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**POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ECONOMY OF CARE:  
ARGENTINA RESEARCH REPORT 1**

**Historical context: economic, demographic and social  
structures and trajectories, and social policies  
in Argentina**

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## **Introduction**

This report analyses the principal developments—political, economic and social—in Argentina over the last 30 years. Approaching the social and political economy of care in the country requires an understanding of the national context and the major changes that have occurred over the period in question. Childcare is a critical element in understanding the social, political and economic organisation of care, and this is particularly true in a country such as Argentina, where social differences have increased alarmingly. The guiding research question here concerns the extent to which social inequalities are shaped by different social and institutional childcare arrangements, and whether what is involved is not one, but a number of “care diamonds.”

Families and their childcare strategies do not exist apart from political, social and economic surroundings. Families are both a central pillar of welfare regimes and a “cushion” to soften the impact of changes affecting the other pillars (most importantly, the State and the market).

The structure of Argentine society, which was once relatively egalitarian by Latin American standards, now features pronounced inequalities and poverty. Beginning with the military coup of 1976 and a series of regressive economic and social programmes, the country has experienced numerous crises that affected the structure and dynamics of the labour market, workers’ incomes and, consequently, family welfare. The crises did not cease with the restoration of democratic institutions that began in 1983. The implementation of neoliberal policies sharply increased unemployment, poverty and social inequality, and the democratic system was not capable of translating widespread popular demands for social welfare measures into policy. Following the most recent, and severe, crisis of 2001-2002, economic recovery began to accelerate and showed high growth rates. However, the economic improvement has not yet succeeded in changing the structure of a society that is characterised by far more inequality than was present 30 years ago.

Argentina’s successive crises were cushioned in various ways by families and their members. At the same time, the Argentine society was undergoing cultural changes in terms of expectations regarding women’s participation in paid and unpaid work. In this context, childcare and access to it have been shaped by social differences that affect the ways in which families arrange for care, as well as by the role of markets and communities and the extent to which government-provided services reach different population groups.

This first report is divided into two sections. The first section describes the principal socioeconomic features of Argentine society and how they have changed over the last 30 years. It provides an overview of the political and economic processes that were most significant in shaping the impoverishment and inequality that typifies the country today, analysing changes in the labour market and women’s place within it. The second section

describes the country's socio-demographic patterns and how they have evolved, presenting population and household data, while emphasising certain factors that show how social inequalities affect reproductive behaviour, participation in education, and the composition of families and households.

This report was prepared by Eleonor Faur, who would like to express her appreciation for the support and review Valeria Esquivel offered during the course of the research. Sara Niedzwiecki assisted in gathering secondary information, and Mariana González provided special tabulations.

## **I. Historical context: political and economic structures and trajectories**

### **Principal political and economic features (1976- 2001)**

The social structure of contemporary Argentina is characterised by far more inequality and poverty than was envisioned not only at mid-twentieth century—as the welfare state expanded—but up until the 1970s.

During these years, the country lived under a harsh military dictatorship (1976-1983). In 1983, the process of restoring democracy began. Various economic strategies were implemented, resulting in irregular cycles of growth and recession that created a social structure with increased inequality and poverty. Of prime importance in these changes was a sort of “offensive against labour” (Cortés and Marshall, 1993). Peaks of economic crisis occurred with the hyperinflation of 1989 and the economic and institutional crisis of 2001. In the periods before and after these crises, a variety of policies were implemented, some with positive effects on GDP growth, but none adequate in terms of human development, labour structure or the protection of social rights. Some of this history will be examined below.

The percentage of poor households in Argentina rose from 4% in 1974 to 45.7% in 2002. It then began to decline, reaching 19.2% in 2006 for urban households.<sup>2</sup> Fluctuations in the poverty level have been a constant feature of the landscape since the mid-1970s, when the process of pauperisation began and social inequality burgeoned. What 30 years ago were relatively isolated “pockets of poverty”<sup>3</sup> today include 1 out of every 5 households, 1 of 4 individuals, and nearly 1 of every 2 children, though there are major regional differences.<sup>4</sup>

In a cultural sense, in terms of family dynamics, and in the dynamics of social cohesiveness, poverty was gradually being internalised. The inflection point was the military coup of 1976. The dictatorship radically transformed the country’s economic

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<sup>2</sup> The information on poverty and the labour market in this document is based on the Current Household Survey of the National Institute of Statistics and Census (Encuesta Permanente de Hogares del Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, or EPH-INDEC), except where otherwise indicated. It should be noted that in 2003, the methodology used by the survey to gather information was changed, as it moved from being a periodic survey to an ongoing one. This affected slightly the comparability of data but does not prevent one from gaining a general view of the situation.

<sup>3</sup> Minujin (1992) applies the “pockets of poverty” image to the urban slums of large cities, which were seen as falling *outside of the social reality*.

<sup>4</sup> Taking as a basis the World Bank’s definition of poverty as those living on two dollars or less per day, 16% of Argentina’s population was poor as of 2005. Using the poverty line defined by Argentina, the figure was 45% (Perry et al., 2006).

structure, strengthening the financial sector, liberalising the economy and destabilising the base of industrial production.<sup>5</sup>

From that point until the crisis of 2001, the various stages through which the country's political and economic processes passed share a common denominator: the reduction in formal labour (Cortés and Marshall, 1999, Beccaria, 2001). This, combined with periods of high unemployment and the declining purchasing power of wages, shaped a society in which social inequality was an integral structural feature, with the rich becoming richer while the poor became poorer. Nevertheless, the different political periods (1976-1983, 1984-1989, 1990-2001, 2002 to the present) have featured different economic and social strategies, and have had rather different impacts in terms of inequality, social development and poverty.

Until the mid-1970s, Argentina, along with its Southern Cone neighbours, differed from the rest of Latin America by virtue of high educational levels, low indices of underutilisation of the labour force, and relatively low wage dispersion. Bayón and Saraví (2001) explain this as the result of two factors. On one hand, the formal economy represented a major part of the labour force. Between 1963 and 1978, urban unemployment was only 5.6%, and poverty affected only 5% of households in Greater Buenos Aires. A social welfare system was in place that aspired to universal coverage, particularly with regard to health and education (Bayon and Saraví, 2001).<sup>6</sup>

The military dictatorship's emphasis on engagement with the international market entailed abandoning the import substitution model. Meanwhile, regulation of the labour market sought to ensure favourable conditions for capital accumulation by reducing labour costs. This was the first "offensive against labour". It created systematic wage cuts by keeping wage increases below the inflation rate, and by giving businesses more freedom to determine wages. It also systematically reduced the power of unions, eliminating collective bargaining (Beccaria, 1992, Cortés and Marshall, 1993). In the reigning context of high inflation, these policies were reflected in households' quality of life.

Politically, 1983 marked the beginning of a process of expanding political and civil rights. Social and economic rights, however, continued to erode. The reality was that the return to democracy did not mean a return to policy as it was before the military coup. The economic strategy of this period consisted essentially on heterodox stabilisation plans to combat high inflation and balance of payments problems. The strategy failed, however, because it proved impossible to simultaneously achieve fiscal and foreign trade balance, due primarily to the onerous foreign debt.

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<sup>5</sup> This strategy enunciated both economic and political objectives regarding the dismantling of social organisations, including workers' organisations and business organisations (See Novaro and Palermo, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> For a more extensive analysis from a historical perspective, see Beccaria and Carciofi, 1993.

Between 1976 and 1989, gross domestic product (GDP) declined at an average annual rate of 1.4%. The gross industrial product declined by 25% between 1974 and 1990, as industrial employment fell 40%, and the share of the national income attributable to employee wages dropped from 45% to 32% (Bayon to Saraví, 2001). While the manufacturing sector contracted, certain assessments argued that wage increases had been the principal cause of inflation. Based on this analysis, new wage adjustments were made, affecting the distributive structure (Beccaria, 1992).

In 1989, hyperinflation and increasing poverty hastened a change of government. The exit of the period's first democratic president, Raúl Alfonsín, occurred in the midst of a highly conflictual economic environment, and led to the election of Carlos Menem, who remained in the presidency until 1999.

As the 1990s began, Latin America's economies exhibited three basic characteristics: the highest inflation rates in the world, the highest indebtedness in the world, and the world's most unequal income distribution (Bustelo, 1992). Argentina was no exception, though other countries (such as Brazil) had even higher rates of inequality.

Neoliberal policies became stronger throughout the 1990s. They focused on controlling inflation, but significantly increased unemployment and social inequality in the process. The prevalent economic policies in this period included the Convertibility Plan, which established a currency board that strictly controlled the issuing of money, reduction of the fiscal deficit, deregulation of markets, and widespread privatisation of State enterprises. The period's ideological context, from a political perspective, was in line with the "Washington Consensus," which mandated macroeconomic reform, amendments to foreign trade schemes, and promotion of the private sector.

The vulnerability associated with convertibility and external shocks led to a series of economic expansions and contractions during this period. Between 1991 and 1994, the stabilisation programme succeeded in halting inflation, leading to a period of growth and a short-lived increase in employment. In 1995, the economy was hit by the repercussions of the Mexican crisis, which interrupted the flow of foreign capital. Between 1995 and 1998, there was a new cycle of expansion, until a contraction and decline in production began in 1998 (Beccaria, 2001).

During the 1990s, the economy experienced relatively high growth rates. GDP grew at an average annual rate of 4.7% between 1991 and 1999, despite marked fluctuations and serious distributive problems. Even during the decade's spurts of economic growth, unemployment rose and the institutions regulating working conditions weakened, putting unions and workers' organisations in a weaker position to influence conditions in the labour market. Meanwhile, the burgeoning foreign debt was to become a problem in the second half of the decade, as it grew from 32.3% of GDP in 1991 to 51.2% in 1999, heralding the approaching crisis.

In this situation, not only was it impossible to consolidate a viable long-term development model, but inequality also grew, with the middle and lower classes becoming increasingly vulnerable. Once again, the new economic growth strategy altered the structure of the labour market and the role of the State in regulating it, as well as the



State's role in the social arena. The impact on the labour market and on the welfare of households and their members was dramatic, as will be seen below.

### **Impact of policy on the labour market and on poverty**

The critical recessions of the 1980s and 1990s had major impacts on working conditions for men and women. Between 1970 and 1990, the economically active population declined in percentage terms, primarily because young people and middle-aged men withdrew from the labour force (Monza, 1993). Between 1980 and 1990, unemployment rose from 2.3% to 6% in Greater Buenos Aires, while underemployment nearly doubled, rising from 4.5% to 8.1% of the economically active population. Informal employment, including domestic work, acted to cushion the crisis that was contracting other productive sectors, growing from 42.1% in 1980 to 48.5% in 1991 (Bayon and Saraví, 2001). Meanwhile, though wage increases were contained, high inflation reduced their purchasing power.

The principal effect of these changes was to increase poverty and social inequality, and to aggravate the economic privations that increasingly characterised the country. Poverty became more heterogeneous, with the appearance of the so-called “new poor” (sectors with the “structural” characteristics associated with middle-income brackets in terms of educational levels, type of housing, etc., but who no longer had the income to cover minimum needs). Meanwhile, those who had been poor before—the “structurally poor”—fell deeper into poverty.<sup>7</sup> Demographically, the majority of the “structurally” poor lived in large households with a high proportion of children, while the “new poor” generally had the demographic characteristics associated with the middle class.

As the following table shows, the increase in poverty between 1980 and 1986 was relatively moderate, becoming more precipitate in 1987, and reaching a peak during the hyperinflation of 1989. Thus, in 1980, 20.6% lived below the poverty line, whereas by 1989, with the new poor, this percentage swelled to 41.1%.

