined to start a small business, Marta borrows money from a neighbor to buy materials and begins selling flower bouquets. Although she hears about a funding opportunity from the state government to expand her business, navigating the application process is daunting, requiring significant time and effort to complete paperwork and secure a bank account. Despite receiving the grant, her journey is interrupted when her husband throws away her materials and tools, forcing her to start over and putting her at risk of escalating gender-based violence. Marta's story illustrates how the universality, fragmentation, and lack of gender transformation and intersectional perspectives of WEA policies fail marginalized women.

When good intentions fall short, it is often because deeper assumptions remain unexamined. Despite Mexico's structured efforts and formal commitments to gender equality, WEA policies continue to fall short in reaching and centering the needs of marginalized women. These gaps are due not only to weak implementation, but also to persistent mental models that shape how policymakers define problems, envision solutions, and relate to the realities of exclusion.

Without confronting these underlying assumptions, even the most well-intentioned programs risk reinforcing the very inequalities they aim to dismantle. Understanding and shifting policymakers' mindsets is essential to designing and implementing more inclusive, cost-effective, and transformative WEA policies that advance the well-being of marginalized women and contribute to shared prosperity.

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# III. Looking under the surface: The role of mindsets in WEA policymaking in Mexico

Using qualitative methods, this study examines how policymakers participate in the design of WEA policy and how their mindsets influence decisionmaking processes that either enable or hinder marginalized women's ability to benefit from existing WEA policies and programs in Mexico. The research methodology (see Appendix A for details) included over 20 in-depth interviews with state-level (Jalisco) and municipal (Zapopan) policymakers and decisionmakers involved in WEA policy, two workshops with implementers and partners of the Co-Meta second chance education program, and an extensive document review of public data on formal policymaking processes both general and specific to WEA.

The research showed that policymakers' mindsets played a central role in shaping engagement with WEA policy in Jalisco. Across the policy cycle—adoption, design, implementation, and evaluation—deeply held beliefs and assumptions influenced how policymakers defined problems, envisioned solutions, and understood their roles, as well as women's relationship to policy. As the findings below will illustrate, these mindsets either facilitated or hindered the translation of gender equality mandates into practice, ultimately affecting marginalized women's ability to access, use, and benefit from WEA programs. While Jalisco's formal policy frameworks—including the State Plan for Governance and Development (PEGD), PROIGUALDAD, and the State System for Gender Equality—emphasized gender mainstreaming, they often left the "how" of implementation open to interpretation, making policymakers mindsets a key determinant of practice on the ground.

Policymakers' decisions were also shaped by institutional constraints, administrative rules, and external inputs. Interviewees highlighted the influence of orders from the governor, as well as guidance from the gender unit (SISEMH), civil society, academia, and international organizations. In the absence of technical tools, personal experience—such as feminist values or caregiving roles—frequently informed decisionmaking. In particular, male policymakers acknowledged limited exposure to inequality and described relying on colleagues for support. Resource allocation and implementation decisions—including program communication strategies and delivery mechanisms—were often constrained by bureaucratic rules that prioritize numerical coverage targets. This discouraged the use of gender-specific approaches. Interestingly, policymakers involved in newer programs such as Women's Justice Centers (CJMs) and CREA reported more systematic integration of gender-sensitive practices compared to those managing legacy programs that reported a lack of data, tools, or incentive to do so. Evaluations relied on process indicators, and few policymakers reported using that evidence in decisionmaking. Still, some expressed growing interest in incorporating feedback and women's lived experiences—despite gaps in real-time data and feedback mechanisms.

> This study examines how policymakers participate in the design of WEA policy and how their mindsets influence decisionmaking processes that either enable or hinder marginalized women's ability to benefit from existing WEA policies and programs in Mexico.
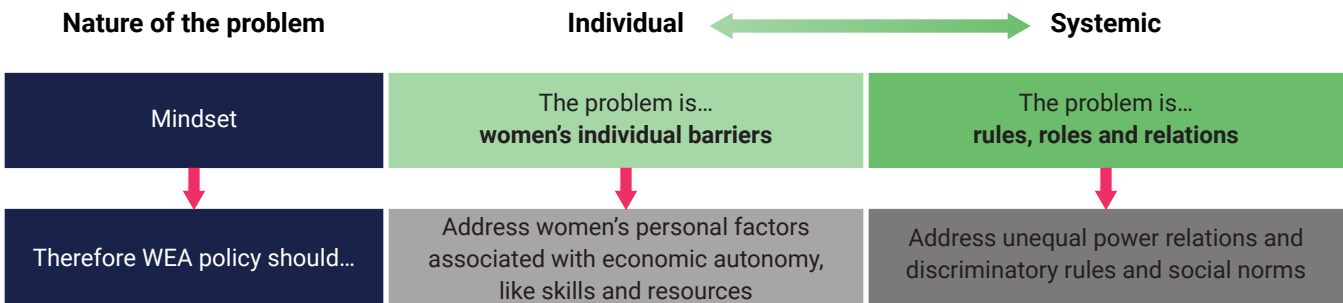
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# IV. Policymakers' mindsets and their effects on WEA policy in Jalisco

Beyond the formal and practical ways in which policy-makers participate in WEA policy cycle, the research set the goal to uncover their underlying mental models and how this might influence their decisions in WEA policy. The research identified four ways in which policymakers' mental models influence WEA policies: (1) how they define the nature of the problem; (2) their beliefs about the nature of the solution; (3) their assumptions about women's roles within these policies; and (4) how they perceive their own role as policymakers.

