Call for research proposals

The future of work in Latin America & the Caribbean

SURFUTURO

FutureWORKS
COLLECTIVE

Abstract

Sur Futuro is pleased to announce a call for research proposals in collaboration with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) through its FutureWORKS initiative. We are seeking innovative, rigorous, and impactful projects with a gender perspective that address the key challenges and opportunities shaping the Future of Work in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

Sur Futuro is a hub dedicated to cultivating and mobilizing knowledge to promote decent, productive, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable employment across the region. At the core of its mission is the generation of innovative, high-impact knowledge, the facilitation of interdisciplinary exchange and learning, the mobilization of policy recommendations, and the contextualization of debates within the Latin American reality.

In this call, the hub invites research centers from LAC to submit proposals for designing educational, labor, productive, and technological policies that promote quality employment in four sectors/occupational groups (a) jobs in science and technology, (b) platform-based jobs, (c) green and climate-resilient jobs, and (d) care economy jobs.

The call will consider research proposals from various disciplines and methodological perspectives that incorporate a gender approach in all aspects of the research work and include in the analysis groups that are disadvantaged in labor markets, such as women and gender diversities, youth, migrants, ethnic minorities, poor workers, and other vulnerable populations. Proposals that include a comparative perspective involving more than one country in the region will be particularly valued.

Research projects of up **to CAD 80,000 (Canadian dollars**) and a maximum duration of **18 months** will be considered for funding.

The deadline has been extended until May 10th (23:59 EDT). Applications can be submitted in English or Spanish. Proposals and documents detailed in section 8 must be sent to surfuturoconvocatorias2024@gmail.com before this date.

Applicants can write to this email if they have doubts or need more information.

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1.In search of modern jobs: towards a job-centered structural transformation in Latin America and the Caribbean

Across the world, labor markets are being disrupted by a set of global macro-trends.

Firstly, **digital transformation**—with Artificial Intelligence (AI) leading the way—enhances occupations intensive in digital skills while threatening the relevance of knowledge and expertise once highly demanded in the labor market. This holds for occupations involved in the design and testing of technological innovations—often found in dynamic sectors like Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and their intersection with the national innovation system—as well as for jobs throughout the economy enabling companies to update their processes and products.

New digital technologies also redefine labor relations in various aspects beyond demanded skills, such as social security mechanisms and worker representation. This, in turn, questions long established concepts like formality and informality. The "platformization" of labor relations is the most visible trend in this regard: it can operate as a mechanism to reduce representation and benefits in formal jobs but also has the potential to act as an entry point for the design of policies focusing, for example, on informal workers through what is known as e-formality.

A second transformation is related to the environment. Amidst the imperative to curb global warming and greenhouse gas emissions, societies must urgently embark on a **"green" transformation** that phases out the most polluting activities and amplifies sectors and activities with lower emission intensity. While desirable and necessary, this structural change toward environmentally sustainable economies has strong adverse implications for the vast labor markets associated with polluting activities in sectors as diverse as agriculture, mining, and industry. In addition to the labor challenges posed by the energy transition, another pressing issue is related to increasing the resilience of the occupations that are most affected by higher average temperatures and a greater frequency of climate shocks.

Thirdly, societies are aging. Changes in the population structure associated with the **demographic transition** lead countries from a stage where the active population is predominant (the "demographic bonus") to another where the passive population takes the lead. The extension of life expectancy in older adults, combined with a slower-than-expected reduction in fertility rates, enhances the increase in dependency rates. Such transformations have various implications for the labor market, one being the increase in demand for care services, from healthcare to domestic services. Many of these occupations, which are predominantly held by women, do not offer working conditions as favorable as others requiring similar education levels. Furthermore, when it comes to care tasks, many cases involve unremunerated work. The demand for care tasks could be further enhanced by another trend: the long-term increase in women's participation in the labor market, a trend that appears to have been reinvigorated in the post-pandemic era.

Structural change focused on the creation of productive and resilient occupations should aim to promote job creation in "future-oriented" sectors and occupational segments, as well as improve the quality of these jobs, considering both labor conditions and inclusivity.

From the perspective of the Latin American experience, this poses a significant challenge: in the past, countries in the region have struggled to update their labor markets and transition "old" or "traditional" jobs into "modern" or "future" jobs. Structural change in Latin America and the Caribbean has often been slow, with its benefits confined to socioeconomically advantaged groups at the expense of others with less influence in the public arena, such as women and other gender diversities, youth, migrant

populations, ethnic minorities, and poor workers. In light of ongoing trends, structural transformation in the region must focus on disadvantaged groups to narrow the substantial and persisting socioeconomic and gender gaps.