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<sup>7</sup> According to Minujin (1992), the distinction between “structural” and “newly” poor is associated with the history of the groups that find themselves in one or another of those situations. While the structural poor suffer from multiple deficiencies in infrastructure, cultural capital, etc., characteristic of long-term poverty, the term “new poor” emerged to designate those groups whose welfare was diminished significantly by the 1980s crisis. Methodologically, however, this distinction is associated with ways of measuring poverty. “Structural” poverty is based on the quantitative criterion of unsatisfied basic needs (UBN), which includes variables measuring problems of housing, water and sewerage, crowding, educational level and the rate of dependency between adults within a household. The “new poor,” on the other hand, are not deficient in terms of UBN, but their income levels are below the poverty line, defined in terms of the value of the total market basket of goods and services needed for minimum household welfare.

**Table 1. Poverty Development in Greater Buenos Aires. 1980-1990**

	<b>1980</b>	<b>1986</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>1989</b>	<b>1990</b>
<b>Poor</b>	20.6	21.4	26.2	41.1	34.5
<b>Structural</b>	16.4	15.1	13.9	17.8	16.1
<b>Newly-poor</b>	3.2	6.3	12.3	23.3	18.4
<b>Non-poor</b>	79.4	78.6	73.8	58.9	65.5
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Minujin, 1993, based on EPH data for October of the respective years.

In response to this crisis, women—particularly married women—increased their participation in the labour market. With the decline of male income, women’s historically low income might have been expected to become a fundamental pillar of households’ relative well-being (Minujin, 1990). However, as women’s economic participation increased, the precariousness of the labour market kept pace, for both men and women—not only for members of structurally poor households, but also for households that were meeting their basic needs.

In Greater Buenos Aires, the rise in part-time work and work not subject to labour protections increased dramatically for both men and women. For poor women as a whole, however, lack of labour rights protections was not the exception but the norm. As of 1987, 76.1% of working women from structurally poor households, as well as 70.5% of women from pauperised households, lacked any social protections. Among men, the figures were also alarming, though somewhat lower than for women (Minujin, 1990).

Source: Based on Beccaria, Esquivel and Mauricio (2005). EPH-INDEC data. **Table 2 Part-time and Unprotected Workers, by Sex and Social Grouping in Greater Buenos Aires, 1974 and 1987**

	1974		1987	
	Part-time (%)	Unprotected (%)	Part-time (%)	Unprotected (%)
<b>Women</b>				
<b>Structural poor</b>	31.6	57.0	47.5	76.1
<b>Pauperised</b>	--	--	48.9	70.5
<b>Non-poor</b>	26.4	23.4	34.0	43.4
<b>Men</b>				
<b>Structural poor</b>	7.7	23.2	16.6	47.2
<b>Pauperised</b>	--	--	15.5	49.1
<b>Non-poor</b>	5.5	11.5	11.5	42.1

Source: IPA, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, BCRA-INDEC, cited in Minujin, 1990.

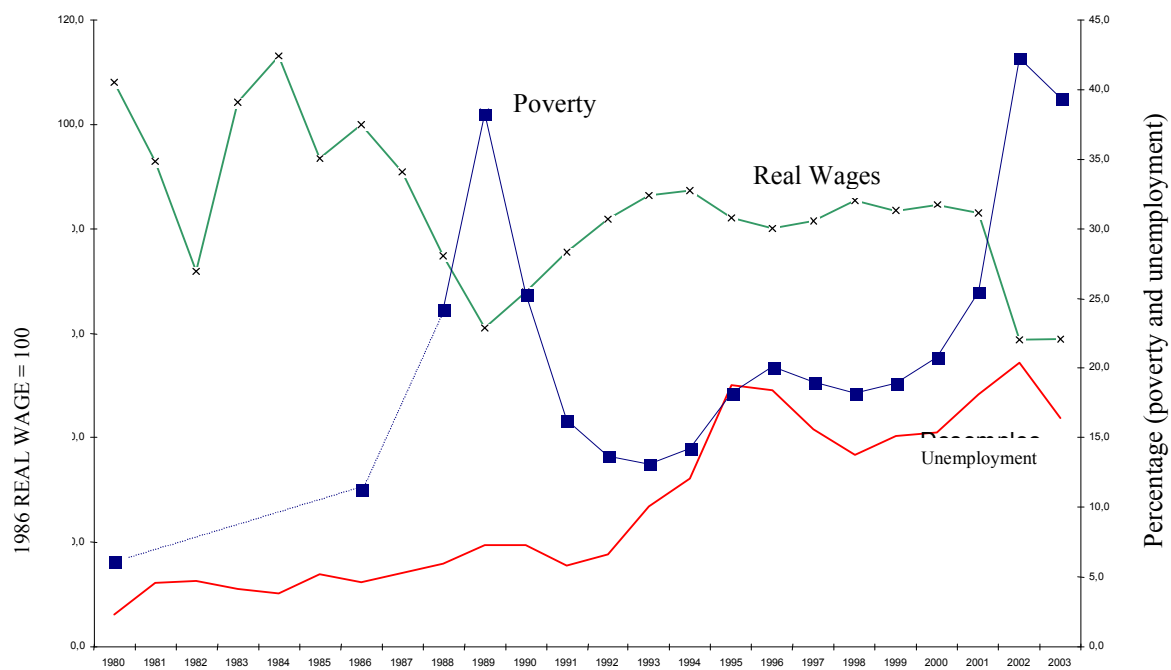
The neoliberal climate of the 1990s furthered this trend. Its impact on the structure of the labour market constituted a major reversal of social advances. During this decade, the economically active population grew without any corresponding job creation, and those jobs that were created were precarious. Unemployment reached high levels, rising from around 6% in 1990 to almost 14% in 1999 (and exceeding 18% in 1995). While 2% and 3% of economically active heads of households (women and men, respectively) were unemployed in the late 1980s, this figure reached 10% in the period being examined (Beccaria, 2001).

One of the most far-reaching effects of the neoliberal policies of the 1990s was the increasingly precarious condition of the labour market, with high unemployment levels and the income of “supplementary” workers—including women—in the paid labour market playing a major role. All of these developments significantly affected family structures and dynamics, as we shall see further on.

Figure 1 shows the intricate patterns and relationships of unemployment, real wages and poverty between 1980 and 2003. During the 1980s, increasing poverty was associated both with fluctuations and declines in real wages, and with rising unemployment. The peak of this process occurred during the 1989 hyperinflation. In the 1990s, inflation was contained, with the implementation of the Convertibility Plan, and real wages recovered in relative terms, although not reaching their 1980 levels. At the same time, the gradual increase in poverty was associated with a sharper increase in unemployment and an accentuation of social inequality.

**Figure 1. Incidence of poverty (official estimates), unemployment, real wages—  
greater Buenos Aires**

**1980-2003**



Source: Based on Beccaria, Esquivel and Mauricio (2005). EPH-INDEC data.

The new distributive matrix in Argentina's social structure was profoundly unequal. In 1974, households in the highest decile represented 26.9% of all income, whereas by 1999 they accounted for 33.9%. Meanwhile, the share of total income in deciles 1 and 3 dropped from 11.4% to 8.2% (Altimir and Beccaria, 1999, in Bayón and Saraví, 2001). The gap between per capita family incomes for the wealthiest 20% of the population and the poorest 20% in Greater Buenos Aires doubled during the 1990s (from a factor of 10 in 1991 to a factor of 20 by the end of 2001). The Gini coefficient for these groups' incomes rose 7% (from 0.478 to 0.512). The disparity was even greater if the comparison is made in terms of households, with the wealthier households accounting for dramatically more income (Esquivel and Maurizio, 2005).

The impact of the 1980s adjustment policies and the 1990s neoliberalism on the labour market and on the country's social structure may be summarised as follows:

- a major rise in unemployment, underemployment and varying forms of vulnerability in the labour market;
- increasing poverty and indigence as a result of lost income and declining purchasing power; and
- increasing inequality in the distribution of income and wealth.

As a result, households' socioeconomic insecurity increased, and individuals' life opportunities decreased (Rodríguez, Enrique, and Reyes, 2006:3).

### **The behaviour of households and their members in response to the labour market crisis**

Women's increasing participation in the labour market began in the 1960s, and has very significantly changed family structures and dynamics. However, women's entry into the labour market is probably not a reflection of the "modernisation" of the family, but rather a response to economic circumstances. The effect of the State's withdrawal of measures that supported families shifted health and education costs to domestic units. Thus, families' reproductive costs increased, driving a gradual increase in poverty (Wainerman, 2003 and 2005).

One of the main coping strategies of households is to enter the labour market. In other words, the increase in women's economic participation, especially during the 1980s and 1990s, has functioned as an adaptive strategy for households and their members, cushioning the effects of adjustment policies and the impact of the various economic crises (Wainerman, 2002; Jelin, 2004; Beccaria, 2001, Cerruti, 2000). Converging in this process are, on one hand, declining real incomes and a need to bolster family incomes, and, on the other, increasing educational levels, low fertility rates and high female life expectancy.

The fact that labour force participation by married women increased while men's decreased suggests, therefore, that women's entry into the labour market—particularly in the case of households headed by men—was an attempt to bolster family income by

replacing the lost income of male heads of household (Cerruti, 2000). Thus, women's incorporation in the labour market cannot be interpreted as a mere indicator of modernisation, development or economic growth, as was thought to be the case in the 1970s.

The feminisation of the labour force led to a narrowing of the gender gap in terms of economic activity. Between 1990 and 2002, the economically active female population in Argentina's urban centres increased more than 7 percentage points (from 43.2% to 50.8%). Women contributed to the growth of assets to a far greater extent than did men, whose economic participation actually fell 3 percentage points (from 81.3% to 78.3%). These phenomena decreased the gap between men's and women's participation, as Table 3 shows. However, unemployment and underemployment did, indeed, affect women.

**Table 3. Specific Activity Rates (15 to 65 years of age).  
Annual Averages (1990-2002). Urban Areas, according to EPH**

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
<b>Women</b>	43.2	43.5	44.7	46.9	46.5	48.6	47.4	48.8	48.9	50.1	50.3	50	50.8
<b>Men</b>	81.3	80.9	81.5	81.5	81	81	80.4	80.5	80.5	79.8	79.4	79.5	78.3
<b>Ratio (W/M)</b>	0.53	0.51	0.55	0.58	0.57	0.60	0.59	0.61	0.61	0.63	0.63	0.63	0.65

Source: Ministry of Labour, DGE&EL (2005), based on EPH-INDEC.

While women's participation in the labour market increased, their unemployment rate followed suit, as they moved from being economically inactive to seeking work and/or were left unemployed upon losing their jobs (Beccaria y Maurizio, 2002). The fact is that the increase in the labour supply was not accompanied by an increased demand for labour, and unemployment therefore rose—very significantly, among women. In 1992, 7.4% of women and 6.8% of men over the age of 14 in Urban Areas were unemployed. In 2001 this figure had more than doubled in the case of women, to 17.8% and 18.7% for men. Female underemployment also grew during the period, about 60% from 1991 - 13.6%- to 2001 -21.8%- (Faur y Gherardi, 2005).

Another significant fact is that not only did participation increase among young women with high educational levels, but also among married women—even those with small children. As Table 4 shows, the increased female participation rates occurred not only among heads of household and daughters, but also among married women, even those with children under age six.