### D. Nature of the problem: Individual barriers vs rules, roles, and relations

Policymakers in Jalisco think of the nature of the public problem of WEA across a spectrum: from women's individual barriers to the more structural and cultural issues, such as unequal gender rules, roles, and relations (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Policymaker mindsets about the nature of the problem**



| Nature of the problem | Individual ⟷ Systemic | |
|---|---|---|
| **Mindset** | The problem is…<br>**women's individual barriers** | The problem is…<br>**rules, roles and relations** |
| Therefore WEA policy should… | Address women's personal factors associated with economic autonomy, like skills and resources | Address unequal power relations and discriminatory rules and social norms |

> How decisionmakers define the problem—whether as individual or systemic—shapes whether policies reinforce or challenge inequality.

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Policymakers with an individual barriers-oriented mindset explained inequality as a result of women's personal limitations affecting their ability to exercise agency—such as low self-esteem, lack of confidence, limited skills and economic resources, and reduced capacity to access opportunities. Policymakers with this mindset tended to focus on individual-level factors linked to women's economic autonomy, emphasizing the need to "empower" women through personal development. For example, in Jalisco, programs designed from this perspective often include self-esteem workshops, financial literacy, or vocational skills training. Initiatives like *Fuerza Mujeres* provide financial support and training, while IDEFT offers skill development for women to pursue self-employment in local economic activities.

*"For women to reach the "big leagues" or have really big companies, it is more than a matter of skills or competencies, because those can be are acquired... it is a matter of working with their self-esteem, those 'mental barriers' that women have accumulated many times throughout your life."* (Source: Interview with female policymaker)

While this mindset can lead to policies and programs that develop tools women need to advance their economic autonomy, it can also place the onus on women to "fix" themselves to overcome barriers that are actually structural, such as limiting social narratives and a sexual division of labor that burdens them with an unequal distribution of care and domestic work.

Contrastingly, policymakers in Jalisco also showed another mindset that identified gender rules, roles, and relations as the problem. This mindset conceives of inequality as rooted in societal structures, such as discriminatory gender norms, economic systems, and institutional barriers. Policymakers with this mindset shifted their focus away from attributing women's lack of participation or success to individual shortcomings and instead recognized the structural systems that exclude or disadvantage them. This systems-oriented perspective leads to policies that aim to change the broader environment—such as reforms to labor laws that promote equality, investments in care infrastructure to redistribute unpaid work, or initiatives to reduce discrimination and bias in hiring practices. Examples include *Jalisco sin Brechas and Pactemos*, policies that promote gender-equitable labor practices. By addressing the root causes, systemic approaches create sustainable change that benefits women. However their results can take time to reflect and risk overlooking marginalized women's immediate, personal challenges.

*"We are aware that there are still much more complex circumstances that women have to go through than men...like internal ways of thinking, but sometimes also, very much external, like 'myths'...for example the gender bias in the access to financing."* (Source: Interview with a female policy maker at the state level)

**Mindsets are not fixed: engaging with lived experiences and other sectors helped shift how some policymakers framed the problem.**

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### E. Nature of the solution: Targeted vs. universal

What policymakers in Jalisco believe to be the nature of the solution or policy response to WEA spans a spectrum, with targeted solutions or affirmative actions to address the specific needs of marginalized women on one side, and universal policies (open to everyone and, hypothetically, creating a level playing field for women) on the other (see Figure 6).
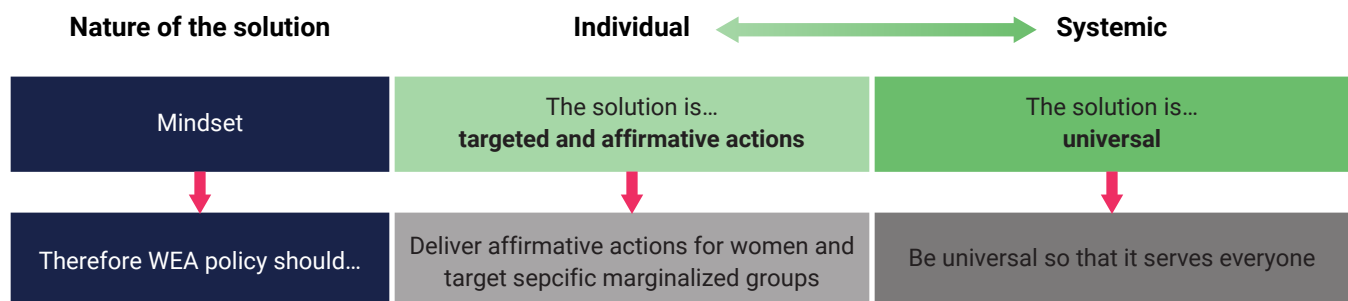
Policymakers with a targeted mindset acknowledged that women's experiences differ and that tailored approaches are necessary to ensure equity. Programs under this mindset address specific barriers, such as stipends or transportation support for single mothers, priority access for survivors of gender-based violence, or culturally relevant services for Indigenous women. Targeted solutions ensure that marginalized women are not left behind, creating pathways for them to access information, use services and overcome systemic exclusion to achieve better economic autonomy outcomes. In Jalisco, examples include the Centers for Women Justice (CJM), which provide comprehensive support to survivors.

