



# EMPOW(H)ER™

## DURING TIMES OF CRISIS



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## ABOUT THE HISPANIC ASSOCIATION ON CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

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Founded in 1986, the Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility (HACR) is one of the most influential advocacy organizations in the nation representing 14 national Hispanic organizations in the United States and Puerto Rico. Our mission is to advance the inclusion of Hispanics in Corporate America at a level commensurate with our economic contributions.

Collectively, HACR Coalition Members reflect the voice of more than 60 million Hispanics living in the United States and Puerto Rico, serving those diverse communities through advocacy, education, representation, assistance, capacity building, public policy support, resource development, and the exertion of political influence.


HACR's work is possible thanks to the generous support of its Corporate Members, which includes some of the largest companies in the United States. Together, the Coalition Members and Corporate Members provide HACR with the resources needed to achieve its mission.

## ABOUT THE HACR RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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The HACR Research Institute (HRI) is the research arm of HACR and is devoted to objective research, analysis, and publication of Hispanic-related issues in Corporate America. The goal of the HRI is to assess current Hispanic trends and stimulate discussion on Hispanic inclusion.

Through the HRI, HACR publishes annual studies on the state of the Hispanic community and corporate best practices in Employment, Procurement, Philanthropy, and Governance along with the HACR Corporate Inclusion Index. The research institute also publishes the Corporate Governance Study, the *Empow(h)er™: Understanding Workplace Barriers for Latinas* report, and other independent studies conducted internally and through partnerships with leading advocacy organizations.



## INTRODUCTION LETTER FROM CID WILSON



On behalf of the Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility (HACR) board of directors and staff, I am pleased to present the *Empow(h)er™ During Times of Crisis* white paper. Since our founding in 1986, HACR has remained one of the most influential advocacy organizations in the nation. Through our programs and research institute we move the needle for Hispanic inclusion in Corporate America. Through partnership with our Coalition Members and our Corporate Members, we have made strides growing the number of Latinos on boards, strengthening the pipeline of Hispanics rising into the C-suite, educating companies on procurement with Hispanic-owned businesses, and increasing corporate philanthropic efforts for the Hispanic community.

In May 2019, HACR launched the Latina Empow(h)er™ Initiative to gain a deeper understanding of the obstacles Latinas face regarding career progression and representation in Corporate America. Over the next five months, the HACR Research Institute (HRI) compiled data from a survey of over 500 professionals and interviews with over a dozen professional women. In March 2020, we released the *Empow(h)er™: Understanding Workplace Barriers for Latinas* report, which dives deep into Latinas' day-to-day workplace experiences and uncovers how high-ranking Latinas have advanced their careers.

The *Empow(h)er™ During Times of Crisis* white paper is a follow-up to that report. 2020 presented tremendous challenges for all Americans, particularly for women and people of color. The Latina community has been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing the long road ahead to ensuring that Latinas are included, integrated, and have access to resources in Corporate America during times of crisis and beyond. The purpose of this white paper is twofold: to explore the inequitable access to corporate resource communication networks, and to present clearly defined actions companies can take to build equitable systems that withstand crisis.

I commend the work of Alida Minkel, HACR's data analytics manager, and the HACR Research Institute for their detailed research and findings that came from the meticulous work they have done on both this white paper and its parent report. We sincerely hope you find the insights and actions outlined in this paper to be useful.

We welcome your feedback and thank you for your continued partnership in advancing Hispanic inclusion in Corporate America.

