

ALIGN REPORT

Transforming gender norms through Uruguay's National Integrated Care System



Interdisciplinary Centre for Development Studies (CIEDUR)

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Contenido

About CIEDUR	2
Acknowledgements	2
Acronyms and abbreviations	5
Summary	6
1 Introduction	8
2 Analytical framework	11
3 Methodological strategy	14
4 Results: the role of SIEMPRE Centres in the social organisation of care	18
5 Conclusion	40
6 Recommendations and lessons learned	42
References	44
Annexes	46

Figuras

Figure 1: Evolution of employment rate by sex (%), 1986–2024	13
Figure 2: Men as political leaders	35
Figure 3: Men as business executives	35

Tablas

Table 1: Caregiving as a driver of women's autonomy	15
Table 2: Typology of couple households	19
Table 3: Percentage of responses according to whether they are non-egalitarian or egalitarian, by sex, 2011 and 2022	20
Table 4: Percentage of responses according to whether they are non-egalitarian or egalitarian, by sex, 2021	21
Table 5: Percentage of responses based on whether they are egalitarian or non-egalitarian, by household type, 2021	22
Table 6: Questions about the justification of violence, Uruguay 2011	33
Table 7: Questions about the justification of violence, Uruguay 2022	33
Table: A1: Description of the variables used in the logit model	46
Table A3: List of interviewees	48

Acronyms and abbreviations

CHS	Continuous Household Survey
CIEDUR	Centro Interdisciplinario de Estudios sobre el Desarrollo, Uruguay (Interdisciplinary Centre for Development Studies, Uruguay)
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ILO	International Labour Organization
INAU	Instituto del Niño y Adolescente del Uruguay (Institute for Children and Adolescents of Uruguay)
INE	Instituto Nacional de Estadística
MIDES	Ministerio de Desarrollo Social (Ministry of Social Development)
MTSS	Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social (Ministry of Labour and Social Security)
SIEMPRE	Sindicatos y empresas (trade unions and employers)
SNIC	Sistema Nacional Integrado de Cuidados (National Integrated Care System)
SUNCA	Sindicato Único Nacional de la Construcción y Anexos (Sole National Union for Construction and Related Trades)
TUS	Time Use Survey
WVS	World Values Survey

Summary

This study explores the impact of SIEMPRE Centres on gender norms and the social organisation of care work in Uruguay. It combines a quantitative analysis of available household surveys with a qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews with trade union and business representatives, educational and management teams, and focus groups with male and female family members from two centres in the nation's interior, where gender norms tend to be more deeply ingrained.

SIEMPRE Centres are education and care services operating within Uruguay's National Care System. They are interinstitutional in nature and cater to children and families through a co-responsibility agreement between the private sector (businesses, trade unions or educational institutions), the community and the state. Their aim is to promote children's rights and their holistic development while accommodating family work and study commitments by offering care services for up to 12 hours a day. Children may remain at SIEMPRE Centres for a maximum of eight hours per day.

The study examines the extent to which SIEMPRE Centres have contributed to shifting gender norms around the sexual division of labour and the social organisation of care, which in Uruguay has traditionally been seen as the responsibility of women (INMUJERES and INE, 2022). It also explores the effects of the centres on the recognition, redistribution and reduction of care work and how these changes influence women's autonomy.

This report highlights four key findings. First, SIEMPRE Centres help to reduce the unequal distribution of care work within families by the defamilialisation of care. Second, they partially contribute to increasing recognition of care work by highlighting the importance of public policies that promote co-responsibility for family well-being. Furthermore, by freeing up time, these centres have an impact on representation, creating more favourable conditions for women to participate in collective spheres. However, this does not necessarily translate into greater representation or leadership roles for women in decision-making spaces.

Third, SIEMPRE Centres do not significantly redistribute care within families, nor do they enhance recognition of the unpaid care work predominantly carried out by women in households. This is evidenced both in the survey data and in the testimonies collected. However, it is possible to argue that the centres' model – designed to accommodate dual-earner families – encourages some shifts in everyday childcare and caregiving practices, as reported in some accounts. It would be relevant to assess whether such shifts in practice also contribute to transforming the gender norms that sustain inequality, a question that falls beyond the scope of this study.

While some key public policy interventions exist to promote gender co-responsibility, such as the Committed Parenting programme (Parentalidades Comprometidas), further efforts are needed. In particular, the lack of concrete tools and actions to foster gender co-responsibility within families, coupled with the absence of specific training for public officials on these issues, often reinforces the role of women as primary caregivers in the home.

One effort to address this issue has been the Caring with Equality Seal (Sello Cuidando con Igualdad), a government-led certification designed to promote gender equality in early childhood care centres by encouraging best practices in education and caregiving. However, the programme has not been implemented during the current government term (2020–2025).

Although care work is formally recognised as a responsibility shared equally between men and women, in practice, it is overwhelmingly women such as mothers, but also aunts and grandmothers, who both undertake and are expected to undertake care work (INMUJERES and INE, 2022).

Lastly, SIEMPRE Centres do have significant effects on women's autonomy. By reducing the time burden of care, these centres foster women's economic autonomy by increasing their availability for professional training or paid work, as well as their decision-making autonomy. Moreover, given their operational mechanisms and close relationships with families, SIEMPRE Centres contribute to identifying and addressing situations of violence, thereby impacting women's physical autonomy. This is a promising finding from the qualitative component of this study.

Nevertheless, despite these advances, barriers to women's equal participation in economic, social and political spheres persist. In Uruguay, these barriers are not primarily due to restrictive legal frameworks but rather to implicit gender norms that continue to position women as the primary caregivers, while relegating them to secondary or subsidiary roles in decision-making and leadership spaces.

1 Introduction

Unlike other developing regions, Latin America has seen the near disappearance of legal barriers that previously prevented women from participating in the labour market on equal terms with men (Arza and Martínez Franzoni, 2018). Despite this, one in three working-age women is still excluded from Latin America's labour market (ECLAC, 2024). Research indicates that while social policies expanded in the first decade of the 21st century across Latin America, these policies still yielded segmented results in terms of gender equality (Arza et al., 2024).

The precarious, interrupted or non-existent integration of women into the labour market is largely explained by the lack of care policies that defamilialise this work. Defamilialisation of care refers to developing public structures that reduce the burden of care work that is mainly provided by families. It shifts the responsibility traditionally placed on families to the state or market, while promoting its redistribution between men and women (Lister, 2003; Martínez Franzoni and Blofield, 2014; UN Women and ECLAC, 2021).

For these reasons, several countries in the region are designing and implementing care systems. Care systems are public policy responses that address the expansion of available care services, while promoting legal measures for the redistribution of paid and unpaid work time, as well as the regulation of the conditions and quality of care services and paid care work.

In December 2015, with the enactment of Law No. 19.353, Uruguay created the world's first comprehensive national care system. This milestone positioned the country at the forefront of policy regulation in this new field of public policy. The National Integrated Care System (Sistema Nacional Integrado de Cuidados, SNIC), which emerged with the transformative goal of addressing the current sexual division of labour, has at the time of writing been in place for eight years. Its creation involved both institutional and regulatory changes that have been reflected in both childcare and the intersection of gender policies with education and childhood policies in Uruguay.

Like the rest of Latin America, Uruguay's care system is characterised by an unequal distribution of care provision, both in its social dimension (state-market-family) and in gender relations. Despite the introduction of a care policy that recognises care as a right and promotes its redistribution, the 2021 Time Use Survey reveals that families, particularly the women within them, continue to be the primary providers of care (INMUJERES and INE, 2022), hindering women's autonomy. These persistent inequalities are rooted both in gender norms around unpaid care work that affect women's autonomy and in the inadequacy of public policies that effectively address the sexual division of labour. Therefore, analysing the role of the national care system in this context is important both for Uruguay and to contribute global evidence about the potential impact of such policies on transforming prevailing gender norms.

This report aims to analyse one of the innovative components of the care system in Uruguay: the SIEMPRE childcare centres. The study seeks to explore how much the SNIC, through the SIEMPRE Centres, has altered gender norms around caregiving and contributed to greater economic empowerment of women in the country by facilitating their integration into the labour market. The study focuses on these centres as the unit of observation.

1.1 The National Integrated Care System and the SIEMPRE Centres

Uruguay's National Integrated Care System (SNIC), created in 2015, is the result of an extensive social and political debate involving various societal actors including academics, civil society organisations and government officials. Its design also reflects a collaborative process, led by the Ministry of Social Development, that included technical and political actors from various state sectors, such as health, education, social security, labour, child protection and gender equality (Pérez de Sierra, 2021). Its design is unique in that it involves coordinated work across different state agencies, both for service provision and regulation. It also designates both those in need of care and the caregivers themselves as subjects of the right to care.

Education and care centres – known as *Sindicatos y Empresas (SIEMPRE)* – are services aimed at children and families. These centres operate through an agreement of co-responsibility between the private sector (businesses, trade unions, or educational centres), the community and the state. Their goal is to promote children's holistic development and the exercising of their rights while adapting to the working and studying conditions of families by offering up to 12 hours of daily care. The objectives include facilitating work-life balance, supporting parental skills development, and promoting social and gender co-responsibility (Sistema de Cuidados, 2020). The interinstitutional agreement stipulates that private entities provide the infrastructure while the state covers the costs of human resources, supports staff training and oversees operations. Daily management is entrusted to a civil society organisation that signs an agreement with the National Institute for Children and Adolescents of Uruguay (INAU), an entity that is part of the SNIC.

Additionally, as part of the SNIC, the SIEMPRE Centres incorporate specific strategies on social and gender co-responsibility. An example of this is the collaboration with the Committed Parenting programme. The aim of this intervention is to strengthen parenting capabilities within the context of raising boys and girls from a rights-based perspective, gender equality, and family-state co-responsibility, with a comprehensive approach that includes five action components:

1. a cycle of workshops for family representatives
2. centre staff training
3. community activities
4. awareness campaigns for the general public
5. knowledge generation related to parenting

1.2 About this document

This study examines the SIEMPRE Centres as a starting point to explore their contribution to:

1. the economic empowerment of women by improving women's employment opportunities
2. increasing women's possibility of accessing positions in political and social participation
3. reducing gender-based violence
4. changing social gender norms related to care.

To this end, the study combines two analytical frameworks that are widely used in this area of research. First, it seeks to determine whether the SIEMPRE Centres impact the recognition, reduction and redistribution of care work (Elson, 2017). Second, the study investigates the extent to which the centres contribute to promoting a change in gender norms and what the impact of these changes is on women's autonomy. In this regard, achieving autonomy is understood as access to a life free from violence and being able to exercise sexual and reproductive rights (physical autonomy); full participation in decision-making across different areas of public and political life (decision-making autonomy); and access to income, property, and time, based on a culture free from patriarchal patterns and discrimination (economic autonomy) (ECLAC, n.d.).

The study implemented a mixed-methods strategy, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. Regarding the qualitative dimension, two case studies were conducted with SIEMPRE Centres in two departments in the interior of the country (Maldonado and Paysandú), where in-depth interviews were held with centre staff, and interviews and focus groups were carried out with the families attending these institutions. These were complemented by interviews with pioneering trade unions involved in establishing this type of co-responsibility agreements in care work (e.g., the Sole National Union for Construction and Related Trades) and with specialists from centres in Montevideo.

The quantitative dimension consisted of analysing secondary sources (Continuous Household Survey 2021, Time Use Surveys 2013 and 2021, and World Values Surveys 2011 and 2022) to identify the factors influencing labour market participation and the types of labour market insertion for both sexes, as well as the differences in time use (distribution of paid and unpaid work), gender norms and violence.

The analysis provides some key reflections on how the SIEMPRE Centres influence the social and economic organisation of care and the gender norms that sustain this distribution. It shows that the SIEMPRE Centres indeed constitute an innovative tool to promote social co-responsibility among the state, the market, communities and families, offering access to quality care services that contribute to the overall well-being of families and society as a whole.

Furthermore, the study found that the SIEMPRE Centres have tangible impacts on the distribution of care and women's autonomy. Centre staff and participants both recognise the importance of this policy in reducing the care workload within families. This reduction in total care time promotes greater economic autonomy for women and provides them with more opportunities to enhance their autonomy in decision-making, as evidenced by the qualitative component of the study.