2. Themes and research questions

Sur Futuro, the hub representing IDRC's FutureWORKS initiative in LAC, is pleased to launch a call for research proposal aimed at designing educational, labor, productive, and technological policies that promote a structural change oriented towards the creation of productive, resilient, decent, inclusive, and sustainable employment —referred to hereafter as 'quality jobs'— in specific sectors/occupational groups:

- Jobs in Science and technology
- Platform-based jobs
- Green and climate-resilient jobs
- Care economy jobs

The following are examples of research questions and policy actions that can be addressed in research projects:

a.Jobs in Science and technology

- Which jobs can be considered resilient in the face of technological change trends? Which ones are necessary for the development and use of new digital technologies? Which ones are enhanced by complementing new technologies, and which ones are threatened by automation trends?
- To what extent are companies in Latin America and the Caribbean implementing new digital technologies in both general and sectoral business functions, and how does this impact tasks and occupations?
-To what extent are the governments of Latin America and the Caribbean implementing new digital technologies in general functions, and what are the impacts at the level of tasks and occupations of workers?
- How does the diffusion of new digital technologies affect the labor prospects of disadvantaged groups, particularly women and gender diversities, youth, migrants, ethnic minorities, and poor workers?
- What are the set of skills and knowledge required by workers in the region to leverage and enhance the use of new digital technologies in the economy?
-What should be the institutional design to promote the acquisition of these skills by workers, particularly for those belonging to disadvantaged socioeconomic groups (women and gender diversities, youth, individuals over 45 years old, migrants, ethnic minorities, and poor workers)? What role does public policy play in this regard? To what extent do the region's technical and vocational education and training systems incorporate these topics into their curricula?
- How can new digital technologies be adapted to reduce labor informality, particularly for women, youth, and other disadvantaged groups?
- What types of productive and innovation policies can redirect the diffusion of new digital technologies towards promoting quality employment, particularly for women, youth, individuals over 45 years old, and other disadvantaged groups?
- How can gender participation and wage gaps in the science and technology sectors be reversed?

b. Platform-based jobs

-To what extent are labor intermediation platforms disrupting the services sectors?
-What is the short and medium-term impact, both potential and effective, of platforms on labor participation rates, incomes, and working conditions of socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, such as women and gender diversities, youth, migrants, ethnic minorities, and poor workers?
-What should be the institutional design of labor intermediation platforms to promote the acquisition of skills and knowledge by workers, particularly those belonging to disadvantaged socioeconomic groups, such as women and gender diversities, youth, migrants, ethnic minorities, and poor workers? What role does public policy play in this regard?
-What is the appropriate regulatory and governance structure for labor intermediation platforms?
-What are the optimal strategies for data sharing and risk distribution to provide social protection benefits and insurance against microeconomic risks in labor intermediary platforms?
-How to design and implement mechanisms for worker representation in the ecosystem of labor intermediation platforms?

c. Green and climate-resilient jobs

-What are the impacts on the labor market of changes in average temperatures and increased frequency of climate disruptions in a business-as-usual scenario, particularly for disadvantaged socioeconomic groups such as women and gender diversities, youth, migrants, ethnic minorities, and poor workers?
-What is the potential for green job creation in Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly in countries specializing in natural resources? How are these jobs distributed among different socioeconomic, age, and gender groups?
-What skills and knowledge do workers in the region need to secure a green job and support the transition to a green economy?
-What should be the institutional design of labor intermediation platforms to promote the acquisition of skills and knowledge by workers, particularly those belonging to disadvantaged socioeconomic groups, such as women and gender diversities, youth, migrants, ethnic minorities, and poor workers? What role does public policy play in this regard? To what extent do the region's technical and vocational education and training systems incorporate these topics into their curricula?
-How to design mechanisms to promote the double transition of workers, from informality to formality, and from polluting sectors to green or neutral sectors?
-What types of productive and innovative policies can shape structural change to promote a "triple win" in terms of lower carbon emissions, better jobs, and greater gender equality?
-How can gender participation and wage gaps in the green economy be reversed?

d. Care economy jobs

-What activities and occupations does the care economy encompass, how prevalent are they in the region, and what are their general employment conditions?
-What is the impact of unpaid work on the well-being, GDP, and long-term growth sources of countries in the region?
-How are unpaid caregiving tasks distributed within households, and how can public policy promote a more equitable distribution of these tasks?
-What is the job creation potential resulting from aging and the expansion of associated sectors in LAC, particularly for socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, such as women and gender diversities, youth, migrants, ethnic minorities, and poor workers?
-What public policy strategies and employer incentives can be implemented to prioritize care-related jobs?