**Table 4: Changes in Activity Rate in Urban Areas, according to Family Relationships and Number of Children (0-6 years old) in the Household, 1994 and 2004 (as a percentage of the female population 15 years old and older)**

Number of children	Year	Family relationship				
		Head	Spouse	Daughter	Other	Total
No children	1994	39.9	37.2	48.1	29.3	39.6
	2004	52.6	47.6	52.9	30.1	48.7
1	1994	60.0	39.2	52.0	43.8	44.4
	2004	72.5	55.6	47.1	41.5	54.8
2+	1994	54.1	32.6	45.2	34.6	36.6
	2004	67.8	44.5	50.9	33.2	48.3
Total	1994	42.3	37.0	48.5	32.8	40.1
	2004	56.0	49.2	51.6	32.6	49.9

Source: ECLAC, Women and Development Unit, based on special tabulations from Argentina's household surveys, cited in Espino and Salvador (2007).

Thus, the male breadwinner family model, with the male head of household as exclusive earner, changed dramatically. Between 1980 and 2000, nuclear family households with couples in Greater Buenos Aires moved away from that model, the incidence of which fell by almost one-third (from 74.5% to 54.7%), while the “two-earner” model (i.e., both man and woman working) saw a three-quarters rise from 25.5% to 45.3% (Wainerman, 2003).

**Table 5. Percentage of Households according to Number of Earners, based on Activity and Employment Status, 1980-2000**

Number of earners, and status of activity and employment	1980	1985	1991	1993	1995	1997	2000
<b>One earner (male)</b>	<b>74.5</b>	<b>68.9</b>	<b>63.2</b>	<b>58.5</b>	<b>55.1</b>	<b>55.5</b>	<b>54.7</b>
Man employed, woman inactive	74.1	67.3	62.2	55.9	50.7	51.1	51.0
Man unemployed, woman inactive	0.4	1.6	1.0	2.6	4.4	4.4	3.7
<b>Two earners</b>	<b>25.5</b>	<b>31.1</b>	<b>36.8</b>	<b>41.5</b>	<b>44.9</b>	<b>44.5</b>	<b>45.3</b>
Man employed, woman employed	24.4	29.1	34.0	35.0	31.3	34.2	35.2
Man employed, woman unemployed	0.7	0.7	1.2	4.1	8.1	5.7	5.7
Man unemployed, woman employed	0.4	1.2	1.6	2.1	3.8	3.5	3.5
Man unemployed, woman unemployed	-	0.1	-	0.3	1.7	1.1	0.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Wainerman, 2003, based on special tabulations from EPH-INDEC.

This process has not been without its conflicts and tensions in family dynamics, both in terms of redistribution of roles between men and women, and as regards available alternatives for caring for children and other family members, given that the services provided through social policy declined, paradoxically, precisely when the social situation was most critical, as detailed below.

### **Changes in the social policy paradigm (1980-2001)**

From the opening of the twentieth century, Argentina was a pioneer in Latin America in developing universal social policies. Around mid-century, social rights became a part of the country's institutional structure, with the enshrinement of labour rights in the constitution. Until the 1980s, under the persisting influence of the welfare state model, social security coverage increased, despite a slow erosion of labour protections and the abandonment of publicly provided social services (Minujin and Cosentino, 1993).

During the 1980s, based on an assessment that it was urgent to “stabilise” public spending, the welfare state's principles of universal coverage were gradually abandoned, and policy began to focus specifically on the poor, in response to the emergency situations produced by the succession of crises. Foreign debt was a decisive factor in shaping public policy, inasmuch as it engendered arguments favouring a nearly total revamping of public policy. In contrast to other countries in the region, however, Argentina's foreign debt was barely directed at productive investment or infrastructure, but rather transformed into private capital and taken out of the country (Minujin, 1992).<sup>8</sup>

While the paradigm associated with “adjustment” policies sought, above all, to eliminate the budget deficit, a series of regressive measures were introduced, and the new social policy model did not compensate for either the falling wages or the declining quantity and quality of basic social services. The issue of equity, in financing this deficit, was skirted (Bustelo, 1992; Lo Vuolo and Barbeito, 1994).

The pressing economic situation had spotlighted the problems of the welfare state in the region, leading to the contraction of the model in Argentina. There was a shift toward what Bustelo (1992) has called the “Malfare State” (*el Estado de Malestar*), in which social policy began to function as economic policy's “ambulance.” In this context, the public sector, which historically had played a catalysing role—providing social protections for poor sectors—found itself facing an accumulation of its own contradictions in an economically recessive environment. Its response was a definitive change of role.

“Numerous studies have pointed to the exclusion of a major sector of the population from the benefits of social policy, as well as to inefficient allocations of social spending. Seen from the perspective of the poor, the welfare state is absent, or its presence is circumstantial, fragmented and/or limited. This becomes the basis for criticism of the State's presence in guiding social policy, particularly as concerns the provision of social services in health and education” (Bustelo, 1992: 125).

In line with the State's new role, the country's first massive food assistance programme was implemented—the National Food Programme (*Programa Alimentario Nacional*, or

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<sup>8</sup> Capital flight in 1989 represented 78% of the debt. When the State assumed total responsibility for the debt in 1983, it placed itself in a weaker position, with less room for manoeuvre and had to reduce the deficit and set accounts in order “at any cost.” See Minujin (1992: 19).



PAN). At the same time, paradoxically, some services provided under universal-coverage policies were reduced. Thus, for example, the State cut educational spending just as schools assumed a new role in the welfare of children (particularly poor children), becoming “not only the place where children were sent to learn, but also the place where they were fed, disciplined, cared for and housed” (Tenti Fanfani 1992: 192).

Also during the 1980s, the government’s efforts to reinstate universal-coverage policies such as employers’ contributions to the pension system (which had been eliminated by the military government) and to the national health insurance system were unsuccessful, because of opposition in the legislature. More generally, the Malfare State promoted procyclical economic forces; made draconian budgetary cuts, particularly in social areas; eliminated social policy or limited it to “soft” areas; decentralised services that had already become highly ineffective; privatised services without instituting regulations to ensure efficiency or universal access; transferred responsibility for coverage of basic needs to families and communities, where the State had previously been responsible; and provided for greater “flexibility” in labour relations. Thus, the use of non-governmental and family services as providers of welfare was strengthened—not to promote participation, but as a strategy for shifting the burden of care and financing from the State to communities and families (Bustelo, 1992; Minujin, 1992).

During the 1990s, the trend of the 1980s became more pronounced. The economic processes described above had fundamental impacts, creating more “flexible” labour regulations—to the detriment of workers’ rights—and transforming the social security system. The principle underlying the State’s provision of universal health and education services was challenged as “inefficient” on the grounds that it favoured the middle class and left out the lower-income strata (Bayon and Saraví, 2001). In this context, the Argentine State—which had once played a key welfare role—itself became precarious, and undertook a process of targeting services. A smaller State meant that the regressive impact of economic measures was not moderated by public policy, but rather was borne (at high cost) by families and communities.

Among the major social policies of the decade were reforms of the labour and pension regimes, the health system and the educational system. The labour reforms of the 1990s sought to reduce the cost of labour by reducing employer contributions to social security, reduce the cost of layoffs and workplace accidents, permit more flexibility in the use of work time, decentralise collective bargaining, and redesign the role of labour agreements and unions (Beccaria, 2001; Bayon and Saraví, 2001, Cortés and Marshall, 1999).

These structural reforms, which had a major effect on the precariousness of new jobs, were accompanied by highly publicised job and training programmes that were, in reality, extremely limited, involving only 7% of the unemployed population (Cortés y Marshall, 1999). The lack of social protections became alarming, as over 90% of the unemployed had no access whatsoever to State benefits (SIEMPRO, 2001, in Bayón and Saraví, 2001).

The pension system was reformed in 1993 to move from a pay-as-you-go regime (based on intergenerational solidarity) to individual capitalisation schemes with private insurers, (Administradoras de Fondos de Jubilaciones y Pensiones—AFJPs, or Managed Pension and Retirement Funds). Under this policy, minimum retirement ages rose from 55 to 60 and then in 2000 to 65 years for women, while they rose from 60 to 65 years for men. In addition to the age requirement, workers were required to have contributed for at least 30 years to obtain full benefits. Thus, more and more people were excluded from social protection.<sup>9</sup> There was a strong gender impact from the reform, since women's jobs were more precarious, and their incomes and contributions correspondingly more sporadic—to say nothing of the fact that their economic contribution, in the form of domestic work, was undervalued. In making benefits dependent on contributions made, the capitalisation system accentuated existing discrimination, ignoring the effect of the male-female income gap, the importance of unpaid reproductive work and the intermittent nature of women's paid work, which made it particularly difficult for women to make such contributions (Birgin and Pautassi, 2001).<sup>10</sup>

In 1997, a retirement regime for housewives was enacted. This took the form of voluntary participation in an AFJP plan for women who were neither being supported nor were engaged in independent economic activity. The obvious limitation here was that the scheme was only available to women who, though receiving no wages or income, had the capability to make the monthly payment required (Birgin and Pautassi, 2001).

In all cases, it is clear that the pension reforms transformed retirement benefits into an asset acquired on the market through a series of payments. They were available not by virtue of being a working woman or because unpaid domestic work was considered work, but based rather on the capability to save—a prerequisite to participation in the capitalisation system. The gender inequalities of the labour market and the differences between women of different socioeconomic classes were not deemed to require any levelling of benefits. Rather, these inequities were accentuated by treating all contributors as “clients” rather than as right-holders.

The health reform was based on deregulation of health insurance schemes, insurers' freedom to select their members, and self-management by public hospitals. This reform (1991) was presented as gender neutral.<sup>11</sup> Thus, it did not take account of the differential

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<sup>9</sup> In fact, “over half of young wage earners between 15 and 24 years of age worked without any social benefits. Increases in the lack of protection among heads of household are equally significant, given the impact that this has on the living conditions of entire households. In 1990, 17.5% of heads of household received no benefits, and by October 2000, this figure had risen to 28.7%.” Lo Vuolo (2001), quoted in Bayón and Saraví (2001).

<sup>10</sup> In 2003, and given that more than 500,000 people over the age of 60 lacked personal incomes, the National Government promoted the program “Adulto Mayor Más”. This Program extended the system of non contributive pensions for the elderly, through an allocation of around 65 dollars per month for those who lack social security (CELS, 2004)

<sup>11</sup> The organisational model of Argentina's health sector was defined by national and provincial governments, and operationalised by dividing it into three subsectors: public (in the hands of national, provincial and municipal governments, comprised of the established network of healthcare providers); private (networks of healthcare firms); and social security (made up of health care schemes for workers in

impact of the sectoral reform on men and women, and adopted no measures to make corresponding adjustments. The increasing precariousness of labour market conditions during the 1990s led to an increase in the population not covered by health insurance plans, which rose from 36.9% of the population in 1991 to 48.1% in 2001. The decrease of coverage was aggravated by the reduction in services offered, higher prices charged to subscribers for services, and the deterioration of public health services—which were also highly variable from one jurisdiction to another (Pautassi, 2005). In terms of gender, slightly more men than women lacked coverage (50.2% vs. 46%); however, women of reproductive age (15-29 years) lacked coverage in greater proportions than did women as a whole (49.8%).<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that when a head of household or spouse has coverage, the benefit applies to the entire family group.<sup>13</sup> Lack of coverage for women of reproductive age becomes more serious when one considers that not until 2002 did Argentina create a national sexual and reproductive health policy for public hospitals and health centres, while abortion remained illegal.

The decentralisation of the health system predates the economic reform of the 1990s, since the public hospitals were transferred to the provinces in 1978. With this reform, the public hospitals became self-managed entities that could charge those able to pay, whereas care in public hospitals had previously been free of charge (Bayón and Saraví, 2001).

As a result, with increasing unemployment and precarious conditions in the labour market, the demand for free medical attention increased, whereas public health spending did not. In other words, public health expenditure did not keep pace with the increase in demand for public health services as a result of new entrants into the system who were now not able to access health care through the social insurance programs. This primarily impacted lower-income sectors, which historically have been the principal users of public healthcare facilities. However, the succession of crises eventually affected middle-income sectors as well, who came to account for 29.3% of the population using public health services (ECV-Siempro, 2001, in Bayón and Saraví, 2001).

Educational reform was also based on assessments that public education was inefficient, in the sense that it was considered to be subsidising the higher-income sectors. The Federal Education Law of 1993 extended mandatory schooling from eight to ten years, made certain curricular changes, and laid the groundwork for teacher training programmes. Although, in the mid-1990s, Argentina had one of the region's highest average schooling levels among the 25+ population (9.44 years), the country's lowest-income sectors were relegated to low-productivity jobs, or even excluded from the labour market entirely (Filmus, 1999, in Bayón and Saraví, 2001). It is widely recognised that

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the formal economy). The coverage provided by the public sector varies according to the area or province in which the patient is located. See Pautassi (2005).

<sup>12</sup> Though we do not have available data, presumably many of the women covered might be covered as “dependents” or “family members” and not as principal insurees

<sup>13</sup> Source: National Population Census, 2001.

not only access to, but also the quality of, education affects workers' advantages/disadvantages in the labour market.

In short, the major decline in State-provided services during the 1980s and 1990s, as a result of structural changes, progressively eroded protections not only for the poorest sectors and the impoverished middle classes—since only the *structural* poor were targeted—but also for the population as a whole. Thus, while the structural poor were limited to charity from the State, the middle class became increasingly defenceless, as the universal social rights associated with formal employment became a relic of the past.

### Economic Performance

Per capita gross domestic product has fluctuated markedly over the last decade, with notably high levels during the 1990s, when the Convertibility Law was in force, and steep declines with the end of the convertibility regime and the crisis of 2001-2002 caused by the devaluation of the peso—drops that were more pronounced than declines in GDP at constant prices (11%).

**Table 6: Per Capita Gross Domestic Product, at Current Market Prices (USD)**

1990	1991	1995	1998	2001	2002	2003	2004
3,983.70	5,274.00	7,421.00	8,307.10	7,235.20	2,719.90	3,422.10	4,005.90

Source: ECLAC, based on Argentine National Accounts.

**Table 7: Per Capita Gross Domestic Product, at Constant 1995 Market Prices (USD)**

1990	1991	1995	1998	2001	2002	2003
5,544.50	6,051.90	6,843.80	7,791.00	6,936.40	6,172.20	6,600.80

Source: ECLAC, based on Argentine National Accounts.

The long-range pattern of public spending as a proportion of gross domestic product was relatively stable (remaining near 30%), with few variations between periods. The largest variation was in actual GDP, as mentioned above. Indeed, public spending—particularly toward the end of the convertibility regime, when GDP contraction outstripped the effect of marginal adjustments in the salaries of public employees—could be described more appropriately as “inflexible” than as “countercyclical.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In mid-2001, the salaries of public employees were reduced by 13%.

**Table 8: Consolidated Public Spending as a percentage of GDP**

	1980	1984	1987	1989	1990	1993	1997	2001	2002	2004	2006*
<b>Total spending</b>	29.04	26.58	34.64	31.71	30.37	31.71	30.36	35.72	29.34	28.90	32.33

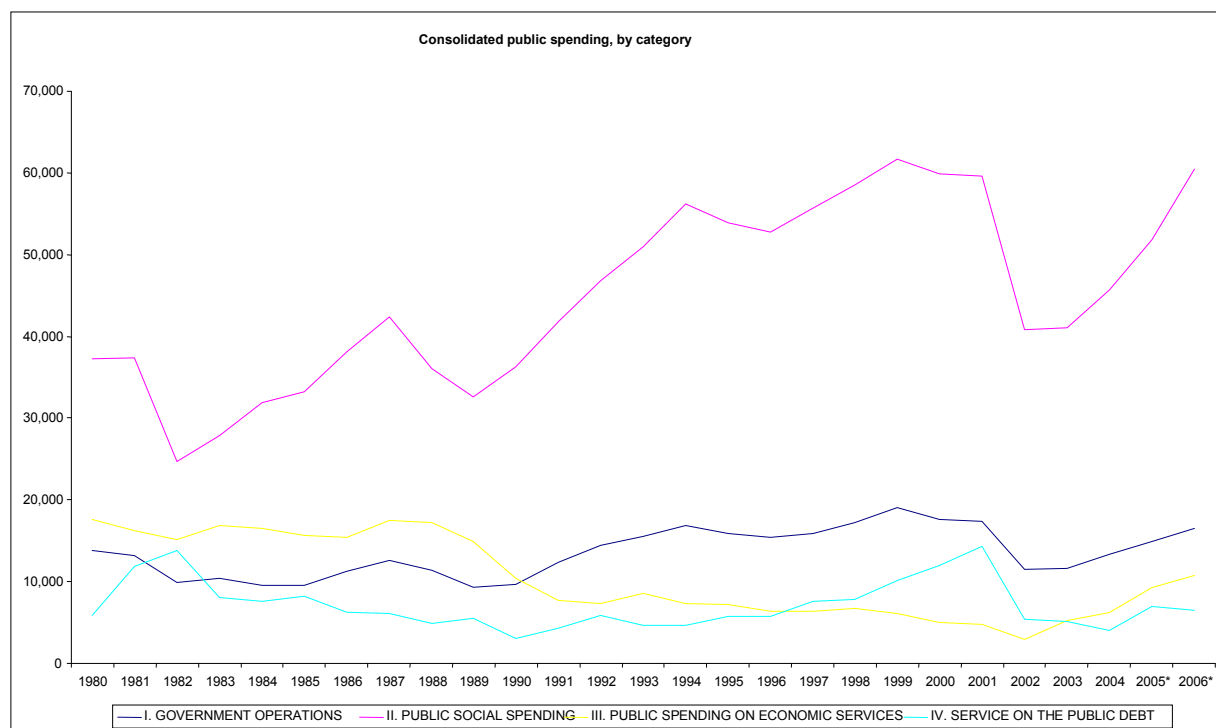
Note: Percentages represent total spending, including interest on the foreign debt.

Source: Ministry of Economy and Production (2007).

(\*) Provisional figures.

The figures for consolidated public spending by category, in millions of 2001 pesos, show major changes in social spending, which followed a generally upward trajectory, reflecting the onus of service on the public debt, which peaked during Argentina's two "debt crises" in 1982 and 2001.

**Figure 2: Consolidated public spending, by category, in millions of 2001 pesos.**



Source: Author, based on Ministry of Economy and Production, 2007.

Table 9 shows that public spending in the social sphere, as a percentage of GDP, was more stable in some areas than in others during the period reflected. While there were major variations in GDP during the period (as cited earlier), certain types of State spending remained relatively stable, due to the nature of government operations.

Table 9 does, however, show major sustained increases in social welfare spending as a percentage of all social spending. The increases occurred with the privatisation of social security described above, when the public system had to deal simultaneously with high debt and diminished revenue—having lost the revenue from assets that had been privatised—while confronting an increase in both unemployment and precarious employment (problems compounded by the inadequacy of social security contributions).

Fluctuations in education spending, as well as (to a lesser degree) in healthcare, can also be seen, along with a gradual but sustained increase in public spending on social assistance programs. In terms of spending on labour-related issues, there were increased outlays for unemployment programs as the result of increased unemployment and the new flexibility in labour policy, while investments in family allocations—an institution closely linked with formal employment—declined.

**Table 9: Public expenditure on health, education and social protection as a percentage of GDP (trend data)**

Purpose/Category	1980	1984	1987	1989	1990	1993	1997	2001	2002	2004	2006*
<b>Public social spending</b>	<b>14.51</b>	<b>12.97</b>	<b>18.68</b>	<b>16.61</b>	<b>18.57</b>	<b>20.28</b>	<b>19.78</b>	<b>22.18</b>	<b>19.75</b>	<b>19.04</b>	<b>20.78</b>
<b>Education, culture, science and technology</b>	2.99	3.08	4.07	3.19	3.52	4.09	4.31	5.20	4.40	4.15	5.07
<b>Health</b>	3.18	3.42	4.20	3.59	4.21	4.63	4.53	5.11	4.47	4.35	4.58
<b>Social assistance and promotion</b>	0.74	0.78	1.12	1.09	0.88	1.10	1.19	1.30	1.23	1.48	1.91
<b>Social welfare</b>	5.18	4.04	6.85	7.08	7.93	7.88	7.49	8.14	7.06	6.33	6.44
<b>Labour</b>	0.80	0.40	0.61	0.37	0.39	0.84	0.86	1.04	1.51	1.45	1.13
Employment and unemployment-insurance programmes	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.20	0.27	0.37	1.00	1.02	0.63
Family allocations	0.77	0.39	0.59	0.36	0.38	0.64	0.59	0.67	0.51	0.43	0.49

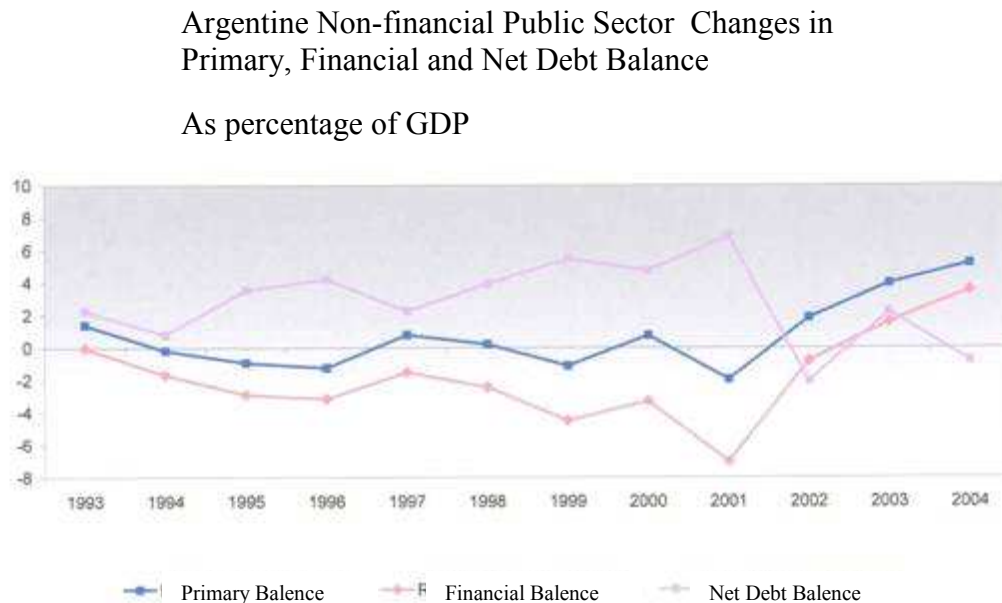
Note: Only transfers from the national government to the fiduciary funds are included, not total spending executed by those funds, since detailed figures and allocations by purpose and category are unavailable.

Source: Ministry of Economy and Production (2007). (\*) Provisional figures.

Finally, it is interesting to note the changes in public financial and primary balances, and in public debt, beginning in 1990. Figure 3 provides a view of the country's high debt level during the last decade, which enabled it to maintain a deficit that was relatively low in terms of the primary balance but high in financial terms. In this way, the most relevant indicator in macroeconomic terms is the one referring to financial balance, as it shows whether there is deficit or special needs in financial terms<sup>15</sup>. The last four years show equilibrium in the public accounts and, for the first time in decades, a positive balance in the primary surplus. Despite this macroeconomic improvement, however, the country continues to have a significant social debt, as discussed in the following section.

<sup>15</sup> The elaboration of this indicator takes into consideration the whole resources and public expenditure, as well as the financial sources and indebtedness, differentiating it from the "primary balance", which is a less complex indicator.

**Figure 3: Argentina's non-Financial Public Sector. Primary, Financial and net Debt Balance, as a percentage of GDP, 1993-2004.**



Source: Ministry of Economy and Production, 2004.

### **Crisis and recovery: public policy, the labour market and social inequality from a gender perspective (2002-2006)**

The 2001-2002 crisis was economically cataclysmic for households in Argentina. Levels of economic activity fell abruptly. The end of convertibility and the sharp devaluation of the currency accentuated the process of net job loss and deteriorating job quality. Unemployment reached 21.5% of the economically active population, and over one half of the population found itself living under the poverty line (Beccaria, Esquivel and Maurizio, 2005).

In the political sphere, the crisis that exploded in late 2001 produced the spectacle of five different presidents in a single week. Ultimately, Eduardo Duhalde became the stable interim president and took immediate measures to address the crisis. The profound deterioration of the social and political situation did indeed require emergency action. This began with protections provided by the Law of Public Emergency and Reform of the



Foreign Exchange Regime, and regulatory frameworks were established in regard to social areas. A national food emergency and a national job emergency were declared.<sup>16</sup>

These laws functioned as frameworks for implementing major social programmes—three mega-social assistance programmes: the Plan for Unemployed Heads of Household (Plan Jefes y Jefas de Hogar Desocupados, or PJJHD),<sup>17</sup> the Food Emergency Programme (Programa de Emergencia Alimentaria, or PEA),<sup>18</sup> and the Remediation Programme. The first of these was implemented by the Ministry of Labour, the second by the Ministry of Social Development and the last by the Ministry of Health (Rodríguez, Enríquez, and Reyes, 2006).<sup>19</sup>

In the years following the crisis, there was a rapid recovery in jobs and, though less quickly, in wages. The PJJHD plan succeeded, to a degree, in maintaining household incomes, and official employment figures recovered—though it must be noted that for statistical purposes the government considered PJJHD beneficiaries to be “employed” persons. Much of the employment recovery was driven by the massive incorporation of women as PJJHD beneficiaries. In the second quarter of 2002, 63% of beneficiaries were women. In the last quarter of 2006, this figure was 72%. A large proportion of these women had previously been economically inactive (Cortés, et. al., 2003). The overall effect of the policy was to reduce unemployment, which was lower among women than among men (UNGS, 2003).

Many of the social policies of the post-convertibility period maintained the structural features of the 1990 assistance policy, though based on the belief that “employment is the only legitimate means by which persons should have access to the resources required to satisfy their needs and aspirations” (Rodríguez Enríquez, and Reyes, 2006: 55). Thus, concern about poverty was supplanted by a concern about *employability*. At the same time, “family” policy, aimed at reducing poverty, not only lacked any relation to the rights enshrined in the constitution, but interacted intimately with social and gender inequalities by rooting itself in an “employability” perspective that neglected poor women responsible for the economic support of their families. Their situation was addressed principally by cash transfers, under the “Families for Social Inclusion” plan (CELS, 2007).

In addition to the impact of cash transfer programmes, there was a 7.6% annual increase in jobs not associated with the job programme between October 2002 and the third

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<sup>16</sup> Sanctioned by Law 25.561 (2002), Decree 108/2002 and Decree 165/2002, respectively

<sup>17</sup> The PJJHD involved monetary transfers of 150 pesos per month (the equivalent of US\$ 50). Over one million beneficiaries were covered, with the number of recipients peaking in the second quarter of 2003 (2,040,916 beneficiaries). Since then, beneficiaries have left the programme, but no new ones have been incorporated.. See Rodríguez Enríquez, and Reyes (2006).

<sup>18</sup> The Emergency Food Programme (Programa de Emergencia Alimentaria, or PEA) was designed to purchase food to cover the basic needs of the population that was at risk of falling below the subsistence level.

<sup>19</sup> “Discretionality” in the execution of these programs has been widely analysed and questioned. See CELS 2004 and 2007, and Rodríguez Enríquez, and Reyes, 2006.

quarter of 2004. Employment indicators show that in the early years of the recovery, the growth in total employment was accompanied by increases in the proportion of informal jobs, a fact that underlines the deterioration in job quality during this period. Starting in 2004, there was an increase in the proportion of new jobs that included social security coverage. It is not yet clear, however, that this reflects a real trend in that direction. When the beneficiaries of social programmes are excluded from the calculation, employment levels in 2004 are actually not much different from the 1999 peak (Beccaria, Esquivel and Maurizio, 2005).

In the second half of 2004, excluding the beneficiaries of employment programmes, the percentage of employed heads of households who were members of poor households was 71.3%—15 points lower than the figure for non-poor heads of household. This gap diminishes if the beneficiaries of the programmes are included, thus demonstrating the impact of the job programmes on a significant number of members of low-income households. Nevertheless, unemployment among heads of poor households (12% for men, 14% for women) was three times higher than among non-poor households (4%) (Esquivel and Maurizio, 2005).

The severe recession of 2001 was followed by a major economic recovery, with annual growth levels of over 8% for four consecutive years.

**Table 10: Evolution of GDP in Selected Years**

	2000	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b><u>GDP growth</u></b> <b><u>(annual %)</u></b>	-0.8	-10.9	8.8	9.0	9.2	8.5

Source: ECLAC, based on Argentine National Accounts.

Despite major economic growth during this period, the proportion of informal jobs remained high, with more precariousness in women's jobs than in men's. Thus, while informal employment in 2006 accounted for 42.3% of the 18+ employed population overall, the rate for women was 47.5%, as compared with 38.1% for men.<sup>20</sup>

Currently, the rate of female activity is 48.7%, demonstrating continued participation in the labour market by women, though at a lower rate than men (73.3%). Meanwhile, the average unemployment rate of 8.7% represents a worse situation for women (11%) than for men (6.9%).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Source: MTEYSS, Subsecretaría de Programación Técnica y Estudios Laborales, Dirección General de Estadísticas y Estudios Laborales, based on EPH-INDEC, third quarter of 2006.

<sup>21</sup> These data refer to the fourth quarter of 2006, EPH-INDEC. For the first quarter of 2007, in the 31 urban centres, unemployment was 9.8% and underemployment 9.3%. However, if beneficiaries of the

In the labour market, there continues to be notable gender-based segmentation of activities. Women have a major presence in the tertiary sector—particularly in social, community and personal services—while the proportion of men in the secondary sector is nearly three times the proportion of women, due to men’s greater presence in industry and their near monopoly of construction jobs.

**Table 11: Distribution of Urban Employed, by Sex and Sector of Activity, Argentina, 2004. Population 15+ years of age**

Sector of activity	Women	Men
<b>Primary</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
Agriculture <sup>22</sup> and Fishing	0.9	1.4
Mining	0.1	0.6
<b>Secondary</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>30.9</b>
Industry	11.0	17.0
Electricity, Gas and Water	0.3	0.6
Construction	0.4	13.3
<b>Tertiary</b>	<b>87.3</b>	<b>67.1</b>
Commerce, Hotels, Restaurants	21.8	25.6
Transportation and communications	3.0	11.4
Financial and real estate services	6.6	8.8
Social, community and personal services	55.9	21.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: ECLAC—Women and Development Unit, based on special tabulations from the household surveys of the various countries. Reference year for Argentina: 2004. Cited in Espino and Salvador, 2007.

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employment programmes are excluded, unemployment rises to 11.1% (less than the 14.1% rate of the first quarter of 2006). EPH-INDEC, see [www.indec.mecon.gov.ar](http://www.indec.mecon.gov.ar)

<sup>22</sup> This figure is not relevant, since the permanent household survey (Encuesta Permanente de Hogares) does not gather information from the rural sector.

Focusing on Greater Buenos Aires, in 2006, we see that the unemployment rate for the economically active population was 9.8%. Disaggregated by sex, it was 12.6% for women and 7.5% for men. Within the female population, those most affected were women up to the age of 29, for whom the unemployment rate was 21.7%.<sup>23</sup>

Among employed women, 28.5% were heads of household, 42.1% spouses of heads of household and 23.6% daughters of heads of household, while the remainder were other family and non-family members of the household.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the percentage of spouses of heads of household and female heads of household in the labour market, which increased during the 1980s and 1990s, remained quite stable during the years of economic recovery.

Most working women are employed in the service sector. This includes those associated with professionalised or marketised care services. Among the activities in this segment are teaching (the occupation of 17.8% of the female economically active population) and social services and health (9.6%). Domestic service accounts for 17.1% of economically active women—the most vulnerable sector, since 92.3% of these jobs are informal.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, informality and precariousness, especially for women, continue to affect the exercise of many of the rights associated with access to basic services. In this sense, access to maternity leave, the availability of infant care, and transfer of economic resources to provide men and women the minimum resources to raise children, are areas that have been particularly affected by the newly established flexibilities in the labour market.

As indicated, the recovery in wage levels in the latest period was a positive development, though less marked than the recovery in jobs. The purchasing power of wages continued to be significantly lower than at the end of 2001 and, from a long-term perspective, much reduced. Between October 2002 and the third quarter of 2004, real growth in wages was 8.1% less than the previous year's decline of 30% (Beccaria, Esquivel and Maurizio, 2005). The growth of wages may be the result of income support policies that the government began in 2003—including cash transfer programmes—as well as of regulation and the bolstering of the minimum wage. (The latter types of measures have continued, as part of an active labour market policy approach.)

All of this played a role in leading to a considerable reduction in poverty. Before convertibility was abandoned, 38% of the population lived in households with incomes below the poverty line. This figure peaked at 57.5% in October 2002, ten months after the devaluation of the currency, and had fallen to the previous level (38.5%) by the first quarter of 2005. During 2006, the percentage continued falling at an accelerated rate. In

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<sup>23</sup> Source: INDEC, Socioeconomic indicators for the 14-year-old+ population in the 31 urban centres, and in the various regions and jurisdictions, by size, fourth quarter of 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Source: INDEC, Sociodemographic indicators, second quarter of 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Source: INDEC, Encuesta Permanente de Hogares Continua, third quarter of 2006, data on employed persons 14-years-old+.

the second half of 2006, poverty affected 19.2% of the population and 26.9% of the urban population. In Greater Buenos Aires during that period, 18.2% of households and 25.5% of individuals were poor. Finally, in Buenos Aires proper, 6.4% of households and 10.1% of individuals had incomes that placed them below the poverty line

Any analysis of patterns of social inequality must be placed in historical context. As has been indicated, increasing inequality in Argentina was associated with extremely unstable macroeconomic factors prior to the 1990s. During the 1990s—even in periods of expansion such as 1995-1998—not only were wages stagnant, but the income gap increased. This trend intensified in early 2002. In more recent years, the relative “improvement” in the Gini coefficient brought inequality in 2004 to its 1994 level—hardly reason, however, for celebration (Beccaria, Esquivel and Maurizio, 2005).<sup>26</sup>

Thus, despite improvements in distribution, which the most recent INDEC data show to be ongoing, there appears to be a certain “cap” on the structural reversal. While the incomes of the lowest-wage quintile of employed persons in the first quarter of 2005 accounted for 4% of all income, the first quintile captured approximately 49%. Furthermore, the average income of this subset of the employed population was 12 times that of the lowest quintile (Esquivel and Maurizio, 2005).<sup>27</sup>

As can be seen from the foregoing, Argentina’s social and economic landscape continues to be characterised by great inequality, even in the capital city of Buenos Aires, where 22.9% of households in the southern district—though only 2.4% in the northern district—are poor (see Table 12).

**Table 12: Distribution of Households, by Poverty Level, in Different Areas of Buenos Aires, 2005**

District	Total	2005		
		Indigent	Poor non-indigent	Non-poor
City of Buenos Aires	100.0	2.6	5.4	92.0
North	100.0	1.1	1.3	97.7
South	100.0	7.7	15.2	77.0
West	100.0	1.3	4.2	94.5
East	100.0	2.2	4.7	93.1

Source: General Directorate of Statistics and Census (Dirección General de Estadística y Censos, or GCBA). Annual household survey, cited in “Pobreza e Ingresos,” Chap. 6, p. 5.

Social inequality in the city of Buenos Aires is evident in the type of housing infrastructure within different areas of the city. While 4.9% of the city’s housing units are rentals, tenements, hotels, boarding houses, non-standard housing, shanties and make-

<sup>26</sup> Given this evidence, it should be borne in mind that income as reported in the EPH does not accurately reflect income, for example, from rental property.

<sup>27</sup> Esquivel and Maurizio (2005) use the phrase “distributive catastrophe” to refer to the systematic worsening of the economic indicators and the way in which “limits” on reversing them are proposed.

shift housing, the percentage is significantly higher in certain areas. In the area covered by Participatory Management Centre (Centro de Gestión Participativa) No. 3, 21.3% of the housing is sub-standard; in the area covered by Centre No. 1, the figure is 12.6%; in Centre No. 2-south, 11.2%; and in Centre No. 4, 8.7%.

A linear view cannot account for the socioeconomic and political developments described in this first section, given that they have been accompanied by a sustained increase in life expectancy, a major increase in school enrolment and cultural changes in marital arrangements and reproductive behaviour. Marital and reproductive behaviour has been changing, particularly in the more highly educated population. In addition, women's increasing opportunities for achieving some degree of economic independence, even in the most disadvantaged sectors, are potential forces for change in the household decision-making process, the education of children and the processes of forming and dissolving families (Geldstein, 1994).

Thus, in the context of this research, the nature of the country's social and demographic landscape, changes in these characteristics, their impact, and the evolving structure of families and households together represent an important starting point in gaining a true understanding of childcare arrangements and adult participation in the labour market from a gender perspective.

## II. Social and demographic features and changes

Argentina experienced an early demographic transition. It is highly urbanised (89.5% of the population lives in cities or towns of more than 2,000 inhabitants), and its average fertility rate is low (2.4 children per woman).<sup>28</sup>

The country has approximately 36.26 million inhabitants, of whom 51.3% are women and 48.7% are men, with the marginal difference explained by women's greater life expectancy (78.1 years, as opposed to 70.6 years). Infant mortality is 13.3 deaths per thousand live births, with male mortality slightly higher than female (14.8 versus 11.8).<sup>29</sup> Infant mortality has declined significantly in the last 15 years, though preventable mortality is still relatively high.

**Table 13: Infant Mortality Rate (1990 – 2005) per 1,000 live births**

1990	1995	2000	2002	2005
25.6	22.2	16.6	16.8	13.3

Source: Ministry of Health, 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Source: INDEC, Censo Nacional de Población, Hogares y Vivienda 2001.

<sup>29</sup> Source: Estadísticas Vitales. Información Básica 2005, Series 5 No. 49, Ministry of Health, Office of the Presidency of the Nation, Buenos Aires, November 2006.

According to census data, there are over 3.34 million children (9.3% of the population) under five years old in need of special care because of their age. Mandatory schooling in Argentina begins at five. As Table 14 shows, 28.3% of Argentina's population is under 14 years of age, while 9.9% is over 65. The population of the city of Buenos Aires is older (over 17% being above 65, with women representing a major portion of that population segment). On the other hand, only 16.9% of the city's population is under 14.

**Table 14: Total Population, and Population by Age and Sex, according to Province, for 2001, in percentages.**

Province	Total population	Age brackets (years)			Men				Women			
		0-14	15-64	65+	Total	0-14	15-64	65+	Total	0-14	15-64	65+
<b>Total</b>	<b>36,260,130</b>	<b>28.26</b>	<b>61.84</b>	<b>9.89</b>	<b>17,659,072</b>	<b>29.46</b>	<b>62.29</b>	<b>8.25</b>	<b>18,601,058</b>	<b>27.12</b>	<b>61.42</b>	<b>11.46</b>
City of Buenos Aires	2,776,138	16.89	65.87	17.23	1,258,458	18.90	67.56	13.54	1,517,680	15.22	64.48	20.30

Source: Author, based on INDEC, National Population, Household and Housing Census 2001.

Most of Argentina's population lives in families. However, families are diverse and their structures and dynamics have changed over the last few decades. Far from being an isolated institution, the family, as Jelin (2004:1) states, is "an organic part of broader social processes, which include societies' productive and reproductive dimensions, cultural patterns and political systems."

Both institutional factors and family relationships are affected by public policy relating to sexuality and fertility, provisions regulating matrimonial ties and the potential for restructuring them, and advances in women's and children's rights. The policies and laws accompanying the restoration of democracy in Argentina in the 1980s have been an important factor in bringing equality to men's and women's rights in the family context. A divorce law was enacted, and equal paternity and maternity rights were provided for children born both within and outside of wedlock. The 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century represented a further advance in the form of legislation that provides sanctions against domestic violence and policies promoting responsible sexual and reproductive health behaviour.

Meanwhile, policies expanding and contracting government-provided services, including what Bustelo termed the creation of the "State of Distress" directly affected household structures and dynamics, including not only the mobility of adult members within the labour market, as was seen above, but also the arrangements made to provide care for the youngest members of the family while at the same time participating in the labour market.

## Educational Levels

Argentina has succeeded, on a massive scale, in bringing the population into the formal educational system. The country's educational levels are relatively high in Latin America, with fairly low illiteracy rates (only 3.7% of the population above the age of 15 is illiterate, according to 2001 census data).

**Table 15: Argentina. 15-year-old+ Population, by Level of Schooling attained, according to Sex and Age. Percentages as of 2001**

Sex and age	15+ population	No schooling	Percentage of 15+ population with no schooling
Total	26.012.435	961.632	3.7
Men	12.456.479	433.149	3.5
Women	13.555.956	528.483	3.9

Source: INDEC-National Population Census, 2001.

At the primary and secondary levels, there are no significant differences between men and women in terms of access to education and remaining in school. However, there is some increase in attrition with increasing age. This is true for both men and women (although with a slight difference favouring women) and is associated with social inequalities that affect—though in different ways—the two sexes.

In 1993, the Federal Education Act No. 24.195 made school mandatory as of the age of five.<sup>30</sup> The National Education Act of December 2006 went further, extending the mandatory period through secondary school. Law 26.206 introduced two new elements: (1) recognition of the first 45 days of life as constituting the initial period of public caring; and (2) the need to make kindergarten universal from the age of 4 (Law 26.206, Article 19). Nevertheless, as the third report in this series will show, the country does not yet have the educational services to meet these objectives.

Among the primary school-age population (6-12), the enrolment rate is 98.3% for boys and 98% for girls.<sup>31</sup> At the secondary level, the percentages drop, with a small gap in favour of females. The 2001 census data show figures of 82.7% for girls and 79.3% for boys between 13 and 18 years of age.<sup>32</sup> Thus, universal coverage for both sexes still remains a distant goal. More in-depth analysis of these differences is required to pinpoint

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<sup>30</sup> Article 10 of Law 24.195 speaks of: "Initial education, consisting of kindergarten for children of 3 to 5 years old, the last year of which is mandatory."

<sup>31</sup> Data from Censo Nacional de Población y Viviendas, INDEC 2001, cited in García Frinchaboy, Mónica (2005).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



the social and regional differences and understand how they affect attrition in students of each sex.

The distribution of the 15+ population, according to grade completed, shows, for 2004, that the highest percentage is for those who completed primary school (25%); next is the population that entered, but did not complete, secondary school (21.3%). 18.4 % completed secondary school. Only 11.8% finished college, with the percentage being higher for women than for men (13.3% versus 10.3%).<sup>33</sup>

As might be expected, attrition increases as the number of school-age mothers increases, and as family responsibilities take precedence over school attendance, thus compromising the futures of both the young mothers and their children.

Finally, when couples are formed, the schooling levels of the two individuals tend to be the same or nearly the same. Thus, for example, in the city of Buenos Aires, 56.1% of married couples share the same educational level. Most of the remaining couples are in adjacent educational brackets, with educational levels still relatively close (Torrado, 2003). Thus, patterns governing marriage and the formation of families reflect a tendency for people of similar social backgrounds to associate. This, in turn, shapes the different reproductive behaviour and patterns of household economic well-being for the more- and less-educated population.

### **Changes in marriage practices**

The patterns of coupling and family formation have changed significantly in only a few decades. This occurred not only in Greater Buenos Aires and Buenos Aires proper, but also in the country as a whole. Two of the most notable features of the change were the increase in the number of unmarried couples and the increasing age at which people came together, whether through legal marriage or otherwise (Torrado, 2003; Wainerman and Geldstein, 1994, Binstock, 2004, Mazzeo, 2004).

The incidence of legal marriage declined sharply during the military government (1976-1982). With the advent of democracy, and particularly with the enactment of the divorce law in 1986, the number of marriages rose, as de facto divorced couples regularised their situation and second marriages were legalised. After that initial spike, the trend visible since the 1960s continued, with new forms of consensual union replacing legal marriage. Though the number of marriages dropped, the overall number of unions remained stable.

In effect, consensual unions, which were more frequent in the rural low-income population, spread to the urban middle class. Thus, the number of unmarried couples rose

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<sup>33</sup> Source: INDEC, Dirección de Estadísticas Sectoriales, based on EPH data.

from 7% of all couples in 1960 to 18% in 1991, a near tripling in 30 years (Torrado, 2003). The trend continued thereafter, with the percentage reaching 24.5% in 2001.<sup>34</sup>

In the city of Buenos Aires, the replacement of marriage by other forms of cohabitation is also highly significant, as the incidence of the latter rose from 13.6% in 1991 to 27.2% in 2005. Thus, the incidence of this type of union doubled in less than 15 years.

**Table 16: Distribution of Unions, by type (percentage)**

Year	Marriages	Consensual unions
1991	86.4	13.6
2001	78.4	21.6
2005	72.8	27.2

Source: General Directorate of Statistics and Census (GCBA), based on census data and Annual Household Survey (EAH) 2005.

The rapid spread of consensual unions is one indicator of the fragility of the institution of legal marriage. Not only are there fewer marriages, there are also more divorces, and the percentage of individuals over 14 who are separated or divorced in Argentina has risen from 0.6% in 1960 to 3.9% in 1991, and to 4.8% in 2001, according to the population censuses for those years. Meanwhile, in the city of Buenos Aires, the age of first unions increased. For women in the 1980s, the average age was 26. This rose to 28 in 1990, and exceeded 30 by the initial years of the twenty-first century (Mazzeo, 2004).

In spite of this, the incidence of coupling and family formation has not diminished, but only changed. In fact, the lower marriage—and higher divorce—rates may reflect more freedom to leave unsatisfactory relationships, as well as a process of social change in which new forms of the family are emerging (Jelin, 2004). The process must be seen in terms of more complex sociocultural processes relating to growing individualism. Thus, the increase in the age of first unions and the increase in consensual unions is connected with women's greater autonomy, resulting from their greater participation in the labour market, which gives them the option of choosing not to enter—or to leave—relationships. Despite these changes, qualitative studies by Binstock and Cerrutti (2002, in Jelin, 2004) indicate that “Most still believe—and more strongly than before—that marriage is not an out-dated institution, that children fare better when raised with both parents, and that women need to have children to feel a sense of self-realization.”