Thus, as the burden of care work is identified as one of the main reasons for the lower participation of women in the labour market and public spaces (Salvador et al., 2022), the SIEMPRE Centres emerge as a social co-responsibility policy that positively impacts women's autonomy. Additionally, an unexpected finding from the study reveals that the existence of the centres enables the identification and urgent addressing of situations of domestic and gender-based violence, directly impacting the physical autonomy of women.

However, the qualitative study found that the centres have a limited impact on the redistribution and recognition of care work within households. This is because, although the centres significantly contribute to defamilialising care work, they have few specific lines of action and tools to address gender stereotypes and the sexual division of labour. As a result, while the SIEMPRE Centres do enable women to reduce the time spent on care work, it is women who remain primarily responsible for caregiving. Consequently, gender norms and stereotypes that associate care with women's responsibility remain unchanged, even when some changes in family child-rearing and caregiving practices are observed.

This research project emphasises the need to promote family workshops and training processes for both staff and families on the importance of gender co-responsibility, helping to reduce the prevalence of stereotypes and norms that assign care predominantly to women.

2 Analytical framework

2.1 The focus on autonomies

The gender agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean advocates for various fundamental rights that must be ensured:

- the right to live free from violence and discrimination
- sexual and reproductive rights
- economic, social, and cultural rights
- civil and political rights
- collective and environmental rights

These rights, in conjunction with freedoms, also emphasise women's autonomy in three key forms: physical, economic and decision-making autonomy, and their interconnections, underscoring the comprehensive transformations needed to achieve equality and sustainable development (ECLAC, 2016).

Economic autonomy refers to women's ability to access, generate and control their own income, assets, and productive, financial and technological resources, as well as their time and property. This concept considers the sexual division of labour and the unequal social organisation of care.

Physical autonomy is the capacity of women and girls, in all their diversity, to live free from discrimination, harmful practices and violence and to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights under appropriate conditions.

Decision-making autonomy refers to women's full and equal participation in all spheres of public and political life.

Lastly, it is important to note that these three dimensions are interdependent and should be understood through an intersectional, intercultural and context-specific approach (ECLAC, 2016). The intersectional, intercultural and context-specific approach refers to the multiple positions that individuals occupy within social systems (based on gender, sexual orientation, age, ethno-racial background, disability, etc.), which interact with one another and with the broader context. Thus, inequalities must be understood through these intersections and in relation to the environments in which they unfold.

2.2 The 3 Rs framework

The development of care policies aims to redistribute, recognise and revalue care work between men and women, as well as across the state, families, communities and the market (Razavi, 2007). This analytical framework has been a central pillar in addressing the transformations that care policies and systems must drive forward.

Originally conceived around the '3 Rs' (Elson, 2017; ILO, 2018), this framework demands:

1. **Recognition** of the economic and social value of unpaid domestic and care work, alongside a critical examination of prevailing gender norms that place a disproportionate burden of care work on women.
2. **Reduction** of the overall volume of the most arduous and time-intensive domestic and care tasks within families and communities.
3. **Redistribution** of unpaid domestic and care work between women and men, as well as among the state, the market and families, through supportive policies, affordable and high-quality care services, social protection measures and gender-responsive budgeting.

In 2014, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) expanded the 3Rs framework by adding **representation**, advocating for caregivers and care recipients to be meaningfully included in policies, budgets and decision-making processes within organisations such as trade unions and businesses. Following this development, a further demand to **reward** caregivers was introduced in 2018, reinforcing the recognition of care as work and calling for the implementation of regulations and decent working conditions for all care workers (ILO, 2018). In this regard, an additional possibility is to extend the selection criteria of programmes from the '3 Rs' to the '5 Rs', although this study remains focused on the original three.

2.3 Gender norms: an integrated analytical framework for studying the SIEMPRE Centres

In every society, various expectations and social norms shape behaviour and the distribution of care responsibilities between men and women. According to Hughes and Desai (2019), a social norm is a pattern of behaviour that individuals follow because:

- a. it holds personal significance
- b. there is an expectation from others to behave in that manner
- c. rewards or sanctions are associated with adherence to or deviation from the norm.

Marcus (2018, cited in Hughes and Desai, 2019) defines gender norms as a subset of social norms that prescribe expected behaviours for individuals of a particular gender within a given social context. Based on this concept, Hughes and Desai (2019) propose measuring gender norms according to the following categories:

1. individual behaviours
2. individual attitudes (what I believe I should do)
3. empirical expectations (what I think others do)
4. normative expectations (what I think others expect of me)
5. societal rewards and sanctions

Marcus and Somji (2024) conducted a literature review on gender norms related to women's economic empowerment worldwide, highlighting how these norms shape the behaviours of men and women

through the gendered division of labour. This often relegates women to reproductive roles and restricts their empowerment. Drawing on the concept of development as possibility, we argue that women's opportunities are constrained by gendered ideas, beliefs and stereotypes about what they can do.

For this study, and from a feminist perspective, we consider it more appropriate to refer to the notion of 'possibilities' rather than 'capabilities', drawing on Amartya Sen's approach (1999). Referring to possibilities acknowledges not only an individual perspective but also a social and structural approach to the opportunities available to women for their full development.

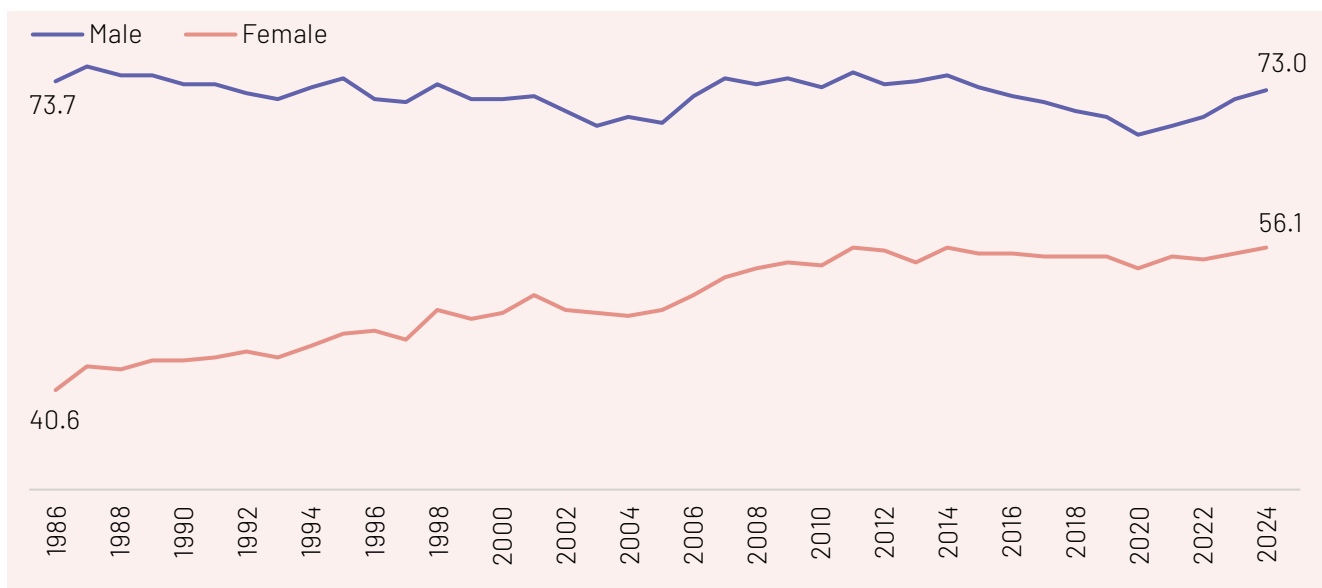
This analysis also incorporates a perspective on the conditions that enable women to achieve effective autonomy in a regional context marked by social inequality. In this sense, women's autonomy is permeated and conditioned by these ideas, perceptions and beliefs, which hinder their full development.

Although Uruguayan legislature still imposes some constraints on women's equal access to political representation positions, overall Uruguay has very few laws that explicitly restrict women's economic, physical and decision-making autonomy. Therefore, the main barriers to achieving these rights largely stem from the persistence of gender norms.

The gendered division of labour shapes perceptions and ideas about care-related gender roles, which in turn hinder economic autonomy by widening gender gaps in the labour market – manifesting in lower female workforce participation and wage disparities. It also affects decision-making autonomy by limiting women's participation in collective spaces and leadership roles (such as trade unions, political spaces and community cooperatives) and restricts physical autonomy by increasing women's exposure to gender-based violence, both within the home and in public spaces.

For instance, in Uruguay, no legal restrictions prevent women from working in the labour market; however, their labour force participation rate has consistently been lower than that of men (Mapa de Género de Uruguay, n.d.). Over the past 35 years, male employment and participation rates have remained relatively stable, while women's participation has significantly increased. Nonetheless, the gender participation gap remains over 15 percentage points, and there are indications of stagnation in women's entry into the labour market during the early decades of the 21st century (MTSS, 2024).

Figure 1: Evolution of employment rate by sex (%), 1986–2024



Source: Statistical Unit, Uruguay Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MTSS).

Numerous studies have shown that this gap is largely based on the unequal distribution of care work, which is grounded in the idea that women are primarily responsible for it (Arza and Martínez Franzoni, 2018; ECLAC, 2016; Espino et al., 2014). This unjust social organisation of care hinders both women's entry into and retention in the labour market, limiting their economic autonomy, decision-making autonomy and physical autonomy.

Indeed, as women predominate in care work, they tend to have more precarious and interrupted career paths, compromising their future social security in older age (Gallo and Sanguinetti, 2021). They face difficulties in participating in decision-making and leadership spaces and are more exposed to gender-based violence (UN Women and ECLAC, 2021; ECLAC, 2016). Consequently, this study examines the close interconnection between gender norms, the organisation of care and women's autonomy.

3 Methodological strategy

The study set the following objectives:

1. To identify changes in norms, ideas and perceptions regarding gender stereotypes associated with caregiving following the implementation of the National Integrated Care System in Uruguay.
2. To determine the impacts of the implementation of the SIEMPRE Centres on the physical autonomy, economic autonomy and decision-making autonomy of women in Uruguay.
3. To describe other impacts of the SIEMPRE Centres on the well-being of families and the community.

Specifically, the SIEMPRE Centres were considered a case study of a gender equality policy within the framework of the SNIC; the aim was to investigate their impact on gender norms and women's autonomy by answering the following research questions:

1. What were the prevailing gender norms prior to the establishment of the SIEMPRE Centres? How did these norms affect women's participation in the workforce?
2. What is the role of SIEMPRE Centres in the reduction, redistribution and recognition of care work?
3. To what extent have the centres contributed to changing gender norms around women's participation in the workforce?
4. To what extent have the centres contributed to changing norms related to women's political and social participation (in unions, business, community, etc.)?
5. To what extent do the centres affect the approach to situations of gender-based violence?

In this sense, the study posed a set of questions regarding the potential role of the SIEMPRE Centres in modifying traditional care roles in terms of gender and their impacts on the 3 Rs described in the

previous section. Following the analytical framework of autonomies (ECLAC, 2016), we divided the questions according to their type of impact on economic autonomy, physical autonomy and autonomy in decision-making.

Table 1: Caregiving as a driver of women's autonomy

Dimensions	Assumptions	Objectives and guiding questions
Economic autonomy	<p>The gendered division of care work shapes ideas and perceptions about gender roles in caregiving.</p> <p>The gendered division of care work shapes ideas and perceptions about gender roles in the paid labour market.</p>	<p>Objective: Identify changes in norms, perceptions and ideas, as well as in women's likelihood of entering the labour market following the implementation of the SNIC.</p> <p>Guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What gender norms related to economic autonomy hinder women's access to employment? • Have the SIEMPRE Centres contributed to changing some of these norms? If so, how? • Have the SIEMPRE Centres promoted greater women's participation in paid employment? If so, how? • Has the likelihood of women's labour market participation changed following the implementation of the SNIC? If so, how?
Decision-making autonomy	<p>The gendered division of care work shapes ideas and perceptions about women's participation in decision-making spaces (political, trade union and community spaces).</p>	<p>Objective: Explore the role of SIEMPRE Centres in promoting women's participation in trade union and community activities.</p> <p>Guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the SIEMPRE Centres contributed to increasing women's participation and influence in decision-making spaces, such as trade unions, collective bargaining, or in other community spaces (cooperatives, housing, etc.) or political spaces? If so, how? If not, why not? • What gender norms constrain women's participation in decision-making spaces such as trade unions, collective bargaining or other community spaces? • Have the SIEMPRE Centres contributed to changing gender norms related to women's participation? If so, how? If not, why not?
Physical autonomy	<p>The gendered division of care work shapes ideas and perceptions about gender roles that reinforce gender-based violence.</p>	<p>Objective: Examine the role of SIEMPRE Centres in eradicating gender-based violence.</p> <p>Guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the SIEMPRE Centres contributed directly or indirectly to the detection, support or other interventions related to gender-based violence? • If so, through what mechanisms? If not, why not?