-What skills and knowledge do workers in the region need to promote decent employment in care-related labor markets?
-What should be the institutional design of labor intermediation platforms to promote the acquisition of skills and knowledge by workers, particularly those belonging to disadvantaged socioeconomic groups, such as women and gender diversities, youth, migrants, ethnic minorities, and poor workers? What role does public policy play in this regard? To what extent do the region's technical and vocational education and training systems incorporate these topics into their curricula?
-How to design better social protection mechanisms and worker representation in care-related sectors?

The questions are illustrative only. Applicans are encouraged to select the combination of questions or variants they deem most relevant to their proposal.

Applicants may choose to focus on one of the occupational groups or adopt a cross-cutting approach that addresses the same questions across several trends. For instance, they could identify strategic skills for transitioning to technology, addressing climate change, and engaging in the care economy, or they could quantify the gendered impact of all these trends.

3. Perspectives and Methods

The call welcomes research proposals from diverse disciplines and methodological approaches. This includes, but is not limited to, i.quantitative or qualitative analysis of the effects of different trends on labor markets, ii.impact evaluation of programs and interventions, iii. conducting surveys, iv.ethnographic studies, v.designing evidence-based tools and solutions, vi.analyzing specific policies and their potential scalability.

Research must address the topics at hand from a gender equality, equity, and inclusion perspective, as established in section 6a. Additionally, proposals should encompass the labor perspectives of disadvantaged groups, such as women and gender diversities, youth, migrants, ethnic minorities, and poor workers. Proposals with a comparative perspective involving more than one country in the region will be prioritized.

The projects should produce original insights about the challenges facing the region in the realm of the future of work. Additionally, they should explore the policy implications of the research findings and their potential scalability to other contexts within the region.

Selected institutions will be expected to produce a working paper suitable for peer review and publication in high-impact research journals as their primary output. They will also be required to develop other products as part of the project's learning, dissemination, and community engagement activities (see section 6b).

4. Eligibility criteria

Only proposals meeting the following criteria will be considered:

- Research projects must be conducted or led by a research-oriented institution with legal entity status in Latin America and the Caribbean. Eligible entities typically include research centers, universities, associations, civil society organizations, and non-profit organizations.

- Applicants must have independent legal status, meaning they possess legal personality or capacity to hire, receive, and manage funds, and implement proposed activities. Preselected institutions must demonstrate their legal status through relevant documentation.
- Research consortiums –applicants comprising two or more institutions– are eligible provided one of the members is designated as the lead institution, taking responsibility for complying with the agreement and managing the funds.
- Government entities at any level, large multilateral organizations such as the United Nations and its agencies, and for-profit companies commercializing products or services unrelated to research are ineligible for this call.
- Research proposals must be led by a researcher affiliated with the applicant institution, possessing a strong academic background in the research topic and experience in the study of public policies.
- The research team must include professionals with the necessary expertise to execute all project stages, ensuring a diverse composition that promotes inclusion and gender diversity (section 6a).
- Proposals must outline how they will promote and adopt the gender equality principles of IDRC (section 6a).
- Projects must be methodologically rigorous, original, and relevant, adhering to the quality standards described in section 5.
- Proposals must consider their relevance to public policy, clearly articulating the research justification and its potential implications for policymakers.
- The research proposal must explicitly adhere to the ethical standards outlined in section 6d.

5. Evaluation criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following dimensions of quality:

30% Research relevance

-Originality: Potential to advance theory and/or practice by generating novel insights into the Future of Work.
-Relevance: Alignment with the call's themes and the research questions outlined in sections 1 and 2.

30% Positioning for the use of research findings

-Engagement of policy makers and other relevant stakeholders: Strategy to establish meaningful, bidirectional connections that increase the likelihood of the research's use and impact on public policy within the academic and Sur Futuro community.
-Openness and actionability: Suitability of plans to share data and disseminate research results.

