

II MAIN CONCEPTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF RECOMMENDATION 195

In this chapter some of the main conceptual contributions of Recommendation 195 shall be analysed regarding configuration of policies and training systems, and inputs shall be provided to broaden the analysis of the large majority of subjects brought up in this governing instrument. To do so, some categories of great interest shall be addressed (decent work, competencies, employability, gender perspective, quality management, etc.), linking them to the suggestions proposed in the Recommendation and providing information on Latin American and the Caribbean experiences that exemplify some processes and results recommended.

The new Recommendation proposes innovations and challenges that are important for the countries of all regions in matters of training and employment policies. Nonetheless, Cinterfor/ILO is convinced that several of the main conceptual aspects and of the practical recommendations of this new governing instrument of the ILO are being adopted and developed by vocational training institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean. Because of this the experience accumulated by them has been gathered up in many of the rationales of the revision process and has oriented the approaches adopted by the Recommendation. Among them, and by way of example, the focus on employability can be mentioned as an expression of the conception of lifelong education in the area of training for work, gender mainstreaming in the design and management of policies, crossing of gender and competency-based training approaches, etc. These facts can be verified in the examples of the *modus operandi* of the institutions of the region that have been included together with the conceptual development of the principal themes collected in the Recommendation.

Moreover, it must be pointed out that the Latin American and Caribbean region has a large institutional history that at the same time is a great strength in vocational training matters. At present, the majority of the countries in the region have at least one national training institution³

³ Since the decade of the forties, as of the creation of the SENAI (1942) in Brazil, the model of institution specialised to provide training spread rapidly, independently of the formal educational system, with its own funds and autonomous management. After the creation of the SENAI, specialised in the industrial sector, there came the SENAC (1946) for the trade sector, the SENA in Colombia (1957), the INCE in

the experience of which has allowed the rapid adoption –in the last few years– of one of the most notable innovations that have occurred in the area of training in the last decade: the modernisation and updating of training programmes in such a way that they express packages of labour competencies, i.e., capacities to achieve results where performance is the fundamental source of evidence. This is one of the many expressions of the pioneering effort made by the American vocational training institutions. The effort has simultaneously encompassed the adoption of the most modern, efficient and flexible schemes of institutional organisation and management, the development of a culture of quality that seeks to reach both the processes involved in providing training services and the results obtained, the search for mechanisms that assure the relevance of that supply and a constant concern to strengthen the role of vocational training in relation to the achievement of greater social equity and the assurance of decent work for everyone, both female and male.

2.1 Training, development of human resources, economic and social development

Vocational training is what has been called a “crossroads” since it possesses the peculiarity of belonging both to the field of social policy, because of its contribution to the personal and vocational development of individuals, to social integration and cohesion, and to the field of productive and labour policies, because of its functionality in terms of the objectives of increasing productivity, enhancing competitiveness and generating labour insertion opportunities. Although it does not in itself generate employment, it is potentially able to manage, by means of an integrating and systemic approach, the knowledge, efforts and resources of the different actors and instances, and, therefore, is strategic for any active labour market policy.

Differently to decades ago, when vocational training was believed to be a specific field reserved for specialists, it is at present included in the discourse of the most varied actors and is a matter of interest for many disciplines. Its links to the labour relations systems are discussed, as well as their function within processes of innovation, development and transfer of technology, and the way to dovetail them effectively with regular education systems, in a perspective of lifelong or permanent education.

The most innovative experiences at the regional level regarding training conceive the latter as part of a package of technological transfer actions, both of work and of production,

Venezuela (1959), the SENATI in Peru (1961), the INA in Costa Rica (1963), the INACAP in Chile (1966), the SECAP in Ecuador (1966). Following that, in the seventies, other countries adopted the institutional model of training for work: The SNPP was established in Paraguay (1971), the INFOP in Honduras (1972) and the INTECAP in Guatemala (1972). More recently the INFOTEP was established in the Dominican Republic (1980), the SENAR in Brazil (1991), the INATEC in Nicaragua (1991), the INAFORP in Panama (1993) and the INSAFORP in El Salvador (1993).

adaptation and innovation. This is marking an abrupt change of direction both conceptually and methodologically in the action of institutions, training centres and technological education units that incorporate in this conception of training the contents and methodologies that belong to what has been called “technological education.” To summarise it can be said that technological education involves recording, systematizing, understanding and using the concept of technology, historically and socially constructed, to turn it into an element of teaching, research and extension, in a dimension that exceeds the limits of simple technical applications: as an instrument of innovation and transformation of economic activities, to benefit individuals as well as workers and countries as a whole.

In conceptual terms, these experiences are characterised by possessing a certain degree of specialisation towards certain economic sectors (metalmachinery, cellulose and paper, leather and footwear, chemistry, construction, etc.) that allows them, among other benefits, a greater degree of technological updating in machinery, equipment and materials, but also in knowledge and techniques applied to production. That updating, supplemented with new strategies of rapprochement and co-operation with the productive sector, is making possible the supply of a series of services that complement the traditional supply of training.

Various institutions in the Latin American and Caribbean region are diversifying significantly their institutional mission, broadening the limits of their modus operandi as a vocational education institution and also receiving recognition as an instrument of technology generation and dissemination. Technological incubators, islands of production integration technology and digital information transportation systems are, among others, some of the institutional initiatives designed to consolidate that function. Therefore, the mechanisms for instrumentation, training and technological support developed by training institutions serve to support and train the entrepreneurs, and in some cases entire productive chains, so that they can face with greater assurance the obstacles that are placed between the world of research and entrepreneurial reality.