Sincerely,

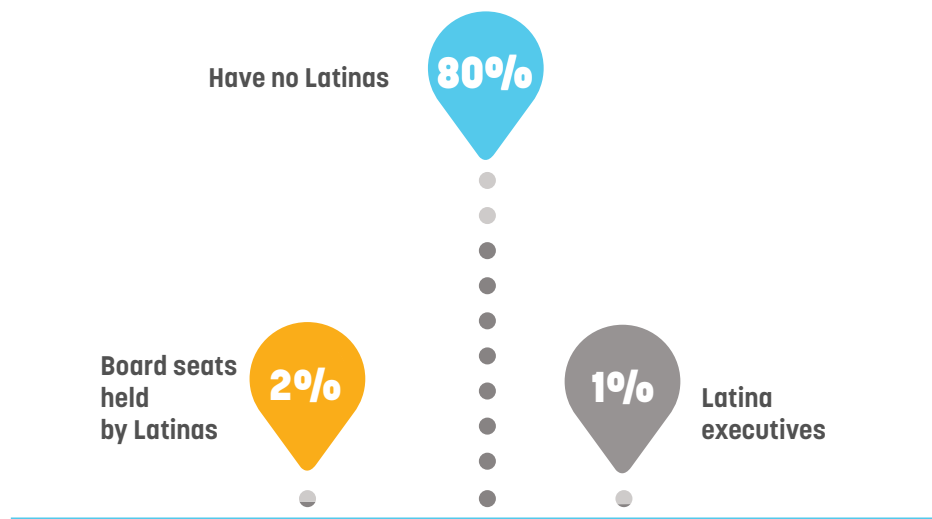
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cid Wilson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Cid D. Wilson  
President & CEO of HACR

# INTRODUCTION

More than 18 percent of the United States population is of Hispanic descent, with projections indicating that Latinas specifically will represent more than one-third of the U.S. female population by 2060.<sup>1,2</sup> U.S. Latinas possess a number of uniquely valuable skills for

today's business market, including the ability to navigate between cultures, entrepreneurial drive,<sup>3</sup> and, for many, bilingualism. Taken together, these qualities make Latinas<sup>4</sup> an invaluable talent pool for Corporate America and position them well for leadership roles.



Despite the competitive advantage Latinas bring to Corporate America, they account for just over one percent of executives and hold, on average, just two percent of all corporate board seats.<sup>5</sup> The events of 2020 have illustrated that despite the progress made in recent decades, Corporate America still has much work to do to dismantle the policies, practices, and norms that reproduce systemic inequalities, which are particularly salient for women and people of color.

These inequitable outcomes should compel companies to question their fundamental beliefs about the efficacy of their diversity and inclusion practices, especially when it comes to communicating the availability of resources. In what follows, we will explore the inequitable access to corporate resource communication networks and lay out four essential actions companies can take to ensure they are building equitable systems that can withstand crisis.

<sup>1</sup> United States Census Bureau. 2017. 2017 National Population Projections Tables. Washington, DC: United States Census Bureau.

<sup>2</sup> White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics. 2015. FULFILLING AMERICA'S FUTURE: LATINAS IN THE U.S., 2015. Washington, DC: White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Although the terms "Hispanic" and "Latino/a" often have distinct meanings, in this paper we use the terms interchangeably.