*"If we want them (women) to enroll in programs we have to go for them...because if not then it is the same people that will continue to enroll...and we continue to reinforce the same gaps as always..."* (Source: Interview with a female policy maker at the state level)

Policymakers with a universal policy mindset assumed a level playing field where all women face similar challenges and, therefore, can benefit equally from broad, one-size-fits-all interventions. Examples include universal cash transfers, extensive job training programs, or services open to all women. While universal solutions aim for inclusivity, they often fail to account for the compounded barriers faced by marginalized women who may lack the resources or access needed to participate or need additional support to achieve economic autonomy outcomes. As a result, universal programs inadvertently deepen inequalities by excluding those who need the most support.

*There can't be a law that forces companies to hire women...that would be a restriction of freedom, but I do believe that as a society we can move forward on these kinds of things, for example, to be able to establish and recognize that perhaps our female colleagues are equal...and not discriminate on the basis of gender and pay [women] less.* (Source: Interview with a male policymaker at the state level)

**Figure 6. Policymaker mindsets about the nature of the solution**



| Nature of the solution | Individual ⟷ Systemic | |
|---|---|---|
| Mindset | The solution is… **targeted and affirmative actions** | The solution is… **universal** |
| Therefore WEA policy should… | Deliver affirmative actions for women and target sepcific marginalized groups | Be universal so that it serves everyone |

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### F. Women's role: Recipients vs. agents

Policymakers in Jalisco differed in how they perceive women's relation to policy, and this influences the design and implementation of WEA programs. Some policymakers showed a "women as recipients" mindset, while others conveyed a mindset of women as agents of change (see Figure 7).

Often seen in policy, policymakers who viewed women as recipients tended to focus on women's basic needs and what they "lacked." For example, economic subsidies, training and social services prioritize immediate interventions like training skills and economic resources. While addressing these needs is necessary, this view can be paternalistic, reinforcing dependency on state support, perpetuating cycles of poverty, and limiting women's autonomy to make their own decisions and use and expand their resources to advance their economic autonomy.

*"Yes, there is an entry barrier for women, that's how it is in terms of paying the recovery fee...so you know what I do...I make this program for 'women only' and we look for a sponsor...because my budget doesn't allow me to give them scholarships...but with a larger number of scholarships it could work better."* (Source: Interview with a female policy maker at the state level)

Policymakers that see women as agents tended to prioritize programs for self-efficacy, personal development, and leadership. Programs like *Resonant Woman* (SICYT) illustrate this mindset by focusing on building personal branding and professional skills to help women thrive. Policymakers with this perspective spoke of the importance of recognizing women's skills and promoting policies that acknowledge their abilities and contributions.

*"I have always believed that any woman who has purchasing power, who has the ability to implement a business idea, who has an expectation of life... will have doors open to her..."* (Source: Interview with a female policymaker at the state level)

While autonomy is a key principle for achieving WEA, it should not come at the expense of access to essential economic resources and social protection. For marginalized women to genuinely exercise their agency, they require enabling conditions such as childcare, transportation, and affordable credit. Empowerment must be accompanied by adequate structural support to ensure meaningful participation and sustainable outcomes. Striking this balance is especially critical for women facing multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage.

**Figure 7. Policymaker mindsets about the role of women in the solution**



| Women's relation to policy | Passive ⟷ Active | |
|---|---|---|
| Mental model | Women are… **receivers** | Women are… **agents of change** |
| Therefore WEA policy should… | Deliver goods and services to satisfy women's immediate needs (i.e. protection, financial aid) | Create the conditions for women to use and expand their skills, resources and support networks |

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## G. Policymakers' role: Compliance vs. active responsibility

Policymakers in Jalisco exhibit contrasting mindsets in relation to advancing gender equality, particularly regarding their roles. Some believed that their role was to comply with the law, focusing on meeting legal requirements and delivering mandated services, while others considered themselves transformational leaders, advocating internally and externally to drive deeper changes (see Figure 8).

In Jalisco, compliance-focused policymakers prioritized implementing procedural aspects, such as establishing Gender Equality Units. They viewed gender equality as supplementary to their primary responsibilities and often relegated it to the purview of the Ministry of Equality (SISEMH). While this mindset might ensure basic institutional standards are met, it limits innovation and expansion of opportunities, especially for marginalized women.

*"Our primary function is not equality...and what we do for gender equality is marginal; we have our hands full...at the end someone must ensure that the progress (in gender equality) is made... (and that is SISEMH, not us)."* (Source: Interview with a male policymaker at the state level)

Some policymakers demonstrated a transformational mindset, advocating internally within government for systemic reforms to address the root causes of gender and intersectional inequalities. These individuals, often self-identifying as "policy changers" or internal activists, leveraged their knowledge of legal frameworks and institutional systems to go beyond compliance and promote more inclusive policies. While many of these transformational actors in this study were women, often drawing from their lived experience, further research would be needed to determine whether this pattern reflects broader trends. Indeed, in this study, most male policymakers were situated within the compliance mindset, echoing findings from other literature that suggest men in policymaking positions are often less likely to engage in gender-transformative action. These positive deviants—those who challenge prevailing institutional mindsets—offer valuable examples for inspiring broader shifts in policymaking cultures. However, given the non-representative nature of the sample, these observations should be interpreted with caution and considered as exploratory insights rather than generalizable conclusions.

