Women's empowerment
Women’s economic empowerment

The economic independence of the women of Latin America and the Caribbean has suffered a historic reverse because of the pandemic. The crisis has deepened the pre-existing gender gaps, with losses of employment and income, increases in labor precarity and the “time poverty” they suffer due to the additional burdens of domestic tasks and care. Their levels of poverty and vulnerability have risen substantially, and they are still not even close to returning to pre-pandemic income levels. There are long-term structural gaps that impact on the kind of economic activities they carry out, which have little added value and are highly concentrated (60%) in the retail and wholesale trade segment (general stores and textiles) and catering services (18%). Just 12% work in agriculture.

We are aware of this reality and so, to be consistent with the purpose of BBVAMF, the institution pays particular attention to the 1.7 million women it serves in the region (58% of all clients at the close of 2023). Driving their economic independence has played and continues to play a very important role in BBVAMF Group institutions because of the impact it has on the development and poverty reduction of their households, communities, and countries. Indeed, the Foundation’s figures show that 65% of those served who escaped poverty as of December 2023 were women. Even so, we see how, after the pandemic, women are finding it more difficult to climb up and out: whereas 50% manage it in the third year, 63% of men are free of poverty in the same period, a difference of 13 percentage points.

Another significant trend is the increasing number of single women with dependents: 64% of new clients served in 2023. This is a further obstacle to their economic empowerment that represents a greater risk of falling into poverty.

Since 2015, BBVAMF has had a strategic partnership with UN Women that has enabled us to take part in the principal international women’s forums. In the last few years we have promoted a strategy of female economic empowerment based around 3 principles: specific value offering, internal equity, and advocacy/partnerships.

At the close of 2023, women accounted for 61% of total borrower entrepreneurs & 58% of all entrepreneurs served
In 2023, we have continued to promote financial products and services with a gendered approach:

- extending female entrepreneurs’ social protection with healthcare microinsurance to cover health conditions specific to women, supporting breastfeeding periods, among others,

- strengthening their businesses with a range of actions such as facilities for granting loans and deposit guarantees, a specialized educational offering, and helping them to go digital,

- developing multiple pieces of research and indicators in the fields of the care economy, and financial literacy with a gendered approach,

- incorporating a diversity approach, with research and initiatives for other particularly vulnerable groups such as indigenous peoples, migrants, the elderly, and the young, broadening the value proposition to include them.

### CONTRIBUTION TO WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT OF GENDER GAP REDUCTION

**Female entrepreneurs**

|                | 1.7 Mill. | 563,587 | 61% |
|----------------|-----------|---------|-----|
| women entrepreneurs |          | women entrepreneurs | of credit clients |
| with a loan        |          |                     |                 |

**Vulnerability**

|                | 83% | 32% |
|----------------|-----|-----|
| are vulnerable  |     |     |
| (gender gap of 10pp) | | |

**Among new entrepreneurs**

**Their businesses**

- Gender gaps*
  - 74% Assets
  - 64% Disbursements/Income

**Their households**

- 64% are the only breadwinner in their household (gender gap of 14pp)
- 12% have more than 5 people in their household
- As such they are more likely to fall into multidimensional poverty

*Percentage of the indicator in women’s businesses compared to those of men.
In recent years BBVAMF’s value proposition has evolved with a gender lens to acknowledge the financial and economic gaps suffered by female entrepreneurs in vulnerability served by the institution, and to cover their needs. As of December 2023, as well as the 563,587 women served with loans (61% of the total) to the value of EUR 633* million, 263,000 women had taken out products designed specifically for women (44.6% of all women with loans and/or insurance).

**BBVAMF GROUP FINANCIAL PRODUCTS WITH GENDER LENS**

| Products | Accident insurance with medical care for rural & urban women |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Colombia Bancamía | Protection for my maternity insurance | Medical care for rural women |
|            | Cancer insurance¹ | Medical care for urban women |
| Peru Financiera Confianza | "Palabra de Mujer" (PDM) Group lending | Protection for my Backpack¹ |
| Dominican Rep. Banco Adopem | "Agromujer" credit for rural women | |
|            | Nestlé Gender victims credits for microfranchises | |
| Chile Fondo Esperanza | Group lending | |
| Panama Microserfin | Cancer microinsurance¹ | Accident insurance with medical care |

*Data current as 31.12.2023, including Emprende. The remaining outcomes exclude Emprende.

1. Product designed with a gender lens; while available to both men and women, most policyholders are women.
There were new products and services too in 2023, with BBVA Microfinance Foundation entities launching the following initiatives:

**Bancamía** issued “Garantía 323” [Guarantee 323], which provides 60% cover over capital and a 700-basis-point discount on the going rate for women microentrepreneurs. Altogether, 763 transactions were guaranteed, worth COP 4,222 billion (USD 1.09 million). In addition, women could take advantage of the “Community people’s economy” guarantee, with 4,787 disbursements for a total of COP 6.973 million (USD 1.8 million).