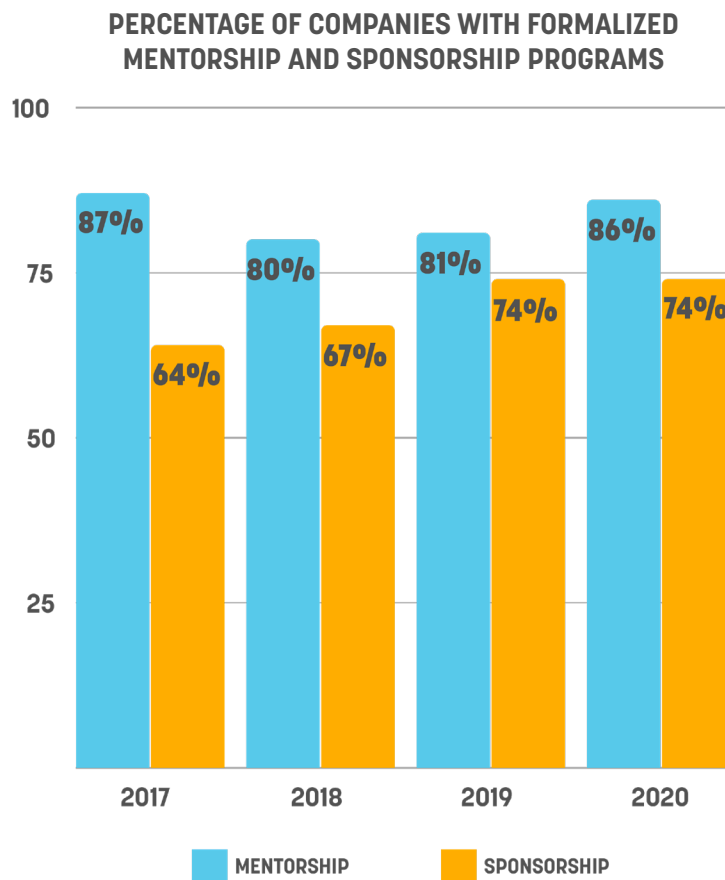
<sup>5</sup> Eric, Lopez, Minkel, Alida, and Roxana Vergara. 2020. 2020 HACR Corporate Inclusion Index. Washington, DC: Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility.

## HOMOPHILY AND COMMUNICATION

The world has changed significantly since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has changed the way we see and participate in the world, both at an individual and organizational level. The pandemic and social events of 2020 have been psychologically, socially, and economically challenging for many people. It's not that companies haven't been offering more employee resources since the start of the pandemic. In fact, many companies have expanded paid leave policies, trainings to help managers support employee needs, tools to help employees work remotely, and services related to mental health support. Although 97

percent of companies reported communicating mental health resources throughout the pandemic, however, only half of employees reported knowing these benefits are available.<sup>6</sup> Data from before the COVID-19 pandemic also reflects this gap in resource communication.

In the *2020 HACR Corporate Inclusion Index* report, 86 percent of companies reported having formalized mentorship programs, while 74 percent reported having formalized sponsorship programs.<sup>7</sup> These percentages have not changed much over the last four years.



<sup>6</sup> Thomas, Rachel, Marianne Cooper, Ph.D., Gina Cardazzone, Ph.D., Kate Urban, Ali Bohrer, Madison Long, Lareina Yee, Alexis Krivkovich, Jess Huang, Sara Prince, Ankur Kumar, and Sarah Coury. 2020. *Women in the Workplace 2020*. McKinsey Global Institute.

<sup>7</sup> Eric, Lopez, Minkel, Alida, and Roxana Vergara. 2020. *2020 HACR Corporate Inclusion Index*. Washington, DC: Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility.

After all, many companies have long understood the importance of mentorship and sponsorship in propelling individuals through the professional pipeline, especially Latinas and women of color. Yet, data from the 2020 HACR *Empow(h)er™* report found that of the 48 percent of participants who did not take part in their company's structured

mentoring program, 25 percent said they did not participate because they were unaware such programs even existed. Similarly, of the 71 percent of participants who did not take part in their company's structured sponsorship program, 45 percent said they did not participate because they were unaware such a program existed at their organization.<sup>8</sup>

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### Of those that did not participate in their company's structured mentorship program



*Did not participate because they were not aware it existed*

### Of those that did not participate in their company's structured sponsorship program



*Did not participate because they were not aware it existed*

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This data is reflective of an ironic problem that arises as an organization becomes more diverse. A 2018 study showed that although organizational homophily<sup>9</sup> places underrepresented groups at a disadvantage by restricting their ability to establish connections with “a majority group or to access novel information,” increased diversity

can negatively impact the effectiveness of an organization's lines of communication by increasing the number of points along the communication line.<sup>10</sup> That is, the more dissimilar (diverse) the groups, the greater the time it takes for information to be shared along the line of communication.