This study employed a mixed quantitative–qualitative research design. Both strategies were designed in a coordinated manner, but each served distinct objectives and aims. The quantitative research aims to describe the prevailing gender norms at the national level, before and after the implementation of the SNIC. In this regard, the descriptive statistics presented herein aim to inform the reader about the Uruguayan case and any possible changes during the period (although, of course, these changes cannot be necessarily attributed to the creation of the SNIC).

In contrast, the qualitative approach works with first-hand information from families about the impacts of a policy within the SNIC (the SIEMPRE Centres) on women’s autonomy and the distribution of care work. The following provides a more detailed description of both strategies.

3.1 Quantitative study

The quantitative strategy is based on the combination of descriptive analyses of secondary sources for Uruguay: Time Use Survey (TUS), World Values Survey (WVS) and econometric tools based on the Continuous Household Survey (CHS), which are used to model the decision-making processes involved in labour participation and the probability of employment. The latter has the objective of identifying the restrictions that women may face for their entry into the labour market and their importance in preventing economic empowerment processes.

We analyse changes in gender norms in Uruguay at two points in time (2011 and 2022) based on the responses to from two statements posed in the WVS: ‘When a mother has a full-time paid job, the children suffer’; and ‘Being a housewife is as rewarding as having a paid job’.

Drawing on the literature on gender norms and recognising that the prevailing norm remains unequal, responses were categorised as ‘non-egalitarian’ if respondents answered ‘Strongly agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘No response’ or ‘Don’t know’. Responses were considered ‘egalitarian’ if they answered: ‘Disagree’ or ‘Strongly disagree’.

Additionally, the quantitative analysis examines the gendered division of labour in households, following previous research (Martínez Franzoni, 2008) and drawing on the 2021 TUS. The study categorises households based on how paid and unpaid work is distributed between partners in two-parent households. Paid work is classified as full-time (30 hours or more per week) or part-time (fewer than 30 hours per week).

In terms of unpaid work, ‘high involvement’ is defined as time spent above the average, and a ratio was calculated between women’s and men’s unpaid work. Households where the ratio exceeds 1.5 are classified as having a ‘feminised’ distribution of unpaid work; ratios between 0.5 and 1.5 are considered ‘egalitarian’; ratios below 0.5 indicate a ‘masculinised’ distribution. Based on these criteria, the following typology was developed:

- **Type 1: Traditional family** – A household in which the man (husband or partner) is engaged in paid employment, while the woman (wife or partner) is fully dedicated to unpaid domestic and care work.
- **Type 2: Modified traditional family** – The man (husband or partner) is the primary income provider through paid work, while the woman (wife or partner) engages in paid employment on a part-time basis and assumes a high share of unpaid domestic and care work.
- **Type 3: Dual-income family with a traditional gendered pattern** – Both partners work full-time or part-time, but the woman takes on a disproportionate share of unpaid work.

- **Type 4: Egalitarian family** – Both partners engage in paid work with similar working hours and share unpaid work equally. This type of family also includes households in which neither partner has paid employment but both contribute similar hours to unpaid work.
- **Type 5: Family with a reversal of traditional gender roles in paid work** – The woman (wife or partner) is employed full-time, while the man (husband or partner) works part-time or is not in paid employment. Alternatively, the woman works part-time while the man does not work. This category focuses solely on the reversal of gender roles in paid work, without considering changes in unpaid work.
- **Type 6: Family with a reversal of traditional gender roles in unpaid work** – The man (husband or partner) takes on a high share of unpaid work, while the woman (wife or partner) contributes less. However, their paid work arrangement follows a traditional pattern, with the man devoting more time to paid employment than the woman.

Regarding the empirical strategy used to analyse economic autonomy at the national level, logit regression estimates were conducted using microdata from the 2021 CHS, based on a set of independent variables. The first model estimates the probability of participating in the labour market, while the second estimates the probability of being in employment. Both models present separate analyses for men and women. A table with the description of variables is included in Annex 1.

3.2 Qualitative study

The qualitative strategy involved undertaking two case studies of SIEMPRE Centres in different departments of Uruguay's interior. This design used participatory methods and included the application of the following techniques across three stages: document review, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders and focus groups with families who use the SIEMPRE Centres.

In the first stage, existing official documentation about the SIEMPRE Centres' policy was reviewed, such as programme design documents, monitoring indicators and others. In the second stage, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders were conducted. A total of 29 in-depth interviews were carried out, with an average of 10 interviews at each of the two SIEMPRE Centres selected for the case study. The aim was to identify the main factors that drove the development of the centres, agreements between trade unions and businesses and perceptions of the gender norms underlying labour market participation, women's participation in decision-making spaces and perceptions of changes in these norms. Interviews were also conducted with union leaders and political actors external to the two selected centres. (See list of interviewees in Annex 3.)

Initially, interviews were conducted with technical and political officials from SNIC institutions responsible for early childhood, including the Ministry of Social Development and the Institute for Children and Adolescents. Then, interviews were conducted at the two SIEMPRE Centres. Additionally, some interviews were carried out at a centre in Montevideo which, for administrative reasons, could not include all members.

At the first of these SIEMPRE Centres, interviews were held with SNIC staff and union and business representatives. At the other two centres, in addition to interviews with staff, focus groups with families participating in the centres were conducted.

One of the centres – the Jardines de Paysandú SIEMPRE Centre – had initially been co-managed with the Federation of Housing Cooperatives for Pre-Saving (FUCVAM), although this entity later withdrew. It is now mainly run by the local government (the Paysandú Intendancy) and the civil society organisation that manages it.

The second centre studied was the Los Doraditos SIEMPRE Centre, made up of workers and employers from one of the largest supermarket chains in the interior of the country. Whereas the Paysandú centre is not characterised by being associated with sectors where male or female employment predominates, in the case of supermarkets, female employment tends to be higher than male employment.

At both centres, in-depth interviews were carried out with workers, union and business representatives, as well as with families participating in the centres through discussion groups.

Three discussion groups (one in Maldonado and two in Paysandú) were conducted with SIEMPRE Centre users and their families, where questions were asked about the gender norms they identify when entering the labour market, performing unpaid work and decision-making in participation spaces, as well as those within households. We also explored the impacts of the centres on the organisation of care within the household and perceptions of potential changes in gender norms as a result of the implementation of the SIEMPRE Centre.

The following section describes the general results of the study, integrating the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative analyses into five subsections that outline changes in gender norms, economic autonomy, physical autonomy, decision-making and the impacts of the centres on the overall well-being of families.

Each subsection is organised according to specific analytical dimensions following the structure of the questionnaires for the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

4 Results: the role of SIEMPRE Centres in the social organisation of care

4.1 Changes in gender norms in Uruguay

This section examines changes in gender norms at two levels: national, using secondary data; and within the SIEMPRE Centres.

Table 2 presents the frequency of different family types, based on the typology outlined in the methodology, comparing data from 2021 with 2013. It also includes the average hours of unpaid work by gender within each family type for both years, along with relative unpaid work gaps (measured as the ratio of women's unpaid work to men's).

A decline is observed in the proportion of traditional families (Type 1), which decreased from 30% to 25% between 2013 and 2021. Despite this decline, they remained the second most-common family type in both years, following dual-income families, which held the highest share.

Meanwhile, the daily averages of unpaid work by gender and the relative gaps remained similar across both years, with traditional families exhibiting the highest disparities. Women in these families spent around seven hours per day on unpaid work, compared to less than two hours for men, resulting in a relative gap of four to five.

Between 2013 and 2021, dual-income families (Type 3) remained stable, continuing to represent the most prevalent family type, at approximately 30%. When analysing the distribution of unpaid work, women in dual-income families spent around six hours per day on such tasks. The relative gap in this group was lower than in traditional families, standing at 4.23 in 2021.

In the case of couples with a modified traditional gendered division of labour (Type 2), their relative share remained stable across both years at approximately 14%. The average unpaid work hours also showed little change, with women spending around six hours and men two, resulting in a lower relative gap compared to the previous categories, at around three.

Nevertheless, across all three family types – accounting for roughly 70% of those classified – significant disparities persist. Women continue to perform a disproportionately high share of unpaid work compared to their partners, regardless of whether they participate partially or fully in the labour market.

On the other hand, egalitarian families (Type 4) accounted for 10% in 2013, increasing to 16% in 2021. The average hours of unpaid work for both men and women remained stable across these years, at around four hours per day, resulting in the same relative gap. While egalitarian families became more common in 2021, their distribution of unpaid labour remained similar to 2013 levels.

For families with reversed roles (Types 5 and 6), their participation is notable when paid labour roles are inverted. By 2021, these couples also exhibited very low relative gaps in unpaid work distribution.

In summary, when examining the gaps by couple type (see Table 2), it becomes evident that in traditional, modified traditional and dual-income families, women spend three to four times more time on unpaid work than men. In contrast, in egalitarian families, including those with reversed roles in paid and unpaid work, women perform the same amount or less unpaid work than men.

Table 2: Typology of couple households

	Distribution in %		Female unpaid work (daily hours)		Male unpaid work (daily hours)		Relative gap in unpaid work	
	2013	2021	2013	2021	2013	2021	2013	2021
1. Traditional	29.92	25.41	7.91	7.56	1.97	1.55	4.01	4.87
2. Modified traditional	14.56	13.59	6.51	6.36	2.11	2.08	3.08	3.05
3. Dual income	33.42	31.21	5.55	6.05	1.83	1.43	3.03	4.23
4. Egalitarian	10.30	16.03	4.38	4.22	4.34	4.24	1.00	0.99
5. Reversal in paid work	10.40	12.44	4.67	4.09	2.91	3.59	1.60	1.14
6. Reversal in unpaid work	1.41	1.33	0.51	1.07	3.29	4.40	0.15	0.24
Total	100	100						

Note: For 2021, only 24 people were part of a household in which gender roles were reversed regarding unpaid work, compared with 40 in 2013. To ensure comparability between the 2013 and 2021 TUS, the data from 2013 was re-estimated to consider individuals aged 15 and older and to exclude time spent caring for dependents with disabilities. Relative gaps are calculated as the ratio of women's unpaid work hours to men's unpaid work hours.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on microdata from Time Use Surveys 2013 and 2021.

Following the set of gender norms questions from the World Values Survey in 2011 and 2022, we observe a decline in support for equality regarding the statement ‘Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as having paid work’. This shift is partly due to a decrease in the number of men disagreeing with this assertion.

On the other hand, the statement ‘When a mother has a full-time paid job, the children suffer’ saw an increase in disagreement from both men and women, with a stronger shift among women. This indicates a positive change in gender norms in the country (see Table 3). These gender-based differences are not statistically significant, except for the ‘Being a housewife...’ statement in 2011.

Table 3: Percentage of responses according to whether they are non-egalitarian or egalitarian, by sex, 2011 and 2022

	‘Being a housewife is as rewarding as having a paid job’						‘When a mother has a full-time paid job, the children suffer’					
	2011			2022			2011			2022		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Non-egalitarian	62.9	65.9	64.5	66.7	65.9	66.3	40.9	45.9	43.5	39.8	34	36.8
Egalitarian	37.1	34.1	35.5	33.3	34.1	33.7	59.1	54.1	56.5	60.2	66	63.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Responses categorised as ‘non-egalitarian’ include ‘Strongly agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘No answer’, and ‘Don’t know’. Responses categorised as ‘egalitarian’ include ‘Disagree’ and ‘Strongly disagree’. M=Male, F=Female, T=Total.

Source: World Values Survey, 2011 and 2022, Uruguay.