Training, productivity, competitiveness and development

It is important to analyse the role of vocational training in strategies to improve productivity, the latter being understood as the relationship between production obtained by a system of production or services and the resources used to obtain it. We can also define productivity as the efficient use of resources – labour, capital, land, materials, energy, information – in the production of various goods and services or as the relationship between results and the time taken to achieve them. Although on occasion productivity is linked to labour intensity, this alludes (mostly) to an excess of effort or “increase” in work, which usually involves very small increases in productivity. Thus it is often said that the essence of the improvement of productivity is to work more intelligently and not harder.

There is a direct and positive relationship between education, training and productivity that can be verified when countries are compared and the best results in terms of productivity and economic growth are obtained in those where the people are better educated. Technology, the other factor invoked as a key factor for raising productivity is no more than a result of education, culture, creativity and systems of administration.⁴

Various approaches advocate the idea that wagering on quality jobs can be profitable thanks to advances in productivity, for which investment is proposed in two key factors: vocational training and safety and hygiene at work. The former concentrates a large amount of the suggestions of the new Recommendation for the development of human resources, focusing attention on the development of competencies, lifelong learning and the close relationship between quality jobs, quality of life and equity.

Through its effect on increasing productivity, the role played by training in the development of competitiveness is verified. In its more literal meaning competitiveness refers to the capacity to compete of the enterprise, sector or country in the framework of the economy. It also alludes to the capacity to generate (without ceasing to be open to international competitiveness because of it) some sufficiently high levels of employment and income.

The dynamics of growth show that, in the long run, the international competitiveness of a country is closely linked to its living standard, and to be competitive it must adapt to the new circumstances of world competition arising from the liberalisation of trade and technological progress. It is because of this that a country's possibility of successfully attracting, assimilating and taking advantage of direct foreign investment and the subsequent transfer of technology will depend, above all, on its own "technological capacity" in which the qualifications and technical know-how of its active population are included.

Among its main suggestions, Recommendation 195 proposes a duty of member countries: they must define policies for the development of human resources, education, training and lifelong learning that "*emphasise sustainable economic development in the context of the globalising economy and the knowledge- and skills-based society*" as well as "*the development of competencies, promotion of decent work, job retention, social development, social inclusion and poverty reduction*" (art. 3, b).

The above also harmonises with the conclusions of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation, created as an independent organ at the instance of the ILO, and that are reflected in the publication "A fair globalisation. Creating opportunities for all" in the sense that "*people must be trained so that they may benefit from globalisation,*" and in particular

⁴ However, in many countries structural adjustment policies and those that lead to an opening towards the global economy incite to a ceaseless restructuring of large enterprises, which is often accompanied by a reduction in the staff payroll, affecting millions of workers. This often cuts down the operations and achievements of the enterprise, undermining confidence and the spirit of the workers and also diminishing productivity.

regarding the new competencies the report stresses that *“At present, men and women need overall qualifications that can be adapted to the rapid changes in economic requirements, as well as basic qualifications that enable them to benefit from information technologies.”*

The importance of innovation, competitiveness, productivity, economic growth, the creation of decent work and the employability of individuals, are thus highlighted, *“considering that innovation creates new employment opportunities and it also requires new approaches to education and training to meet the demand for new skills”* (art. 3, c).

Although the concept of competitiveness has always been relevant for all eras, it acquires greater importance in the present context of economic globalisation, where the opening-up processes allow both strengths and weaknesses of enterprises, productive sectors and national economies to be revealed with greater evidence. In that respect there are different approaches as regards which the most adequate strategies are and, above all, the combination of measures that may turn out to be most effective.

On the one hand, we find examples of strategies that are fundamentally based on macroeconomic measures that tend to lessen the costs of production, such as decisions regarding exchange rate policies, tax exemptions or labour cost reduction (wages, dismissals, etc.). On the other hand, the need to make efforts that aim towards a strategic horizon marked by the achievement of what has been called “systemic competitiveness” is affirmed. This latter approach does not depend on a restricted and relatively simple set of measures, but rather on a complex range of policies that, applied together, would locate the economy in a globally more competitive position. Policies of investment in public and private infrastructure, of innovation and technological development, of integration of sectors and productive chains, of investment in the development of human capital (education, training and skills development) are some of the most typical instruments proposed by this approach.

It is within the systemic competitiveness approach that vocational training has a clearer and more central role to play. It is believed that investments oriented to raise the qualifications of the population are in and of themselves an action that tends to increase competitiveness and, in turn, reinforce the effectiveness of other supplementary policy lines. Therefore, although vocational training is a good bet in any context, its beneficial contributions to society and the economy are better able to show up in the framework of long term strategic approaches.

The idea of vocational training as a specialised field of activity that is to a certain extent self-referent is also losing ground in the face of the conception that what is involved is something at the same time interdisciplinary and inter-institutional and that must, as such, seek to insert itself in the framework of strategies of attention that are an integral part of the economy, productive chains and sectors, enterprises and the community.