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<sup>34</sup> Source: INDEC, National Population Census 2001. In consensual unions, proportions are similar to those among “second-time” couples—i.e., those in which one or both members had some prior union and are forming a “single” union. Conversely, the proportion of legal unions is much greater among those in a “single union” than among “second-timers.”

## Reproductive behaviours and social inequalities

Though an exception in Latin America, low—and long-term declines in—fertility rates are a long-standing phenomenon in Argentina, dating from the last decade of the nineteenth century (Jelin, 2004). In 1895, the fertility rate in Argentina was 7 children per woman. By 1914, it had declined to 5.3, and by 1947 to 3.2, where it remained until 1980. This figure reached 2.8 during the 1990-1995 period, and was 2.4 for 2000-2005. In short, women in Argentina are having fewer children (Torrado, 2003, Jelin, 2004).

Despite the general decline and low rates, there is a strong relationship between socioeconomic stratum and fertility rates. Analysis shows that women of poor households have more children on average than other women. For example, 39% of women in non-poor households have no children, and 84% of those who do, have between 1 and 3 children, with only 16% having 4 or more. In poor households, on the other hand, 29% of women have no children, and of those who do, 41% have 4 or more (Ariño, 2003). Not surprisingly, therefore, the poorest provinces have the highest fertility rates. These include Misiones (3.7), Santiago del Estero (3.5) and Formosa y Salta (3.4). The jurisdictions with the lowest rates are the city of Buenos Aires (1.8) and the province of Santa Fe (2.4).<sup>35</sup>

The other aspect of this phenomenon is that while overall fertility is declining, maternity among adolescents has remained unchanged, concentrated primarily in the most socially disadvantaged sectors. In absolute numbers, there were 712,220 births in 2005, of which 107,109 were to women of 19 years old or less.<sup>36</sup> Among these mothers, 2,699 were girls between 10 and 14, with a high incidence of sexual abuse involved.

Marked social and regional differences are seen in adolescent maternity figures. While 27.3% of poor women became mothers before age 20, this is the case for only 1.6% of those living in high-income households (Ariño, 2003). There are also significant differences from province to province.

On the other hand, the average age at which women have their first child—especially in middle-class and urban sectors—is rising. In the city of Buenos Aires, it rose from 26 to 28 through the 1980s and 1990s, and to above 29 in 2000, accompanying the rise in the average age of first unions (Mazzeo, 2004).

Other elements also bear on these differences in fertility rates, including women's educational levels and the family practices and environments in which young women grow up. For example, a significant correlation has been found between the age at which a girl's mother had her first child and the age of the daughter's first pregnancy, a pattern that represents an intergenerational cycle of adolescent fertility (Geldstein and Pantelides, 2001).

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<sup>35</sup> Source: INDEC, National Population Census 2001.

<sup>36</sup> Source: MSAL, *Estadísticas Vitales, Información Básica* 2005.

In the last ten years, the maternal mortality rate remained around 4 per 10,000 live births (or 3.9 for 2005, signifying that 279 women died in that year for reasons related to pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum conditions). According to a study by the Ministry of Health on the distribution of maternal mortality, 40% of births occur in provinces with the highest mortality rates, and it is in these provinces that approximately 65% of maternal deaths occur. Thus, while maternal mortality in the city of Buenos Aires is 0.7 per 10,000 live births, it is 16.4 in the province of Formosa, 15.4 in La Rioja and 9.6 in Corrientes. These same data at the regional level show that women less able to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights are concentrated in the northeastern and northwestern parts of the country, where maternal mortality rates are 8.4 and 5.9 per 10,000 live births, respectively. It should be noted that much more has been achieved in terms of reducing infant mortality than in reducing maternal mortality, which remains high for a country as developed as Argentina.

**Table 17: Maternal Mortality Rates (per 10,000 live births)**

1990	1995	2000	2001	2005
5.2	4.4	3.5	4.3	3.9

Source: Ministry of Health, 2006.

## Household and Family Structures

Living within family settings is the most widespread choice of the Argentine population. Nevertheless, families and households have changed significantly in the last few decades. Changes in conjugal models and reproductive practices, longer life expectancy, women's greater autonomy, and increasing individualism (among both women and men) are all factors affecting the formation of households. The economic conditions of families and their members also influence the ways in which households are organised (both size and structure). Throughout the family life cycle, these processes have changed over time, although this is not always clear in the data from population surveys and censuses. It is important to differentiate between family and household, since many family responsibilities may be met by family members not in the household (divorced parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, etc.). Care and affection may be given and received by parties not living together (Jelin, 2004).

Beginning in the 1970s, the structure of the Argentine household underwent four fundamental changes. First, there was a reduction in the average number of household members. Second, there was an increase in single-parent families. Third, there was a reduction in the number of extended families.<sup>37</sup> Finally, the presence of single-person

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<sup>37</sup> Between 1970 and 1991, the change was toward nuclear families. The incidence of extended families decreased by approximately 50%, declining from 32.1% in 1970 to 21.5% in 1991, a drop seen in both dual- and single-parent families (Torrado, 2003).

households increased, especially in urban areas (Torrado, 2003, Wainerman and Geldstein, 1994; Jelin, 2004; GCBA, 2005). Notably, the average size of Argentina's households, overall, has declined since the late nineteenth century—from 6 in 1869 to 4.3 in 1947, 3.86 in 1980 and 3.61 in 1991, finally reaching 3.57 in 2001 (INDEC, 2003, in Jelin, 2004).

Toward the extremes of the socioeconomic scale there are sharp contrasts in household size. The poorest households have more members than the national average, and have many more members than do the country's highest per capita-income households.

In Greater Buenos Aires, where average household size was relatively stable between 1980 and 2003, households in the highest quintile declined significantly in size, from 2.84 to 2.36 members (representing a 16% decrease), while the average size of households in the lowest quintiles increased 20%, from 4.04 members to 4.89 (Jelin, 2004). Thus, the gap between household size at the ends of the scale increased, with the size of the poorest households being double that of the wealthiest at the close of the period, as shown in the following table:

**Table 18: Average Household Size according to Income Level.  
Greater Buenos Aires, 1980-2003<sup>38</sup>**

Year	Average number of members	Income level	
		Quintile 1 (lowest)	Quintile 5 (highest)
1980 <sup>a/</sup>	3.31	4.04	2.84
1990 <sup>a/</sup>	3.29	4.33	2.37
2003 <sup>b/</sup>	3.31	4.89	2.36

Source: Jelin (2004), based on the Permanent Household Survey (EPH).  
(a: October; b: May)

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<sup>38</sup> The IPCF Quintile, valid for all households. The break in the table shows data based on the change in methodology used for the Permanent Household Survey in 2003.

During 2006, these trends in household size, as a function of per capita income, remained unchanged. The differences in household size are not explained entirely by the difference in fertility rates between the wealthiest and poorest households. Thus, not necessarily the largest households imply the greatest number of children. More thorough study of household structure is required, with further analysis of differences over time, as well as of the socioeconomic gap (examined here in terms of household per capita income quintiles).

Table 19 shows that nuclear family households—and, within this category, households comprised of a couple with children—continue to be the most common type of household, though their predominance diminished slightly between 1991 and 2001 for the country as a whole (declining from 42.3% to 40.8%, according to census data). In 2006, the proportion of households composed of a couple with children was somewhat lower (38.3%), but it should be noted that the data for that year come from the EPH, and are specifically indicative of urban patterns and thus not strictly comparable with the prior data.

Within the category of nuclear family households, the proportion composed of a couple with children declined, while the number of single-parent households increased (representing 12% of urban households as of 2006). Households comprised of a couple without children represented 13.6% of the households.

Moreover, there has been a slight decline in nuclear family and multi-family households. In 2006, these households represented 19.3% of all households in urban areas; in 2001, they represented 21.8% of the all of the nation's households (including small cities and rural areas, as well as large urban centres). These households reflect the ageing of the population and, as will be seen, are more prevalent in poorer sectors and less common in wealthier sectors

Finally, the percentage of single-person households has increased. This process has been driven particularly by behaviours that are more present in urban areas and among wealthier sectors. Thus, in 2001, single-person households accounted for 15% of all households, and in 2006, according to the EPH, they represented 16.8% (of the urban households that are the target of this information-gathering instrument).

**Table 19: Types of Households - Argentina**  
**1991 – 2001 (National total)**  
**2006 (Twenty-eight urban centres)**

	1991	2001	2006
Single-person	13.3	15.0	16.8
Nuclear family	64.1	63.2	63.9
*Couple without children	12.8	12.2	13.6
*Single parent with children	8.9	10.2	12.0
*Couple with children	42.3	40.8	38.3

<b>Extended, complex and other</b>	22.6	21.8	19.3
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Sources: Jelin (2004), based on National Population Census, 1991, 2001.  
 Author, based on EPH-INDEC, 2006.

The variation in the average size of households, then, is affected by superimposed trends. One trend consists of changes in reproductive behaviours, such as those leading to reduced fertility rates (people have fewer children than was true several decades ago, and do so later in the life cycle). Another trend is the increase in single-parent families as a result of separations and divorces, along with an increase in single-person households.

It is worth underscoring the diversity of households *headed by women* in Argentina. Census data show that such households represented 14.1% of all households in 1947, but had risen to 19.2% in 1980, 22.4% in 1991 and 27.7% in 2001.<sup>39</sup> Not all such households, however, are comprised of a woman with children: some are single-person households (e.g., older widows), single-parent households, and ones with couples who, when surveyed, choose to designate the woman as head of household.

Single-person households reflect two different processes: a shift toward individualism, and population aging. They are made up of single, separated or divorced individuals covering the full gamut of adult ages—young, middle-aged and older (those in the latter bracket being principally widowed women). This type of household is much more common among higher-income individuals who can bear the high cost of maintaining a dwelling without distributing the cost among various household members.

Thus, as the following tables show, while one-person households represent 16.8% of all urban households, they constitute 30.2% of the wealthiest households, but only 7.8% of the poorest. It is also interesting to note that only 5.1% of the total urban population lives in one-person households. Twelve-point-four percent of wealthier persons live alone, while in urban centres only 1.5% of lower-income individuals do so (Tables 20 and 21).<sup>40</sup> The care requirements of those living alone are not necessarily less demanding than for those who choose other living arrangements. In particular, older individuals living alone may have special care needs. These are most often provided by family members, though they reside in other households.<sup>41</sup>

An examination of information on single-parent households with children shows that 83% are headed by women, with the remaining 17% headed by men (National Population Census, 2001).<sup>42</sup> Among higher-income households, single-parent households are associated primarily with separations and divorces and with the fact that the children

<sup>39</sup> National Population Census, in Jelin, Elizabeth, 2004.

<sup>40</sup> In 2005, in the city of Buenos Aires, single-person households constituted 26.9% of all households. This accounts for only 10% of the total population of the city (GCBA, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> The 65+ population represents 9.9% of the country's overall population, while in the City of Buenos Aires it represents 17%, according to data from the National Population Census 2001.

<sup>42</sup> Among a total of 1,427,336 single-family households, 1,185,110 had female heads of household, while in the remainder, males served as heads of household, according to data from the National Census for 2001. Source: INDEC.

generally live with their mothers (this group constituting some 10% of households in the two highest-income quintiles). Among the poorest households, the proportion of single-parent households with children is significantly higher (20.6% in the lowest quintile for the country overall). As a result of recessive macroeconomic policy and of crises in the provision of social services, lower-income single-parent households are less able to meet their families' consumption needs with one income—a problem accentuated when the head of household is female.