Additionally, changes in gender norms can also be examined through the latest 2021 Time Use Survey in Uruguay. This survey explores beliefs and perceptions based on the following statements, which are scored on a scale from 1 to 5, with additional options for ‘Don’t know’ and ‘No answer’. Given that the prevailing norm dictates the sexual division of labour, respondents who answered ‘Don’t know’ or did not respond were considered to adhere to non-egalitarian norms based on this division.

For analysis, responses categorised as ‘non-egalitarian’ include ‘Strongly agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘No answer’, and ‘Don’t know’, while responses categorised as ‘egalitarian’ include ‘Disagree’ and ‘Strongly disagree’ (with the exception of the last statement, where more ‘Agree’ responses indicate greater equality).

1. When a mother has a full-time paid job, the children suffer.
2. Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as having a paid job.
3. If a woman earns more than her husband, it is almost certain to cause problems.
4. If parents divorce, it is better for the children to live permanently with the mother rather than the father.
5. Fathers are just as good at caring for young children as mothers (for example, cooking, bathing the child, changing nappies, etc.).

First, the responses are analysed based on sex, and then in relation to the types of families according to the sexual division of labour. While statements 1 and 2 are characterised by predominantly stereotypical opinions for both men and women, the responses to statements 3 and 5 were largely in favour of greater gender equality; statement 4 was divided equally (see Table 4).

Table 4: Percentage of responses according to whether they are non-egalitarian or egalitarian, by sex, 2021

		Men	Women	Total
'When a mother has a full-time paid job, the children suffer'.	Non-egalitarian	72.5	73.2	72.9
	Egalitarian	27.5	26.8	27.1
'Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as having a paid job'.	Non-egalitarian	64.8	58.6	61.3
	Egalitarian	35.2	41.4	38.7
'If a woman earns more than her husband, it is almost certain to cause problems'.	Non-egalitarian	30.4	38.0	34.6
	Egalitarian	69.6	62.0	65.4
'If the parents get divorced, it is better for the children to live permanently with the mother than with the father'.	Non-egalitarian	50.3	54.2	52.5
	Egalitarian	49.7	45.8	47.5
'Fathers are as good at caring for young children as mothers (for example, cooking, bathing the child, changing nappies, etc.)'.	Non-egalitarian	32.0	31.6	31.7
	Egalitarian	68.0	68.5	68.3

Note: Responses are considered 'non-egalitarian' if they are: 'Strongly agree', 'Agree', 'No answer', and 'Don't know'. Responses are considered 'egalitarian' if they are: 'Disagree', 'Strongly disagree'. In all statements, the differences by sex were statistically significant with a p-value = 0.000.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the 2021 Time Use Survey from the National Institute of Statistics (INE), Uruguay.

When analysed according to the type of family (see Table 5), statements 1 and 2 again show a predominance of responses that validate gender inequality, with more stereotypical responses recorded among couples who distribute work in a traditional way and those with reversed roles. In contrast, among dual-income and egalitarian couples, these percentages of responses are lower.

In statements 3, 4, and 5, the highest percentage of responses are those that validate the belief in gender equality, especially among dual-income couples, egalitarian families and those with reversed roles in paid work. Therefore, egalitarian families, as well as dual-income families, uphold less traditional gender norms.

Table 5: Percentage of responses based on whether they are egalitarian or non-egalitarian, by household type, 2021

		Traditional	Modified traditional	Dual income	Egalitarian	Reversed roles paid work	Reversed roles unpaid work	Total
When a mother has a full-time paid job, the children suffer.	Non-egalitarian	76.57	79.32	63	67.65	74.55	66.84	70.87
	Egalitarian	23.43	20.68	37	32.35	25.45	33.17	29.13
Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as having a paid job.	Non-egalitarian	67.45	58.11	54.53	53.98	56.94	73.57	58.71
	Egalitarian	32.54	41.89	45.46	46.03	43.06	26.43	41.29
If a woman earns more than her husband, it is almost certain to cause problems.	Non-egalitarian	30.83	32.74	22.2	22.97	26.54	32.67	26.61
	Egalitarian	69.17	67.26	77.81	77.04	73.46	67.32	73.4
If parents divorce, it is better for the children to live permanently with the mother rather than the father.	Non-egalitarian	56.11	53.46	44.07	42.64	39.64	58.49	47.83
	Egalitarian	43.89	46.54	55.92	57.36	60.35	41.51	52.18
Fathers are as good at caring for young children as mothers (for example, cooking, bathing the child, changing nappies, etc.).	Non-egalitarian	32.4	33.48	25.44	24.94	26.78	47.9	28.67
	Egalitarian	67.6	66.52	74.55	75.07	73.21	52.1	71.33

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the 2021 Time Use Survey, Uruguay.

Perceptions of gender norms and the role of the SIEMPRE Centres

The quantitative approach outlined is complemented by a qualitative analysis of how the centres contribute to combating or perpetuating gender norms and stereotypes. To observe potential changes in gender roles, we analyse SIEMPRE Centre practices related to gender, along with perceptions of the results of these activities and what staff, union or business representatives, and families think and believe about the distribution of roles within households.

Ideas and perceptions of interviewees regarding SIEMPRE Centres and gender roles

Regarding perceptions and ideas about gender roles, some differences were identified between the views expressed by key interviewees (who generally aligned with gender equality) and the ideas they perceived as dominant in society. In this regard, when asked about their own views, some interviewees tended to respond according to what they felt ‘should be’, whereas when asked about societal beliefs, responses more closely reflected gender stereotypes.

For instance, respondents frequently stated that men and women should share caregiving responsibilities equally, yet in practice, women were the ones primarily undertaking these tasks – such as when needing to contact a family member about a child.

The following excerpts from interviews illustrate the perceptions of centre staff regarding mothers who believe they are better at caregiving, centres that routinely contact mothers rather than fathers in case of issues regarding their children, and staff discussions about who to contact in order to ensure that caregiving responsibilities are not systematically and solely placed on women:

I think maternal roles are often assigned to mothers, and even the mother herself sometimes believes that no one else – neither the father nor another family member – will do it better.

Female staff member, Los Doraditos Centre, Maldonado

We have a tendency to contact the mother first, and that's something we're trying to change as a team. The mother has always been the visible caregiver to show up at the centre and, in the vast majority of cases, we haven't even met the father, only the mother. In cases where we do know the father and he is actively involved, we challenge ourselves to try calling the father instead. [...] However, there have been instances where families were upset by this approach, as they believed we should always contact the mother.

Female staff member, Los Doraditos Centre, Maldonado

Yes, sometimes a child is lacking something – food or materials, for example – and despite our intentions, we end up holding the mother responsible.

Female staff member, Los Doraditos Centre, Maldonado

These interview excerpts highlight that although gender norms assigning caregiving responsibilities to mothers are prevalent, centre staff are often aware of these norms and actively seek to challenge them.

SIEMPRE Centre practices with regards to gender norms

Regarding centre practices related to gender norms, some staff members mentioned the Committed Parenting programme as a complementary initiative to the SIEMPRE Centres that aims to foster gender co-responsibility in caregiving. This programme seeks to promote engaged parenthood that supports the holistic development of children from a rights-based, gender-equality perspective, and shared responsibility between families and the state. It is implemented through a series of eight workshops over six months, involving family caregivers and covering topics related to child-rearing practices and shared responsibilities between men and women. One interviewee commented:

Well, the Committed Parenting project focuses significantly on masculinities and deconstructing many assumptions. This year, we had strong participation from men. Last year, participation was also balanced between men and women.

Female staff member, Guichón

Although the Committed Parenting Project is not solely focused on gender equity, as it also addresses child-rearing practices, caregiving and positive parenting, it was frequently mentioned by staff when discussing gender co-responsibility initiatives. Staff were also asked about communication practices with families and which family member is typically contacted. While some centres reported engaging with both caregivers, or even prioritising the father in some cases, others admitted that they still tended to contact mothers by default:

At the centre, we try to involve both caregivers. [...] We always aim to establish contact with the male figure because, generally, it is the mother who is called and the one who is expected to be responsible. [...] But we make an effort to call the father too. When we organise open classes or workshops, we actively encourage their participation. We make a constant effort to work a lot on parenting.

Female staff member, Jardines del Hipódromo Centre, Paysandú

Additionally, in one case it was noted that since the centre was associated with traditionally male-dominated industries, the male caregiver was sometimes the primary contact person:

Male caregivers are more present because of the nature of our centre, which is closely linked to construction. We use communication channels like WhatsApp to engage both parents, and sometimes we prioritise contacting the father because he is the more involved caregiver.

Female staff member, COOPINTARE Centre, Montevideo

In one centre, several staff members stated that their communication groups included both male and female caregivers and that they had a policy of reintegrating fathers who withdrew from communication channels, explaining the importance of staying informed about their children's education.

One female staff member also mentioned working with a gender indicators booklet as part of the centre's project, aiming to incorporate a gender perspective into its activities. Given the highly feminised workforce in these centres, some teams have actively sought to include men in their staff to help challenge traditional gender roles in early childhood care.

Ideas about caregiving work

In this point, technical staff and union representatives were asked about their views on the following statements:

1. Women should primarily be responsible for domestic work.
2. Being a housewife is as fulfilling as having paid employment.

Regarding the first statement, technical staff, as well as union and employer representatives, generally agreed that both men and women should share domestic responsibilities and are equally capable of performing them effectively. As already mentioned, these responses often reflected ideal expectations rather than everyday realities. Some respondents also stressed that women should have the opportunity to pursue any life path they choose, including domestic work or caregiving, if they find it fulfilling:

I believe that women – or anyone, really – should seek whatever makes them happy, what they enjoy, what they are good at. If someone prefers to stay at home and raise their children, and they feel fulfilled doing so, I think that's great. If that's how the person finds fulfilment, I think that should be valued rather than judged.

Female staff member, Paysandú

However, in practice, most interviewees acknowledged that caregiving responsibilities overwhelmingly fall on mothers or, in many cases, other female relatives rather than fathers:

Yes, it's mostly women who do the caregiving. I am a grandmother, and I was raised by my grandmother and my mother. [...] If you stand by the entrance, you will see that the majority of people coming to the centre to pick up the children are women.

Woman, focus group, Los Doraditos Centre, Maldonado

Yes, in practice, it falls on us. I try to ensure my eldest daughter is not responsible for caring for her younger sibling, but sometimes it happens. I know it's not fair, and I try to avoid it.

Woman, focus group, Los Doraditos Centre, Maldonado

Respondents were also asked about the following ideas:

1. Women prioritise their children.
2. Men prioritise their children.
3. Fathers are just as competent in caregiving as mothers (e.g., cooking, bathing, changing nappies).

Opinions on the first two statements varied. In centres located in the interior of the country, respondents more frequently expressed traditional views, stating that mothers are generally more present or prioritise caregiving. While some exceptions were noted, both staff and families largely recognised that caregiving responsibilities still fall disproportionately on women, as illustrated by the following accounts:

Once, a separated mother kept missing work because she was always called first whenever something happened with her child. One day, she got fed up and took the child to the father at his workplace. Both parents worked for the same company. She was right, but the manager got angry with the father, and she ended up being seen as irrational by everyone.

Female staff member, Los Doraditos Centre, Maldonado

Mothers do it better, but only because they do it more.

Female staff member, Los Doraditos Centre, Maldonado

It's also important to note that many staff members working at these centres are single mothers. There are also cases of separated parents where they share custody of the children, as discussed in the following quote:

For example, I've been separated from the mother of my children for quite some time now, and we both work the same... and we split up our time: when she's working, the children are with me; when I go to work, the children are with her, and we share the role. [...] Even if they need to go to the doctor or

something, whoever's available at the time takes them. But yes, yes, society still deems that the one who should take most care of the kids is the woman.

Male trade unionist, Guichón

However, it is also true that in some cases, there are perceptions of a more equal distribution of caregiving between men and women, or even single fathers who take on the care of their children, as mentioned in the following interview excerpts:

We have several dads in charge of childrearing. They're exclusively in charge of raising the kids, and not just one kid, but more than one. And nowadays it's no longer just mothers who bring their kids here, sometimes both the mother and father come.

Female staff member, Paysandú

I've been a teacher for many years, and I'm telling you, I see that yes, many men are now prioritising the care of their children.