Therefore, vocational training is betting on two types of integration: one that is vertical, to the extent that it seeks to offer answers not only to different situations but also to the transformation itself of those situations (lifelong training); another that is cross-sectional and where the

search involved is in the sense of dovetailing with other fields of social and economic policy, with various institutional areas and affecting different disciplines. Such are, in short, the two main dimensions of a process of transformation of vocational training that seeks to locate it in a strategic and functional horizon, among other aspects, to achieve systemic competitiveness.

Taking into account the strong relationship between training and aspects such as productivity, competitiveness and, ultimately, the economic and social development of countries and the quality of life of individuals, it is not surprising that already in the preamble of the Recommendation a need is explicitly expressed for educational and training policies to be a part of and be consistent with *“comprehensive economic, fiscal, social and labour market policies and programmes that are important for sustainable economic growth and employment creation and social development.”*

The relationship between training, competitiveness and productivity has been the axis of development of various institutions of Latin America and the Caribbean that have established an increasing relationship with productive technological development, involving among its main functions that of teaching vocational training through the transfer of the technology to be applied to the productive processes of enterprises of all sizes and technological complexities.

On occasions their actions are centred on supporting sector Conventions on competitiveness, applied research in partnership with other entities and special co-operation agreements. These activities tend to be executed mainly by training centres and sector technological services that have comparative advantages to advance development activities and possess equipment and facilities that allow them to establish strategic alliances with enterprises and technological development and productivity centres to stimulate actions within the framework of innovation and development.

Finally, although training can play an important role in topics related to employment from a quantitative perspective, that is what has mainly been referred to so far, no less important is the role it has to play in the qualitative dimension of human labour. The insufficiency of an exclusively quantitative approach to employment and the world at work has propitiated new types of approaches that stress the importance of also taking into account the ethical and value dimension when addressing the study and research of the world at work as well as at the time the policies are drawn up that tend to mitigate the difficult situation of collectives that are particularly disadvantaged regarding employment. The notion of decent work of the ILO is inscribed in this framework.

2.2 Training and decent work

The idea of decent work may be introduced as an integrating concept that involves and dovetails various objectives, values and policies or as a dynamic concept the content of which evolves with the social and economic progress of a given country. In any of its meanings it

possesses an obvious ethical content: to promote decent work involves the clear adoption of a valuating position very closely related to the dignity and the quality of life of human beings.

As quality employment that respects the rights of workers, both male and female, and fosters the development of forms of social protection, if we refer to decent work we must combine aspects relating to rights, employment, protection and dialogue. Therefore, it can be said that it is a concept under construction to which the following features have been attributed: productive and safe work, respect for labour rights, equity, adequate income, social protection, social dialogue, trade union freedom, collective bargaining and participation.

Decent work is, even in its more synthetic formulation, at least work of sufficient quantity and quality, and it presumes that the following rights are in place: the right to work or employment; equitable working conditions; fair or sufficient pay; safe work (meaning that which guarantees safety and hygiene); social protection; vocational training; and other rights and principles such as trade union freedom and collective bargaining.

Vocational training is a fundamental human right and, at the same time, an instrument that promotes and facilitates exercising the other rights that also constitute decent work. That is why there is insistence that decent work implies recognition of rights and not only compliance with those established in labour laws in force, nor in the convenience of establishing new rights, but rather it is connected to the conception that fundamental rights exist that must be recognised although they are not proclaimed in the legislation, given that they are innate in any fair and inclusive society.

Therefore, recalling that decent work for all workers all over the world is a fundamental objective of the International Labour Organization, Recommendation 195 alludes to the responsibility of governments regarding training and especially enhancement of the employability of the population *“to secure decent work, in the private and public sectors, through such measures as incentives and assistance”* (art. 10, a).

Training and employability

Although, as has already been stated, training policies cannot by themselves generate employment, they can and must support individuals so that they become detectors of opportunities, passing from the status of passive subjects, dependent on an external intervention to provide them with an insufficient job offer, to active subjects, builders of opportunities and insertion strategies.

This leads us to centre our attention on employability and to define it, as per the Recommendation 195 proposal, as *“portable competencies and qualifications that enhance an individual’s capacity to make use of the education and training opportunities available in order to secure and retain decent work, to progress within the enterprise and between jobs, and to cope with changing technology and labour market conditions”* (art. 1, d).

The definition clears up any type of confusion regarding whether to consider employability to be a synonym of employment or of achievement in a job and centres it on the set of personal, social and technical competencies that allow individuals to themselves manage their processes of occupational and vocational development in a scenario where employment needs to be created through entrepreneurial capacity and co-operation strategies.

This new type of learning can no longer be circumscribed to a stage at the beginning of professional life but rather involves lifelong training, permanent learning. Moreover, it cannot be the sum of specific training actions since it seeks, on the one hand, that the person be able to achieve the results required for his or her vocational performance and, on the other hand, that he or she understand the reason why they are doing it, what the implications and impacts of their actions are, and that they develop the capacity to relate what has been learned, to transfer it to other situations, to adapt to new social and labour contexts.

Employability is related to processes occurring at different levels: structural, governing, cultural. But it also links up with factors of a personal and relational nature, that dovetail with the specific contexts of the life of each individual, with the result that differences and inequities are found in the possibilities of access to resources, in employment opportunities or in the generation of productive activities, in participation and decision-making regarding issues involving their community or the group to which they belong.

The enhancement of employability should be, therefore, one of the fundamental objectives of training policies and also, because of that, necessarily require analysis from a gender perspective.