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<sup>8</sup> Garcia, Ph.D., Lisette, and Alida Minkel. 2020. *Empow(h)er™: Understanding Workplace Barriers for Latinas*. Washington, DC: Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility

<sup>9</sup> Homophily is the principle that individuals tend to associate with those who share similar characteristics. In other words, the more similar two individuals are, the more likely they are to form a social connection. (McPherson, Miller, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and James M. Cook. 2001. “Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 27(1):415–44.)

<sup>10</sup> Karimi, Fariba, Mathieu Génois, Claudia Wagner, Philipp Singer, and Markus Strohmaier. 2018. “Homophily Influences Ranking of Minorities in Social Networks.” *Scientific Reports* 8(1):1–12.

Men and women are frequently segregated by industry and occupation, resulting in more gender homophilous workplace networks for men than women.<sup>11</sup> This is particularly true in organizations where the majority of employees are men, making women more likely to feel alienated and excluded from social and resource networks that are critical to career progression. What's more, ethnic and racial homophily continues to be the most ubiquitous divide in U.S. social networks, with individuals significantly more likely to have personal and professional confidants of the same ethnicity or race as themselves.<sup>12</sup> Workplace homophily hampers an underrepresented group's ability to access resources, information about new opportunities, and their ability to collaborate effectively. As women and as ethnic minorities, Latinas occupy two underrepresented identities. They therefore encounter additional degrees of "difference" that impact the effectiveness of an organization's lines of communication to them.

Ensuring that resources and opportunities are communicated effectively to the employees who would most benefit from them requires that organizations understand the intersectional spaces those employees occupy. The importance of intersectionality becomes especially salient during times of

crisis. First coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality aims to illuminate the converging causal factors of discrimination and inequality. Intersectional analysis on gender, for example, holds that gender cannot be understood in isolation from other identity categories of inequality such as race, class, and ethnicity, to name a few.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, to understand the mechanisms that reproduce the subjugation of some groups over others, they must be looked at through an intersectional lens. For Corporate America, taking an intersectional approach to the application and evaluation of diversity and inclusion policies and resource access can give organizations greater insight into their employees and how they are being impacted (for example, who loses jobs during times of crisis).

All organizations, no matter how well intentioned, have inequality regimes – they all have interrelated practices, policies, and processes that create and maintain gender, class, and racial inequalities.<sup>14</sup> Taking an intersectional approach to understanding and dismantling these regimes will help companies not just change the makeup, but the *form* of their organizations as well. You cannot change one without also changing the other.

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<sup>11</sup> McPherson, Miller, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and James M. Cook. 2001. "Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27(1):415–44.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989(1):31.

<sup>14</sup> Acker, Joan. 2006. "Inequality Regimes: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations." *Gender & Society* 20(4):441–64.



## FOUR ESSENTIAL ACTIONS

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In the case of ineffective communication lines, taking an intersectional approach will spotlight the underlying issues. The events of 2020 have reversed much of the progress made toward gender parity in recent years. The pandemic has led to women leaving the workforce in droves. Women have lost more than 5.4 million net jobs between February 2020 and December 2020, accounting for 55 percent of overall net job loss since the start of the COVID-19

pandemic.<sup>15</sup> Women, especially Latinas and women of color, need to be made aware of the opportunities and resources available to them. There are four actions a company can take to improve the effectiveness of their resource communication networks and ensure they are building equitable systems and practices that can withstand crisis. Such systems are crucial to ensuring Latina talent is represented, supported, and seen in the workplace.

**1**

### Check Bias Behavior

**2**

### Middle Management Engagement is Vital

**3**

### Increase Access to Mentors & Sponsors

**4**

### Take an Intersectional Approach to Data Analysis

#### 1. Check Bias Behavior

Microaggressions. Confirmation bias. Attribution bias. Name bias. Perceptions about accents. These are just a few of the biases and challenges that Latinas may face every day, both in and out of the workplace. The biases we have help shape the reality around us. For example, the language we use to communicate with others can impact how we see those very people. For years, companies have implemented workplace programs and trainings

designed to combat bias, but many workplaces still struggle with bias-laden cultures. To mitigate the biases women and people of color are up against, companies must not only make sure that employees at all levels are aware of them, but they must also put processes in place to *actively* check them. Educating employees on how unconscious bias and homophily may be affecting how they communicate and *with whom* they communicate is vital.

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<sup>15</sup> Ewing-Nelson, Claire. 2021. *All of the Jobs Lost in December Were Women's Jobs*. Washington, DC: National Women's Law Center.

This training needs to occur on a consistent basis not just for entry level or high-potential employees, but also for the supervisors and middle managers who play a critical role in selecting such candidates.

In 2020, just one in four employees participated in unconscious bias training.<sup>16</sup> This is especially concerning since the pandemic has only amplified the biases women and people of color face. Many employees no longer have a personal space that is distinct from their professional space, and the pressure to conform to certain standards of behavior,

speech, and dress is no longer something they can let go of at home. Many women and people of color are increasingly feeling that they have nowhere to fully be themselves. Latina and black women have reported feeling that they now have the additional burden of managing their colleagues' perception of their personal spaces and lifestyles, forcing them to code-switch around the clock.<sup>17</sup> Now more than ever, companies must take the extra step of actively checking biases and putting resilient systems in place that alleviate the effect biases have on women and people of color.



## 2. Middle Management Engagement is Vital

There is extensive literature on the importance of getting executives invested in diversity and inclusion initiatives, and the key role they play in communicating the value of such initiatives. Getting executives on board with inclusive communication practices, however, is only

part of the picture. Middle management is also essential to the long-term success of diversity practices and resource communication strategies. Because middle management tends to focus on *executing* long-term strategy and growth, they are often rewarded for maintaining

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas, Rachel, Marianne Cooper, Ph.D., Gina Cardazone, Ph.D., Kate Urban, Ali Bohrer, Madison Long, Lareina Yee, Alexis Krivkovich, Jess Huang, Sara Prince, Ankur Kumar, and Sarah Coury. 2020. *Women in the Workplace 2020*. McKinsey Global Institute.

<sup>17</sup> Ekemezie, Chika. 2021. "Why It's Hard for People of Colour to Be Themselves at Work." *BBC*. Retrieved January 25, 2021 (<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20210119-why-its-hard-for-people-of-colour-to-be-themselves-at-work>).

the status quo. The stagnation of diversity and inclusion practices that often occurs at this level is felt by many employees, as evidenced in the *2019 HACR STEM Report*. Participants reported that although leaders at the upper levels of their company seemed to understand the importance of a diverse and inclusive workplace, this understanding had not filtered through all layers of middle management.

Since they play a crucial role in hiring, business development, and promotion decisions, engaging middle management is crucial. Research shows that the key to getting them engaged is by demonstrating that diversity and inclusion initiatives can contribute to other goals “such as increased capacity, better solutions for business challenges, employee engagement/ownership, [...] innovative ideas, reduced turnover, and the ability to

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***“There’s a lot of top management that support this diversity and inclusion” concept, and then, it’s kind of middle management where it starts to linger.***

**-Hispanic female, pharmaceuticals<sup>18</sup>**

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resolve complex business issues.”<sup>19</sup> That is, actively promoting diverse thinking at the middle management level will help those managers see that cultural differences are strengths that can positively impact business

outcomes. What’s more, middle management buy-in can improve the awareness and effectiveness of the many communication and bias training programs and resources that companies already invest so much into.

