

# FIRST STEP: Mexico Overview



*Mexico is a country in transition, politically and economically, creating a major shift for women both in society and in their increased participation in the workforce.*

Mexico is experiencing widespread social, political, and economic changes, with a growing middle class (about 40% of the population) and a newly competitive marketplace.<sup>1</sup> The rising number of people who are more educated, wealthier, and healthier than before is transforming Mexico from a poor to a middle-class nation that includes an unprecedented number of women in its formal labor force.<sup>2</sup> But Mexico's growth is limited due to a host of infrastructure problems including women's continued marginalization in society, leadership, and the labor force.<sup>3</sup> This male-dominated, family-focused society has retained the paternalist attitude that women are usually subordinate to men, "who know best."<sup>4</sup> The cultural construct of *machismo*, coupled with legal inequality, continues to influence gender discrimination and hold women back.<sup>5</sup> *First Step: Mexico Overview* provides an outline of the government, economy, society, and workplace in Mexico, especially as related to women.

Mexico is the most populous Spanish-speaking country in the world, with over 110 million people.<sup>6</sup> The majority of Mexicans are Roman Catholic (82.7%). Although Mexico is a secular state, the Church is a major influence in women's lives.<sup>7</sup> With their shared language, shared religion, shared history of 300 years of Spanish colonialism, and high participation rate in civil and religious festivities as well as sporting events, Mexicans think of themselves as a homogeneous people despite their ethnic diversity—they consider themselves first and foremost to be "Mexican."<sup>8</sup>

Ancestry is a much less important way to classify an individual racially or ethnically in Mexico than is physical appearance, particularly skin color.<sup>9</sup> In fact, although miscegenation is prevalent, the basis of discrimination and social stratification is not by race but by skin color. In modern Mexico, many people say that they prefer whiter skin.<sup>10</sup> This has consequences in Mexicans' perceptions of equality: in Mexico's *National Survey on Discrimination*, four out of 10 people surveyed reported that they are treated unequally due to their skin color.<sup>11</sup> Evidence suggests that those who have darker skin,

regardless of their race or ancestry, not only have lower levels of education and lower occupational status, but are also more likely to live in poverty. Some part of this socioeconomic difference could be an aftereffect of the colonial occupation, when racial discrimination and social stratification were more overt.<sup>12</sup>

*Mestizaje* (combined Indigenous American and European ancestry) makes racial identity a complex issue in Mexico. While some scholars argue that *mestizaje* makes race more fluid in Mexico than in the United States, others argue that the use of the term *mestizaje* to celebrate Latino identity is used to distance mestizos from those Mexicans with African ancestry.<sup>13</sup> It is difficult to estimate how many Mexicans have African ancestry. Because official data does not recognize the presence of Afro-Mexicans, the estimates range from 0.5–4.7 million.<sup>14</sup> Almost one-third of the overall population identifies itself as predominately indigenous.<sup>15</sup> In Oaxaca alone, 56% of the population identifies itself as indigenous.<sup>16</sup> In Mexico, people are considered indigenous not based on ancestry or skin color but whether they speak an indigenous language or share cultural traits.<sup>17</sup> Similar to those who also do not appear white, indigenous peoples still suffer discrimination, which manifests itself in poverty, repression, and police brutality.<sup>18</sup>

## Mexico Is a Country of Contrasts

The geography of Mexico runs from arid deserts to tropical forests, and the architecture varies from colorful buildings in the south, to tropical huts along coastlines, to modern glass skyscrapers in cities. In urban areas there are expensive cars, while horses still pull wagons in rural villages.<sup>19</sup> But the biggest contrast in Mexico is the wealth gap and social inequality. The gap between the richest and the poorest is quite large: the top 20% of Mexico's population earns 13 times as much as the bottom 20% of the population.<sup>20</sup>

Women's growing labor force participation has decreased poverty levels.<sup>21</sup> While over 46% of Mexicans lived in poverty in 2010, the number living in extreme poverty—those who earn less than \$76 USD a month—decreased slightly from 10.6% to 10.4% (11.7 million people).<sup>22</sup> Extreme poverty exists, but it is balanced by government programs such as universal healthcare (*Seguro Popular*) and childcare (*Estancias Infantiles para Apoyar a Madres Trabajadoras*), which covers 90% of the cost of childcare for children under four at childcare centers.<sup>23</sup>