To improve employability implies to focus attention on an individual located in and conditioned by his or her gender, economic and cultural milieu, age, etc. As is proposed in the following point, this is a contribution of the gender perspective that, additionally, shows that women have been subjected to particular cultural barriers in matters of hiring and have traditionally found themselves to be far from the channels of creation and use of wealth. Because of all that, employability competencies complement each other and dovetail with needs to insert themselves and participate socially.

Male and female training converge as never before with training of citizens of both sexes. The right to work is one of the substantive aspects of the rights of citizens and the issue thus involves that the work performed not undermine a person, allowing him or her not only to make their living but also enabling their personal development and autonomy, meaning the capacity to think and act on their own, to choose what is valuable for each of them.

To behave as a citizen conscious and respectful of diversity, as also for insertion in the current labour market, it is required to have the capacity to express oneself and communicate, to make decisions, to make choices, to understand the milieu in which one acts, systemically address reality, work in a team, show solidarity, participate, take care of oneself and of others, etc. Because of this, employability, citizenship and gender are interdependent concepts that should be conceived as cross-sectional approaches of the teaching-learning process.

Employability thus becomes a fundamental dimension for personal development and social integration,

From this point of view, to train for employability in the present context means:

- to strengthen the capacities of individuals so that they may improve their labour insertion possibilities through the development of key competencies that reduce the risk of obsolescence and allow men and women to remain active and productive throughout their life (not necessarily in the same job or activity);
- to train for permanent and complex learning that implies learning to learn, learning to be, learning to do and learning to undertake;
- to support individuals so that they may identify inner and outer obstacles, the demands and competencies required in the world at work, and so that they value their skills and knowledge;
- to stimulate and strengthen the capacity of each individual to define and manage their vocational career.

There is therefore no doubt that by means of training for employability the competencies the workers require are increased in terms of having greater possibilities to keep their jobs or to obtain a new one as well as to access better paid jobs with adequate working conditions.

Nonetheless, training programmes have the best results when macroeconomic policy fosters employment growth, to which must be added the need for training programmes to resort to other services related to the labour market, as, for example, help to find a job, professional advice, a subsidised labour experience, etc.

Regarding employability, since the nineties the experience of the OECD shows a concern to find a new set of indicators of the real capacities of individuals. Such indicators must have greater explanatory power and deliver information beyond the traditional indicators of schooling, coverage, desertion, etc. In this line, after several studies in the framework of the project “Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo)” in 1994, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) was carried out in the belief that literacy incorporates something more than the capacity to decipher written symbols and, therefore, to overcome the traditional concept of reading learnt at school.

The IALS defined the concept of literacy as: “*The capacity to understand and use printed information in daily activities, in the home, at work and in the community; to achieve personal objectives and develop knowledge and the potential of each.*” The concept of literacy includes the capacity to perform tasks typical of daily living. For example, the instructions to operate electronic equipment, as well as those involving arithmetical operations such as those appearing on a daily basis in writing, for example, calculations involving simple interest rates, and also comprehension of selected fragments of prose.⁵

⁵ The IALS was applied in Chile (1998) and its results are reflected today in a goodly part of the plans and programmes that, on education, were designed in this country in the last few years.

Some countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region have implemented strategies to improve computer literacy. These are included in a set of measures designed with the purpose of becoming digitally developed countries. Such purpose is associated with development and trade integration policies that are complemented in other areas such as in education, in which teaching the English language is encouraged. Insofar as information technologies are concerned, training and certification in key competencies is promoted for a wide spectrum of labour performance.

Along this same line, the FORMUJER Programme⁶ has developed an intense process regarding the identification and construction of employability indicators. Taking as a reference the construction of the Occupational Project, the following group of competencies was defined to inquire into evaluating the strengthening of the employability of the beneficiary population of training actions:

- Diagnosis of itself and its context of family, community life, groups it belongs to, as well as the productive and occupational milieu (competencies regarding reading and analysis of context, interpretation of information, comprehension of messages, interpretation of data on facts, problem identification, etc.).⁰
- Planning objectives and goals as regards work and training, choice of training and/or occupational careers, feasibility analysis (competencies involving knowledge and interpretation of information on facts, organisation of time, bargaining, planning, analysis of alternatives, decision making, solving problems, argumentation, use of resources).
- Management and execution of activities for the development of the project, programming, organisation of time and of resources.
- Solving problems linked to training and to work, in the labour area, in the family and/or community environment (competencies involving analysis of problems and alternatives, bargaining, decision making, linkage with others, communication).
- Teamwork/partnerships: listening capacity, capacity to incorporate the contributions of others, co-ordination competencies, bargaining competencies, etc.
- Autonomy/bargaining/decision making: changes of position regarding the labour market, training, family, etc.
- Communication: changes in ways of oral, written, body expression, arguing capability, transmission, etc.

