

Measuring gender gaps in work time in Latin American countries *

Juan Carlos Campaña^{1,3,4}, J. Ignacio Gimenez-Nadal^{2,4}, Jorge Velilla^{2,4}

¹Department of Applied Economics and Public Management, UNED, Madrid-Spain

²Department of Economic Analysis, IEDIS, University of Zaragoza, Zaragoza-Spain

³ECEMIN, Nebrija University, Madrid-Spain

⁴GLO, The Netherlands

Abstract

The analysis of gender gaps in time allocation is a recurrent topic of research, and gender differentials in both paid and unpaid work have been documented in different regions and periods. We analyze the gender gap in time allocation in fifteen Latin American countries, offering a comparison of two time periods (a five-year difference), along with an explanation based on social norms and institutional factors. We document gender gaps in both paid and unpaid work, and show that the gender gap in unpaid work has decreased in all countries, although this gap is not heterogeneous in terms of size. More traditional social norms are related to greater gender inequalities in paid and unpaid work, while countries with better, more family-friendly policies and a greater representation of women in politics and in the labour market exhibit smaller gender differentials in working time.

Keywords: Latin American countries, social norms, institutional factors, paid work, unpaid work.

JEL codes: D04, D10, J12.

* Correspondence to J.C. Campaña jcampana@der.uned.es

Acknowledgement: This paper has benefitted from funding from the Government of Aragón (Project S32_20R), the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (Projects PID2019-108348RA-I00, PID2019-111765GB-I00 and TED2021-132824B-I00) and the Regional Government of Madrid (OPINBI Project H2019/HUM-5793).

1. Introduction

Female participation in the labor market is an important contributor to the wealth and economic survival of households. This is especially relevant in Latin America, where female labor force participation has grown from 42% to 52% between 1990 and 2020 (World Bank, 2023). Yet, it is still women who are largely responsible for household chores and care tasks, and this unpaid work is also productive, as it provides services to the household and is essential for family welfare (CEPAL, 2022). This has generated a disproportionate workload for women, who participate in the labor market but also assume the burden of unpaid activities (Rubiano Matulevich and Viollaz, 2019). Thus, it is important to jointly analyze gender differences in *paid* and *unpaid* work, and their evolution over time, to have a picture of the situation of women and men in the labor market, and implement policies to improve the lives of those who are worse off.

We use data from CEPALSTAT (Statistical Databases from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) to analyze trends and gender gaps in paid and unpaid work, in 15 Latin American countries. We also study how social norms on the role of women and institutional factors explain these gender gaps. We contribute to the literature by analyzing how social norms and institutional factors reduce gender gaps in the time devoted by individuals to paid and unpaid work, with our results being similar to those found in developed countries (Campaña et al., 2023). Evidence of how these social norms and institutional factors reduce the gender gaps in Latin American countries is scarce and inconclusive.

2. Data and variables

We use aggregated time use data from the CEPALSTAT time use surveys, which provide information for Argentina (2013), Brazil (2012, 2017), Chile (2015), Colombia (2012, 2017), Costa Rica (2011, 2017), Ecuador (2012), El Salvador (2010, 2017), Guatemala (2014, 2017), Honduras (2009), Mexico (2009, 2014, 2019), Panama (2011), Paraguay (2016), Peru (2010), Dominican Republic (2016), and Uruguay (2007, 2013).¹ Time use data has been shown to produce more accurate estimates and reduced measurement error

¹ Details regarding definitions, units of measurement, methodology, sources, and dimension and disaggregation, for the data utilized in this paper can be found at https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/technical-sheet.html?indicator_id=2744&lang=es The data used in this paper come from <https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/dashboard.html?lang=es>

than other surveys and have become the “gold standard” in the analysis of daily behaviors (Gimenez-Nadal and Molina, 2022).²

We analyze paid work and unpaid work. The definitions in CEPALSTAT are the following: *Paid work* is the sum of time devoted to employment, job search, and commuting. *Unpaid work* is measured as the sum of the time spent in self-consumption work, unpaid domestic work, and unpaid care for their own home or to support other household work or the community. These variables are measured in hours per week, and the aggregated information is available only for individuals aged 15 and over. Furthermore, non-working individuals are excluded from aggregated samples.