Female staff member, Montevideo

There are also perceptions of extreme cases. For example, in some instances, mothers internalise gender norms surrounding caregiving so deeply that they contribute to hindering parental co-responsibility in caregiving. And, on some occasions, women feel that their leisure time comes first or that they cannot reconcile their maternal responsibilities with their leisure time:

Before, if you had a child, you had to raise that child and make sacrifices, and you couldn't go anywhere because you had that child and the commitment and everything that came with it. But nowadays, on the contrary, people are like, well, I have the right to go out, I have the right to this, I have the right to that... Yes, you have the right to all of that, but you also have an obligation. If you have a child, you have the responsibility and the commitment.

Female staff member, Paysandú

Regarding how unpaid domestic work is valued in relation to paid work, mixed opinions are observed. On the one hand, some interviewees mention that they value both unpaid and paid work equally. On the other hand, other interviewees state that the difference lies in the fact that paid work involves a salary, which is a necessity for households. Furthermore, in terms of social recognition, one of the trade union representatives points out that society values paid work more highly than unpaid work:

When it comes to the level of social recognition, it is more socially accepted to have a paid job than to be a housewife.

Male trade unionist, Guichón

Impact of the SIEMPRE Centres on the redistribution of caregiving work within the household

Although the services that the centres provide allow for a reduction in the caregiving burden within households, particularly for women, SIEMPRE Centres do not play an explicit role in redistributing caregiving responsibilities between men and women within the household. Through the Committed Parenting programme, the centres have made some small progress in terms of raising awareness

through workshops with fathers and mothers. In this regard, staff believe they have brought about changes in the families attending the centre in terms of awareness regarding caregiving and unpaid work. However, this does not mean that changes have been made at the structural social level, but rather at the level of some families within the centre:

It's so important for fathers to be present in terms of their commitment to raising their children. In that sense, we do believe that this may have changed things, beyond what society structurally dictates. Because, as I said before, a system that offers more job security to men means that men are expected to provide; this notion of the man providing for the family. So, in this regard, we cannot make an impact: the structure is very difficult to change.

Female staff member, Montevideo

On the other hand, some staff members also mentioned acting as mediators and communicators in promoting co-responsibility between separated fathers and mothers:

Another issue we're facing is that, as a centre, we are often mediators between separated dads and mums because the communication has broken down, such a basic thing, you know? The dad and the mum don't communicate, so then they end up in a situation where it's unclear who is going to pick up the kid, for example.

Female staff member, Paysandú

Regarding the distribution of caregiving roles within families, some mothers express that, since the centre allowed them to start working for pay, changes occurred in the family dynamics:

Before, I was a bit more involved because, as I was studying, I was only studying and wasn't working yet, so I had a little more time. Now, yes, we definitely have to share the responsibility.

Women's focus group, Jardines, Paysandú

In other cases, fathers express that, since the dynamics of these centres accommodate the flexible working hours of many dual-income families in rural areas, the intra-family dynamics are distributed more equally. For example, in one family (he is a livestock transporter, and she is a teacher in another department), the family dynamics are more equally divided, as a significant amount of caregiving time is covered by the centre:

Yes, and whoever's at home... There's no turning back, of course. It's varied, because sometimes she leaves work at 10 p.m., sometimes 11 p.m. And I get home and... everything has to be done. You have to bathe the child, make food, everything. And when she's home, she has to do the same. It's not like one day you do it and I do it the next. [...] And you enjoy it, you enjoy being present with the child.

Male family member, Paysandú

4.2 Economic autonomy: indicators, perceptions and changes with the SIEMPRE Centres

Indicators of women's economic autonomy

This section will address economic autonomy through the Continuous Household Survey (CHS) of 2021. Additionally, it will explore the extent to which and how the centres contribute to greater economic inclusion for families, especially women. Various studies have indicated that the disproportionate caregiving workload for women tends to affect their employment and educational participation, access to resources and stable job positions that would allow them to achieve economic autonomy (Espino et al., 2014; Salvador et al., 2022). Therefore, this section analyses labour force participation by gender in Uruguay in 2021, before delving into the role of ideas and perceptions related to caregiving.

From the quantitative strategy, the results of the logit estimation are presented. The marginal effects of each explanatory variable on the dependent variable are shown in Annex 1, and these are read as the change in the probability of participating in the labour market or being employed due to a one-unit change in the independent variables.

Considering only the variables that proved significant, it is observed that age positively affects both the probability of participating in the labour market and being employed; however, when age squared is considered, the impact is negative in both cases. These two results are observed for both men and women, and the same was found in an analysis conducted with data from 2013 (Espino et al., 2014).

Regarding the education variables, the fact that both men and women attend an educational institution reduces the probability of participating in the labour market and the probability of being employed. On the other hand, the variables related to the level of education attained are not significant in all cases.

In the case of men, almost all variables have a positive effect on the probability of participating in the labour market, and the impact increases with higher levels of education, while for women, the impact is negative except for those with complete tertiary education (university or non-university tertiary institutions). This is associated with the fact that the labour participation of women with complete tertiary education is high and similar to that of men.

Regarding the probability of being employed, only the negative impact of incomplete tertiary education for men is significant, and for women, the effect of having completed secondary or tertiary education is significant and positive. Therefore, having a high level of education remains a relevant factor for women's labour market insertion.

Regarding the household-related variables, being married or in a marital union positively impacts men's probability of participating in the labour market and being employed, while for women, its effect is to decrease their probability of participating in the labour market, likely due to gender stereotypes associated with the sexual division of labour. In the same way, being head of household increases the probability of both men and women participating in the labour market and being employed.

Additionally, two variables regarding the presence of children in the household (aged 0 to 5 years, and 6 to 14 years) are considered, which have a negative effect on the probability of women being part of the labour force, and a positive effect for men. But, in terms of the probability of being employed, both variables have a positive impact for both men and women. This means that once women decide to participate in the labour market, the probability of being employed is not explained by the presence or absence of children in the household. In line with this, the presence of domestic help increases the probability of both men and women being employed.

The attendance of children at an educational centre is significant for women's participation in the labour market, and it is not relevant for men. It should be noted that these centres were only constructed for children aged 3 to 5 years. On the other hand, belonging to a two-parent household, compared to other types of households, decreases the probability of participating in the labour market and being employed for both sexes, but the impact is greater for women.

Furthermore, when considering the variable of residence (Montevideo vs the interior of the country), living in the capital decreases the probability of men participating in the labour market and increases it for women.

Finally, the variables related to income show that, as the income quintile of households increases, the magnitude of the positive effect on the probability of participating and being employed increases for both sexes. This could be explained by the fact that households with higher income levels have greater access to opportunities to hire care services both inside and outside the home.

Regarding transfers, the negative impact on participation and employment is significant for both men and women. A similar trend is observed with the variable of other labour income in the household, except for the probability of participation in the case of women, where a positive effect is recorded.

In summary, the most significant variables contributing to women's economic autonomy, measured by their increased probability of participation in the labour market, are having a high level of education (completed tertiary education), being the head of the household, and the increase in income strata. Meanwhile, the presence of children aged 0 to 5 in the household and belonging to a two-parent household reduce this participation.

When considering the probability of a woman having a job (indicating greater autonomy), the most important variables in explaining this are high educational level (completed tertiary education), being the head of the household, having domestic help, and belonging to a household with higher income.

Perceptions of economic autonomy based on the intervention of the SIEMPRE Centres

From a qualitative perspective, the following were analysed:

1. ideas and perceptions regarding economic autonomy
2. impacts on women's labour and educational participation
3. the relationship between the SIEMPRE Centres and collective bargaining

Ideas and perceptions regarding economic autonomy. Concerning economic autonomy, some ideas persist regarding jobs that are considered more suitable for women or men based on personal characteristics. For example, there are perceptions that jobs requiring physical effort, such as construction or the use of machinery, are more appropriate for men, while caregiving roles are seen as more suitable for women. These ideas are based on gender stereotypes. Interviewees mention that, in the forestry sector, women are considered more meticulous when working in nurseries, which leads companies to prioritise hiring women for this specific task:

Yes, I think so, I do think that for the harvesting of seedlings, I think women are more... I don't know how to put it, but more delicate when working with plants or more careful, I'm not sure how to call it, but I think it's something along those lines.

Male trade unionist, Guichón

On the other hand, other interviewees point out that women could also be integrating and/or are already integrating into more masculinised sectors, such as mechanised harvesting or construction.

Changes in labour and educational integration from the SIEMPRE Centres. On this issue, centre staff, union representatives and mothers themselves highlight that the opening of the centres has not only allowed women to enter the labour market or pursue their education but has also enabled them to continue working or studying. This is because, upon the birth of a child, women tend to prioritise caregiving responsibilities:

The fact that there is a place where they can leave their children, with quality care, allows them to work, to enter the workforce as a new employee, but also to stay in that job. There were situations where workers had to leave their jobs because they prioritised caring for their children.

Male trade unionist, Guichón

I had just started my teaching practicum. So, I needed a place to leave my daughter, who was the first to come here [to the centre]. Then my second child arrived. And with complete trust, we left them there. Now I've finished my degree, and I'm working.

Female family member, Paysandú

Another advantage of the SIEMPRE Centres highlighted by union actors is the reduction in the cost of childcare, as workers previously had to pay for childcare if women entered the workforce, while the SIEMPRE Centres are free. In this regard, some interviewees point out that for certain sectors of workers, especially women, the decision between going to work or taking care of their children often leaned toward caregiving, as paying for childcare would take up a large portion of their salary:

But yes, it improved their availability to work, to comply with a schedule, because, you see, if they had a child who went to school in the afternoon, they would either have to leave them with a relative all morning or pay for a nanny. And when you start doing the math, the salary with paying for a nanny just doesn't add up.

Male trade unionist, Guichón

The fact that it's free [is crucial], because in commerce and services, we have relatively low salaries, and when you have to pay for rent, obviously between rent, food and childcare, childcare is what gets most neglected.

Female trade unionist, Maldonado

In this regard, the SIEMPRE Centres significantly contribute to promoting social co-responsibility, impacting a better redistribution of care between the state, family and community. This is because the state assumes the costs associated with the centre's operation; the community, through civil society organisations, contributes time; and the family can reduce its caregiving responsibilities in terms of time and costs.

According to the interviewees, the establishment of the centres has also allowed mothers to continue and/or finish their studies, as well as dedicate time to building their homes:

Many of the cooperatives were formed by women because men were often seen as the providers, and it was us, the women, who worked and dedicated hours to the cooperatives. For example, when I started building my house, I had a baby, and it would have been great if there had been a service like this. Instead, I had to pay for private schooling to have my child looked after for more than four hours because I also worked and built my house.

Female family member, Paysandú

Relationship with collective bargaining. In most of the cases studied, the trade union players mentioned that the opening of the SIEMPRE Centres was not related to collective bargaining in Wage Councils but was rather an initiative of the care system, which approached unions and businesses to generate synergies in the distribution of care.

However, in the construction sector – one of the sectors with the most progress in terms of shared responsibility in care – interviewees mentioned that the implementation of the centre was part of the 2018 Wage Council negotiation.

The Sole National Union for Construction and Related Trades (SUNCA) is the only case with four SIEMPRE Centres (two in the Montevideo department and two in the Canelones department), which were created through collective bargaining between the union, businesses and the state with the support of the Housing Fund and the Social Fund for Construction. These funds were created prior to the establishment of the SIEMPRE Centres but are used for the construction of the centres and to cover food expenses:

Well, the centre started operating in 2018, following a round of the Wage Council negotiations of the SUNCA Union, which somehow reached an agreement with employers for the creation of early childhood centres, mainly for the children of construction workers. They have five funds, with the union and employers generating five construction funds, one of which is the housing fund that started everything, in regards to all that about local purchases and everything.

Female staff member, Montevideo

The housing fund builds the SIEMPRE Centres, and then the social fund takes care of food and all the management aspects, knowing that the SIEMPRE programme has co-participation from the state in the sense that it pays the teachers and professionals, and we handle the rest.

Male trade unionist, Montevideo

The case of SUNCA is emblematic due to the number of affiliates, the organisational capacity, and the history of this union. In this sense, it has managed to create social funds that it uses for different issues identified by the workers, such as caregiving. These social funds allow financing centre construction, which in other cases are establishments obtained through the state.