All these considerations are present in Recommendation 195 when it calls on countries to define human resources development policies that “*facilitate lifelong learning and employability as part of a range of policy measures designed to create decent jobs, as well as to achieve*

⁶ See box

INSTITUTIONALISATION OF THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE AND TRAINING FOR EMPLOYABILITY IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN LATIN AMERICA

Strengthening institutional competencies and social partners to design and implement quality training policies addressed to enhancing employability and gender equity has been the central purpose of the FORMUJER and PROIMUJER Programmes executed by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security of Argentina (MTEySS), the INFOCAL Foundation of Bolivia and the INA of Costa Rica, and the second one by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security/JUNAE of Uruguay. Both initiatives have been co-ordinated and technically supervised by Cinterfor/ILO. By means of participative management and a common conceptual and methodological framework at the regional level, and differentiated emphases, management strategies and demonstrative actions in keeping with national realities, a *model of policies for enhancing employability and gender and social equity* was built collectively and has been validated and adopted in very varied contexts and contains a wide repertory of methodologies and management strategies applicable on a broader and more diversified scale.

Some of the main results of this trans-national effort are:

- 1) **Argentina:** The MTEySS institutionalised equal opportunities as the governing criterion of its policies, and reformulated the Labour Intermediation Services; training for employability and the Occupational Project device were incorporated into the Protocols of the National Training System, in the Male and Female Heads of Household and Educational Terminality National Programmes as well as for the areas responsible for training and employment in the provinces of Cordoba, Mendoza and La Pampa.
- 2) **Bolivia:** the INFOCAL included gender equity and employability as strategic and cross-sectional objectives of its modus operandi; it incorporated the "Training modules for employability and citizenship" and the development of competency-based training curricula in its training supply; it implemented a Labour Information and Orientation System and drew up a proposal for a Single Classifier of Occupations from the point of view of competencies and gender. These approaches and capacities were transferred to national policy, through the technical support and staff trained, to the Programme for Strengthening Technical and Technological Training executed by the Ministry of Education.
- 3) **Costa Rica:** the INA incorporated the systemic approach of the policy, the gender perspective as a cross-sectional axis, and training for employability and the occupational project in its modus operandi and in government initiatives under its responsibility: the "New Life" University for Labour Programme and the fight against poverty. It transferred these approaches to and achieved their adoption by the National Information, Guidance and Intermediation of Employment Policy, the Research and Improvement Centre for Technical Education and the Guides for Orientation and Seeking Employment of the ILO MATAc Project for Central America, Belize, Panama and the Dominican Republic.
- 4) **Uruguay:** the MTySS has continued to execute specific training actions for women whereby the PROIMUJER Programme is no longer a pilot experience and the gender perspective has been adopted by many skills development entities and is beginning to be promoted as a cross-sectional dimension for other decentralised programmes financed by the JUNAE/DINAE.

sustainable economic and social development” and “give equal consideration to economic and social objectives, emphasise sustainable economic development in the context of the globalising economy and the knowledge- and skills-based society, as well as the development of competencies, promotion of decent work, job retention, social development, social inclusion and poverty reduction” (art. 3, a and b).

Training, equal opportunities and social inclusion

If quality education and training are to be a relevant instrument for improving general social and economic conditions and preventing social exclusion and discrimination, they should encompass all people as well as assure the inclusion of the most disadvantaged groups. Because of this, the new Recommendation proposes that countries should “*recognise that education and training are a right for all and, in cooperation with the social partners, work towards ensuring access for all to lifelong learning*” (art.4, a) and “*promote equal opportunities for women and men in education, training and lifelong learning*” (art.5, g).

The place where these specifications position both statements reinforces their axiomatic nature and speaks of impressive changes and advances regarding Recommendation 150. The earlier Recommendation proposed that countries adopt policies and programmes for guidance and training that bore a close relationship to employment and that took into account the needs, possibilities and problems of employment at the regional and national level; the phase and level of economic, social and cultural development and the relationship between the development of human resources and other economic, social and cultural objectives. That is to say that the focus was on employment and on the contributions that training could make to increase it. Now, as this text has already analysed, it is believed that training policies must address equally the economic and social objectives and that stress is laid on individuals as holders of rights and on development of their competencies to attend, in that way, to the problems of employment and economic development.

If training is a fundamental right one must ensure that all human beings, without distinctions of any kind, may have access to it. Hence the inclusion of equal opportunities among women and men as a specific point of the set of objectives and definitions of policies in matters of education and training. This is a crucial conceptual and strategic contribution of this instrument through which the countless efforts made and lessons learnt are brought together, especially those of the last decades of the last century and in all continents, to progress towards effective equality between the sexes. Although we are still far from making it a reality, what has been achieved is a unanimous discourse regarding women and men having the same rights and that they should therefore be treated in the same way and given the same opportunities in all areas of expression of economic and social organisation. The open gap between

formal or legal equality –that has not been universally achieved either, as we all know– and real equality is the great challenge that countries face in the 21st century. In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean the regulatory prohibition to discriminate against persons or groups on the basis of some characteristic feature they might display has been consolidated. Therefore, the removal of obstacles and barriers and the adoption of measures needed for equality to be effective, i.e., proactive behaviour, are in full swing and there is still a long way to go for them to become “unnecessary.” That is why it is so important that the new Recommendation adopt the promotion of equality between the sexes as an objective of the policies and programmes that, therefore, must be part of the guidelines or governing principles of all their actions, and of all areas of intervention, on an equal footing with lifelong learning, employability, development of competencies, innovation, competitiveness, etc.

In Recommendation 150 promotion of equal opportunities between women and men appeared as a specific point (VIII), very distant from formulations on policies, after having addressed special groups and before migrant workers. However, what is more revealing is that it was conceived as a part of the set of measures that governments should take to improve the employment situation of women and not as a responsibility or concern of training policies.