### **3. Increase Access to Mentors and Sponsors**

Make sure mentorship and sponsorship programs are accessible to employees at more levels. Data from the 2020 *Empow(h)er™* report found that of the 48 percent of participants who did not take part in their company’s structured mentorship program, 22 percent said they

didn’t participate because such programs were not offered at their level. Similarly, of the 71 percent that didn’t participate in their company’s structured sponsorship program, 37 percent said it was because it was not offered at their level.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Garcia, Ph.D., Lisette, and Eric Lopez. 2019. *2019 HACR STEM Report*. Washington, DC: Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility

<sup>19</sup> Tapia, Andrés. 2007. *Middle Managers: Engaging and Enrolling the Biggest Roadblock to Diversity and Inclusion*. New York, NY: The Conference Board.

<sup>20</sup> Garcia, Ph.D., Lisette, and Alida Minkel. 2020. *Empow(h)er™: Understanding Workplace Barriers for Latinas*. Washington, DC: Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility.

### Of those that did not participate in their company's structured mentorship program



*Did not participate because it was not offered at their level*

### Of those that did not participate in their company's structured sponsorship program



*Did not participate because it was not offered at their level*

Companies too often place the responsibility of mentorship and sponsorship opportunities on high-potential employees and not on the executives. After all, the executive has the power to open their doors and networks to individuals from underrepresented groups. Interestingly, many companies have ceased formalized sponsorship programs, “citing pushback from executives who feel they are being asked to advocate for people they don’t know well or don’t think are ready.”<sup>21</sup> Executive leaders need to leverage their own clout to not

just advocate for underrepresented groups, but to form meaningful relationships with them as peers. That is, effective mentorship and sponsorship programs require executives to look beyond their homophilous spaces to form relationships with high-potential employees outside of their own ethnic, racial, and gender identities. It also requires them to re-evaluate their own ideas of leadership and the value underrepresented groups can bring to the table.

## 4. Take an Intersectional Approach to Data Analysis

Finally, approach the tracking and evaluation of employee demographic data with intersectionality in mind. For example, although 42 percent of companies check for bias in reviews and promotions by gender, just 18 percent track outcomes for the intersecting biases of race *and* gender.<sup>22</sup>

Taking an intersectional approach to tracking employee data will help companies figure out where exactly the opportunities in their communication strategy lay. Are announcements of opportunities only sent to folks that are considered “high-potential” and not to a wide group of employees? How are

<sup>21</sup> Ibarra, Herminia. 2019. “A Lack of Sponsorship Is Keeping Women from Advancing into Leadership.” *Harvard Business Review*, August 19.

<sup>22</sup> Washington, Zuhairah, and Laura Morgan Roberts. 2019. “Women of Color Get Less Support at Work. Here’s How Managers Can Change That.” *Harvard Business Review*, March 4.

you identifying “high-potential” employees? Are these definitions based on norms that reinforce the status quo? Is communication about opportunities only reaching homophilous spaces that reinforce white male norms? If so, your diverse employees most likely will not be in those spaces, and if they are there, they may assume the opportunity is not for them.

Disparities in communication are amplified during times of crisis and can negatively impact who gets access to valuable resources. The COVID-19 recession is one of the most unequal recessions in U.S. history, having an overwhelmingly disproportionate impact on minority workers. Hispanics are almost twice as likely as their white counterparts to have lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 20 percent of Hispanic adults being furloughed or laid off compared to 11 percent of white adults.<sup>23</sup> This disparity is further amplified when evaluating how the COVID-19 pandemic affected Latinas.