The north is richer overall than the south, and there is a great disparity of wealth and income between these two regions. Salaries are nearly three times as high in the north,<sup>24</sup> and most people living there have easier access to industrial clusters, healthcare facilities, education, and therefore a higher standard of living. The rural south tends to be somewhat less developed, and agriculture remains the dominant employment sector. The south has a much larger informal economy, defined as economic activities that do not adhere to a country's laws and regulations,<sup>25</sup> so those who work in it do not have access to government benefits. In rural Mexico only 28% of households are middle class, compared to over 50% of urban households.<sup>26</sup>

Today, more than three-quarters of Mexico's people live in cities.<sup>27</sup> With a population of 20 million people—which is expected to increase to 25 million in 2025—Mexico City ranks third worldwide in population.<sup>28</sup> Almost half of all urban residents in Mexico are members of the middle class, whereas in rural areas this figure is approximately one-quarter.<sup>29</sup> This helps women, as there are more economic opportunities for women in urban areas than in rural Mexico, where traditional gender roles still prevail.<sup>30</sup>

## The Mexican Constitution Includes a Broad Range of Civil and Labor Rights for its Citizens

Mexico, or *Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, has been a Federal Republic since 1824.<sup>31</sup> The government is heavily influenced by US constitutional law theory.<sup>32</sup> Mexico's president is elected by direct popular vote for one six-year term. The Chamber of Deputies, *Cámara de Diputados*, consists of 500 members elected for three-year terms, while the Senate, *Cámara de Senadores*, has 200 members elected for six-year terms.<sup>33</sup>

In 2002, Mexico's Supreme Court ruled that a gender quota law for elections mandating that at least 30% of the candidates must be women was constitutional; it also ruled that women must appear in at least one of every three spots in the first nine spots on a list of candidates. There is legal enforcement of these quotas.<sup>34</sup>

*Since quotas were introduced in 2002, the share of candidates and elected officials who are women has risen from 16% in 2000 to 23% in 2003.*<sup>35</sup>

## A Gender Gap Persists for Women in Politics

Mexico ratified the "UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women" (CEDAW) in 1981 and has passed various laws to establish gender equality, including Article 4 of the Constitution, which states that men and women are equal under the law.<sup>36</sup> The Chamber of Deputies and the Senate have established an Equality and Gender Commission.<sup>37</sup> Currently women occupy one-quarter of all parliamentary positions, which is a higher proportion than in the United States. Josefina Vázquez

Mota was the first woman from a major party to run for president in 2012, and she has served as leader of the conservative National Action Party (PAN) in the Chamber of Deputies.<sup>38</sup> Yet while quotas and laws have helped women gain equality in politics, they still have a ways to go to close the gender gap.

## By 2050, Mexico Will Be One of the 10 Largest Economies in the World<sup>39</sup>

Mexico's free-market economy is the second largest in Latin America and is dominated by the private sector. The economy is made up of a mixture of modern and outmoded industry as well as agriculture. In 2012, Mexico's GDP was \$1.8 trillion.<sup>40</sup> Due to the global recession, its GDP growth was 3.9% in 2012, compared to 6.6% in 2000.<sup>41</sup>

*The economic and political reforms of the late 1990s, as well as high creditworthiness and membership in the OECD, are all contributing to Mexico's growing economy.*<sup>42</sup>

Once dominated by oil exports and agriculture, Mexico's economy is now dominated by manufacturing. The main industries include food/beverage, tobacco, chemicals, iron and steel, petroleum, mining, textiles, clothing, motor vehicles, consumer durables, and tourism.<sup>43</sup> The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which was in power for over 70 years, used tariffs and subsidies to actively promote domestic industries. State-owned enterprises controlled such varied sectors as telecommunications and sugar. The effects of these monopolies included overpriced goods, inefficient policies, and a culture of corruption. Today, after reforms, Mexico is considered one of the "most open and globalized economies in the world."<sup>44</sup>

Mexico has free-trade agreements with over 40 nations, more than either China or Brazil, and has begun taking a larger role in the global manufacturing market due to rising transport and wage costs in the Chinese markets.<sup>45</sup>

*Mexico's economic transition from commodities and agriculture to services and manufacturing is outpacing other emerging markets including China, India, and Russia.*<sup>46</sup>