In the case of the forestry sector, interviewees mention that, although the union has attempted to address the issue in collective bargaining rounds, it has not received a good response from the Forestry Association:

It doesn't go hand in hand with collective bargaining. The SIEMPRE Centres were part of a government plan, and one of the components of those centres was the social aspect, and that's where the union fit in, in this case, Guichón. But it didn't come from collective bargaining. In fact, we've tried through collective bargaining to introduce other social aspects, like study scholarships for workers, but it's been very difficult. I'll tell you, it's been really difficult, especially with the Forestry Association, which is somewhat reluctant to these kinds of issues.

Male trade unionist, Guichón

On the other hand, in the case of the centre associated with the services sector, the willingness to negotiate on the part of the company and the tradition of implementing such policies by its owners, along with the union's organisation, were mentioned to be key factors that explain the establishment of the centre:

This idea has been around for years... the company has always been interested in these topics, and there is a tradition in this regard. [...] It was made possible because there was space, and the union was very interested.

Businesswoman, Maldonado

4.3 Physical autonomy

This section addresses the changes in gender norms related to physical autonomy as seen through the World Values Survey (WVS) 2011 and 2022. It will also discuss how the centres contribute to promoting, for example, the detection of cases of gender-based violence and other types of domestic violence.

In relation to the WVS, two statements were selected for 2011 and 2022. Respondents were asked whether they believe the following statements can always be justified, never be justified, or if their opinion is somewhere in between, where 1 means 'Never justified' and 10 means 'Always justified'.

In 2011, and even more in 2022, a high percentage of people said that it is never justified for a man to hit a woman (though the response is higher among women). However, regarding the question of whether it is justified for a man to hit his children, the percentage of responses 'Never justified' is around 70% in 2011 and 65% in 2022 (higher among women than men). Finally, regarding the question of whether violence against other people is justified, the response 'Never justified' is around 81% to 82% in both years, though there is a greater gender gap in this response, with women being more likely to choose not to justify it.

Table 6: Questions about the justification of violence, Uruguay 2011

	For a man to beat his wife			For a man to beat his children			Violence against other people		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
No answer	0.21	0.38	0.30	0.42	0.38	0.40	0.21	0.57	0.40
Don't know				0.00	0.57	0.30	2.12	0.76	1.40
Never justified	86.23	91.10	88.80	69.92	71.02	70.50	78.39	86.17	82.50
2	5.93	3.79	4.80	6.36	7.39	6.90	6.99	6.63	6.80
3	1.27	0.76	1.00	5.93	4.55	5.20	2.75	0.76	1.70
4	0.64	0.38	0.50	4.03	3.60	3.80	2.12	1.14	1.60
5	1.91	1.33	1.60	8.47	8.33	8.40	4.66	2.46	3.50
6	0.42	0.38	0.40	2.12	1.14	1.60	0.21	0.19	0.20
7	0.42	0.19	0.30	0.85	0.95	0.90			
8	0.42	0.19	0.30	0.42	0.38	0.40	1.06	0.57	0.80
9	0.00	0.38	0.20	0.21	0.19	0.20	0.64	0.19	0.40
10	2.54	1.14	1.80	1.27	1.52	1.40	0.85	0.57	0.70
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

World Values Survey 2011

Table 7: Questions about the justification of violence, Uruguay 2022

	For a man to beat his wife			For a man to beat his children			Violence against other people		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Never justified	90.58	92.27	91.47	62.79	67.20	65.10	76.97	83.87	80.59
2	2.23	1.05	1.61	7.79	4.88	6.27	4.80	3.05	3.88
3	0.67	0.77	0.72	6.70	6.20	6.44	4.06	2.38	3.18
4	0.00	0.07	0.04	2.02	3.49	2.79	2.90	1.45	2.14
5	0.66	1.32	1.00	10.67	8.13	9.34	5.68	2.07	3.79
6	0.82	0.36	0.58	2.68	2.27	2.47	0.56	0.70	0.63
7	1.26	0.19	0.70	1.08	1.75	1.43	0.86	0.62	0.73
8	0.00	0.13	0.07	0.74	1.77	1.28	0.35	1.15	0.77
9	0.57	1.08	0.84	0.78	1.03	0.91	0.78	0.76	0.77
10	3.22	2.76	2.98	4.74	3.27	3.97	3.03	3.96	3.51
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

World Values Survey 2022

Approaches to physical autonomy carried out by the SIEMPRE Centres: detecting and addressing cases of gender-based violence

Detecting and addressing cases of gender-based violence is not an explicit function of the SIEMPRE Centres. However, staff handle these situations through communication and coordination with local agencies that address these issues in the community. Staff perceived that the centres have a substantial impact on detecting and addressing domestic violence and gender-based violence cases. They mentioned providing advice to victims and helping families navigate institutional channels for these problems. In this regard, they have supported and assisted victims and, in cases of violence against children, have managed to quickly activate detection processes and make referrals to the corresponding institutions:

Each situation has been different. If it's a case of violence, we report it, or in some cases, we first try to address the situation with the victim and attempt to offer our support and any available coordination to accompany them through the process.

Female staff member, Montevideo

So, when these situations are detected, the goal is to protect the child who is caught in the middle of sometimes very difficult situations. We have cases of children who are referred directly from the court, because the centre conducts a much more thorough follow-up regarding these situations. There are many cases that come from there.

Female trade unionist, Maldonado

Additionally, it is evident that the coordination and responsibilities of the staff extends beyond only their centre and often includes other government institutions. In one of the centres, an adolescent mother moved from another department with her child due to a situation of extreme vulnerability: she had no income or housing and had experienced repeated abuse by close family members who let her stay with them. The young woman remained in contact with the team, which allowed them to provide a report on her situation to a team managing a housing access programme for people in extreme vulnerability in the department in which she now resides.

4.4 Autonomy in decision-making

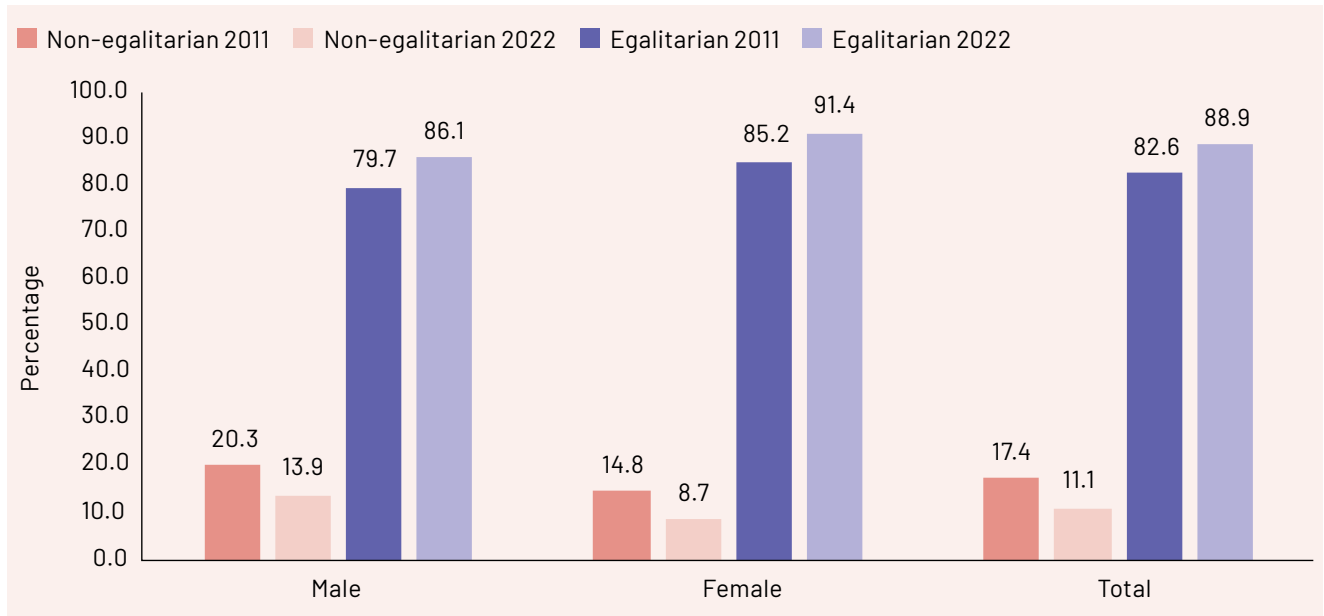
This section explores changes in gender norms related to autonomy in decision-making, referring to the information available in the WVS 2011 and 2022 regarding women's participation in decision-making spaces.

Once again, the following answers are grouped as 'non-egalitarian': 'Strongly agree', 'Agree', 'No answer', and 'Don't know'. The answers considered 'egalitarian' are: 'Disagree' and 'Strongly disagree'.

For the statements 'Men are better political leaders than women' (see Figure 2) and 'In general, men are better business executives than women' (see Figure 3), we observe an improvement in the trend of responses toward equality between men and women between 2011 and 2022. When comparing responses by sex, we see that women register higher percentages of pro-equality answers than men, with this difference being more significant in the case of the second statement.

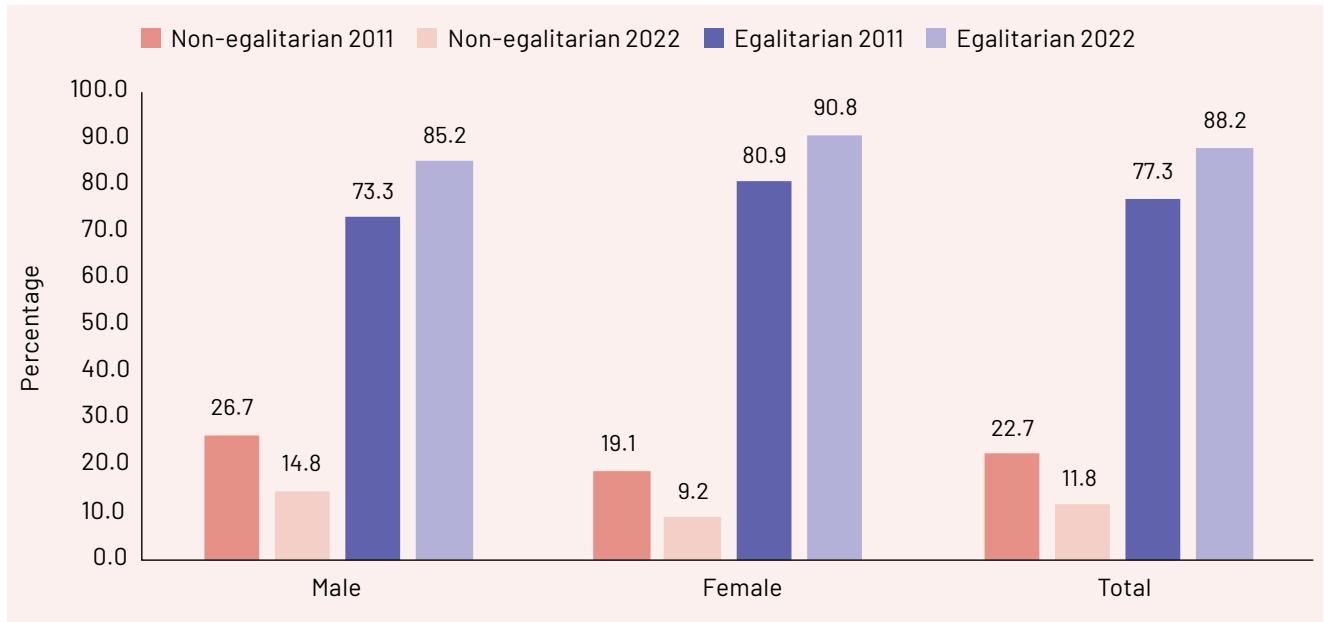
In the case of the statement 'Men are better political leaders than women', 85% of women in 2011 and 91% in 2022 disagreed, while 80% of men in 2011 and 86% in 2022 disagreed. For the statement 'Men are better business executives than women', 81% of women in 2011 and 91% in 2022 disagreed, while 73% of men in 2011 and 85% in 2022 disagreed.

Figure 2: Men as political leaders



Source: WVS, 2011.

Figure 3: Men as business executives



Source: WVS, 2011.

Perceptions and ideas regarding advances in women's participation in decision-making

The qualitative approach addresses how the centres promote or hinder women's participation in collective spaces such as unions or others. In this regard, the following are discussed:

1. the reasons that explain the lower participation of women in these spaces
2. the composition of unions and women's participation in decision-making positions

In general, most of the people interviewed mention that women's participation in decision-making spaces tends to be lower than that of men – not because women do not perform these tasks as efficiently but because of cultural reasons and lack of time. Some interviewees mention that women are equally capable of leading but that, in practice, society does not value women and men equally in decision-making and leadership spaces.