20% Scientific Rigor

-Consideration of existing knowledge regarding the Future of Work field and relevant regional specifics.
-Clear and explicit presentation of research questions, knowledge gaps, and proposed methodology.

20% Legitimacy of research

> -Ethical considerations: Clear identification and explicit mitigation plan for potential negative consequences of the research (see section 6d).
> -Gender Equality, Equity, and Inclusion: Comprehensive approach to the considerations outlined in section 6a.
> -Engagement with local knowledge: Contextualization of the research to the specific issues of the geographies under study, and appropriate definition of the scale at the community, national, regional, or global level.

For the final list of projects to be financed, additional criteria will be followed associated with the need to cover the heterogeneities present in the region in terms of patterns of productive specialization, levels of per capita income, stage in demographic transition, among others.

6. Expectations and responsibilities

Selected projects will be responsible for:

a.Implementation of Gender Equality and Inclusion (GEI) Principles

The integration of GEI considerations in all areas related to research proposals is essential to advance gender equality and sustainable development goals and increase the relevance, accountability, quality, and impact of work.

Sur Futuro expects research projects to incorporate a sensitive, transformative, and comprehensive approach to the gender, equity, and inclusion (GEI) agenda at every stage of the project. This includes several dimensions like research design and methodology, team composition, language usage, dissemination strategy, monitoring & evaluation, and learning considerations. Applicants are encouraged to consider the following dimensions of GEI and refer to this guide for more details:

- **Comprehensive approach to GEI**

Projects are expected to adopt a gender perspective or a transformative approach to it. Teams must promote equality and inclusion in all aspects of their work, including the internal ways of working, the implementation of the research project and the relationships with stakeholders, addressing inequalities based on identity, which can manifest in gender, sexuality, age, class, race, caste, ethnicity, citizenship status, religion, and ability.

- **Research design and methodology**

-Inclusive objectives and questions: Including GEI in the research design and methodology involves recognizing the different experiences, needs, obstacles, and strengths of workers of different genders, ages, migration statuses, or ethnic backgrounds, among others. The research objectives and questions should explicitly address the challenges arising from gender differences and other identity dimensions, or specifically refer to gender-related issues and identities.

-Inclusive methods: Proposing research methods that consider and include diverse perspectives and experiences in terms of gender, age, migration status, disability, race and other identities. Teams should also consider inclusive data generation strategies and, when data or methodologies do not allow it, mention this limitation in the methodological description of the proposal.

-Gender lens for data analysis: Data analysis must be conducted through a [gender lens](#) to ensure that the research findings are meaningful and relevant. For this, it is essential that the research includes a gender breakdown of the primary and secondary data used and analyzes the gender implications of its findings, regardless of the nature of the study.

- **Research team composition**

-Diversity: The project must be composed of individuals of different genders and consider diversity in other dimensions such as age and ability.

-Capacity strengthening: The research team will receive gender equality and inclusion training and opportunities for capacity building during the project from gender experts and the Sur Futuro coordination team.

- **Evaluation, dissemination, and learning**

-Integration of GEI principles and indicators in the monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) strategy: The MEL plan, to be developed with Sur Futuro support, should capture the impact on diverse groups of workers, taking into account their gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and other intersecting identities.

-Gender perspective in research outputs: It is important that the different research outputs and deliverables – including dissemination and awareness materials for different audiences – include the synthesis of research findings and recommendations with a GEI perspective and use an inclusive language.

b.Participation in Sur Futuro and FutureWORKS learning, dissemination and community activities

The projects funded through this Sur Futuro call will be part of the global [FutureWORKS](#) initiative. This program aims to support high-quality and impactful research on the future of work, as well as the creation of quality jobs, through a network of hubs covering the regions of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and Asia.

As members of the Sur Futuro and FutureWORKS network, research teams are expected to collaborate in peer learning activities, collective intelligence, and dissemination of findings organized by Sur Futuro. These activities include participating in interviews and virtual workshops for the discussion of ideas and recommendations, preparing dissemination materials such as blog articles and policy briefs, and sharing research findings through webinars and a digital platform aimed at interaction with the community interested in future work topics.

Additionally, it is recommended that applicant institutions include in their budget the expenses associated with a regional trip so that at least one team member or consortium member can participate in a face-to-face meeting to be held during a stage of the research process to be confirmed.

Throughout the research cycle, Sur Futuro will support research teams by connecting them with experts from the Advisory Committee and network members with expertise in various topics, as well as by

providing training on gender-focused research, ethical considerations, and other topics related to the research content. There will also be instances of monitoring, evaluation, and feedback, promoting a dynamic of continuous bilateral feedback.

c.Actions aimed at translating knowledge into the public policy sphere

A fundamental goal of Sur Futuro is to maximize the reach and impact of research. To achieve this, it is important to promote the generation of knowledge and specific policy solutions that are relevant to national, regional, and global development agendas.

Research proposals must include an impact strategy that delineates the specific knowledge gaps it will address, its relevance for policymakers, and an engagement strategy with the public sector and key actors, ideally throughout the entire research cycle. The research institutions are expected to leverage their dialogue channels with key public servants in at least one of the countries involved in the research. Sur Futuro will promote and facilitate the presentation and discussion of research results in international policy forums and with public sector stakeholders from other involved countries in the region.

In cases where the aim is to scale the impact of research, we encourage applicants to consult the Scaling Playbook and other IDRC materials focused on the science of scaling. These challenge the predominant paradigm of "more is better" and emphasize the multiple dimensions that need to be considered to achieve optimal impact scale in each specific case.

d.Ethical considerations

Sur Futuro will select research proposals that adhere to high ethical standards in line with IDRC's Principles of Institutional Research Ethics. The IDRC standard grant agreement further outlines applicable ethics standards.

e.Data management plan and open access policy

Research projects funded through this program must consider IDRC's Open Access Policy and IDRC's Open Data Principles Statement. Applicants must include a Stage 1 Data Management Plan using the template that can be downloaded here, among the annexes of their application, to explain the proposed strategy regarding research data.

7. Duration, scope, and funding

Sur Futuro will consider research projects with a budget of up to CAD 80,000 (Canadian Dollars) and a duration of up to 18 months including the results dissemination stage. It is important to note that we encourage the submission of proposals with more modest funding requirements when the project has a limited geographical scope, a less intensive methodological approach, no need for primary data generation, or minimal resource mobilization.

The budget must be strictly related to the project's needs and include all necessary resources throughout the research cycle. This includes data collection, participation in stipulated community activities, and presentation of results and dissemination material. The selection Committee might suggest modifications to the proposal or budgetary adjustments, leading to a final version that is agreed upon by Sur Futuro and the project leads. In-kind support or project co-financing is allowed, though are not mandatory.

The budget template can be downloaded here. It must be completed in Canadian Dollars and submitted as an annex when applying to the call.

8. Application and review process

Sur Futuro invites eligible organizations to submit their proposal and the supporting documents listed in this section to surfuturoconvocatorias2024@gmail.com, before **May 10th (23:59 EDT)**. Receipt confirmations will be sent to those submitting their complete application before the deadline.

Research proposals will undergo review by a selection committee comprised of professionals and subject experts, based on the criteria outlined in this call. During the selection process, there may be conversations with the research team leaders, and a revised version of the proposal may be requested. The selected projects will be publicly announced after the final application and the requested institutional documents have been reviewed.

The research proposal should be presented in a single PDF document, containing between 5,000 and 10,000 words, written in either Spanish or English. We recommend including the following sections and specifications:

- **Cover Page:** proposal title, institution or institutions comprising the consortium, and summary.
- **Technical Specifications:** lead institution (and participating institutions in the case of a consortium), contact details of institutional focal point, contact details of research project leader, and names, affiliations, and roles of the team members involved in the project. Mini-bios can be included for each team member.
- **Research justification and objectives**, including their relevance for public policy.
- **Methodology, data sources, and gender methodological approach of the study**
- **Expected Research Results**
- **Dissemination and public policy incidence strategy**
- **Comprehensive Gender Equality, Equity, and Inclusion Strategy**

Annexes:

- Brief CV (no more than 2 pages) of principal investigator and main research team members. These should be compiled in a single PDF document.
- Sample of principal investigator's work demonstrating the capacity to carry out rigorous research on the topic (no more than three documents, preferably as hyperlinks).
- Stage 1 Data Management Plan template (downloaded at the end of the linked page).
- Budget form (to be completed in Canadian Dollars) indicating the budget breakdown.
- Applicants are requested to send all documents as attachments in a single email, copying all individuals who need to be notified in case the proposal is preselected.

Applicants can write to surfuturoconvocatorias2024@gmail.com if they have doubts or need more information.