## The North American Free Trade Agreement Resulted in Advantages and Disadvantages

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect in 1994 and resulted in not only a tripling of trade between Mexico and the United States and Canada, but also an increase in women working outside of the home.<sup>47</sup> In addition, NAFTA lowered the prices of many goods, so a salary could go further and allow for more accumulation of wealth, which helped grow the middle class.<sup>48</sup>

With the passing of NAFTA, more attention has been paid not only to working conditions in general, but gender issues in particular. Mexico's *maquiladoras* (manufacturing and assembly facilities) have been cited for gender-based discrimination by many international organizations.<sup>49</sup>

Unfortunately, the passage of NAFTA has also led to a "flood" of workers into the unorganized work sector, where more than one-third of jobs were created, leading to declining wages.<sup>50</sup>

## Family Run Businesses Are at the Core of the Mexican Economy

For much of Mexico's history, family-owned businesses have played a central role.<sup>51</sup> An estimated 95% of Mexican companies are family-owned and run.<sup>52</sup> When the economy was deregulated in the 1990s, Mexico's markets opened and more multinationals bought up family firms.<sup>53</sup> However, approximately 80% of the companies listed on the country's main benchmark index, the *Índice de Precios y Cotizaciones (IPC)*, are still owned by individuals or families.<sup>54</sup>

The strength of these businesses comes from Mexico's family centered society, in which there is a belief that only family can be trusted.<sup>55</sup> And while family-owned businesses provide many opportunities for women, men tend to hold the management roles.<sup>56</sup> Family-owned businesses also present other problems, such as limited talent supply and management-entrenchment issues.<sup>57</sup> There are next-generation employees in family-owned businesses who are taking courses on conflict resolution and "familism" in an attempt to prune unproductive family members off the payroll.<sup>58</sup>

## Mexico Is an Emerging Middle-Class Country

Historically Mexico has been a poor country with no middle class. Only 50 years ago, 80% of Mexicans were living in poverty.<sup>59</sup> Because there is no international consensus to statistically define the middle class, there is room for debate as to whether Mexico now qualifies as a middle-class country.<sup>60</sup> In Mexico, the middle class is defined not only by income, but also by its desire for social mobility and advancement, type of employment (often within the services sector), and rental or home ownership.<sup>61</sup> The middle class also tends to have a

positive worldview and prefers economic stability. This has led to a rise of independent voters who do not identify with any one political party, as they see “stability as a precondition to change rather than a means to preserve the status quo.”<sup>62</sup>

The *Instituto Nacional De Estadística Y Geografía* defined 12.3 million households and 44 million people as middle class. Three-quarters of these live in urban areas.<sup>63</sup> Although poverty is still very widespread, the majority of Mexicans, due to the emerging middle class and rising GDP, are no longer living in extreme poverty. But like other emerging markets, Mexico’s middle class relies on the collaboration of family. Families do not attain middle-class status by increasing the earnings of just one individual or one couple, but instead by combining the incomes of several family members.<sup>64</sup> Economically, Mexico’s middle class includes a wide range of incomes, with the highest salaries up to ten times greater than the lowest salaries.<sup>65</sup>

However, there is very little class mobility in Mexico. Women tend to be more socially mobile than men, both upwardly and downwardly, but the richest and poorest segments of the population tend to remain in the socioeconomic groups they were born into. This impacts not only individual Mexicans, but the entire economy, as Mexico’s overall lack of mobility diminishes productivity, motivation, and innovation, and even stalls economic growth.<sup>66</sup>

Education is the single most important factor influencing mobility, and children whose families have the resources to send them to private schools fare better than those who don’t.<sup>67</sup> It is therefore very important for Mexico to keep investing in and improving its education system.

## Mexico Has a Very Large Working-Age Population

Mexico’s population skews young: the median age is 27 years old, with over 65% of the population between 15 and 64 years old.<sup>68</sup> Just 7% of Mexico’s population is over the age of 65.<sup>69</sup>

However, the country’s demographics are shifting. Effective campaigns have curbed population growth, and now working-age people have fewer dependents (children or elderly parents).<sup>70</sup> As the middle class attains a better standard of living and increases its wealth, more women are joining the labor force.<sup>71</sup>

Reports have shown that with the recent recession in the United States, immigration is at a net zero as an equal number of Mexicans are entering and returning from the United States.<sup>72</sup> Mexicans working primarily in the United States sent home \$23 billion to their families. This is the world’s biggest influx of foreign currency (larger even than tourism).<sup>73</sup>

While Mexico’s smaller family sizes are helping to produce a demographic dividend, in order for this to pay off in the long-term Mexico needs to “invest in education and training” to increase the productivity of the working population.<sup>74</sup> Although women’s labor-force participation has made gains, women’s employment rate in Mexico is still one of the lowest of all OECD countries, well below the OECD average of 60%.<sup>75</sup> This gender gap is one of the barriers to the continued growth of Mexico’s economy.