Once again, as in previous sections, this section identifies tensions and contradictions between the ideal and the reality. Thus, interviewees acknowledge men and women as equals but at the same time mention that 'society' – some 'other' – does not see it this way. Some excerpts from the interviews presented below show these tensions:

I believe there is a historical, cultural construction of the value placed on the role of women compared to men. I think there's a lot of work to be done within ourselves as a group of women, because many times we are the ones who question a woman leading an institution or political matter, and we don't do it as much when it's a man.

Female staff member, Maldonado

Yes, we just don't have time. You get home, prepare the food, clean, and you don't feel like doing anything else.

Female family member, Maldonado

What happens is that it's not valued the same. Women have less time, and men generally tend to participate more.

Female staff member, Maldonado

These findings are similar to those found in national and Latin American literature on care (see Batthyány et al., 2017; UN Women and ECLAC, 2021).

In both the forestry sector and the construction sector, two heavily male-dominated sectors, the presence of women in union leadership is limited. In the forestry sector, within the three territorial base groups in Guichón, most of the union delegates are men, with only one woman serving as a delegate. At the national level, leadership remains male-dominated, although some interviewees mention seeing progress in women's participation in decision-making positions:

The current leadership is still predominantly male, although we do have female colleagues in leadership as well. This inclusion has mainly come from these female colleagues, some from the industry but also from the rural and forestry sectors, which is closely related to the work in plant nurseries, where there is clearly a large number of female workers. [...] And of course,

we want more women in the grassroots committees and in leadership. While progress has been made, in the previous period, we had a female colleague who was president of the National Union, a female forestry worker who served during that time.

Male trade unionist, Guichón

In the case of the services sector, the role of the union and in particular the presence of women in positions of union leadership has been identified as a key factor in the generation of initiatives for shared responsibility. The following interview excerpts largely illustrate this point:

This idea had been around before, but with the change in the organisation, with more women involved, it gained momentum. [...] The difference was that I was running for the position of Organisation Secretary, which is the highest responsibility within the structure and, well, we wanted to create this change because I came with the idea that the trade union wasn't just about defending wages, but that we needed to address other social issues that also impact the lives of workers. [...] When I started working here, I couldn't afford to pay for a babysitter, so my child was left alone. Therefore, when you experience it yourself, beyond what you can see in other women's situations, the number of sanctions that were in place, you understand it from your own lived experience. This also gave us more drive to make this happen, because we had a clear understanding of the suffering faced by some of the women who were mothers. [...] At that time, the union's composition changed; we were seven members, and we were all women.

Female trade unionist, Maldonado

4.5 Effects of the centres on the overall well-being of families and communities

This section describes additional factors that impact the well-being of families, beyond the four dimensions previously mentioned. For instance, the potential impacts of the centres will be identified in areas such as social inclusion, the creation of bonds between families, child development, support for families in parenting tools, and community impact, among others.

Social integration and inclusion

A factor frequently mentioned by the interviewees is the impact of the centres on the inclusion and integration of families with different socioeconomic levels. In this regard, the quality of the centres' equipment, the training of staff, the diversity and quality of recreational activities, state regulation regarding infrastructure quality, and the child-to-educator ratio are highlighted, among many other factors that promote the comprehensive development of children. This results in a very positive perception from families and prevents higher-income company workers from preferring the use of other private centres, which ultimately leads to greater social cohesion.

In this sense, given the progressive stratification of education in Uruguay and the increasing importance of private care and education centres in the national provision of care, the possibility of having a centre where workers from different socioeconomic backgrounds are integrated qualifies as a virtue from the perspective of social integration.

Additionally, since the centres have a 20% quota for families from the community who do not work for the reference company, this facilitates greater social integration. Below are some interview quotes that emphasise this point:

One of the things about Maldonado is that there is a lot of social differentiation. Worker's kids go to public school, and as soon as a worker's situation improves a little, they start sending their children to private schools. Yes, in some areas the doctor's kid, the lawyer's kid, and the cleaning lady's kid are all in the same classroom, but in more unequal areas like Maldonado, you hardly see that anymore. One of the things I think is great about the centres is that they maintain this integration, because the centres are not just for a specific type of person, so I think this also helps in this social dynamic.

Businesswoman, Maldonado

The company has always had a vocation for social integration, and I believe the centres do a lot in that sense because it benefits everyone, and everyone attends, so you have very different families, and that is very good.

Female family member, Maldonado

Finally, the centres have had a particularly positive effect on families from other regions. In particular, the centres have been a central policy to facilitate the labour market integration of women with children who have moved in search of employment, as illustrated by the following interview excerpts:

Most of them were heads of households or faced some difficulties because they were from other regions and had moved to Maldonado, so they didn't have family or a support network to rely on. And that's where the idea of setting up a daycare at that time came about, the platform, in 2016. Then we won the elections, and that's when we began to work on the issue in depth.

Female trade unionist, Maldonado

What happened to us? The vast majority of colleagues who work in the construction industry are from the interior of the country, meaning they leave behind their homes in places like Artigas and Rivera, and well, they end up building their lives here due to the work conditions. The issue is that they had no one to leave the kids with. That's when the workers have to move, they have to move, I don't know, from Rivera to Montevideo to work.

Male trade unionist, Montevideo

Child well-being

A key factor highlighted by staff, as well as by trade union and business representatives and families, is the impact of the centres on children's well-being, particularly in terms of coordination with medical services, social services, and other support networks. The high quality of the socio-educational provision and its positive effects on children's development are also frequently emphasised. In particular, the way in which some centres structure the daily schedule – bringing together children

at different developmental stages in shared spaces – has been noted as enhancing learning and progress through inter-age interaction. The following quotes illustrate this point:

We recently went to do an activity with the children, and it's like a completely integrated approach that really impacts the child, but also impacts the family, and it's impactful because it's not simply about dropping them off there; there's a whole world that goes beyond just care... there are issues related to nutrition, detecting situations of violence, and many other factors included that really have a very positive impact on the family.

Company, woman, Maldonado

The centre has been key to the child's autonomy, and independence, and to detecting neurological or physical issues in early development. It's also about what comes next, such as the family context, situations of violence, addiction issues, and many things that the centre begins to be part of within that family context.

Female trade unionist, Maldonado

They [the children] love coming, and you can see how they change; it's amazing how much they've changed since they've been coming; they teach them all sorts of things over here.

Female family member, Maldonado

Image and performance of the company

An additional outcome of the centres is related to the company's image in the community, as well as the productivity of the workers. Furthermore, SIEMPRE Centres are generally recognized as high-quality, given that they have qualified human resources, excellent materials and building structures, and tend to offer a wide range of activities.

In this regard, it has been emphasised that the existence of the centres has improved worker performance, job satisfaction and negotiation processes between workers and the company, as well as reduced conflict and absenteeism:

From the employers' side, there was an interest in creating this type of initiative, like the centres, to meet the workers' demand because they believed it could help reduce absenteeism. [...] There were many women, the cashiers were mostly young women with their first job experience, and suddenly, with children to care for, it became very difficult for them [to come to work]. So, it was a demand from the workers, and there was also a sense of the company's involvement in trying to improve the quality of life for employees.

Businesswoman, Maldonado

One interviewee mentions the trade-off between staying in a job, even when not satisfied, due to the benefit of accessing these types of services:

I think many people think twice if, for example, they're not happy with their job. You have to consider whether it's worth leaving because what they offer you here, you don't get elsewhere, and it's something you have to consider because this service is expensive. You might earn more somewhere else, but with what you spend on childcare, in the end, it makes no difference.

Female family member, Maldonado

This trade-off is not an option for families of informal workers. In this regard, the 20% quota for vulnerable families not only facilitates integration between families of different social classes, but also provides access to childcare for families with informal jobs.

5 Conclusion

Through a quantitative and qualitative analysis strategy, this study examined the impact of the SIEMPRE Centres on gender norms that sustain the unequal distribution of caregiving work and their effects on women's autonomy. The findings of this study indicate that the SIEMPRE Centres are indeed a central intervention of the National Integrated Care System in terms of social co-responsibility. In this sense, these centres represent a novel and highly relevant tool in the regional context for promoting sustainable caregiving policies over time, grounded in agreements between businesses, workers and trade unions.

Furthermore, these centres have a highly positive impact on reducing caregiving work, which contributes to greater economic autonomy and decision-making power for women. At the same time, the close, personal engagement that characterises these centres also provides networks for detecting and addressing gender-based violence. In this regard, as part of a comprehensive social approach, those working in the centres help to identify potential cases of domestic violence and gender-based violence, and if such cases are found, the centre's staff guide and support the victim in the steps to take at the institutional and legal levels.

By freeing up women's time, the centres also have an impact on representation as they promote more favourable conditions for women to engage in collective participation. However, this does not necessarily mean that women have greater representation and leadership in decision-making spaces. In fact, the centres have limited effects on the recognition and redistribution of caregiving work. While the Committed Parenting programme holds workshops with families on gender differences, this is just one of its topics, alongside parenting practices, caregiving, etc. In this regard, training and awareness-raising actions for staff and families on gender issues depend on whether the centres join the Committed Parenting programme, as it is not a specific function of the SIEMPRE Centres.

Although some changes in everyday parenting and caregiving practices at the intrafamilial level are evident from testimonial sources, it is not possible to assert that this outcome is widespread, nor to guarantee that these changes affect prevailing gender norms and ideas.

These results, derived from the qualitative strategy, align with the findings from the quantitative strategy for the entire study population. In fact, while positive changes in gender norms are identified, such as the idea that women with full-time paid employment harm their children (according to WVS 2011 and 2022), caregiving work continues to be a responsibility largely associated with women.

Despite the decline in the traditional family model, where the man works outside the home and the woman takes care of domestic tasks (falling from 30% in 2013 to 25% in 2021), and the increase in egalitarian families (rising from 10% to 16% between 2013 and 2021), women still do more unpaid labour hours than men. For example, in dual-income families, which are the majority (around 30% of total families), women dedicate around six hours to unpaid domestic labour, with a relative gap of 4.23 times more time spent on household tasks by women compared to men in 2021. This is also consistent with the results from the logit model, which shows, among other things, that women's participation in the labour market tends to drop by 6% in the presence of young children and by 8% in two-parent households.

The SIEMPRE Centres also have an impact on women's autonomy. In terms of physical autonomy, the centres contribute to the detection and handling of gender-based violence cases. In this regard, the staff provides tools and follows up on institutional complaints, channelling the situation to the necessary institutions based on the type of support required in each case (e.g. assistance for children in the home and legal support for victims).

Furthermore, the centres have significant impacts on economic autonomy as, by freeing up caregiving time within families, particularly for women, they promote greater integration into the workforce. Having a place where children can stay during the workday is especially important for single mothers and even more so for women who lack family support networks that can provide care.

In terms of decision-making autonomy, as mentioned earlier, the centres free up time for women, thereby increasing their opportunities to participate in decision-making spaces and roles. However, to foster effective participation and equal democratic processes in substantive terms, it is necessary to address other factors that also influence this situation, such as gender roles associated with leadership.

Finally, the centres have shown impacts in other areas beyond the 3 Rs of unpaid labour (reduction, redistribution and recognition), especially in child development, social welfare and social cohesion. By providing high-quality services, the centres are the first choice for families who need childcare and have access to the centres, regardless of their economic level, which promotes social integration. Additionally, the SIEMPRE Centres have been key institutions in promoting social co-responsibility, as their design involves the active tripartite participation of companies, workers and the state in the management of care services.

This study contributes to the existing literature on gender and care in three ways. First, at the regional level, there are very few public policies that promote social co-responsibility in care, and even fewer tripartite implementation structures. In this way, this work describes and analyses an 'unlikely' case of care policy in Latin America. Given the context of fiscal slowdown and restrictions that many countries in the region are experiencing, such policies are gaining increasing relevance. Thus, the Uruguayan case of the SIEMPRE Centres represents a care policy to be observed and considered – bearing in mind the particularities of each context – by the rest of the region.