We also use ancillary information on social norms, taken from the World Values Survey, a cross-national survey on human values conducted every 5 years. For the sake of comparability, we use data from the 2005-2009, 2010-2014, and 2015-2019 waves, and use 5 indicators towards the social evaluation of women: 1) “Men should have more right to a job than women”; 2) “Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay”; 3) “Men make better political leaders than women do”; 4) “University is more important for a boy than for a girl”; and 5) “Men make better business executives than women do”. These indicators reflect traditional social norms, i.e., women as care providers, and take value 1 if “strongly disagree” or “disagree”, 0 otherwise. We also use information on institutional factors: (1,2) Public spending on families (cash and services, from CEPALSTAT). (3,4) Maternity and paternity leave duration (UNICEF). (5) Women in senior and middle management (World Bank). (6,7) Women judges in the highest court or supreme court. Elected mayors who are women (CEPALSTAT). (8,9,10) Indicators of human development from the Human Development Data, including the Human Development Index (HDI), the Gender Development Index (GDI), and the Gender Inequality Index (GII).³

3. Paid and unpaid work

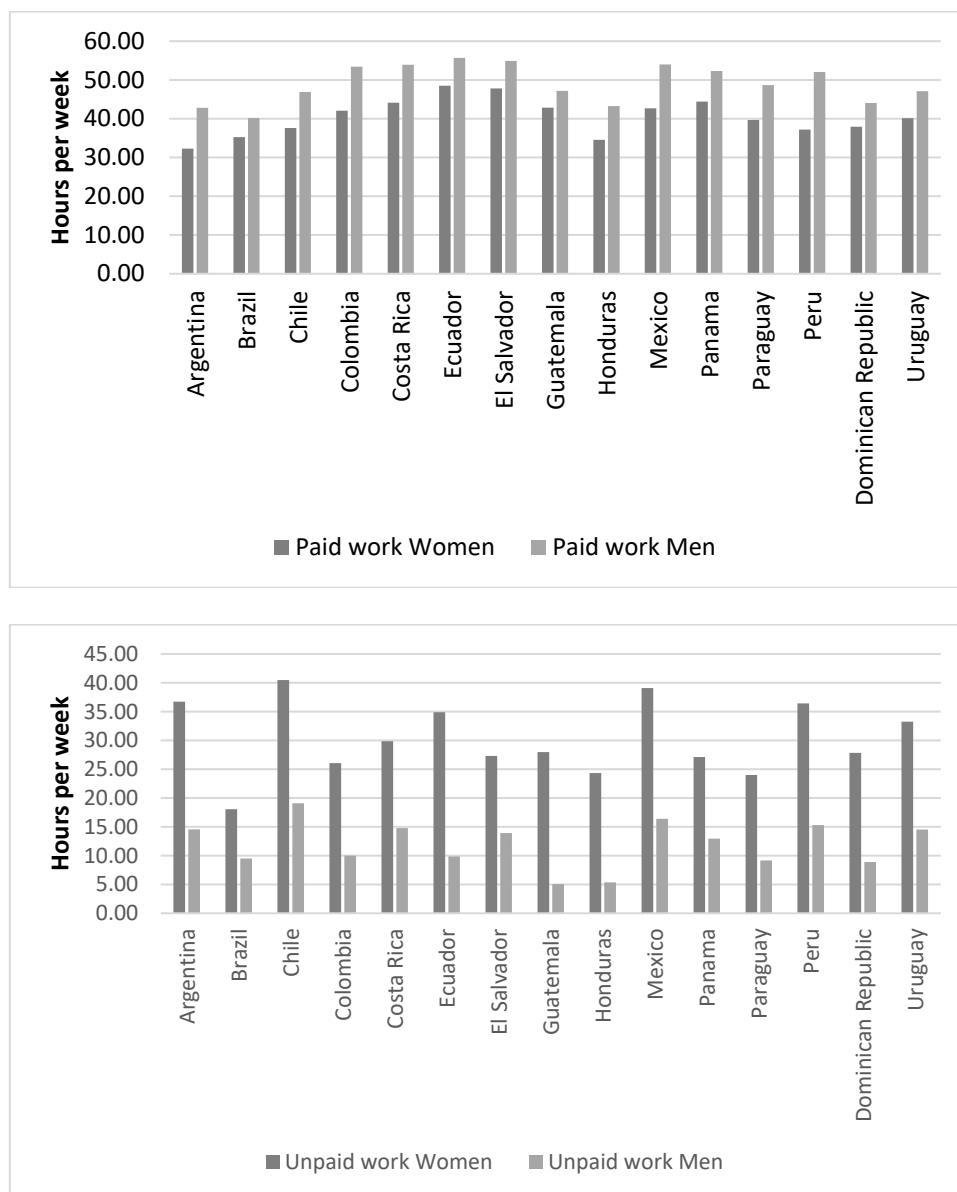
Figure 1 shows the time devoted to paid and unpaid work by men and women in the analyzed countries, focusing on the most recent available years. On average, women (men) devote 40.5 (49.1) hours per week to paid work, with a gender gap of 8.6 hours per

² See Appendix A (on-line) for technical information on the surveys.