These formulations, that are so different, are witness to the recent evolution, both in theoretical and practical terms, of the opinion of the social partners and the international community in the field of development and in the distinction between sex and gender. That evolution has meant that the stress is transferred from focusing on meeting basic needs to affirming fundamental rights. The new “focusing on rights” means that women cease to be considered passive “beneficiaries” of development policies, and are recognized as participants or active subjects with full rights to receive their benefits. Moreover, it means moving from considering equality of rights and opportunities as a question of social justice to conceiving it as a prior condition for attaining sustainable development centred on individuals. Concretely in the world of work, the broad lines of this evolution have been: in the fifties the stress was on protecting the reproductive role of women; in the sixties on the participation of women in development and on corrective actions to reduce the gap with men; at the beginning of the seventies, and since there has been better knowledge of the poverty phenomenon and of the belief in the need to formulate effective strategies for its eradication, recognition was reached of the specific conditions that affected poor women and the fundamental role they played in supporting the household, at which time assistentialist policies began to be orchestrated in matters of training and employment. As of 1980, the integration of women into the process of development began to be considered essential if the potential of available human resources was to be used to effectively materialize the development possibilities of countries. In 1985, the United Nations established the decade of women and with the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century attention was centred on the historical inequalities between men and women in terms of access to resources and to the benefits of development. Thus the concept of gender arrived as a constitutive element of social relations based on an unequal distribution of power, and it is expressed in representations and

cultural symbols, in governing concepts, in policies and institutions and in subjective identity. While sex is a biological category, genetically transmitted, that establishes functional differences in live beings (male and female), gender is a social construction that ascribes and assigns values to roles, attributes and capacities of men and women hierarchically. This unequal circumstance is in place from the beginning of socialisation, is transmitted from the home, is confirmed by education and is expanded by the mass media. Because of this it is internalised and conditions the distribution of spheres and vital, vocational and professional options. Men and women, then, are immersed in a social system where they produce and reproduce gender relations. Precisely because it is social this process may be the object of reflection and, therefore, of change. By “denaturalising” this assignment of roles and attributes, by incorporating a new point of view, the places of men and women are changed.

Gender is a perspective, a critical instrument of analysis of social relations and a basic dimension on which all other conditions that generate relations of power and differences (ethnics, race, age, income, socio-economic condition, educational level, etc.) act, empowering themselves. Because of this, the achievements of gender equity find their stopping point in the survival of other inequities and vice versa. Gender is therefore not a synonym of woman, is not a module, nor does it mean to add a feminine component to policies. Rather it is a conceptual and methodological framework that guides decision making and leads to valuing all the implications any action planned has for men and women, whether it is legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels.

For all these reasons, the gender perspective must necessarily be cross-sectional and, as is established in the Platform of Action adopted in the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, integration of gender issues must be guaranteed as a global strategy that allows understanding and, therefore, operation with greater relevance to promote equality by right, opportunities and treatment between men and women and to change social reality, that of the world of work as well as of education and training.

Recommendation 195 is responding to this epistemological framework when it incorporates the promotion of equal opportunities between the sexes as an objective of human resources development policies, but also when it incorporates for the first time in this type of instrument, the concept of gender, alerting to the presence of gender biases in the evaluation of labour competencies.⁷ When mainstreaming the gender perspective in training, *individuals are being considered as subjects located* in a social reality that conditions them, but they are able to change on the basis of personal and collective learning and strategies. Their adoption claims simultaneous action on the comprehensiveness of interventions and on the qualification of spaces for constant reflection, attention and evaluation to promote change in the paradigms in force, but also to orchestrate specific actions and methodologies to attend to the initial disad-

⁷ See points 3.3 and 5.2

vantages of women, especially poor women, with low educational levels, heads of households, adolescent mothers, rural women, etc., as well as the specific problems of the female collective such as occupational diversification, access to management positions, to technologically innovating areas, to the field of science and technology, to training for micro and small enterprises.⁸ The incorporation of this approach in training routines fuels a conception of curriculum planning as a dynamic process, that begins with simultaneous recognition of the demand of the economic sectors and of the needs of individuals, and extends up to labour insertion based on capacities and not on issues of gender. When mainstreaming the gender perspective a change is being generated in the ways of performing training, in the conception and practice of teaching, whereby its quality is being improved and innovation in educational technology is being boosted.

Based on the belief that, besides considering systematically the promotion of equal opportunities between men and women, social inclusion and the fight against poverty also require focused actions and those that discriminate positively, Recommendation 195 sustains the need to “*promote access to education, training and lifelong learning for people with nationally identified special needs.*” Among them it lists youth, low-skilled people, people with disabilities, migrants, older workers, indigenous people, ethnic minority groups and the socially excluded, as well as workers in small and medium-sized enterprises, in the informal economy, in the rural sector and in self-employment (art. 5, h).

Regarding youth, the behaviour of unemployment, as well as of underemployment, informality and precarious labour insertion is quite different in terms of the internal heterogeneity that the juvenile collective itself possesses. If the single fact of being young implies a greater probability that they will be affected by these problems, in many cases this probability is reinforced and increased by other concomitant factors, such as sex, race and socio-economic level.