The feasibility of a single woman maintaining a household with children varies considerably from one end of the social scale to the other. For female heads of poor households, the precariousness of conditions in the labour market is aggravated by the lack of publicly provided childcare—or even educational services—for children under five. Generally, the nuclear family household with a couple plus children continues to be the most common in Argentina, and this is true across the socioeconomic scale. Indeed, close to 50% of the population lives in households of this type, representing 38.3% of all households.

The trend for multi-generation households is the reverse of that seen for single-person households. They represent 7.6% of households, but are much more common in poor sectors. In the poorest quintile, they constitute 14.8% of households, whereas they represent only 1.7% of the households in the highest income brackets. Approximately one-fifth of the lower-income population lives in multi-generation households (22%), while 11.5% live in other types of extended-family households, in multi-family households or in other types of households.

Thus, the smallest households —the single-person and couple-without-children households— represent over half the households in the highest quintile, but only 11.7% in the lowest quintile. On the other hand, nuclear family households with couples or single parents, multi-generation households, complex households and other extended-family households represent nearly 90% of households in the lowest quintile. Moreover, these large households include 97.1% of the lowest-income population, as indicated in tables 20 and 21.



**Table 20: Households by Type, and by Family per capita Income.  
Urban Areas. Second Semester of 2006**

<b>Quintile</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Single-person</b>	<b>Couple without children</b>	<b>Couple with children</b>	<b>Single parent with children</b>	<b>Multi-generation</b>	<b>Extended, complex, other</b>
<b>1 - 20% poorest</b>	100%	7.8	3.9	41.4	20.6	14.8	11.5
<b>2</b>	100%	3.7	9.7	50.5	11.3	12.2	12.6
<b>3</b>	100%	10.2	12.1	42.5	11.1	10.1	13.9
<b>4</b>	100%	20.1	14.8	37.8	10.1	5.2	12.1
<b>5 - 20% wealthiest</b>	100%	30.2	20.8	27.5	10.1	1.7	9.7
<b>Total households</b>	100%	16.8	13.6	38.3	12.0	7.6	11.7

Source: Author, based on EPH-INDEC.

**Table 21: Persons by type of Household, and Family per capita Income.  
Urban Areas. Second semester of 2006**

<b>Quintile</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Single-person</b>	<b>Couple without children</b>	<b>Couple with children</b>	<b>Single parent with children</b>	<b>Multi-generation</b>	<b>Extended, complex, other</b>
<b>1 - 20% poorest</b>	100%	1.5	1.3	47.2	16.4	22.0	11.5
<b>2</b>	100%	1.1	4.9	54.1	8.9	18.0	13.1
<b>3</b>	100%	2.6	6.3	51.1	8.6	16.2	15.3
<b>4</b>	100%	7.1	10.3	50.6	9.0	9.2	13.8
<b>5 - 20% wealthiest</b>	100%	12.4	17.4	44.2	10.6	3.6	11.8
<b>Total households</b>	100%	5.1	8.2	49.4	10.6	13.6	13.1

Source: Author, based on EPH-INDEC.

Trends in Greater Buenos Aires are similar to those seen in urban centres as a whole. Changes in living-arrangement patterns for specific income segments within the overall population are also reflected to a significant extent in Greater Buenos Aires, as tables 22

and 23 show. Nuclear family households continue to predominate, and within this category, households composed of a couple with children represent 38.4%, while single-parent households represent 11.9%. Over 60% of the Greater Buenos Aires population lives in this type of household. When couples without children are included, the figure rises to 70%.

Though this type of household continues to constitute a majority in Argentina, a growing proportion of families are moving away from what one might call the “traditional” model (nuclear, two-generation, couple plus children). Among these, a substantial proportion is made up of single-person households, single-parent households and “combined” families. Single-person households have increased, representing 16.9% of the households in Greater Buenos Aires in 2006, while extended and complex households constituted 18% of the total.

Although the increase in single-person households is evident at various income levels, their presence and increase in the highest quintile is overwhelming. In Greater Buenos Aires, such households account for 31.6% of the total among the highest quintile, with 13.9% of the region’s highest-income individuals living in such households. According to Jelin (2004), single-person households constituted 15.3% of the highest quintile in 1980—double the proportion for the same quintile thirty years ago.

Conversely, extended and complex households in Greater Buenos Aires are concentrated among those who have low levels of family income, as is the case in the rest of the country. In Greater Buenos Aires, 14.3% of the poorest households contain three generations and house 20.5% of the most socially disadvantaged population. Taken together, multi-generation households and other extended and multi-family households represented 27.2% of the poorest households as of 2006 and 33.6% of this population segment. While these households diminished as a percentage in the country overall, they became more common in the highest quintile, where, in 1980, they constituted 18.7% of households (Jelin, 2004).

**Table 22: Households by Type, and by Family per capita Income.  
Greater Buenos Aires. Second Semester of 2006**

Quintile	Total	Single-person	Couple without children	Couple with children	Single parent with children	Multi-generation	Extended, complex, other
1 - 20% poorest	100%	6.6	4.0	40.9	21.3	14.3	12.9
2	100%	4.6	11.0	52.6	10.5	10.8	10.7
3	100%	15.9	15.4	39.3	9.5	8.6	11.3
4	100%	17.0	15.8	40.8	10.2	4.6	11.6
5 - 20% wealthiest	100%	31.6	22.7	25.2	10.3	1.3	8.9
<b>Total households</b>	100%	16.9	14.9	38.4	11.9	7.1	10.9

Source: Author based on EPH-INDEC.

**Table 23: Persons by type of Household and Family per capita Income.  
Greater Buenos Aires. Second Semester of 2006**

Quintile	Total	Single-person	Couple without children	Couple with children	Single parent with children	Multi-generation	Extended, complex, other
1 - 20% poorest	100%	1.4	1.7	46.8	16.5	20.5	13.1
2	100%	1.2	5.6	57.2	7.7	16.6	11.7
3	100%	5.2	10.0	50.2	7.6	13.8	13.2
4	100%	5.9	10.9	53.9	9.3	7.3	12.8
5 - 20% wealthiest	100%	13.9	20.1	40.9	11.1	2.8	11.2
<b>Total households</b>	100%	5.3	9.3	49.9	10.6	12.6	12.4

Source: Author based on EPH-INDEC.

Distinguishing the concepts of family and household, it is understandable that family obligations and responsibilities may fall on family members who do not share the household living space, and that even care (of children, older persons and the ill) and affection can be given and received by people who do not live together (Jelin, 2004).

Each of the possible household structures creates different childcare demands and possibilities. Members of extended-family households might employ the strategy of combining resources to cover expenses. The extended-family organisation could also allow different members of the household to care for its youngest members, while other adult members enter the labour market to take advantage of the demand for labour when severe fluctuations in the market make that feasible.

Nuclear-family households with children—and either a couple or a single parent—arrive at many different ways of structuring the household so as to make it possible for adult members to perform paid work. Methods of covering childcare needs depend on whether or not resources are available to pay for childcare services on the market (in the form of domestic help, private childcare facilities, or a combination of the two). These households can also arrange for care by family members either within or outside the home, and by drawing on community networks. In the course of this research, these various strategies will be examined.

## **Concluding observations**

Argentina's society, politics and economy have undergone profound changes in the last 30 years. The return to democracy after a period of harsh military dictatorship was accompanied by acute economic recession in the 1980s. Increasing poverty and social inequality led to polarisation, and turned the already existing economic privation into a widespread phenomenon. Poverty became more heterogeneous, with the appearance of the so-called “new poor” (segments of the population with middle-class social and demographic characteristics, in terms of education, housing, etc., who no longer garner the income needed to cover basic needs). Meanwhile, the situation of the already (“structurally”) poor deteriorated further.

The Washington Consensus was adopted by the Argentine government as a general economic policy framework, with alarming effects for the population, in terms of worsening labour conditions for men and women. Unemployment, underemployment and various forms of job vulnerability increased steeply in the 1990s, and the distribution of income and wealth became more unequal.

This period led to highly paradoxical situations: (i) while international human rights treaties were recognised in constitutional provisions, economic and social rights were reduced; (ii) periods of GDP growth were not accompanied by improvement in the labour market or increases in overall well-being; and (iii) the “offensive against labour” initiated during the military regime continued. Unions, which had historically been strong in Argentina—and allied with the governing political forces (the *Justicialista* party) during that decade—no longer had the power to forestall the onset of precarious conditions in the formal labour market, with the consequent exclusion of substantial sectors of the working population from formal employment. This occurred in a context of substantial State reform, particularly in regard to social security, public services, privatisation of State enterprises, and the (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to balance the budget, which assumed precedence over the well-being of the population.

Beginning with the recovery of the economy in 2003, which ushered in a more than 8% annual increase in GDP over four consecutive years, unemployment was partially ameliorated, though the unequal economic structure and poverty levels (approximately 25% of the population) continued.

At the same time, family structures and dynamics changed. The decline in men's incomes made women's historically low incomes a fundamental pillar of household welfare. The entry of new workers into the labour market became one of the principal coping strategies for households. The feminisation of the labour force advanced, reducing the gender gap with regard to economic activity. The male breadwinner family model was dramatically altered.

Over the last three decades analysed in this report, many women have entered the paid labour market. The conditions under which they have done so, however, include a high degree of precariousness, while their rights as workers have not always been respected. In this process, a major change in the sexual division of labour occurred. Men had previously been responsible for providing family incomes, whereas women were responsible for reproductive activity in the home—including caring for and raising children. It is worth examining how the State, under new economic conditions corrosive to family well-being, attempted to implement childcare alternatives that did not rely on women being economically inactive.

This process has not been free of conflict and tension within the family—both in terms of shifting gender roles and in regard to the care alternatives available for children and other family members.

Changes in reproductive behaviours, participation in education, and shifts in the composition of families and households have produced changes in household structures and dynamics, along with different childcare demands and possibilities. Within this context, it will be important to analyse the way in which social inequality filters down to the familial and societal organisation of care; the extent to which families benefit from care services provided by the State; the degree to which they rely on services available in the marketplace; and the amount of care work that continues to be performed by families—particularly women.

Thus, it is worthwhile to ask to what extent policy is addressing the profound changes that Argentina's society has undergone over the last 30 years—transformations associated not only with the labour market and household well-being, but also with family dynamics and structure. In what way is policy responding to the population's new childcare needs, in the face of major changes in the “male breadwinner / female housewife” model? How are responsibilities being reallocated among different social institutions? How are they being reallocated between the sexes? And, as Nancy Folbre (1994) asks, “Who pays for the children?” During this research project, a number of hypotheses on these issues will be developed.

Our research will delve into the social organisation of care, in order to better understand the political and social economy of care in contemporary Argentina. The second report in this series will explore the way in which men and women with different educational backgrounds and types of families distribute their time between productive work and care work.

The third report will examine the welfare and childcare regime in Argentina, focusing on the city of Buenos Aires, in the wake of a change from a regime in which major services were provided by the State, to one in which existing services are “residual.” Thus, we shall examine the State’s role in regulating and providing care services, as well as the role of social and community organisations in the care market. The fourth report will examine a specific population dedicated to providing care within the framework of the market, namely, domestic workers.

Some of our guiding questions will be: How does access to greater resources facilitate the family organisation of care in an environment in which care seems to be a service provided principally by families and by the market? Are public services being provided only for the poor? How is the State interacting with non-state providers of welfare services? Lastly, are different “care diamonds” being created for different social classes?

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