³ See Appendix B (on-line) for a detailed description of the variables measuring social norms, and institutional factors.

week. There is country heterogeneity, as gaps are largest in Peru, Mexico, and Colombia, and smaller in Guatemala and Brazil (but still as large as 4 hours per week). Regarding unpaid work, women (men) spend 30.2 (12.0) hours per week in unpaid work, which generates a gender gap of 18.2 hours per week. Such a gap seems especially relevant to Ecuador, Guatemala, and Mexico (more than 20 hours per week) but is shorter in Brazil (about 8.5 hours per week). Another conclusion of Figure 2 is the degree of heterogeneity in *male* unpaid work, ranging from 19.1 hours in Chile to only 5.1 hours per week in Guatemala.

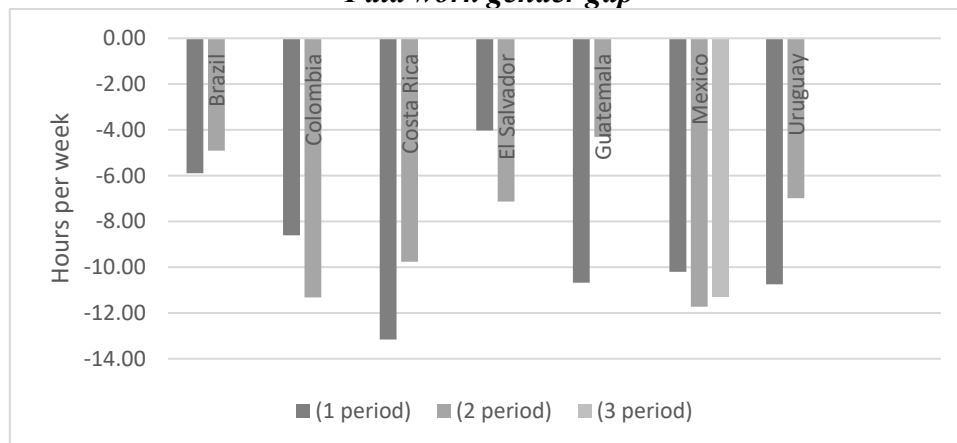
Figure 1. Paid and unpaid work



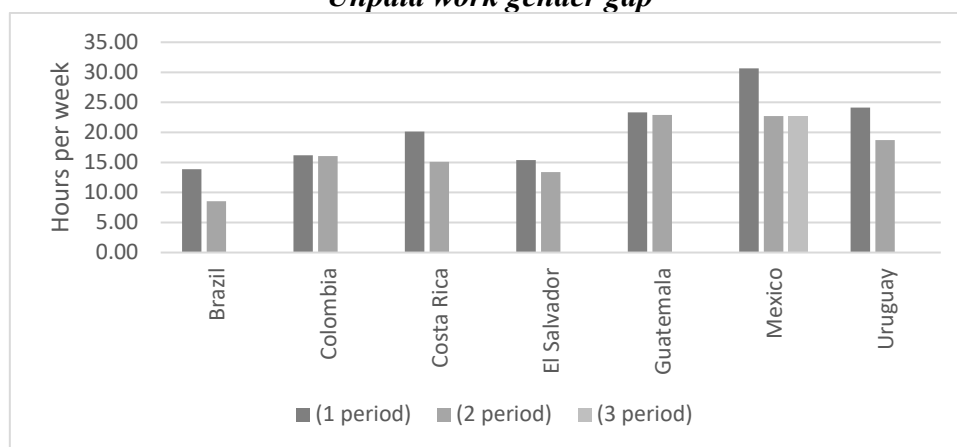
Note: The sample is restricted to the last year with available data.

We now focus on the evolution of the gender gaps, for the countries with more than 1 period with information. Figure 2 shows a decrease of about 1.03 hours per week in paid work, but the evidence is mixed across countries. As for unpaid work, it is observed that the gender gap in unpaid work hours has decreased during the analyzed period for all the analyzed countries. Results thus indicate a certain degree of gender convergence in unpaid work.

