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**4. Measuring time use and valuing unpaid work**

**Time distribution: a key element of the inequality analysis**

Note by ECLAC Division of Gender Affairs

*Abstract*

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the production structure, gender roles and family structures have reinforced the differences between men and women with respect to time distribution. As occurs with income, the lack of own time and of the ability to manage it freely is a significant contributor to gender inequality. In order to increase well-being and sustainable development, public policies must include time as a central element to guarantee a balance between time spent on domestic work, labour market and personal activities and to foster gender equality.

The Montevideo Strategy adopted by the governments at the thirteenth Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean highlights time-use surveys as essential data-generating tools which provide input for the design of equality policies. These surveys are the ideal information source for the analysis of gender inequality and for studies on the link between monetary poverty, income and time distribution and use. They are also very useful for national, regional and international comparison and for data on unpaid work and new labour statistics requirements (ILO, 2013). Nineteen countries in the region have already made at least one measurement on time use. However, existing time-use surveys are not comparable owing to the different methodologies used in terms of the objectives, collection process, classification of activities, geographical scope and ability to disaggregate data. Nonetheless, it is hoped that the adoption of the Classification of Time-Use Activities for Latin America and the Caribbean (CAUTAL) in 2015 will allow the region to move towards a common methodology and international comparability.

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The paper analyzes, thought time-use data, the dimensions of inequality in the region and how they interconnect. In addition, it presents a non-exhaustive research and recommendation agenda for public policies, highlighting the potential use of time-use and distribution data for equality policies from a gender perspective. Although some sectoral applications are suggested, it is important to establish inter-institutional and intersectoral coordination and synergies, and there is an urgent need for comprehensive policies, especially on redistributive measures aimed at working in a cross-cutting manner towards equality between men and women and the recognition of women's contributions to countries' growth, well-being and development.

## I. Time distribution: a key element of the inequality analysis

### Introduction

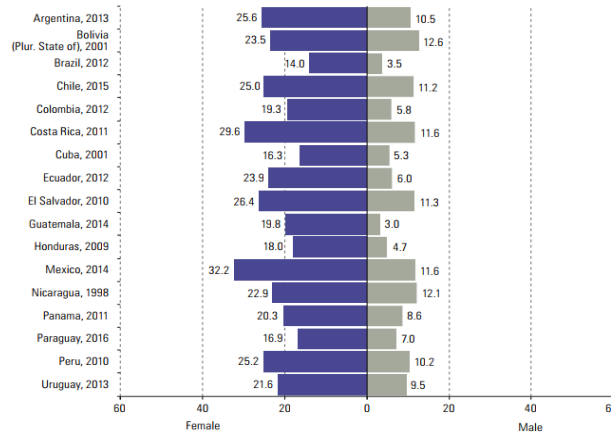
1. Time is a finite resource that people use in different ways depending on a number of sociocultural factors that reflect social structure, power relationships and the prevailing gender order, among other things. In the region, the current sexual division of labour operates as a restriction to use time freely and autonomously, resulting in a lack of own time for some people. As occurs with income, the lack of own time and of the ability to manage it freely is a significant contributor to gender inequality.
2. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the production structure, gender roles and family structures have reinforced the differences between men and women with respect to time distribution. This has led to inequalities in opportunities and outcomes for personal and professional development. In order to increase well-being and sustainable development, public policies must include time as a central element to guarantee better harmonization and balance between time spent on domestic, professional and personal activities. Just as the feminist movement's slogan "the personal is political" drew attention to domestic issues requiring public policies, advances in the region show that, now, **time is political**. It is essential to develop and implement public policies on the redistribution of time and work to foster gender equality and sustainable development (ECLAC, 2016a).

### A. Time distribution and inequality

3. Ongoing discussions about the care economy and the sustainability of human life —from the perspective of feminist economics— clearly show that much of what is produced and what sustains people is neither considered nor accounted for in traditional economics (Carrasco and Tello, 2013). Social inequality in the region is strongly determined by the production matrix and ownership structure, as well as other structural determinants —like the prevailing gender system— which in turn intersects with factors such as life cycle stages, area of residence, ethnicity and race (ECLAC, 2016b).
4. According to ECLAC (2016d), time use and the distribution of unpaid domestic work are a central element in the analysis of gender inequality. The achievement of women's autonomy depends heavily on the balanced distribution of unpaid domestic and care work between men and women, and between families, the market, the community and the State. For a complete and in-depth analysis of inequalities in Latin America and the Caribbean, more light must be shed on the distribution and use of time by men and women.

5. The Montevideo Strategy adopted in 2016 by the governments of the region at the thirteenth Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2016) highlights time-use surveys as essential data-generating tools which provide input for the design of equality policies. These surveys are the ideal information source for the analysis of gender inequality and for studies on the link between monetary poverty, income and time distribution and use. They are also very useful for national, regional and international comparison and for data on unpaid work and new labour statistics requirements (ILO, 2013). Nineteen countries in the region have already made at least one attempt to measure time use, mainly in the past 10 years. However, existing time-use surveys are not comparable owing to the different methodologies used in terms of the objectives, collection process, classification of activities, geographical scope and ability to disaggregate data. Nonetheless, it is hoped that the adoption of the Classification of Time-Use Activities for Latin America and the Caribbean (CAUTAL) in 2015 will allow the region to move towards a common methodology that allows international comparability.
6. The analysis of the dimensions of inequality and how they interconnect is fundamental to the design of public policies that would allow society to achieve sustainable development and the Goals set forth in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (ECLAC, 2016e, 2016f). Sustainable Development Goal indicator 5.4.1 (Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location) was proposed at the global level to monitor the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Although it is not one of the Sustainable Development Goal indicators that countries regularly produce (despite a clear concept and established methodology), the efforts of national statistical offices in Latin American to develop time-use measurement tools have made it possible to calculate this indicator in 17 countries, as shown in figure 1. According to these data, women in the region spend between one fifth and one third of their time each day or each week on unpaid domestic and care work, while men spend about 10% of their time on this work. Although indicator 5.4.1 offers a perspective of the situation at the national level, efforts should be made to shed light on the inequalities affecting specific groups, which are concealed by average figures.

**Figure 1**  
**Latin America (17 countries): time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex (Sustainable Development Goal indicator 5.4.1)**



**Source:** ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) (2017), Social Panorama of Latin America, 2016 (LC/PUB.2017/12-P), Santiago.

**Note:** Figures take into account time spent on domestic and care work in one's own household, in other households, in the community and volunteer work, except in the case of Brazil, where the survey asks only one question relating to domestic work in one's own household, and of Honduras, which includes only information on care for members of one's own household. The data correspond to the national total except for Costa Rica (Greater Metropolitan Area) and Cuba (Old Havana). The population examined was 15 years and older, except in Argentina (18 years and older) and Nicaragua (6 years and older).

7. Time distribution varies during a person's life cycle. However, there is a common thread which is the greater burden of unpaid domestic and care work for women, in particular during their reproductive years.
8. The division of public and private spaces for men and women occurs from a very early age. Although data from time-use surveys are not designed to measure child labour, they do shed light on the early construction of gender roles by showing that girl children and adolescents spend more time on unpaid work. They show notable differences which ranges from 6.6 to 15.2 hours per week for male children and adolescents, compared with 13.6 to 23.3 hours per week for girl children and adolescents, depending on the country. Data on how boys, girls and adolescents spend their time also allows the measurement of their well-being. They indicate that boys aged 18 and under spend two to seven hours per week more than girls in the same age group on social activities, including leisure, sports and recreational activities with family and friends across countries.
9. Data on time use by young people aged 15 to 29 who are not in education or employment helps break the stigma that they are inactive or unproductive members of society. On average, women who are not in education or employment spend at least 40 hours per week on unpaid domestic work, which means that they do work, but receive no compensation (ECLAC, 2016a).
10. Lastly, time-use data help to analyse the care that older persons provide and receive. Some surveys in the region (for example in Mexico and Uruguay) show the care provided to older

persons at home and take account of activities such as assistance with personal hygiene, feeding or medical care, including transportation to health centres, and support in the use of information technology. In households where older persons are present, women spend 18 hours per week caring for them, compared with 15 hours for men (ECLAC, 2017).

11. The data indicate that women aged 65 and older spend between 9.8 and 32.5 hours per week caring for members of their own or other households, generally younger generations, so that other women (daughters, daughters-in-law, nieces, neighbours) can be incorporated into the labour market. This is a clear example of the unequal distribution of time in old age. It also shows that the situation is worse for women who may not have been as active in the labour market during their adult lives and thus receive fewer social benefits relating to employment, which then results in greater difficulties for them to access care services. This is a perverse logic that deprives people of the very services that they provided to others throughout the course of their own lives (Gómez, 2008).

## B. The valuation of unpaid work and the System of National Accounts

12. Domestic and care work support societies and have a significant impact on countries' well-being and development potential. Nonetheless, the limited definition of the System of National Accounts (SNA) production boundary excludes the domestic and care services produced or consumed by members of a household from the central framework of macroeconomic analysis. This conceals the importance of these activities for the economy, and perpetuates economic and power relationships. Owing to the importance of national accounts in economic analysis, decision-making and policy formulation, the exclusion of these activities has repercussions for the distribution of resources and benefits stemming from that production. If this aspect of the economy is not recognized or its impact is not analysed, inequalities will persist or worsen.
13. The valuation of unpaid work in the framework of SNA provides a more precise measurement of what society produces (shedding light on a part of the economy that had remained hidden) and allows the contribution of this type of work to be incorporated into macroeconomic analysis and decision-making. Moreover, it aids the analysis of the interaction between the household and market economies. A revision of SNA carried out in 1993 introduced the possibility of adding satellite accounts to the central framework, in order to provide a comprehensive picture of a specific field of economic activity. This significantly expanded the analytical capacity of national accounting, without overburdening or disrupting the central system.
14. The countries that have determined the economic value of unpaid domestic work in the region have shown that this type of work represents 15.2% to 24.2% of GDP. In terms of the relative weight of men's and women's contributions to GDP, women contribute between 70% and 87%, depending on the country (figure 2).