**Financiera Confianza** in partnership with CARE Peru and its donor ally CUMMINS, part of the VALORA project, has created an Employee Severance Indemnity [Compensación por Tiempo de Servicios: CTS] account specifically for female domestic workers. This partnership also seeks to develop and coordinate joint strategies and actions to drive events, campaigns, communication material and other activities nationwide about the incorporation of female domestic workers into the financial system. To this end, the partners have taken part in several events and had meetings with the Domestic Workers Federations that are registered with the Ministry of Employment.

Furthermore, 2023 marked the end of the Ignite program, a joint initiative between CARE Peru and Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth, in which Financiera Confianza was the financial partner, designing and adapting products to the profiles and actual needs of its female clients. Although the project ended, a subsequent phase is being launched in 2024. Altogether, 66,132 women clients (23,000 of them in 2023) have benefited through this partnership and the individual loan product Emprendiendo Confianza.

In 2023, **Fondo Esperanza** conducted a study into the potential demand from five new profiles: migrants, rural dwellers, older adults, young people and entrepreneurs who have advanced further in their entrepreneurial development. This study sought to update the model of potential demand, exploring the country’s new socio-demographic context and identifying each group’s key vulnerabilities with the aim of developing a value proposition adapted to these groups. In addition, **Fondo Esperanza** has worked to modernize the impact model with a gendered approach (empowerment and gender module). The institution incorporated indicators of the gender gaps between its male and female partners into its impact model. Questions such as the time spent on domestic tasks and care were included in the social measurement, as were the levels of shared responsibility in their homes. Furthermore, the module of “empowerment and gender” was launched in the School for Digital Entrepreneurship in order to educate female and male partners about gender roles.
Partnerships and initiatives in 2023

Bancamía

CAF Development Bank: The Customer Journey on 360º Financial Education study was developed, giving rise to the “Conversations about Banking” project which aims to empower women by equipping them with soft skills, that converge creatively with financial realities, in a style that is close to the practicalities of their everyday lives. The objective is for them to feel that finances are indeed for them and are easy to manage, while also fostering conditions so that they see themselves as worthy of respect and productive, and able to transition to the next levels of their development thanks to their entrepreneurship, following their overarching life goals.

Financiera Confianza

Instituto de Estudios Peruanos (IEP): The partnership signed with the IEP gave rise to research on how to expand the use of financial services among women and indigenous peoples in Peru. The aim was to develop interventions based on behavioral science to overcome barriers to the use of financial products by women. The “Nudges” project, partly financed by the IDB, deals with the development of the Chatbot pilot “Charito” to send messages on WhatsApp about how to save to women using the Palabra de Mujer product. This fosters a positive change in behavior about saving. Fifty women took part in the pilot phase, while the second, which will be rolled out in 2024, is expected to reach around 10,000 women.

Banco Adopem

The entity renewed its agreement with the Nestlé Neighborhood Plan. This includes the definition of a Technical Assistance & Training Program through Adopem’s MIPYMES [MSMEs] Center for top saleswomen on that plan. A group of 37 women were trained during 2023 through the Embajadoras Nestlé program in financial literacy, digital marketing, entrepreneurship, and customer service, together with good practice in sustainability and nutrition. Work continued with the Dominican Republic’s Women’s Ministry to promote and manage contacts to provide credit facilities and recommendations for prospective attendees at training and support workshops. Several in-person workshops have also been organized in the Ministry’s Training Centers as part of the Digital Women Entrepreneurs Community project, along with a training program to Foster economic empowerment for entrepreneurial women or those aspiring to embark on entrepreneurship.

With the IDB LAB, Adopem continued to move forward with the Comunidad Emprendedora Digital (CED) [Digital Female Entrepreneurial Community] project. In 2023, the bank also worked with The Trust for Americas to diagnose training needs and technological deficiencies, defining and designing the training model for the CreceConAdopem [Grow with Adopem] platform, and setting the learning pathway. (For more information, see the digitalization section).

Fondo Esperanza

Fondo Esperanza created a series of partnerships with third parties to create awareness around healthcare, gender violence and business improvement, among others. Likewise, it launched the Empowerment & Gender module for the new digital education platform, with capsules about shared responsibility, economic independence and how to make progress toward shared responsibility in the home.
It carried out research on the Care Economy with the Social Work School of Chile’s Catholic University [Universidad Católica de Chile] and the Instituto Milenio para la Investigación del Cuidado (MICARE)[Millennium Institute for Care Research]. The study analyzed the relationship between informal care and entrepreneurs’ wellbeing, according to their profiles, taking into account family and community factors, as well as the use of technology both in care and in their businesses. At the same time it explored the relationships between the family determinants associated with motherhood, the composition of the family and the home, and unpaid work, with women’s experiences of entry into and time spent in the informal economy through micro-enterprises.