In that which concerns individuals with different capacities, the principle of equal opportunities and treatment in training must be considered a part of human rights. Because of this it is necessary to visualise the obstacles and discriminations that affect them as circumstances that it is necessary to recognise, interpret and work with to ensure the feasibility and sustainability of plans and programmes and to take advantage of the real circumstances in which these persons live as well as their specific competencies.

Many institutions of the region, encouraged by the ILO and Cinterfor/ILO, implemented a programme to promote standardised integration to training of people affected by this condition.

⁸ Although the participation of women in training has been increasing sustainedly, it is still insufficient and is fundamentally characterised by double horizontal and vertical segmentation, which implies concentration in a small number of occupational profiles but also in actions of lower quality or level, of short duration and that do not enable, even in feminized areas, access to the new technologies and/or decision making positions.

Training for the informal economy

Although it is inscribed in the relationship between training, decent work, equity and inclusion because of the significance it has acquired in the configuration of the new employment and training reality, the informal economy merits special attention. It is extremely difficult to provide a precise definition of what the informal sector is or in broader terms the informal economy. This is because there is no generalized consensus regarding its definition, both conceptual and operational, and that therefore in different countries the informal sector is considered and measured in different ways.

In the ILO report prepared for discussion of the subject of the informal economy in the International Labour Conference of 2002, stress is laid on the lack of criteria shared among countries at the time statistics are gathered on employment in the informal economy area.

That report sustains, for example, that in some of the latest data published by the organisation on employment in the informal sector, information is included on countries that use as a criterion to define the informal sector that of non registered enterprises (exclusively, or in combination with other criteria such as the small size of the enterprise), and of countries that, differently from the former, use the criterion of the small size of the productive units (exclusively or in combination with others such as non registered enterprises).

In the Latin American and Caribbean region, the ILO publishes data on the structure of non agricultural employment, and for that purpose considers the informal sector to be composed of self-employed workers (except for administrative, professional and technical workers) and family workers, domestic service and employment in micro-enterprises (enterprises of up to five workers).

Perhaps it is more interesting in a study of this type to analyse, not so much the different operational definitions of the informal sector, but basically what features the workers of the informal economy have in common, what risks and contingencies all individuals who carry out their productive activities in this environment must face, the enormous diversity of activities and productive units that make up the informal sector is simultaneously recognizing.

In this sense, the ILO has sustained that what the workers of the informal economy have in common is that they are not recognised or protected within legal and regulatory frameworks. However, it stresses that this is not the only feature that defines informal activity. The main and most important one is that informal workers and entrepreneurs are characterised by their high level of vulnerability.

The subject of vulnerability, that appears frequently in the literature on the informal sector, is intimately linked to security and social representation, which its members often lack.

In terms of the security/insecurity of informal activity, the ILO has identified seven dimensions that appear with particular significance.

- Labour market security: refers to good labour opportunities that arise from a high level of employment, the result of suitable macroeconomic policies.
- Employment security: protection against arbitrary dismissals and, in general, labour laws that regulate hiring and firing.
- Occupational security: involves the opportunity for insertion in a vocational segment and the possibility of developing a sense of belonging as a consequence of vocational enhancement.
- Safety on the job: possibility of being protected against labour accidents and vocational diseases.
- Security for the development of competencies: opportunities to maintain and develop vocational skills and knowledge by means of lifelong training actions.
- Security of income: involves the possibility of accessing adequate income for the worker and his/her family.
- Security of representation: possibility to exercise the right to collective representation of workers and employers through independent organisations, as well as the right to collective bargaining and the social dialogue.

The ILO intends to analyse labour in the informal economy in terms of the vulnerability and lack of security described above, fundamentally on the basis of the deficit of decent work. And this perspective may be seen reflected in the new Recommendation 195, where it is established that *“Members should identify human resources development, education, training and lifelong learning policies which: d) address the challenge of transforming activities in the informal economy into decent work fully integrated into mainstream economic life; policies and programmes should be developed with the aim of creating decent jobs and opportunities for education and training, as well as validating prior learning and skills gained to assist workers and employers to move into the formal economy;”* (art. 3, d).

Besides there being differences in the conceptualisation of the informal sector, there are also different positions, or different stresses, regarding its origin, the forces that lead to its form and growth. When analysing the evolution of the diagnoses and interpretations of the informal sector, at least three perspectives may be identified to address the subject. The first one does so mainly from the logic of survival: in countries where there is not enough work for everyone in the modern sector of the economy and where unemployment insurance (and social protection in broader terms) is inexistent or insufficient, people seek their own solutions, producing or selling something that allows them to obtain some income to live.

Another position stresses productive decentralisation. As a result of globalisation and the international division of labour, modern enterprises have needed to have flexible (due to demand instability) and efficient production systems. Production process decentralisation allows a

reduction in costs of production and transfers to outside the enterprise the problems and risks of the changes in the demand of the products produced by it.

In the particular case of Latin America and the Caribbean, there are authors who, when addressing the subject of productive decentralisation, sustain that the insertion of national economies in the global market developed the “maquila” as a way to dislocate activities that require low levels of qualifications. They also add that a part of the work done in the home is located in the last links of this chain.

A third conceptual logic or approach places the stress on the operation outside the legal framework. The stress on the regulatory perspective involves the risk of assimilating the informality with the illegality, when in point of fact this occurs both in the formal and the informal sector and in reality what predominate are the grey areas in matters of legality/illegality.