Latinas initially experienced a steeper decline in employment due to COVID-19 than women or men in any other racial or ethnic group. One potential explanation for the disproportionate effect on Latinas is that they are more likely to be employed in the leisure and hospitality industry, an industry that was hit particularly

hard by the pandemic. According to the Pew Research Center, three industries – leisure and hospitality, education and health services, and retail trade – accounted for 59 percent of the total loss in non-farm jobs between February and May 2020.<sup>24</sup> This led to a disproportionate effect on women since these sectors also accounted for 47 percent of the jobs held by women, compared to just 28 percent for men.<sup>25</sup> These numbers improved little as the year progressed. Black and Latina women accounted for almost 140,000 job losses in December 2020 alone, with 9.1 percent of Latinas over the age of 20 remaining unemployed.<sup>26</sup>

The causes of these disparities, however, go much deeper than just differences in sector employment by gender. There are specific challenges that women face that make them more likely to be pushed out of the workforce during times of crisis. These challenges include lack of flexibility at work, increased housework and caregiving burdens, concerns that their performance is being negatively judged because of increased caregiving responsibilities, and discomfort communicating the challenges they face with managers and co-workers.<sup>27</sup> Latina mothers are 1.6 times more likely than their white counterparts to be responsible for all childcare and housework for their families.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Jan, Tracy and Scott Clement. 2020. “Hispanics are almost twice as likely as whites to have lost their jobs amid pandemic, poll finds.” *Washington Post*. Retrieved June 30, 2020 (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/05/06/layoffs-race-poll-coronavirus/>).

<sup>24</sup> Kochhar, Rakesh. 2020. “Hispanic women, immigrants, young adults, those with less education hit hardest by COVID-19 job losses.” *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved July 9, 2020. (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/09/hispanic-women-immigrants-young-adults-those-with-less-education-hit-hardest-by-covid-19-job-losses/>).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>26</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics. “Table A-3. Employment status of the Hispanic or Latino population by sex and age.” Washington, DC: Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved February 25, 2021 (<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t03.htm>).

<sup>27</sup> Thomas, Rachel, Marianne Cooper, Ph.D., Gina Cardazone, Ph.D., Kate Urban, Ali Bohrer, Madison Long, Lareina Yee, Alexis Krivkovich, Jess Huang, Sara Prince, Ankur Kumar, and Sarah Coury. 2020. *Women in the Workplace 2020*. McKinsey Global Institute.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*.

During times of crisis, it becomes especially important for companies to evaluate whether the resources and support tools they have available are being shared and promoted effectively within the spaces occupied by those who would most benefit from them. Only about a third of companies have asked managers to take specific steps to ensure that the work-life balance needs of parents are being met.<sup>29</sup> Companies should empower managers at all levels to take action to ease

the challenges being faced by their team members. Meaningful Latina inclusion in Corporate America demands that companies continuously evaluate the processes and systems they have in place to recruit, support, and retain Latina talent, and that such systems can remain resilient in times of crisis. This is only possible if companies first develop effective evaluation and tracking methods at every level of the professional pipeline.<sup>30</sup>

## CONCLUSION

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Intersectionality matters because it spotlights the underlying mechanisms that form the basis for all kinds of inequalities – inequalities of power, resources, and opportunity. The pandemic and civil unrest of 2020 have underscored how the workplace is often a venue for inequality regimes to thrive unless meaningful action is taken. Latinas are not a monolith. Understanding the intersectional spaces they occupy is critically important to dismantling the inequality regimes that disproportionality impact them and other underrepresented groups. Changing the makeup of the organization is only part of the picture. Structural change is needed too.

While much of the inequalities Latinas face have been well-documented from a

quantitative perspective, little research has been conducted that evaluates how these quantitative figures are impacted by their unique individual experiences. These experiences become even less understood during times of crisis. Companies can begin to impact change by taking an intersectional approach to the development and application of their diversity and inclusion practices, especially in the communication of resources and support. If companies truly want to continue diversifying their ranks at all levels, they need to build equitable systems that can withstand drastic change. The development of resilient equitable systems is essential to empowering Latinas in times of crisis and beyond.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> To learn more about the importance of tracking, read our blog post on the topic here: [https://www.blog.hacr.org/hri\\_blog/2019-hacr-cii-the-importance-of-tracking](https://www.blog.hacr.org/hri_blog/2019-hacr-cii-the-importance-of-tracking)

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**ALIDA MINKEL**  
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