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**Figure 2**  
**Latin America (8 countries): economic value of unpaid household work in relation to the national gross domestic product (GDP)**  
*(Percentages of GDP)*



**Source:** ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) (2016a), Equality and women's autonomy in the sustainable development agenda (LC/G.2686/Rev.1), Santiago.

<sup>a</sup> In this calculation the countries' governing bodies of the national accounts did not participate.

<sup>b</sup> Costa Rica Greater Metropolitan Area.

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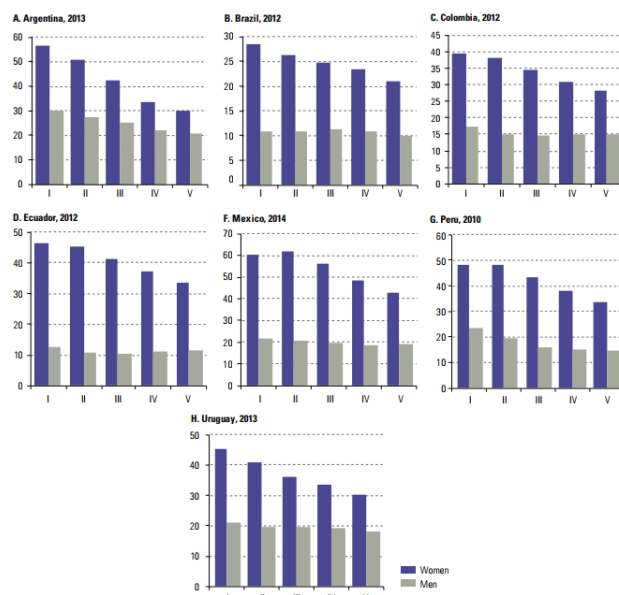
### C. The contribution of time-use data to equality policies

15. Today's apparently gender-neutral public policies disregard distribution of time as a fundamental resource for the social and economic well-being of people and society as a whole. The failure to recognize the contribution by both men and women to families' well-being and to sustainable development through unpaid work widens gaps and reproduces inequalities. States must address this problem through innovative public policies designed around time distribution and unpaid work and geared towards transforming the existing sexual division of labour.
16. Although some sectoral applications are suggested, it is important to establish inter-institutional and intersectoral coordination and synergies, and there is an urgent need for comprehensive policies, especially on redistributive measures aimed at working in a cross-cutting manner towards equality between men and women and the recognition of women's contributions to countries' growth, well-being and development.
17. Reach the Sustainable Development Goal 6 (Ensure access to water and sanitation for all) is key to reduce the burden of unpaid work, as it would decrease the time spent collecting water, a task often carried out by women and girls. Time-use data gleaned from surveys, for instance, generate empirical data for policies to expand water networks, sanitation and drinking water distribution. For example, in rural areas of Peru, data shows that 57.3% of women spend time fetching water, and in Guatemala women spend six hours per week on this activity, which is almost two hours more than men (ECLAC, 2017). Hence, policies that extend water networks sanitation and drinking water distribution could have a much larger impact than expected on gender equality and, in particular, reduce women's workload.
18. People's time distribution is closely linked to the organization of space in each territory: the harmonization of their activities is linked to the distances and means and conditions that exist to go over them, especially in the case of cities. (ECLAC, 2016e). Data on the time that

men and women spend each week commuting between home and work in the capital cities of five Latin American countries (Bogotá, Quito, Ciudad de México, Lima and Montevideo) shows that they spend one hour more than the national average on this activity. One measure that contributes to built cities with a better quality of life for both men and women is to plan spaces and define the morphology of the time-use of the urban services (for example, timetables, waiting times, attention and management of procedures or distances, among others), so that women and men can perform their daily care tasks for family members and paid work more easily and in a shorter time (Segovia, 2016).

19. Time-use indicators establish a link between unpaid work (for households) and paid work (for the market) as the amount of time spent on the first one limits the availability of time to perform the second. Time use by the employed population shows that people have double working days (paid and unpaid) and that women have a heavier overall workload in all countries (on the whole, they work 6 to 21 hours more than men each week). Women's overrepresentation in unpaid work and underrepresentation in paid work show the link between unpaid work and women's lesser engagement in the labour market, as well as the fact that, compared with men, women tend to have more informal and precarious jobs. Hence, it is crucial to consider time distribution in the formulation of policies which, when combined with other sectoral policies, incentivize the redistribution of domestic work and promote labour practices that offer alternatives for the organization of time spent on market activities (Marco, 2012). Moreover, the balance between paid and unpaid work with shorter working days would allow men to participate more in domestic and care work and would increase women's employment and income-generation options (ECLAC, 2016a).
20. Monetary poverty and lack of time sustain a vicious circle that is very difficult to break without policies focused on strengthening women's economic autonomy. An analysis of time-use data based on per capita income shows that women in the lowest-income households spend the most time on unpaid work as shown in figure 3. The differences are significant: women in quintile V households spend an average of 32 hours per week on unpaid work, compared with 46 hours per week for women in quintile I. For men, the difference between those in quintile V and quintile I households is generally not more than one hour per day (figure 3). In order to eliminate poverty in all its forms, as proposed on the Sustainable Development Goal 1, there is a need for public policies with a gender perspective that can eliminate the structural factors of the feminization of poverty in the lowest income households. In addition to monetary income redistribution policies, there is a need for policies targeting time redistribution, which is indispensable to eradicating poverty and achieving development.

**Figure 3**  
**Latin America (7 countries): unpaid work<sup>a</sup> by population aged 15 and older<sup>b</sup>, by sex and household income quintile**  
*(Hours per week)*



**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 46. ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) (2017), Social Panorama of Latin America, 2016 (LC/PUB.2017/12-P), Santiago.

**Note:** In light of the heterogeneous nature of data sources, comparisons between countries are still not possible; hence, the aim of this figure is to show the trends within each country.

<sup>a</sup> Unpaid work is measured by quantifying the time a person spends on own-use goods production work, unpaid domestic work, unpaid care of household members, unpaid work for other households or for the community and volunteering. The survey in Argentina does not include any questions relating to own-use goods production work; in Brazil only one question about domestic work is included.

<sup>b</sup> Surveys target the population aged 15 and older, except in Argentina (18 years and older).

21. Various studies on time use by beneficiaries of conditional transfer programmes (Gammage and Orozco, 2008; ECLAC, 2013) suggest that time spent on unpaid work and the workload itself increase for the women carrying out the activities required by these programmes. Time-use data should be taken into account to incorporate the gender perspective when designing poverty-eradication programmes or when evaluating the benefits of retaining conditionalities that represent an additional burden for those responsible for meeting them. They should also be used to encourage shared responsibility between men and women and between the State, the market and families (ECLAC, 2013).
22. The fact that the macroeconomic aggregates in the national accounts lack indicators on health services provided within the household, limits the measurement of the economic value of health care to that provided in public and private institutions. This is prejudicial to health policies and to countries' economic and social growth (Ferrán, 2008). Hence, the



information provided by time-use surveys is crucial to the monetary valuation of domestic health services. In Mexico, for example, the estimated monetary value of unpaid domestic health care is 167,536 million pesos, which is equivalent to roughly 1% of GDP, or 85.5% of the value added of hospital services; women contribute 72.2% of this monetary value (INEGI, 2014).

23. In order to support appropriate provision of care, public policies must recognize care work as an essential development activity that must be guaranteed by society (Gómez, 2008), as well as meet the challenge of providing the care required by dependent individuals and of protecting and promoting gender equality. Time-use data shed light on the household's lack of autonomous capacity to meet their care needs and the debt the region owes to women who sustain the care economy. With respect to care for children under age 5, time-use surveys show that women in households with the means to send these children to day-care centres spend 3.2 to 7.6 fewer hours on care per week, compared with households that are unable to do so. In the case of men, there is no significant difference. The surveys that also provide information on the care of dependent persons with disabilities show that women are more involved in this activity and that they spend more time on average caring for this population segment (12 to 56 hours per week) than men. In households where a member has a disability of some sort, other members spend a significant amount of time meeting their care needs, given the demanding nature of the tasks required.

#### D. Conclusions

24. The region must take advantage of the progress made in the past few years in the production of statistics with a gender perspective. However, there is still much work to be done. On one hand, data collection instruments must be fine-tuned to provide information that can be disaggregated to reflect situations that affect men and women differently throughout their life cycles and in different socioeconomic situations and territories. Hence, surveys such as those on time-use should be part of the national statistical offices' planning, with frequency and adequate budget. On the other hand, none of these advances in measurement will bring about real change unless the resulting data are used to guide the implementation of public policies for equality and unless they are supported by studies on the subjective well-being produced by the current time distribution. As well as stronger measurement tools, decision-makers need stronger analytical and statistical capacities to “transform data into information, information into knowledge and knowledge into political decisions”, as established in the Montevideo Strategy.

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