**Microserfin**

Together with Voces Vitales [Vital Voices], Microserfin implemented the first iteration of the program to empower and strengthen soft skills Escala Mujer. A total of 25 women from provinces around Panama received mentoring on: Life Projects, Female Empowerment, Creativity & Innovation, Resilience and Adapting to Change.

Calicanto Foundation: to build on the actions to strengthen women’s soft skills, 96 micro-entrepreneurs were trained in subjects such as: Entrepreneurial Leadership, Assertive Communication and Emotional Intelligence in business.

The telecomms company TIGO implemented the Women’s Digitalization program, whose effects impacted over 290 women in all, with training sessions such as: How to set up an email address, The importance of internet, Online security, social media and how to use them, How to use Excel in my business, among others.

Government of the Republic of Panama: Microserfin shared its Women’s Empowerment strategy in the meeting organized by the Gender Equality Initiative to discuss companies’ responsibilities in the area of women’s rights. It also joined the Inter-institutional Governance Board for the Plan to Empower Indigenous Women in Panama, in the capacity of co-leader of the Employment & Entrepreneurship working group, an initiative which is the first regional public policy advocating economic independence for indigenous women.
This year, Bancamía launched its Entornos Seguros [Safe Surroundings] initiative to promote equity, diversity, inclusion and respect for differences, whether physical, mental or in the workplace. It also launched version 2.0 of its Nosotros con Ellas [We stand with the Women] initiative, with the participation of 28 women leaders occupying management positions in the head office. This initiative seeks the growth and leadership of women in Colombia, from all the regions where the bank operates.

Bancamía was chosen by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to participate in the Colombian edition of the Sourcing2Equal program as an entity that is committed to reducing gender gaps in Colombia. This program promotes corporate acquisitions with a gendered perspective. Finally, Bancamía received the 2023 Global SME Finance Silver award in the ‘Best Financier for Women Entrepreneurs’ category, for the most effective, successful and innovative practices in the world in supporting small and medium enterprises.

At Financiera Confianza, the Equity and Diversity Committee, comprising a multidisciplinary team and representatives from the operations and sales network groups, was reactivated. This committee promoted the voluntary Wellbeing survey, with the aim of understanding the conditions of employees along the dimensions of health, housing, and household characteristics. In addition, self-identification questions were asked about sexual orientation and ethnic identification.

In 2023, initiatives were consolidated, such as blind resumes, formalization of a guideline for prohibited interview questions to avoid stereotypical inquiries, provision of psychological assistance for mental health, as well as support to prevent domestic violence, acknowledging its impact on the performance of staff who have suffered it. Extended paternity leave was also provided beyond what is established by law. Moreover, health insurance was extended to partners of all organization staff, explicitly including LGBTQI+ community members. Finally, unconscious bias and diversity talks continued in the induction spaces for new employees.
Adopem progressed with the UNDP Gender Equality Seal. Among the activities carried out, a full report on the gender gap was presented by the DR Gender Equality Seal team, and the organization prepared the design and implementation of action plans to close the gaps. Additionally, talks on equal opportunities, sexual education for parents, and non-discrimination and equal treatment for bank employees were provided, fostering a more inclusive and equal environment for all. Finally, improvements were made in recruitment and selection communication processes, with more inclusive publications, training processes, and data reports disaggregated by gender, along with benefits that will come into effect in 2024.

Fondo Esperanza organized internal chats about street harassment, changes in internal welfare policies to encourage diversity, as well as continuing the activity of its Equity & Inclusion committee.

At the beginning of 2023, Microserfin consolidated its Gender, Diversity & Inclusion Committee, a space with representation from a range of areas: Communication (a leading strategic area), Human Talent (Internal Equity), Sales (Value Proposition), Administration and Finance (Procurement), and Legal (Standards and Laws). This committee is responsible for establishing the roadmap and strategy for incorporating a gender perspective throughout the entity’s activities. Additionally, it supports the Management Committee and various departments in adopting a gender focus in projects and initiatives and presents the report on compliance with the strategy to the Board of Directors semi-annually. Furthermore, campaigns were promoted, and a workshop was conducted with the Calicanto Foundation, in which 65 people participated in raising awareness about prevention of gender-based violence. Three training sessions were also conducted for the entire organization at the Microfinance Campus on Unconscious Biases, Diversity, and Inclusion. Moreover, for another year, they were assessed through the PAR ranking by Aequales to learn how they were performing on the gender issue and to strengthen their strategies.