*"I was an activist, a person who could serve as a network for women whenever they needed it, because women can live in the cycle of violence, many times. So this is a vision that I personally have... I managed to put it in the policies of the Women's Justice Center Network, in our work plan, in our guidelines for our staff, who are very well trained and our staff is certified not to force women to report if they are not ready..."* (Source: Interview with a female policymaker at the state level)

**Figure 8. Policymaker mindsets about their role in the solution**

| Policymakers' relation to policy | Passive ⟷ Active | |
|---|---|---|
| **Mindset** | Policymakers should be… **compliant with the law** | Policymakers should be… **transformational** |
| **Therefore WEA policy should…** | Meet legal requirements and deliver mandated services to address gender inequalities | Advocate for systemic reforms, internal and external, to address the root casuses of inequality |

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## H. The mindset map: A navigation tool to understand policymaker mindsets on WEA policy

To synthesize the findings from the four mindset areas explored above, Figure 9 presents a Mindset Map that illustrates the complexity and variation in how policymakers approach WEA. This model captures the spectrum of beliefs policymakers hold about the *nature of the problem* and *of solutions*, from individual to systemic, as well as the mindsets around women's and policymakers' own role, from passive to active. These dimensions are not static or mutually exclusive; rather, they reflect co-existing assumptions that shape decisions across the policy cycle—from program design to implementation and evaluation. By visualizing how deeply held mindsets operate beneath formal policymaking processes, the map highlights both the barriers these mindsets may pose and the opportunities they present for enabling more inclusive, intersectional, and transformative WEA policies.

**Figure 9: Policymakers' mindset map on WEA**
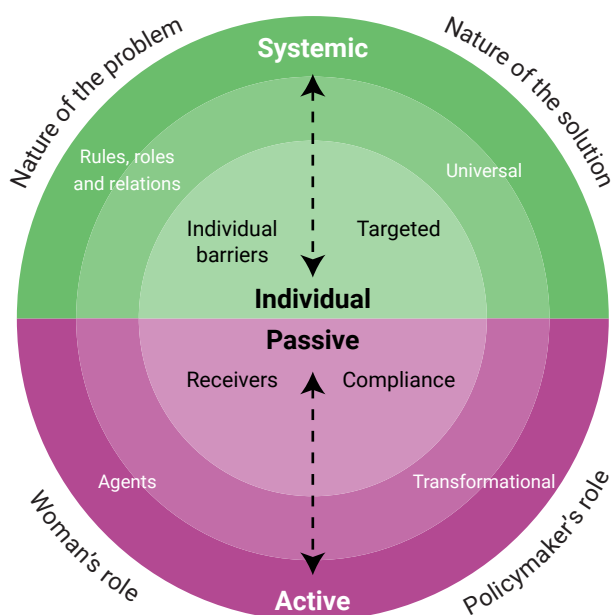


Source: Author's conceptualization

## HOW POLICYMAKERS' MINDSETS CHANGE: INSIGHTS FROM CO-META

As seen in the previous section, policymakers' mindsets play a critical role in the adoption, design, and implementation of WEA policies—and directly affect marginalized women's ability to achieve economic autonomy and improved life outcomes. This section explores how those mindsets can shift through intentionally designed interventions. Drawing on the case of *Co-meta*—a second-chance education program led by ProSociedad in collaboration with a multisectoral network of civil society, private sector, and public agencies in Jalisco—this section illustrates how proximity to women's lived experiences, participatory learning, and reflective practice with policymakers and public servants can foster meaningful mindset change. These shifts, in turn, influence how policies are conceived and delivered, increasing the likelihood that WEA programs truly center marginalized women and improve their chances of success.

## A. Co-meta: A program designed to influence mindsets to center marginalized women in WEA policies and programs

Co-meta is a second-chance education program that offers holistic and accessible pathways to economic autonomy for marginalized women who have been excluded from traditional initiatives. Designed to address persistent gaps in existing WEA efforts, Co-meta focuses on women facing intersecting barriers such as violence, caregiving responsibilities, informal work, digital exclusion, and poverty. The program integrates financial literacy, life skills, psychosocial support, entrepreneurship, and employability training, all delivered in flexible, participatory formats that directly respond to women's needs—including childcare, transportation, and mentorship.

Co-meta takes a knowledge transfer approach: rather than functioning independently, ProSociedad partners with public and private community centers that aim to support women but often lack the tools or structures to do so effectively. Through technical assistance and staff training with gender-sensitive methodologies, Co-meta

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aims to build the institutional and individual capacity of these centers—from frontline trainers to program managers and leaders—enhancing their ability to serve marginalized women more inclusively and effectively.

Co-meta functions as a learning ecosystem for public servants and local implementers, designed to influence how policies are understood, designed, and delivered. Parallel to the support for marginalized women, the program includes five integrated mechanisms that aim to foster mindset change among policymakers and frontline implementers:

1. **Design centered on women's needs:** Services like flexible schedules, childcare, and transport stipends are co-designed with women themselves. This shows institutions that responsive, needs-based design improves participation and outcomes.

2. **Experiential and participatory learning:** Facilitators, public officials, and civil society actors engage in horizontal learning processes based on real cases, gender theory, and applied reflection. This fosters critical thinking and ownership of the approach.

3. **Proximity to women's lived experience:** Co-meta creates safe spaces where women share their stories, not as beneficiaries but as experts in their own lives. These exchanges build empathy and shift how exclusion is understood.

4. **Monitoring and evaluation that reveals exclusion:** Instead of celebrating only success stories, Co-meta tracks dropout rates, access gaps, and reasons for non-participation. This encourages adaptive management and promotes learning from what isn't working.

5. **Cross-sector collaboration and co-responsibility:** Through collective impact strategies, Co-meta brings together government, civil society, and private sector actors around a shared agenda for gender equity, helping overcome institutional silos.