## Traditional Gender Roles Predominate and Play an Important Role in Women's Lives

*Machismo* and the lesser-known *marianismo* divide women and men into strictly defined gender roles. *Machismo* has been described as “the cult of virility,” which is characterized by exaggerated aggressiveness, with man’s role as the unquestioned, absolute head of the family.<sup>76</sup> While *marianismo* may be less understood, it is just as prevalent. It has been called a “cult of feminine spiritual superiority” and is the belief that women are “semi-divine, morally superior to and spiritually stronger than men.”<sup>77</sup> In *marianismo*, a woman is hyperfeminine, putting the needs of her husband and family ahead of her own.<sup>78</sup> The cultural influence of *marianismo* means that women who have children are often seen first as mothers by their employers, who “respect the sacredness of motherhood.”<sup>79</sup>

Motherhood is the single biggest hurdle for women’s participation in the workforce, with two-thirds of working women having at least one child.<sup>80</sup> The more educated mothers have a greater commitment to remaining active in the labor force—more than 50% of mothers with some tertiary education were economically active, compared to 31% those who had not finished elementary school and 27% with less education than that.<sup>81</sup>

As more women enter the workforce, some of these gender stereotypes have started to break down. In a 1995 UNAM (*Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*) opinion poll, half of all respondents believed husbands and wives should both help with childcare and household duties. Even so, when it comes to voting, three out of 10 women ask permission or inform their husband, partner, or relative of their choice, while over 40% ask permission to go out alone in the evening, and nearly one-quarter ask permission before spending money.<sup>82</sup>

## Family Is the Foundation of Mexican Society

Mexico is family-centric. Divorce rates are low, though they have tripled since 1980 (from four to 14 divorces per 100 marriages).<sup>83</sup> Single-income families are more common than dual-income families.<sup>84</sup>

On average a woman’s age at the birth of her first child is 21, and younger mothers spend less time in the workforce.<sup>85</sup> The vast majority of parents are married at the time of their first child’s birth, but today couples average only two children, unlike the seven of the 1970s.<sup>86</sup> Even so, women typically spend 23% of their time caring for children.<sup>87</sup>

In Mexico in particular, women executives are much less likely to have children than women in the general population, and in fact women stated they understood that being a woman executive in Mexico meant most likely foregoing having a family.<sup>88</sup> Forty-nine percent of women executives are single (widowed, divorced, or never married), which is very high in a country where in some districts almost 70% of women over 25 are married.<sup>89</sup>

## Today, 45% of Women Work Outside the Home<sup>90</sup>

The role of women has been dramatically changing since the 1970s, when a woman’s role in the labor force only lasted until marriage. The emerging feminist movement helped make it culturally more acceptable for educated women to be career-focused and to stay in the workforce.<sup>91</sup> Increased education, lower fertility rates, and economic need are three factors that have contributed to the increase of women in the labor force.<sup>92</sup> The number of women working outside of the home has more than doubled over the last 30 years, and the number of dual-income households is also increasing, though it is still less common than in many other developing countries.<sup>93</sup>

However, the reality remains that there are nearly two men in the paid labor force for every woman.<sup>94</sup> This is unlikely to change soon, as there are many challenges for women entering the workforce, including a culture with traditional gender roles, a higher burden of unpaid work at home, and few family-friendly policies in the workplace to help promote their employment.<sup>95</sup> Married women in Mexico have the lowest labor force participation rate, at just over 32%, compared to married men at over 80%.<sup>96</sup>

The National Women's Institute, INMUJERES, created a program called the Gender Equity Model (GEM or *Modelo de equidad de género*) to acknowledge companies with best practices for increasing equal access and advancement opportunities for women. To participate in this voluntary program, firms begin with a self-analysis to pinpoint both discriminatory practices and gender gaps. All participants who request a Gender Equity Seal must undergo an external audit by an independent firm trained in the GEM process. By 2010, 305 Mexican organizations received a Gender Equity Seal, with over 60 new firms adopting the program yearly. The preliminary results show that GEM has been effective in reducing discriminatory recruiting practices toward pregnant women, reducing the gender pay gap, and increasing women's access to leadership positions.<sup>97</sup>

Working women tend to be employed in one of the service sectors, either commerce (38%), education and health (19%), or low-tech industries (11%).<sup>98</sup> Women tend to choose "nurturing" fields of study such as education, conforming to gender expectations, rather than working in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields, which pay better. In fact, there is some wage parity among technicians, while in all other categories of employment women earn between 64% and 96% of men's median salaries.<sup>99</sup>

Although Mexico has very progressive legislation and the Constitution guarantees fair pay and prohibits gender discrimination, often these laws are not enforced and women face discrimination in the workplace. Corporate Mexico generally has not been active in promoting gender equality.<sup>100</sup> The 2004

*National Survey on Discrimination in Mexico* found that close to 40% of men believe women should work in traditionally gender-appropriate jobs, 30% believe that it is right for men to earn more than women do, 22% said women are not capable of holding leadership positions, and 25% thought that women job applicants should be administered pregnancy tests.<sup>101</sup> Controlling for age, education, and marital status, women earn on average 89–96% of what men earn in the same role.<sup>102</sup> For professional women to reach parity, their salaries on average would need to be raised over 17%.<sup>103</sup>

*Mexican women struggle with the lack of fair-paying jobs, equal treatment before the law, and gender violence.*<sup>104</sup>

In one survey, corporate presidents stated the most important reason to hire women was to increase the talent pool, and the least important reason was to bolster a company's sense of social responsibility. In the same survey, presidents did not make the connection between the lack of women's advancement and their current company policies.<sup>105</sup> However, approximately one out of every five women in the labor force (formal and informal) has reported at least one incident of labor discrimination in the past twelve months.<sup>106</sup> In Mexico's *National Survey on Discrimination*, two out of 10 people surveyed reported that the biggest hurdles facing women are the lack of paid employment, followed by problems related to insecurity, abuse, harassment, mistreatment and violence, and discrimination.<sup>107</sup>

## Women in the Formal Labor Sector Receive 12 Weeks of Paid Maternity Leave<sup>108</sup>

It is illegal for employers to dismiss a pregnant employee, and pregnant employees are prohibited from working with heavy, dangerous, or toxic materials. Because these maternity regulations can be expensive for employers, some women are made to take pregnancy tests.<sup>109</sup>

Childcare can be costly for many families, and working women struggle to afford quality childcare.<sup>110</sup> In an effort to promote gender equity, President Felipe Calderon introduced *Estancias Infantiles para Apoyar a Madres Trabajadoras* (EI), which covers approximately 90% of childcare costs for children under four.<sup>111</sup> Unfortunately, just 6% of working mothers' children under three are cared for by these childcare services.<sup>112</sup>

According to a Mercer report, over 60% of Mexican workers surveyed stated that flexibility is very important to them, and over 70% stated that their organization provided flexible work options. Over 75% of Mexican workers stated that they believed they were able to maintain a balance between their work and personal lives.<sup>113</sup>

## Women Have Both Lower Labor-Force Participation Rates and Lower Numbers in Leadership Roles

Seventy-eight of the top 500 companies in Latin America in 2012 were located in Mexico.<sup>114</sup> There are only seven women CEOs across all Latin American companies, compared to 15 women country managers of foreign multinationals operating in Latin America.<sup>115</sup> According to companies covered by the GMI survey, less than 6% of Mexican corporate board seats belong to women.<sup>116</sup> Women hold 18% of senior management positions in corporations, while in the public sector they hold over 20% of those positions.<sup>117</sup> Like most countries, Mexico suffers from not only vertical segregation but also horizontal segregation, where 45% of women officers are human resources directors, and only 5% of them held management positions in production.<sup>118</sup>

Social hierarchy and harmony are important elements of Mexican culture, and organizations and employees tend to expect directive leadership and to avoid

conflict.<sup>119</sup> Additionally, the dominance of family and the societal norm of paternalism have influenced both management style and employee expectations. Traditionally, managers command respect and maintain a distance from their staff, while staff expect not only job security, but also to be individually supervised. In large organizations, employees want to be treated as members of their boss's extended family.<sup>120</sup> As more women have moved into management positions, they have helped contribute to a change of work culture characterized by more delegation and open communication.<sup>121</sup>

However, at present most professional women are excluded from important communications networks, and they perceive this as a barrier to advancement. This exclusion is even more apparent for women who do not have family-run business connections.<sup>122</sup> In addition, women report that the chauvinistic attitudes prevalent in the culture create obstacles, as do unsupportive corporate policies and the overall lack of opportunities.<sup>123</sup>

*Where family is central, Latin American professional women tend to focus more on the barriers created by work-family conflict instead of the gender discrimination that they encounter.*<sup>124</sup>

Mexican women have therefore organized to create their own networks. Some of the most important associations include Mexican Association of Executive Women (AMME) and the Association of Women Business Owners (AMMJE). AMME promotes professional development to further the advancement of women into leadership positions.<sup>125</sup>



## Children in Mexico Now Stay in School Longer Than Ever Before

Over the past decade, Mexico has made some of the largest increases in educational expenditure of any country, and the effort has paid off with improved literacy and public education. In 2001, the adult literacy rate was 91% for men and 90% for women. Today, over 96% of Mexicans between the ages of 8–14 can read and write.<sup>126</sup>

Many Mexican children finish primary school but drop out of secondary school to join the workforce. This is one of the biggest problems facing Mexico's government today, and despite increased expenditure, two million children do not have access to basic education.<sup>127</sup> Articles 3 and 31 of the Mexican Constitution, proposed in 2012 and still to be approved by congress, make secondary education compulsory, which would institute a total of nine years of mandatory schooling.<sup>128</sup> But for those who do stay in school, the educational system remains poor. Mexican students score lower on all tests for reading, math, and science than those in any other OECD nation.<sup>129</sup>

The number of Mexicans enrolled in higher education tripled between 1980 and 2009.<sup>130</sup> While half of all tertiary students are women, and women are earning slightly more degrees than men, they are not earning as many degrees in STEM fields.<sup>131</sup> In 2010, women earned only 28% of engineering, manufacturing, and construction degrees, and 46% of science degrees.<sup>132</sup> Of those women with degrees, 72% (aged 25-64) with a tertiary degree were employed.<sup>133</sup> But nearly 30% of Mexicans believe that university education is more important for boys than for girls.<sup>134</sup>

## Improvements in Mexico's Educational System Could Help Create More Opportunities

Mexico has many educational challenges. Secondary and tertiary educational achievement both rank lower than in most other OECD countries.<sup>135</sup> Approximately two-thirds of girls and one-third of boys between 15 and 17 years of age have completed their basic education.<sup>136</sup> Over one in 10 children do not attend school,<sup>137</sup> and only about 20% are expected to complete a university education in their lifetime.<sup>138</sup> Overall, young men feel a strong obligation to contribute to the family income by either entering the labor force in Mexico or crossing the border to find employment in the United States (55% of those crossing the border yearly are between the ages of 15 and 29 and without basic education).<sup>139</sup>

## While Mexico Is the First Latin American Member of the OECD, the Country Has Many Challenges to Overcome

Violence against women in Mexico is epidemic. The UN ranks Mexico as first in the world in sexual violence against women.<sup>140</sup> Since 1999 the government has implemented a series of initiatives to address gender violence in Mexico.<sup>141</sup> There are many societal factors contributing to gender violence, including the general acceptance of traditional gender roles, the unequal position of women in society, and the normative use of violence by police.<sup>142</sup> However, research conducted by Ipas revealed that Mexican women do not perceive sexual violence as a problem, and that close to 60% felt that women were somehow responsible, especially in cases of rape.<sup>143</sup>

## Monopolies Dominate the Visible Economic Landscape

Private and public monopolies dominate Mexico's economy and marketplace. Consumers tend to have only one or two brand choices for everything from phone service to bread to cement to beer to oil.<sup>144</sup> Monopolies hurt the working and middle classes the most, as individual Mexicans are forced to pay over 40% higher costs for basic goods.<sup>145</sup>

Weak competition is viewed as an obstacle to growth.<sup>146</sup> To strengthen its economy and workplaces, economists believe Mexico needs to focus on breaking up some of the country's monopolies. Doing so may lead to more disciplined management, reduced corporate expenditures, and increased employment.<sup>147</sup>

## Corruption Taints Business

Mexico City is ranked 15 out of 30 of the world's leading cities when it comes to ease of doing business.<sup>148</sup> Firms perceive the need to give "gifts" to public officials in order to "get things done."<sup>149</sup> Half of firms feel that corruption is a major business constraint, with another one-third of firms finding the court systems to be a challenge.<sup>150</sup> Bribes are common, for example to reduce taxes, secure government contracts, or obtain licenses, water and electrical connections, and permits for construction.<sup>151</sup> In an effort to reduce the amount of bribery and corruption among Mexico City's traffic cops, the male cops no longer have the authority to write traffic tickets, and have been replaced by an all-female traffic squad.<sup>152</sup>

## Mexico's Large Informal Economy Is a Hindrance to Economic Growth

The country's informal economy employs nearly one-third of the workforce.<sup>153</sup> Average earnings tend to be lower in the informal sector, and those who work in it do not qualify for social security benefits. Women are over-represented in this sector, especially in lower-paid jobs with little to no job security that put them in a position of greater economic vulnerability due to lack of access to social programs.<sup>154</sup>

## Insecurity and Drug-Related Violence Plague Mexico

For the first time in five years, Mexico's murder rate is starting to fall.<sup>155</sup> But insecurity and drug-related violence cost Mexico an estimated 1-1.5% of its national GDP.<sup>156</sup> Extortion, kidnapping, theft, assault, and murder inhibit economic growth, especially for small- and medium-sized companies that cannot afford to hire the private security necessary for maintaining basic business operations at all times.<sup>157</sup> A recent report from the National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence Against Women (CONAVIM) found that a rise in the murder rate of women correlated with the rise of violence in the drug trade. Between 2001 and 2010, the rate of murders of women grew by 500% in the northeast and 280% in the northwest, both areas with the highest incidence of drug-related violence.<sup>158</sup>

## Improving Women's Opportunities Is the Key to Mexico's Growth

Many of our assumptions about Mexico are no longer true. Mexico is moving slowly from a poor to a middle-class country, but the infrastructure, women's rights, and development have not kept pace. Nevertheless, the growth of women's labor force participation over the past decade has helped reduce poverty by 30% in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>159</sup> In fact, women's income was more than twice as effective as men's income as a factor in poverty reduction.<sup>160</sup> Working women from the growing middle class are also new consumers whose greater spending power helps keep Mexico's economy growing. Expanding women's work opportunities, improving women's ability to make life choices, and reducing the gender wage gap will help Mexico's continued economic growth, poverty reduction, and growing middle class.<sup>161</sup>

## AVAILABLE RESOURCES

### WOMEN'S INITIATIVES IN THE MEXICAN LABOR FORCE

The following Practices highlight some interesting initiatives for women in the labor force in Mexico.

- PepsiCo Mexico—*Promoting Gender Equity and Women's Leadership: Creating Inclusive Environments and Developing Female Talent*<sup>162</sup>
- BSR and Levi Strauss Foundation—*HERproject: Health Enables Returns Workplace Program for Women*<sup>163</sup>
- Avon Mexico—*Living a Vision for Women*<sup>164</sup>
- The Coca-Cola Company—*Global Women's Initiative: Women as the Real Drivers of the 21st Century*<sup>165</sup>
- Natura—*Fostering Innovation, Empowering Employees, and Developing Communities: Sustainability for Business and Society*<sup>166</sup>

### RELEVANT WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN MEXICO

- **Asociación Mexicana de Mujeres Empresarias** is an organization that works to unite, and support women entrepreneurs in Mexico.<sup>167</sup>
- **Women on the Border, Inc.** is a 501(c)3 nonprofit educational organization whose mission is to advance awareness about the conditions for workers and families in the *maquiladoras* at the Mexican border and to support the empowerment of working women.<sup>168</sup>
- **Modelo de Equidad de Genero** is a gender equity model to provide tools for private companies, public institutions, and social organizations to commit themselves to review their internal gender policies and practices, and to establish an equal work environment for both men and women.<sup>169</sup>

## Endnotes

1. Shannon K. O'Neil, *Mexico Makes It: A Transformed Society, Economy, and Government* (Council on Foreign Relations, March/April 2013); Instituto Nacional De Estadística y Geografía (INEGI), *Clases Medias en México* (2013).
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