Second, the analysis carried out here shows that social co-responsibility policies are indeed central to defamilialising care and promoting a more just and sustainable organisation of care. However, this study highlights the importance of norms and cultural change as central pillars of care policies. As discussed earlier, without specific interventions that promote a change in the assignment of gender roles regarding care, social co-responsibility policies are not sufficient.

Third, as the National Integrated Care System is the first of its kind implemented in Latin America, and given the growing number of initiatives in the region aimed at addressing these issues, this analysis contributes to identifying possible challenges, critical issues and possibilities in other countries. For example, Uruguay's SIEMPRE centres have been key tools in favouring women's employment and child

well-being, addressing situations of domestic violence, among other issues that go beyond their main objectives. Thus, the experience of the centres and this type of proximity-based approach, on the ground and with social participation, can help highlight the potential that such public interventions have, not only in terms of care but also in the promotion of social well-being and development in societies.

As previously noted in other works (e.g., UN Women and ECLAC, 2021; ECLAC, 2022; Salvador, 2011), care policy is central to promoting more just, equal and sustainable societies. The case of the SIEMPRE Centres analysed here is particularly relevant because it identifies gender inequalities in the interior of the country, where private care services are often scarce and where more traditional gender norms tend to prevail. For this reason, such an intervention is often central to promoting women's labour force participation (Salvador et al., 2022).

6 Recommendations and lessons learned

6.1 Recommendations for the National Care System and the Institute for Children and Adolescents of Uruguay

1. Continue expanding the territorial reach of SIEMPRE Centres through both tripartite arrangements (trade unions, employers and government) and bipartite arrangements (trade unions and government). Trade unions have expressed strong interest in this policy, as it addresses an important concern for their members.
2. Strengthen collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security to ensure care policies are central to Wage Councils and collective bargaining agreements, whether for the establishment of new centres or the creation of social funds to support the construction of new facilities.
3. Raise awareness among other trade unions and employers about the positive impacts of SIEMPRE Centres – both in terms of child well-being and in enhancing women's economic, physical and decision-making autonomy – to encourage broader participation in the initiative.
4. Develop and implement comprehensive strategies to drive cultural change and transform gender norms. While this aspect is often referenced in care policy design, there is generally a lack of strong implementation strategies. It is crucial to establish initiatives targeting families, businesses and trade unions to integrate this component effectively.
5. Increase employer engagement in the development of SIEMPRE Centres, given that businesses currently play a relatively minor role in this initiative.
6. Integrate specific training sessions, workshops, and activities for families to promote both the recognition and valuation of care work and the redistribution of care responsibilities between men and women. Strengthening this aspect will enhance the centres' impact on challenging gender stereotypes, fostering a more equitable social organisation of care, and

improving women's autonomy. An existing and valuable public policy instrument that could be leveraged further in this regard is the Caring with Equality Seal.

7. Strengthen the Committed Parenting programme by making it a mandatory component of SIEMPRE Centres. This would improve staff training and increase family engagement and awareness.
8. Expand gender inequality workshops within the Committed Parenting programme to enhance families' understanding of gender perspectives in care work.
9. Allocate financial resources to support coordination time at SIEMPRE Centres, as team coordination currently takes place outside of paid working hours.

6.2 Recommendations for within the SIEMPRE Centres

1. Continue fostering inter-institutional collaborations at the local level and with families, focusing on physical autonomy (to identify situations of violence) and economic autonomy (as a channel for employment and educational opportunities).
2. Strengthen communication with trade unions and businesses that support the initiative to ensure the maintenance of the centres and the provision of necessary materials.
3. Continue addressing gender inequalities at the family level through the Committed Parenting programme. While the centres successfully support defamilialising care, redistributing care work within households remains a challenge.

6.3 Recommendations for trade unions and employers

1. Familiarise themselves with the SIEMPRE Centres' policy and incorporate it into collective bargaining negotiations.
2. Develop strategies for collaboration with civil society organisations, recognising them as key stakeholders with significant expertise in this area.
3. Increase the recruitment and inclusion of women in various workplace roles and support the participation of women in trade unions.
4. Establish gender committees within businesses and trade unions to address gender inequality in the workplace and labour representation.

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Annexes

Annex 1

Table: A1: Description of the variables used in the logit model

Variable	Description
edad	Age
edad2	Age squared
asistcentro	Binary variable, equal to 1 if the person attends an educational centre
primaria	Binary variable, equal to 1 if the person has completed primary education
bascompl	Binary variable, equal to 1 if the person has completed lower secondary education
secompl	Binary variable, equal to 1 if the person has completed upper secondary education
tercinc	Binary variable, equal to 1 if the person has completed some tertiary education
tercompl	Binary variable, equal to 1 if the person has completed tertiary education
casadouni	Binary variable, equal to 1 if the person is married or in a marital union
jefe	Binary variable, equal to 1 if the person is head of household
conyuge	Binary variable, equal to 1 if the person is a spouse
mdeo	Binary variable, equal to 1 if the person lives in Montevideo
hoghijos0a5	Binary variable, equal to 1 if there are children aged 0 to 5 years in the household
hoghijos6a14	Binary variable, equal to 1 if there are children aged 6 to 14 years in the household
servdom	Binary variable, equal to 1 if there is domestic service in the household
todosasisten	Binary variable, equal to 1 if all children in the household aged 3 to 5 years attend a care centre
hogbiparental	Binary variable, equal to 1 if the person belongs to a two-parent household
Q2	Binary variable, equal to 1 if the person belongs to quintile 2
Q3	Binary variable, equal to 1 if the person belongs to quintile 3
Q4	Binary variable, equal to 1 if the person belongs to quintile 4
Q5	Binary variable, equal to 1 if the person belongs to quintile 5
logtransf	Logarithm of social transfers received by the household
logotrosylab	Logarithm of other labour income

Fuente: Elaboración propia

Table A2: Logit estimates of the probability of participating in the labour market and the likelihood of being employed, by sex, 2021, Uruguay.

	Probability of participating in the labour market		Likelihood of being employed	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
edad	.0378036***	.0578986***	.008125***	.0124873***
	(.0010497)	(.0012157)	(.0008996)	(.0011171)
edad2	-.0005344***	-.0007686***	-.000092***	-.0001239***
	(.0000116)	(.0000132)	(.000011)	(.0000137)
asistcentro	-.0941576***	-.0352526***	-.0371166***	-.034088***
	(.0067787)	(.0085484)	(.0045461)	(.0054072)
primaria	.0156291*	-.0600821***	.0091077	.001138
	(.0083997)	(.0096483)	(.0065409)	(.0071556)
bascompl	.0204622**	-.0286396**	-.0050986	.0053588
	(.0083857)	(.0097658)	(.0063926)	(.0070969)
secompl	.0100989	-.0048971	-.0107765	.0180414**
	(.0095748)	(.0109913)	(.0073624)	(.0081006)
tercinc	.0282137***	-.0442998***	-.0133845*	.005387
	(.0108656)	(.0113878)	(.0079487)	(.0080876)
tercompl	.0705726***	.126135***	.0146524	.0468072***
	(.0119018)	(.0121243)	(.0098867)	(.0094223)
casadouni	.0163779**	-.0354222***	.0334287***	.0071427
	(.006686)	(.0065441)	(.0062657)	(.005893)
jefe	.1825157***	.1399313***	.0843946***	.0717761***
	(.0075801)	(.008423)	(.0056689)	(.0059767)
conyuge	.1940926***	.0933637***	.0684551***	.0504523***
	(.0090412)	(.0091162)	(.0066533)	(.0065406)
mdeo	-.0099133**	.0152499**	-.0319367***	-.0123481**
	(.0044142)	(.0051266)	(.0034729)	(.0040744)
hoghijos0a5	.0643036***	-.0599486***	.0490155***	.0149172**
	(.0151295)	(.0095469)	(.0082452)	(.0069235)
hoghijos6a14	.0258085***	-.0302408***	.0136886***	.0084298*
	(.0064262)	(.0063713)	(.0043201)	(.0046738)
servdom	-.0002873	-.0039178	.039363**	.0791946***
	(.0158082)	(.0185456)	(.0200278)	(.0243609)
todosasisten	.0077978	.0531401***	-.0410639***	.0145292
	(.0254215)	(.014654)	(.0118459)	(.0105763)

	Probability of participating in the labour market		Likelihood of being employed	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
hogbiparental	-.0265352*** (.004414)	-.0812485*** (.0057652)	-.0097879*** (.0035127)	-.0249867*** (.0045898)
Q2	.0121751* (.0071743)	.0695169*** (.0072548)	.032514*** (.0045998)	.0578181*** (.0051706)
Q3	.0232011*** (.0071887)	.1208493*** (.0074933)	.0596877*** (.0049248)	.0922484*** (.0056513)
Q4	.0426306*** (.0073045)	.1668989*** (.0079032)	.0975999*** (.0054956)	.1202578*** (.0062394)
Q5	.0485832*** (.0077226)	.184257*** (.0087297)	.1253744*** (.0064857)	.1529167*** (.0075182)
logtransf	-.0063078*** (.0011641)	-.0018695* (.0009073)	-.0077144*** (.0008109)	-.0055998*** (.000628)
logotrosylab	-.0036203*** (.0013403)	.0075629*** (.0019948)	-.0145814*** (.0006681)	-.0134008*** (.0008933)
Nro observ	26.180	30.303	21.960	21.647

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the Continuous Household Survey (INE, 2021).

Table A3: List of interviewees

Number	Type of entity	Entity
1	Institutional governance	SNIC
2	Institutional governance	SNIC
3	Institutional governance	INAU – Early Childhood
4	Institutional governance	INAU – Early Childhood
5	Institutional governance	INAU – General Management
6	Institutional governance	INAU – Documentary Administration
7	Institutional governance	INAU – Presidency
8	SIEMPRE Centre, Guichón	SOIMA Union – Secretary General
9	SIEMPRE Centre, Guichón	SOIMA Union – Workplace Committee, Silvitek
10	SIEMPRE Centre, Guichón	SOIMA Union – Workplace Committee, Aprofor
11	SIEMPRE Centre, Guichón	SOIMA Union – Workplace Committee, UPM
12	SIEMPRE Centre, Guichón	Care System in Paysandú
13	SIEMPRE Centre	Focus group
14	SIEMPRE Centre, Maldonado	Coordinator
15	SIEMPRE Centre, Maldonado	Educator

Number	Type of entity	Entity
16	SIEMPRE Centre, Maldonado	Psychometrician
17	SIEMPRE Centre, Maldonado	Psychologist
18	SIEMPRE Centre, Maldonado	Teacher
19	SIEMPRE Centre, Maldonado	Social worker on leave (replaced by another educator)
20	SIEMPRE Centre, Maldonado	President of the El Dorado union
21	SIEMPRE Centre, Maldonado	El Dorado company
22	SIEMPRE Centre, Maldonado	Focus group
23	SIEMPRE Centre, Montevideo	Coordinator of the COOPINATARE Centre
24	SIEMPRE Centre, Montevideo	SUNCA
25	SIEMPRE Centre Jardines, Paysandú	Jardines del Hipódromo Centre
26	SIEMPRE Centre Jardines, Paysandú	Coordinator, Jardines del Hipódromo Centre
27	SIEMPRE Centre Jardines, Paysandú	Educator 1
28	SIEMPRE Centre Jardines, Paysandú	Educator 2
29	SIEMPRE Centre Jardines, Paysandú	Educator 3
30	SIEMPRE Centre Jardines, Paysandú	Educator 4
31	SIEMPRE Centre Jardines, Paysandú	Educator 5
32	SIEMPRE Centre Jardines, Paysandú	Educator 6
33	SIEMPRE Centre Jardines, Paysandú	Educator 7
34	SIEMPRE Centre Jardines, Paysandú	Psychologist
35	SIEMPRE Centre Jardines, Paysandú	Social worker
36	SIEMPRE Centre Jardines, Paysandú	Service assistant
37	SIEMPRE Centre Jardines, Paysandú	Women's focus group
38	SIEMPRE Centre Jardines, Paysandú	Men's focus group

Source: Compiled by authors

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ALIGN is a digital platform and programme of work that supports a global community of researchers, practitioners and activists, all committed to gender justice and equality. It provides new research, insights from practice, and grants for initiatives that increase our understanding of – and work to change – patriarchal gender norms.

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Children taking part in an activity at a SIEMPRE care centre. © Centro SIEMPRE Los Doraditos

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