### B. How has Co-meta shaped policymakers' and implementers' mindsets?

The research showed that participation in Co-meta has resulted in meaningful shifts in how public officials and implementers understand inclusion, autonomy, and their roles within public institutions. These changes go beyond acquiring technical skills—they involve questioning the institutional frameworks, assumptions, and narratives that shape WEA programs.

One of the clearest effects was a move away from checklists and coverage metrics as the main indicators of success. Implementers started asking different questions—about women's participation, their barriers, and systemic exclusion.

*"It's not about a checklist anymore. It's about really understanding why these women didn't show up—and what that says about how we design programs."*
(Source: Co-meta implementers workshop attendee)

*"We began to realize that success wasn't just about attendance or completing modules. It was about what was stopping them from coming in the first place—violence, transportation, care work. We had never looked at the design from that lens."*
(Source: Co-meta implementers workshop attendee)

Co-meta also helped shift how implementers and policymakers view the women themselves—not as passive recipients, but as capable actors whose autonomy is worth investing in and learning from. Others even recognized their own privilege, and the limitations of policy disconnected from lived realities.

*"What this Co-meta program allows is to recognize the women's own authorship, and that gives the project a completely different identity."*
(Source: Female Policymaker Co-meta Implementer)

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*"I had the privilege of studying abroad and thought gender equality was about policies. But after listening to mothers who skip meals to pay for transport, I realized how disconnected we were."*
(Source: Co-meta Partners workshop attendee)

These insights prompted a broader rethinking at the policy level. Some decisionmakers began to question whether existing institutional frameworks were truly inclusive—or if they placed the burden of adaptation on women. Crucially, Co-meta also empowered policy decisionmakers to act with agency within their institutions. Several reported that the program helped them see themselves not just as implementers of external mandates, but as changemakers.

*"I used to think we were designing inclusive policies. Now I wonder: were we just asking women to adapt to systems that weren't built for them?"*
(Source: Co-meta Partners workshop attendee)

*"I think the most important change was realizing that we can also propose ideas. We can adjust what we do—not just carry out what we're told."*
(Source: Female Policymaker Co-meta Implementer)

These testimonies demonstrate that Co-meta helps reframe women as co-creators of policy rather than passive recipients—and supports public officials in viewing themselves as allies in systemic transformation.

## C.   Looking forward: Limitations and opportunities

While Co-meta has proven effective in fostering mindset change through proximity, participation, and reflection, scaling this transformation across public systems remains a challenge. Many of the most engaged participants are mid-level staff with limited authority, and institutional incentives still prioritize short-term metrics and numerical coverage over systemic change. Crucially, mindset shifts require more than exposure to data—they depend on emotionally resonant, participatory experiences. Co-meta succeeds by embedding these into its design, allowing reflection to unfold over time and in real-world contexts. Additionally, the research revealed that policymakers' decisions are influenced not only by their mindsets but also by institutional constraints, administrative rules, and external inputs—including top-down directives and limited technical tools.

Looking ahead, the opportunity lies in institutionalizing and scaling these mechanisms: embedding participatory learning and co-design into program cycles; creating formal channels for women's voices to shape policy beyond service delivery; and investing in leadership development that equips public officials with the mindset and tools for systemic change. Co-meta demonstrates that when proximity, participation, and reflection converge, policymakers' mindsets can evolve—and with them, the systems that shape marginalized women's lives.

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# V. Shifting mindsets to strengthen local ecosystems for marginalized women's economic autonomy

As this brief has shown, changing the mindsets of policymakers is essential to achieving shared prosperity in Mexico-where marginalized women are truly included in economic life and experience better life outcomes. Changing mindsets is critical not only to closing the persistent gap between WEA policy intentions and transformative outcomes, but also to strengthening local ecosystems capable of centering the realities of marginalized women. Improving program design and expanding service coverage will not be enough; shifting the mindsets that shape decisionmaking in all moments of the policy cycle must be at the heart of change. The following recommendations provide a roadmap for key policy actors to lead this transformation.

## MARGINALIZED WOMEN: FROM BENEFICIARIES TO CO-CREATORS

Marginalized women must recognize themselves as transformative leaders within their communities. There must also be a shift in mindsets among marginalized women themselves to a belief that their experiences, aspirations, and collective power are central drivers of change. Building self-efficacy, political voice, and critical consciousness will enable women to move beyond the role of beneficiaries and become active co-creators of WEA policies and programs (Cornwall, A., & Rivas, A.-M. (2015)). Public institutions, civil society organizations, and education institutions must expand investment in the creation of enabling environments that promote leadership development, advocacy skills and collective organizing that begins with women's own lived experiences and aspirations for systemic change.

## GENDER EQUALITY AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE POLICY ACTORS: CATALYSTS OF MINDSET SHIFTS ACROSS GOVERNMENT

Gender equality and gender-based violence actors need to strengthen their role as catalysts for changing the mindsets of policymakers across the public administration and accelerate broader changes in how institutions conceptualize and operationalize WEA. Beyond traditional gender mainstreaming in technical frameworks, they should lead investments in participatory, emotionally resonant learning spaces—such as storytelling, peer dialogues, and reflective workshops—that surface assumptions and foster critical thinking among policymakers. They must also identify and elevate positive deviants: policymakers in WEA who already embody transformative mindsets and can act as internal champions. Context-specific mindset mapping should inform leadership development, capacity-building, and technical assistance initiatives that mainstream intersectional and gender transformative approaches to WEA throughout public administration.

## PLANNING, BUDGETING, AND MONITORING POLICY ACTORS: RETHINKING WHAT WE PLAN, MEASURE, AND VALUE

To reinforce and sustain mindset shifts, planning, budgeting, and monitoring actors must redefine success beyond outputs to include outcomes that capture women's agency, perceived inclusion, and systemic change. Rather than focusing solely on checklists, mandates, and procedures, public policy and program planning regulations and frameworks must embed gender-transformative, intersectional approaches through participatory co-design, inclusive leadership development, and iterative learning platforms. Building institutional incentives that

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reward progress towards inclusion—not just numerical coverage—will reinforce and sustain mindset change, so monitoring and evaluation frameworks should combine quantitative indicators (e.g., participation rates, income generation) with qualitative measures (e.g., perceptions of autonomy, changes in social norms). Resources for evaluation agendas for public programs should be allocated not only for transparency and improved service delivery, but also for participatory learning, gender-transformative leadership development, and mechanisms for continuous feedback from women. Collaboration with gender equality actors is essential to embed these practices institutionally.

### CIVIL SOCIETY AND ACADEMIA: BUILDING REFLEXIVE, PARTICIPATORY SPACES FOR MINDSET CHANGE

Civil society and academic institutions need to act as facilitators of continuous change in policymakers' mindsets, particularly by building bridges between women's lived experiences and formal policymaking processes. This ensures that marginalized voices are not only heard but structurally integrated into policymaking processes. Advocacy efforts must focus on centering women's voices in policymaking - not just as consultative input, but as sustained co-leadership. They should foster participatory spaces where policymakers and marginalized women jointly diagnose problems, co-create solutions, and evaluate progress. Research agendas should prioritize documenting successful cases where shifts in thinking have led to improved WEA outcomes, providing concrete models for replication and scaling.

### SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, CARE SYSTEMS, AND EDUCATION POLICY ACTORS: EMBEDDING INTERSECTIONAL, GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES

Actors involved in second-chance education, education for work, and lifelong learning—particularly those operating through community centers and adult education initiatives—must align their program design and delivery with gender-transformative, intersectional frameworks. Universal services should be complemented by targeted interventions that address the specific barriers faced by marginalized women, including care burdens, violence, and poverty. Beyond expanding the coverage of training and assistance, participatory processes should enable women to co-design services, build ownership, and exercise agency. This would foster solidarity and collective identity among women, challenge restrictive gender norms, and promote self-efficacy. These education spaces must go beyond providing technical skills to cultivate critical consciousness and leadership, while also building strategic collaborations with actors in economic and labor policy to address the structural barriers that limit women's economic autonomy. Participatory learning environments that foster empathy between service providers and learners should be institutionalized, along with leadership development efforts for public officials that center on reflective practice and systemic change.

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## ECONOMIC AND LABOR POLICY ACTORS: REDEFINING ECONOMIC INCLUSION THROUGH MINDSET CHANGE

Economic and labor policy actors must recognize that inclusive economic development is not just about job creation or entrepreneurship, but also about transforming the social norms, networks, and barriers that condition marginalized women's economic opportunities. Programs must incorporate mindset-sensitive strategies (e.g., recognizing women's care responsibilities, transportation barriers, and other intersectional constraints) and ensure flexible, holistic support mechanisms, such as childcare and adaptable training schedules. Actors must move beyond gender-neutral assumptions to explicitly address structural exclusion, in collaboration with social development and care system actors. Embedding participatory learning spaces and leadership development initiatives in labor and economic programs will accelerate systemic change toward genuine economic autonomy for marginalized women.

In sum, mindset change is the foundation for building stronger, more inclusive local ecosystems for women's economic autonomy. All actors—marginalized women, policymakers, civil society, and academia—must recognize the need to transform mindsets as a strategic priority and an ongoing process. By embedding participatory, reflective, and gender-transformative practices at every stage of policymaking—from design to evaluation—we can center the realities of marginalized women, dismantle systemic barriers, and unlock the full potential of economic autonomy as a pathway to shared prosperity in Mexico. The opportunity is clear: lasting change begins by changing the way we think, the way we lead, and the way we co-create the future

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# Appendix 1—Research methodology

This study utilized a qualitative research approach to examine the adoption, design, implementation, and evaluation of Women's Economic Autonomy (WEA) programs in Jalisco, with a specific focus on policymakers' mindsets. The research relied on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with over 20 policymakers across gender, social, and economic policy sectors at the state and municipal levels. The interview protocol was designed to capture policymakers' decisionmaking processes, including their perspectives on gender equality, institutional priorities, and the barriers or facilitators they encountered in advancing WEA programs. The interviews also explored the influence of personal experiences, legal frameworks, and resource constraints on program design and delivery. Insights were triangulated with secondary data—including program reports, operational guidelines, and official documents—to provide a comprehensive understanding of the policy landscape.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach, identifying key patterns and variations in policymakers' attitudes, priorities, and actions. Particular attention was given to the interplay between formal institutional processes and personal or cultural factors that shape policymaking. This included examining how policymakers navigate structural challenges (such as limited budgets and inter-agency coordination) and how their mindsets—ranging from compliance-focused to transformative—affect the scope and impact of WEA programs. The findings offer nuanced insights into how systemic and individual factors converge to influence WEA policies, providing actionable recommendations to enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of these programs.

To further enrich the research, two workshops were designed and conducted. The first workshop brought together implementers of Co-meta to explore their experiences, challenges, and strategies in advancing the program's goals. This interactive session focused on identifying practical solutions to implementation barriers, and fostering a shared understanding of best practices. The second workshop engaged representatives from civil society, business sectors, and community organizations, aiming to generate cross-sectoral insights and collaborative opportunities. Participants in this workshop discussed how private and civil society actors could complement and enhance the impact of WEA programs, particularly for marginalized women. These workshops provided critical perspectives that complemented the interview data and offered actionable insights to strengthen the program's design and implementation.

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# Appendix 2–
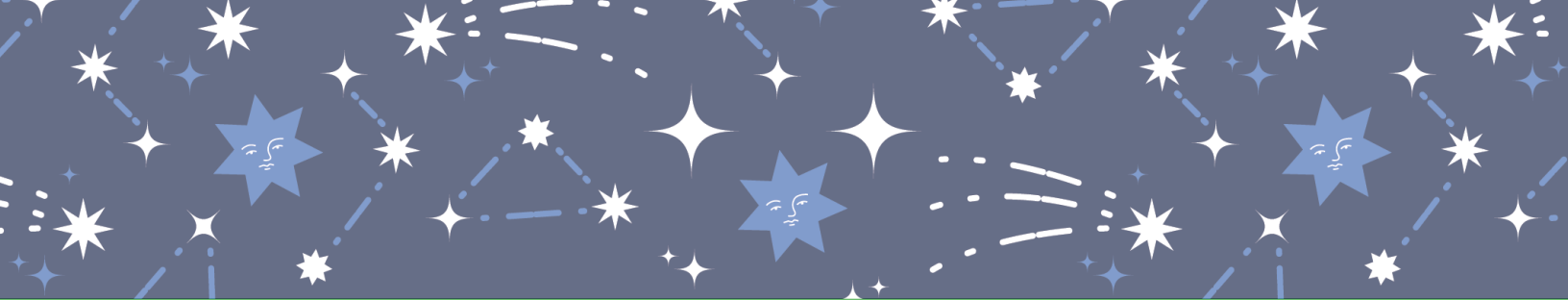# Detailed analysis of National and State legal and programmatic framework for WEA

## NATIONAL LEGAL, POLICY AND PROGRAMMATIC FRAMEWORK FOR WEA

| DIMENSION OF WEA POLICY | LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK | KEY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES |
|---|---|---|
| **Gender equality and gender-violence prevention**<br><br>Executive arm: National Institute of Women | Mexico's Constitution lays the foundation for gender equality through its 4th article, which declares that men and women are equal before the law and guarantees access to all human rights equally. Article 123 further establishes equal rights for men and women to access decent work and other equitable labor conditions. These constitutional principles are operationalized through key laws, including the General Law for the Equality of Women and Men, the Federal Law to Prevent and Eradicate Discrimination, and the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence. Complementary mandates— such as the Planning Law, the Federal Budget and Fiscal Responsibility Law— and decrees requiring gender mainstreaming in all Federal Public Administration programs ensure that gender perspectives are integrated into planning, budgeting, implementation, and evaluation. The National Development Plan (NDP) 2019–2024 designates gender equality, non-discrimination, and inclusion as transversal priorities, further supported by the National Program for Equality between Women and Men (PROIGUALDAD) 2020–2024 and coordinated by the National Women's Institute. Recent additions, such as the National Care System and its legislative backing through the General Law for the Care System, address critical gaps in care infrastructure, directly supporting women burdened by unpaid domestic and caregiving work. | • Mainstreaming gender perspectives across government initiatives: The federal gender equality agenda has strived to integrate gender-sensitive policies and systemic reforms at the federal and state levels, with particular focus on institutionalizing efforts through Gender Equality Units.<br><br>• Economic Empowerment Nodes and Women's Development Centers (CDM) provide training, advisory services, and access to financing and online stores.<br><br>• Collaborative efforts in rural areas have promoted land ownership and governance for indigenous women, and grassroots initiatives like Mucpaz empower women to rebuild social cohesion and participate in local economies.<br><br>• The National Care System addresses unpaid care work through the Care Map, providing information on the status of care facilities country-wide.<br><br>• Centers for Women's Justice (CJMs): These centers provide comprehensive support to women experiencing violence, enhancing access to justice and offering tools for informed decisionmaking to build lives free from violence. CJMs address national and international commitments to prevent and respond to violence against women while promoting human rights. |

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| **Social policy**<br><br>Executive arms:<br>Ministry of Wellbeing<br><br>Ministry of Education<br><br>Ministry of Health<br><br>Mexican Institute of Social Security | Social protection policies include the Social Security Law (LSS), the General Health Law (LGS), and the General Law on Social Development (LGDS), which sets the foundation for the National Policy for Social Development. | • Cash transfers: The government has prioritized direct financial transfers, reaching 14 million women and girls, with 6.8 million elderly women receiving pensions to meet basic needs. The government estimates that 58% of social program beneficiaries are women. These are intended to provide a safety net that enables women to invest in education for their children, entrepreneurial activities, or professional development.<br><br>• Welfare services: Initiatives such as healthcare services and medication for people social security give access to health services for men and women without formal employment. Through community centers and local spaces, resources and social services are provided to urban and rural populations in poverty (including indigenous communities and female-headed single-parent households) that receive economic and in-kind support to satisfy basic needs.<br><br>• Childcare support: Childcare services alleviate the caregiving burden, enabling women who have access to formal employment to participate in the economy. These services contribute to redistributing unpaid care work and reducing gendered time poverty. |
| **Economic policy**<br><br>Main executive arms:<br><br>Ministry of Labor<br><br>Ministry of Economy<br><br>Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development | Mexico's economic policies to support women's economic autonomy are anchored in labor laws such as the Federal Labor Law (LFT) and the Federal Law of Workers in the Service of the State (LFTSE).<br><br>Additional frameworks include the Law on the Social and Solidarity Economy, the Law to Boost Sustained Productivity and Competitiveness of the National Economy, and the Federal Law on Special Economic Zones.<br><br>The Mexican Official Norm NOM-025 promotes workplace equality and non-discrimination, reinforcing the role of inclusive labor policies in economic empowerment.<br><br>Key policies that the past administration implemented included increasing the minimum wage, which resulted in a 110% rise in purchasing power and reduced the gender wage gap by 3.3 points. | • Economic policy efforts focus on enhancing employability, entrepreneurship, and inclusion in the labor market.<br><br>• Vocational training and job placement: Programs like Jóvenes Construyendo el Futuro provide vocational training and job placement opportunities to young people, with benefits for young women. Similarly, the Employment Support Program (PAE) offers subsidies for training and employment along with the National Employment Service (SNE) to support formal job placement. PAE provides labor information and intermediation services through a digital portal, a telephone assistance center, chat, and email. It also organizes job fairs, offers workshops for job search strategies, and promotes the improvement of labor skills and employability.<br><br>• Training and skills development programs: These are aimed to enhance workforce opportunities by certifying individuals' labor or educational skills for individuals lacking formal documentation of their skills through diverse programs. These initiatives, offering a wide array of courses and workshops, are tailored to the specific needs of workers, enhancing their skills, employability, and access to formal economic opportunities.<br><br>• Support for entrepreneurship and self-employment: Initiatives such as Producción para el Bienestar and Sembrando Vida empower population in agricultural sectors by offering financial incentives and support for sustainable practices, promoting self-employment and economic independence. |

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## STATE OF JALISCO GENDER EQUALITY POLICY FRAMEWORK

| INSTITUTIONAL PROGRAMMATIC INSTRUMENT | GENDER EQUALITY | GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE | CARE SYSTEM |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Legal and Institutional Framework** | The State Law for Equality Among Men and Women provides the legal foundation for gender equality, mandating the creation of dedicated institutions like the | The Law for Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence in the state of Jalisco | Along with this, the recently published Law of the Integral Care System for the State of Jalisco |
| **Executive arm** | Ministry for Substantive Equality between Women and Men (SISEMH). | Network of Women's Justice Centers | Not defined |
| **Interinstitutional Coordinating Mechanisms** | State System for Equality between Women and Men (SEIMH) acts as the central entity for inter-institutional collaboration, coordinating efforts among government agencies, civil society, and academia to integrate gender equality considerations across all gender equality policy areas. | State system to prevent, address, eradicate and punish violence against women. | Board of the Integral System of Care for the State of Jalisco. |
| **Core Policy Document** | State Program for Equality (Proigualdad): This state-level program serves as the overarching planning frame for advancing gender equality, with sector-specific goals in areas such as women's economic autonomy, human rights, violence prevention, health and education, environmental access, and gender-responsive governance. It promotes transversal gender integration, which requires that all policies and programs account for gender-specific impacts in their design, implementation, and evaluation. | State program to Prevent, Address, Eradicate and Punish Violence against Women | State Program for Care |
| **Citizen Participation and Collaboration:** | The Women's Citizens' Council is an auxiliary body of the Secretariat for Substantive Equality between Women and Men of a plural, participatory, consultative, permanent and honorary nature. This participatory approach aims to ensure that policies are inclusive and reflect diverse perspectives. | State Council for the Prevention, Attention and Eradication of Violence against Women. | Not defined |
| **Institutional culture change and public service development** | Gender units and focal point at each dependency | Not defined | Not defined |
| **Monitoring and Evaluation** | There are no specific monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms (other than the indicators established in the policy documents) to monitor and evaluate the advancement of each of these policies. However, the overarching M&E mechanisms of the public policy of the State serve as M&E mechanisms for some of the indicators. These include MIDE Jalisco, Evalua Jalisco, and the State Commission for Human Rights of Jalisco, all of which play a critical role in holding institutions accountable and evaluating progress toward gender equality commitments. | | |

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She holds a master's degree in Development Management from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a bachelor's degree in Industrial and Systems Engineering from Tecnológico de Monterrey. As an academic, she currently teaches courses on corporate social responsibility and social innovation at Universidad Panamericana, ITESO, and UNIVA.

As a social entrepreneur, she has been recognized by the **U.S. Department of State** through the International Visitor Leadership Program (2018), received the **Don Lorenzo Servitje Award** for socially responsible entrepreneurs (2021), and was a finalist for the **Latin American Leaders Awards** (2022).

## ABOUT THE ECHIDNA GLOBAL SCHOLARS PROGRAM

The Echidna Global Scholars Program at the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at Brookings seeks to catalyze and amplify the impact of local leaders working to advance gender equality in and through education across the Global South.

During a six-month fellowship, Echidna Global Scholars conduct individual research focused on improving learning opportunities and life outcomes for girls, young women, and gender non-conforming people, develop their leadership and evidence-based policy skills, build substantive knowledge on gender and global education issues, and expand their pathways for impact. Upon completion of the fellowship, scholars transition to the Echidna Alumni Network, a growing community of practice aimed at promoting their significant, sustained, and collective influence on gender-transformative education globally and locally.

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