Finally, it is necessary to highlight, particularly in the case of the American continent, the relationship between informal economy, poverty and female labour. As ECLAC indicates, the region has not advanced in the process of overcoming poverty. On the contrary, it has been stagnant: between 1999 and 2002 the poverty rate diminished by only 0.4% and extreme poverty grew by 0.3%, encompassing 18.8% of the regional population. The evolution of poverty and indigence was characterised by relatively small variations. Moreover, the situation of poverty and indigence systematically affects more women than men. If persons who have no income of their own are analysed, in poor and not poor households, what stands out is that this affects mainly women. The percent of women of more than 15 years of age with no income of their own exceeds amply that of men. In urban areas 45% of women lack any income of their own, compared to 21% in the case of men. Regardless, it is interesting to note that women who do have an income of their own contribute significantly to the reduction of poverty of households. The data available show that, without the female contribution, poverty would increase by more than 10 percentage points in several countries of the region.⁹

In the year 2001, 49.7% of female employment was informal, while for men this figure was 43.8%. Inside the informal economy, in turn, women were concentrated in the most unstable, unprotected and precarious categories wherefore their insertion conditions were even lower than those of males. Moreover, they are more inclined to work in small scale economic units where their contribution is invisible and they are almost not taken into account. Frequently they work in agricultural activities that in many countries of the region are not even considered within statistical systems. Inside the informal sector *work at home*, *self employment* and *domestic labour* are proportionately the most important categories in the total of working women. *Work at home* offers women the best possibility for them to make their domestic and family responsibilities compatible with paid activities. To the traditional tasks of the textile and garment sector, the new technological services (telephone sales, consultancies, Internet, etc.) are now added, as well as the outsourced productive manufacturing phases, the

⁹ ECLAC. Panorama Social de América Latina 2002-2003. Santiago de Chile, 2003.

low level “maquila” work and other services linked to transferring to the productive area many domestic activities, which generates a highly heterogeneous spectrum both in terms of conditions and pace and in educational and training requirements. In the activities that require greater technological intensity and qualifications conditions are better, there being for instance a written contract, benefits and social security payments similar to those of the workers of the enterprise and competitive pay as regards the local market. For women *outsourcing* is also work *in the home*, which means that the limits between paid work and domestic occupations become diffuse. The men, however, work in the main in a special workplace, although it may be close to their home, and normally they have an assistant which makes the workday shorter. *Self employed women* were those who point-blank led the growth, generating 9 out of every 10 new jobs for women. In sectors where less qualifications are required, conditions of greater instability and social disprotection are concentrated. In general, contracts are verbal and do not contemplate any kind of social protection or minimum income and pay is by the piece or as piecework and cash on delivery. Furthermore, *domestic labour* (the category which receives the lowest levels of pay and social protection in the informal sector) accounts for 22% of new jobs for women generated between 1990 and 1998. Because of this, in the same manner as the other dimensions and strategies of training policies, in terms of the informal economy, the incorporation of the gender perspective is fundamental to improve quality and relevance.

Support strategies for workers and enterprises of the informal economy tend to include a series of actions usually designed for different collectives and productive units that are a part of it same, among which the ILO has pointed to a) support for productive development of the micro-enterprises of the sector; b) development of social welfare of workers in the informal sector, that includes above all programmes against poverty, fundamentally designed for particularly disadvantaged collectives in the labour market (here there is a predominance of programmes that target women and/or young people of low income and scant qualifications); and c) actions on the regulatory framework (trade, labour, tax and property rights legislation are particularly relevant). In turn, the programmes that support enterprises of the informal sector tend to have three types of components: credit, advisory services and training.

If the analysis is centred on training for micro-undertakings of the informal economy, it can be shown that the methodology usually tends to begin with a diagnosis of the original or starting situation of the micro-enterprise, its lacks and possibilities. What is sought is both the personal development of the micro-entrepreneur and that of the undertaking as a whole, often through workshops adapted to different economic needs and activities.

Training and skills development courses and workshops for these collectives tend to encompass subjects such as accounting, finance and marketing, technical-productive skills development (in the area involved as, for example, leather, garments, metalmechanics): entrepreneurial management skills, among others.

The components mentioned above show differences in the levels of importance according to the type of micro-undertaking that is being considered. This type of courses are above all impor-

tant and useful in the case of micro-enterprises that are closest to the modern sector of the economy, those that are more stable and consolidated. In the case of net subsistence undertakings they are not as suitable since many, if not the majority, of their members and directors do not have the competencies needed to incorporate this type of knowledge.¹⁰ It is due to this that it is so important to strengthen, prior to initiating the type of skills development actions mentioned above, the key competencies of employability and citizenship (reading and writing, applied mathematics, communications and social skills, etc.) of the individuals taking part (or who could potentially take part) in micro-undertakings in the area of the informal economy.

Thus the close link between training for work in the informal economy and education of adults and the retention and quality of basic education in the formal educational system emerges clearly. This fact is recognized and addressed by Recommendation 195 when, as was mentioned in the previous point, it includes among the persons with specific needs “*workers in small and medium-sized enterprises, of the informal economy, in the rural sector and in self-employment.*” (art. 5, h).

¹⁰ In various ILO empirical studies on training for the informal economy this fact is pointed out. For further information the ILO series on Informal Economy of the Infocus Programme on Skills, Knowledge and Employability may be consulted at the following address:

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/skills/informal/publ/index.htm>