Figure 2. Trends in gender gaps
Paid work gender gap



Unpaid work gender gap



Note: Gender gaps defined as the time of females, minus that of males.

4. The impact of social norms and institutional factors

Differences in paid and unpaid work may be driven by country characteristics, as some countries show more egalitarian gender behavior than others. We now provide an empirical exploration of how egalitarian social values and institutional factors relate to gender gaps in paid and unpaid work hours. In doing so, we estimate multi-level mixed-effect regressions by country, with the dependent variables being the gender gaps in paid and unpaid work.

Table 1 shows the main results. We find that, in countries with less traditional and more egalitarian social values, the gender gap in paid work is smaller. These results suggest the importance of social norms in explaining imbalances in paid and unpaid work between women and men. In countries with less traditional attitudes toward the role of women in society, gender gaps in both paid and unpaid work decrease. These findings are consistent with prior literature highlighting the importance of social norms in shaping individual time allocation decisions in other countries (Campaña et al., 2023). Regarding institutional factors, estimates show that when public spending is higher, the gender gap in unpaid work is smaller. The duration of maternity leave is also related to a decreased gap in unpaid work, while paternity leave is not significant, likely because of its scarcity in Latin America (Karu and Tremblay, 2018). A greater representation of women in senior and middle management, and among judges, is correlated with decreased gender gaps. Variables capturing gender equity also point to gaps decreasing when equity increases.

Table 1. Estimation results

VARIABLES	(1) Paid work gap	(2) Unpaid work gap	(3) Obs.
<i>A) SOCIAL NORMS</i>			
Men should have more right to a job than women	0.004	-2.233**	14
Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay	1.253***	-3.255***	14
Men make better political leaders than women do	0.369	-0.843	14
University is more important for a boy than for a girl	0.982*	-3.958***	14
Men make better business executives than women do	0.721	-0.296	14
<i>B) INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS</i>			
Public spending on families (cash)	-0.436	0.394	14
Public spending on families (services)	-0.247	-1.141*	14
Maternity leave duration	-0.761	-1.880**	15
Paternity leave duration	-0.948	0.523	15
Women in senior and middle management	0.935***	-1.886***	16
Women judges in the highest court or supreme court	1.192**	0.400	21
Elected mayors who are women	0.205	-1.359	22
HDI	-0.787	0.251	23
GDI	0.739	-2.315**	23
GII	1.124**	-1.275	23

Note: Robust standard errors available upon request. Gender gap defined as the time of females, minus that of males. *** Significant at the 99%; ** significant at the 95%; * significant at the 90%.

5. Conclusions

This paper finds limited evidence of convergence in paid work between women and men in Latin American countries, using time use survey data, but some degree of convergence in terms of unpaid work. Despite that, results suggest that women are still responsible for most household chores, despite the overall increases in female work hours. This evidence is in line with the notion of the double burden that faces women and that stalls their progress in the labor market (Rubiano Matulevich and Viollaz, 2019). We also explore whether social values and institutional factors relate to these gaps and find that countries in which social norms are less traditional towards women's role in the household, and countries in which institutional factors are less traditional, are the same countries where gender gaps are smaller. Thus, planners should consider these results to address gender inequalities in the household and in the labor market. We acknowledge that other mechanisms may (complementarily) affect gender gaps, such as intrahousehold allocations and distribution of tasks (Chiappori et al., 2020), or the social organization of care. These are mechanisms that further research should study in detail.

References

- Campaña, J. C., Gimenez-Nadal, J. I., & Velilla, J. (2023). Measuring Gender Gaps in Time Allocation in Europe. *Social Indicators Research*, 165(2), 519-553.
- CEPAL, N. (2022). *La sociedad del cuidado: horizonte para una recuperación sostenible con igualdad de género*. (LC/CRM.15/3), Santiago, 2022.
- Chiappori, P. A., Gimenez-Nadal, J. I., Molina, J. A., Theloudis, A., & Velilla, J. (2020). Intra-household commitment and intertemporal labor supply. Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER) Working Paper Series, 11.
- Giménez-Nadal, J. I., & Molina, J. A. (2022). Time Use Surveys. *Handbook of Labor, Human Resources and Population Economics*, 1-18.
- Karu, M., & Tremblay, D.G. (2018). Fathers on parental leave: An analysis of rights and take-up in 29 countries. *Community, Work & Family*, 21(3), 344-362.
- Rubiano Matulevich, E. C., & Viollaz, M. (2019). Gender differences in time use: Allocating time between the market and the household. *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper*, (8981).
- World Bank. (2023) <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS>