



Working Paper 21

Social Reproduction, Care System and Public Policies

by

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Abstract

The crisis of social reproduction deepened in the post-pandemic, and a global economic and financial crisis accompanied it. By setting care at the center of the discussion and as part of a system of public policies with a gender focus, a re-articulation of public spending carried out to date is imminent. The objective will be to start from the gaps in care and its relationship with social reproduction to delve into the time committed to domestic work and unpaid care among women and men within the family unit. The research hypothesis is to show how the inequality in the time devoted by women to unpaid work, compared to men in the family unit, results in the lack of opportunities to acquire better income because of their involvement in precarious jobs, both paid in the formal and informal economy.

Resumen

La crisis de reproducción social se profundizó durante la postpandemia acompañada de una crisis económica y financiera a nivel mundial. Al poner en el centro de la discusión al cuidado como parte de un sistema de políticas públicas con enfoque de género es inminente una nueva rearticulación del gasto público desempeñado hasta el día de hoy. El objetivo del presente trabajo es partir de las brechas sobre el cuidado y su relación con la reproducción social para ahondar en el tiempo dedicado al trabajo doméstico y de cuidado no remunerado que existe entre mujeres y hombres al interior de la unidad familiar. La hipótesis de investigación es demostrar cómo la desigualdad en el tiempo dedicado por parte de las mujeres al trabajo no remunerado frente a los varones en la unidad familiar redonda en la falta de oportunidades de aquellas para obtener mejores ingresos al participar en empleos precarios remunerados tanto en la economía formal e informal.

Social Reproduction, Care System and Public Policies¹

*Alicia Girón*²

Introduction

The crisis of social reproduction *deepened* during the post-pandemic, and a global economic, financial, and social crisis accompanied it. Gender inequalities and inequities in the development of confinement set as a priority objective to “untie the structural knots of gender inequality”, placing the care of the members of society at the center of “sustainable development”. In the document entitled *The Society of Care. Horizon for a Sustainable Recovery with Gender Equality*, the “inequality knots” are mentioned.

These inequality knots express in the prolonged crisis of care, in the face of a demand that resolves with the overload of unpaid work faced by households and mainly women, the monetary and time poverty that affects them, and also their indebtedness to be able to meet the demand for care, which will grow in the coming years due to demographic and epidemiological trends. The important

¹ This research was carried out in collaboration with Valeria López, in compliance with her social service as a student of the Economics Degree of the Faculty of Economics of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, and Adheli Galindo, scholarship holder of the National System of Women Researchers, CONACYT.

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contribution to social reproduction adds to the contribution to the economy. In at least ten countries for which data are available, the contribution of unpaid domestic and care work would represent between a quarter and a fifth of GDP. Women make 74% of this contribution. When the gender approach is absent in macroeconomic policies, particularly fiscal, and is not mainstream in the design of public policies, it is women who cushion the effects of multiple crises by intensifying domestic and unpaid care work. (UN ECLAC, 2022, p. 11).

Before the confinement crisis, it had been pointed out that women execute three times more unpaid work than men and dedicate approximately only half the time to paid work, according to the document of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment (2018). In turn, the ActionAid International report (2018) registered that not only 76% of women carry out care work but also that 90% of nurses and 70% of health personnel worldwide are also women. For this reason, a care system should be at the center of the development strategy of international financial organizations and of the monetary and fiscal policies of democratic governments to achieve gender equity in the distribution, recognition, and remuneration of care within a society.

The confinement increased to a greater extent the hours dedicated to care in the hands of women. Therefore, in order to achieve women's economic empowerment and reduce gender inequality, it is essential to focus on the recognition, reduction, and redistribution of unpaid work dedicated to domestic and care work. Public policies should focus on a care system as a State guarantee to reduce inequalities between genders and achieve a more equitable society.

Within the framework of economic development and the definition of public policies, the importance of the gender approach is closely related to the degree of wealth of a society. In this case, wealth is the right to equality between genders and access to basic principles such as health, education, water, and energy. In other words, the minimum infrastructure that a society must have at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century is based on what a democratic and parliamentary regime, through public spending, must provide its citizens. Therefore, the function of the State is to be the provider of the aforementioned essential services based on a monetary and fiscal policy where paid employment is the elemental and strategic principle to achieve equity.

The work carried out mainly by women within the family unit is the pillar of an economic, political, and social system. It is a culturally accepted job by society, regardless of the development degree of a country. It is a job that culturally conditions the participation of women in the labor market and prevents the application of the same parameters to a man. A full employment policy will have the care system as a pillar to satisfy a human right to be cared for and care, or not, for those around us.

The causal relationship between women's opportunities in the labor market and paid work is closely related to the use of time devoted to unpaid work, expressed in time use statistics. An example is the data presented below on time dedicated to domestic and care work and its relationship with paid work in emerging countries such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, and Mexico.

The objective of the hypothesis of this work is to demonstrate that the amount of hours dedicated to domestic work and unpaid

care work shows an asymmetric relationship with women's paid work in the labor market. The hypothesis verification will be executed by evaluating time-use surveys and comparing the data to unpaid hours between genders within the family unit. Based on the above, the inequity shows in the hours devoted to unpaid employment. The development of this work will be based on the concepts of care and social reproduction to delve into the time dedicated to domestic work and unpaid care between women and men within the family unit. The unequal situation has prevailed; however, the necessary confinement to avoid infections and deaths more significantly impacted the number of hours women committed to care. Therefore, in order to achieve women's economic empowerment and reduce gender inequality, it is crucial to focus on the recognition, reduction, and redistribution of unpaid work dedicated to domestic and care work. Public policies should concentrate on a care system as a State guarantee to reduce inequalities between genders and achieve a more equitable society.

Methodology

The hypothesis to verify will be how the hours devoted to domestic work and unpaid care work in the family unit have an asymmetric relationship with women's paid work in the labor market.

Time-use surveys will be employed to compare unpaid hours between both genders within the family unit and verify the proposed hypothesis. The latter will demonstrate the inequity of hours devoted to unpaid employment. From carrying out a comparative study between emerging countries such as the BRICs, Morocco, Egypt, and

Mexico, the lack of public policies with a gender approach that reduce the unpaid work of women, specifically in care activities, will be pictured. The comparative results will allow us to observe the need for public policies with a gender approach that must be referenced to a care system as an obligation of the State. The concepts framing this research are the meaning of social reproduction and care.

Social reproduction, in the book *Economy of Life: Feminisms, Social Reproduction, and Financialization*, is defined as:

[...] how the conditions that sustain a social system are produced and reproduced. These conditions reproduce with the help of culture and exchange systems based on a productive structure conditioned by the environment of natural resources, the contradictions between social class relations, and ideology. In this scheme, there is a context in which women fulfill a fundamental biological function for the reproduction of the labor force, which in turn defines the participation of women in economic activity. (Girón, 2021, p. 20).

Care is defined as all activities that give existence to the well-being of societies and people who live in different economic, political, and social formations in an exchange relations space, including paid and unpaid activities. Care systems involve care for health, the planet, the environment, and education, seeking to keep relationships based on reciprocity, cooperation, and equity.

Therefore, the care of the labor force until its insertion in the labor market is carried out by women, even until the end of the life of a large part of the population. The perspective of women as caregivers is not only economic but also cultural.

Using the statistics on time use produced by various national and international organizations in different countries, it is possible to compare the hours of unpaid and paid work carried out in the care of social reproduction and, at the same time, to deepen the dialectical relationship between monetary and fiscal policies, and the austerity alternatives implemented in different government regimes.

Use of time in domestic and care work

For the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean,

the average time that women/men spend providing domestic services for their own consumption is expressed as a proportion of time in one day. Domestic and care work includes food preparation, dishwashing, housekeeping and maintenance, laundry, ironing, gardening, pet care, shopping, installation, service and the repair of personal and household items, child care, and care for the sick, elderly or disabled members of the household, among others. (CEPAL, 2021)

Women tend to disproportionately spend more time on unpaid care and domestic work than men. This unequal division of responsibilities correlates with gender differences in economic opportunities, including low female labor force participation, occupational segregation by sex, and income differentials. The need for a gender balance in unpaid care and domestic work distribution is increasingly recognized.

The Sustainable Development Goals address the issue in goal 5.4 in which UN-Women:

has developed a rapid and targeted response to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women and girls, as well as to ensure that long-term recovery benefits them. The focus lies on five priorities to achieve the latter:

- Mitigate and reduce gender violence, including domestic violence.
- Advocate that social protection and economic stimulus packages serve women and girls.
- Encourage people to support and practice the equitable sharing of care work.
- Promote women and girls to lead and participate in the planning and decision-making of the response to COVID-19.
- Guarantee that the data and coordination mechanisms include the gender perspective. (United Nations Organization, 2015).

The COVID-19 pandemic provides an opportunity to take radical and positive steps to offset the prevalent traditional inequalities in many areas of women's lives and to build a fairer and more resilient world.

On the other hand, productive activity is defined when it is within the "general limit of production" and if it satisfies the criteria of a third person; that is, whether someone else can accomplish the activity and produce the same desired results. According to the International Labor Organization (ILOSTAT, 2013), statistically, productive activities can be classified as:

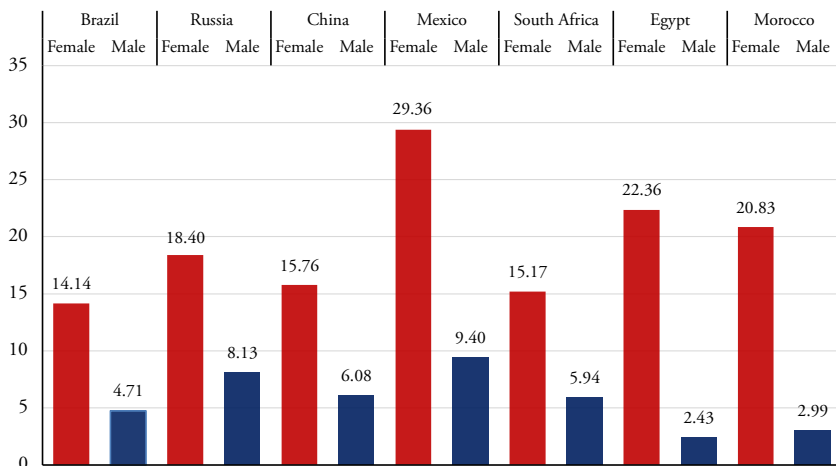
- Production work for self-consumption is those activities that serve to produce goods and services for own final use; the intended destination of the production is mainly for the final use of the producer in the form of capital formation, final consumption of household members, or of family members living in other households. In the case of agricultural, fishing, hunting, or gathering goods, mainly intended for self-consumption, a part or surplus can, however, be sold or exchanged.
- Employment encompasses activities to produce goods or provide services in exchange for remuneration or profit.
- Unpaid apprenticeship work is any unpaid activity to produce goods or provide services to others to gain work experience or skills in a trade or profession.
- Volunteer work is any unpaid and non-compulsory activity to produce goods or provide services to others.
- Other forms of work.

Time-use surveys are employed to measure unpaid domestic and care work; these surveys can be functional to measure unpaid work or considered in other household surveys carried out at the national level. There are different methodologies to measure the use of time, such as diaries, that is, records of activities carried out on specific/random weekdays and weekends or descriptions of an average day of the surveyed person. The latter implies that the respondents remember the time they devote to different activities throughout the day in a specific period of time. Usually, the results are reported in daily hours, or proportion of hours, in a day dedicated to unpaid domestic and care activities.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals database was the source of the data employed for this work; the data obtained from the national surveys of each country are taken into account, and each survey was carried out with a different methodology and during different periods, so their comparison presents certain limitations.

From 2000 to 2019, 3 surveys were carried out in Brazil, 4 in Mexico, 2 in China and South Africa, and, finally, in Russia, Egypt, and Morocco, only 1. Among the most relevant observations is that women in Brazil, on average, spend less time on unpaid domestic and care work at 14.14%, while Mexico is the country where they spend the most time with 29.36%. Egypt and Morocco are below with 22.36% and 20.83%, respectively. The same indicator showed that women in Russia, China, and South Africa spend between 15.17 and 18.40%, while men in Egypt and Morocco spend less time, presenting 2.43% and 2.99%, followed by China with 6.08%. Mexico is the country where men spend more time, with 9.40%. On average, women and men dedicate 17.7% and 7.3%, respectively (4.2 hours and 1.7 hours a day); this means that women commit 2.4 times more than men to unpaid domestic and care work.

Graph 1. Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work. %, of 24 hour day



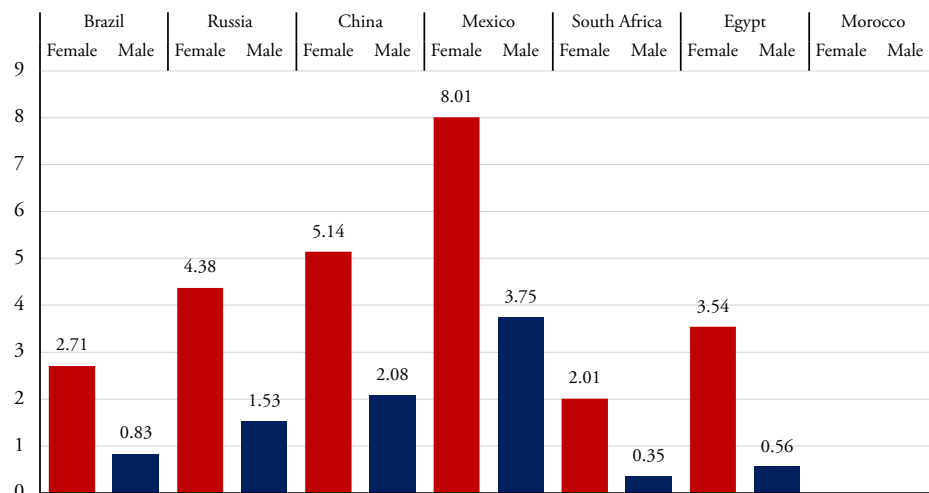
Source: Own elaboration with data from World Bank, 2022.
Retrieved from <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/gender-statistics>

Proportion of time spent in unpaid care work

Regarding unpaid care work, only those activities related to care were considered, either inside or outside the home when it is unpaid. No data was available for this indicator for Morocco. The group minimum was 2.01% for women and 0.35% for men, corresponding to South Africa. A maximum of 8.01% and 3.75% for women and men, both from Mexico. Among these figures are those of China (5.14% and 2.08%), followed by Russia (4.38% and 1.53%), Egypt (3.54% and 0.56%), and finally Brazil (2.71% and 0.83%). On average, in the group, women dedicate approximately 4.4% of the day (1.06 hours) to unpaid care, while men 1.7% (0.40 hours). In other words, the time women dedicate to it is 2.6 times greater than that of men.

Among the unpaid care services for household members, care for the education and instruction of children, and care for sick people or the elderly were defined. To this it is added the provision of unpaid domestic and voluntary services to other households, communities, and non-profit institutions that benefit the families; also was taken into account informal help for neighbors and relatives, “informal/unorganized” volunteer and community work through informal neighborhood and community associations as well as “formal/organized” volunteer and community work through the Red Cross, welfare organizations, professional organizations, churches, clubs, and other non-profit institutions that serve households.

Graph 2. Proportion of time spent on unpaid care work %, proportion of time in a day*



* Reference data, latest year

Source: Own elaboration with data from United Nations: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics, 2022.

Proportion of time spent in unpaid domestic work

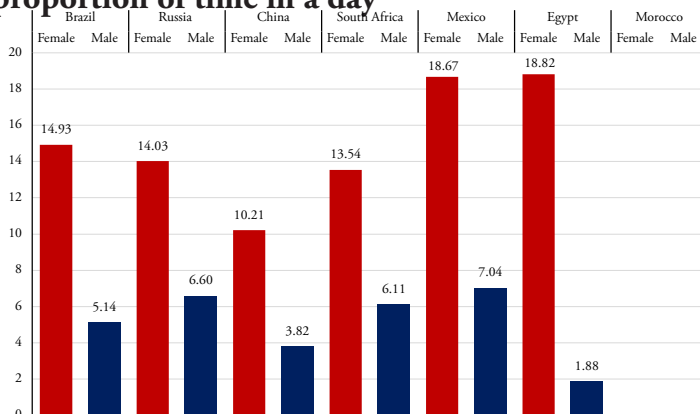
Domestic service for one's own final use within the home is the cleaning, decoration, and maintenance of the household occupied by the family unit, including small repairs. The following activities are listed below (United Nations Statistics Division, 2017):

- Cleaning, service, and repair of durable family goods or other property, including vehicles employed for household purposes.
- Preparation and service of meals.
- Transportation of household members or their property.
- Provide unpaid care work and volunteer services to other households, communities, and non-profit institutions that help families.
- Informal help to neighbors and relatives.
- "Informal/unorganized" volunteer and community work through informal neighborhood and community associations.
- "Formal/organized" volunteer and community work through the Red Cross, welfare organizations, professional organizations, churches, clubs, and other non-profit institutions that serve households.

On the other hand, in what refers to the time spent on unpaid domestic work, care activities are not taken into account. The activities considered for this study are related to home maintenance, both one's own and other households'. No data were found for Morocco

for this indicator either. On the other hand, of the group, the country with the lowest proportion of time dedicated to unpaid domestic work for women in China, with 10.21%, and for men, Egypt with 1.88%, followed by China with 3.82%. Mexico and Egypt are where women spend their time in greater proportion than men in these activities, with 18.67% and 18.82%. And, again, Mexican men are the ones who lead the group with 7.04%. Between these extremes, we found that women in Brazil dedicate approximately 14.93% to it, in Russia 14.03%, and in South Africa 13.54%, while men 5.14%, 6.6%, and 6.11%, respectively. On average, in the group, women dedicate 14.2% of the day (3.4 hours) to unpaid domestic work, while men only 5.7% (1.3 hours). In other words, women spend 2.4 times more time than men on cleaning, decorating, maintenance, shopping, preparing and serving food, transporting household members, etc.

Graph 3. Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic chores %, proportion of time in a day*



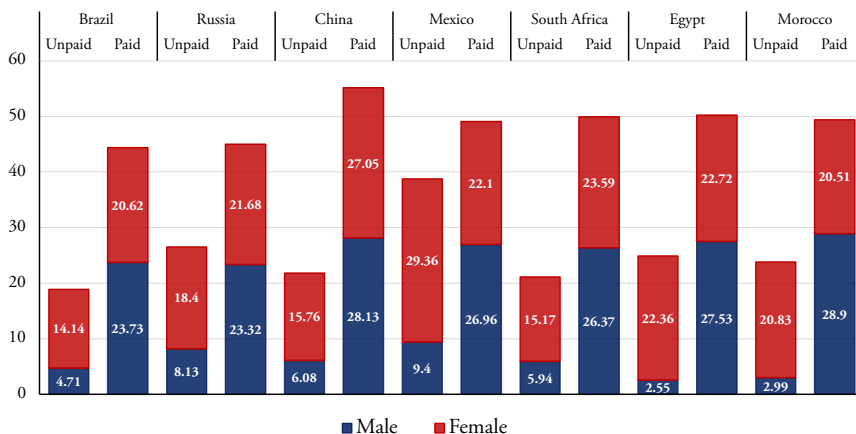
* Reference data, latest year

Source: Own elaboration with data from United Nations: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics, 2022.

Hypothesis verification

The previously described data allows us to make visible only one of the elements of unpaid work: the disproportionate time women dedicate to it. Despite the differences between countries, women commit more than twice the time to unpaid domestic and care activities, even with the supposed equality of opportunities and rights agreed in the law. The arbitrary gender roles that condition the type of work and the time women can dedicate to paid activities become evident. This is visible in the proportion of time women and men dedicated to paid and unpaid work. One may observe that while women reserve more and more time for paid work, the ratio of time men dedicate to unpaid work has not changed; consequently, unpaid work falls more heavily on women. On average, in the studied group, women devote 22.9% and men 25.4% of the day to paid work, a 2.56% (0.6 hours) difference, while the difference for unpaid work is 10.3% (2.5 hours). In other words, women work an average of 0.6 hours less in paid employment and 2.5 hours more in unpaid domestic and care work. Among the countries studied, we found that the highest portion of time spent by women on paid work in China is 27.05% and men 28.13%. The minimum for women is 20.51% in Morocco and 23.32% for men in Russia. Despite the differences, on average, women dedicate 5.5 hours to paid work and men 6.1.

Graph 4. Proportion of time spent on total paid work. %, of 24 hour day



Source: Own elaboration with data from ILOStat, 2022.

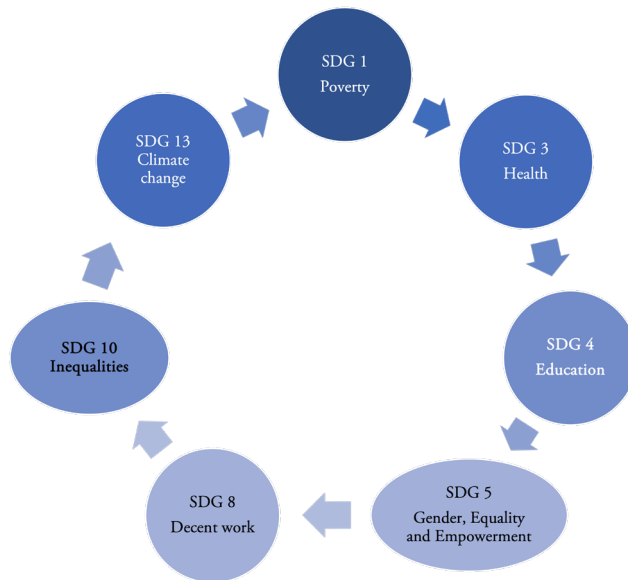
Public policies, human rights, and the 5 rs

United Nations (United Nations, 2016) has worked on those public policies that oblige the State to protect and provide economic, political, and social rights in society. These human rights are in the 2030 Agenda, mainly in the objectives shown in the following diagram. The diagram 1 shows access to essential³ public services such as health, education, water, sanitation, and electricity. These services

³ The basic definition of public services involves any essential service, such as health care, education, water and sanitation, and electricity, provided by the government to all people within its jurisdiction. Public services are essential for progressive human rights realization and the repair of gender and other intersecting inequalities. Public services must also be gender sensitive to be effective, publicly funded, publicly delivered, universal, gender-equitable, and inclusive. ActionAid International, “Framework 2018: Gender-Responsive Public Services.” (Actionaid, 2018). “Future Is Public: Global Manifesto for Public Services” (Future Is Public, 2021)

are closely related to the fiscal policy of a government. To this must be added the urgent need for a gender approach in the decisions of the resource destined to finance the various services.

Diagram 1. Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda



Source: own elaboration.

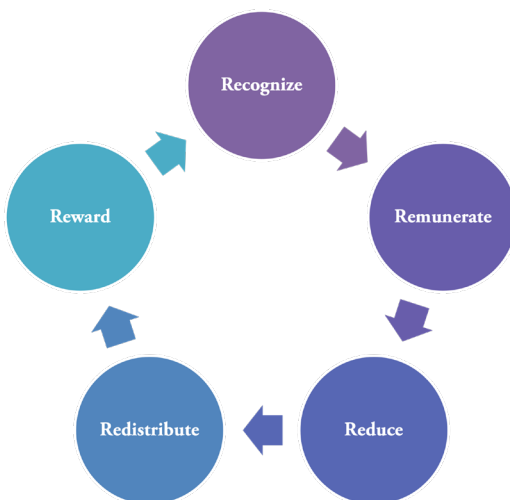
The Organization of Labor stated the ‘5 Rs’ that outline the demands to rebuild the social organization of care and solve the care crisis (UN Women, 2022):

- Recognize the social and economic value of care work (paid or unpaid) and the human right to care.
- Reward, remunerate, and represent care work and care workers with professionalized work, equal pay for work of equal value, adequate pensions, comprehensive social protection,

healthy and safe working conditions, strong representation, unionization and collective bargaining, and dialogue in line with the ILO Decent Work Agenda.

- Reduce the burden on women of unpaid care work.
- Redistribute care work within households, eliminating the sexual division between all workers, and between households and the State.
- Recover the public character of care services, restore the primary duty and responsibility of the State to provide public care services, and develop care systems that transform gender relations and women's lives, including through capacity financing of the states.

Diagram 2. 3r + 2r



Source: own elaboration.

Conclusion

Social reproduction, as a concept, must be studied through the need to safeguard social reproduction as part of the life of a society. Social reproduction, for its part, is aimed at the necessary reproduction of the workforce in the transformation of raw materials for the global market. The care of the environment is essential to continue the life of living beings surrounding us and the care of men and women from birth to death.

The economic, political, and social environmental conditions must begin with public policies as long as their objectives involve social welfare. To the extent that public spending continues to be dependent on foreign debt interest, monetary and fiscal policies will not be able to eliminate the population's poverty in an environment of austerity in health, education, and access to water and energy.

In this context, women fulfill the fundamental biological function of caring for the reproduction of the labor force, and their participation is limited in a monetary economy of paid activities.

The dialectical relationship between culture and the economy, therefore, is one that constantly reproduces patriarchal relations in society. At the same time, women support a system of unpaid care and domestic work, which prevents them from having more time for personal development and access to better pay from their workforce.

It is relevant to highlight that production and exchange relations reproduce specific situations, including political, legal, and ideological associations based on patriarchal relations. The stability of a social system based on biological reproduction is not linear; it is

disruptive and fragile and comes with a ‘rentier regime’ which violates the development of capitalism.

For this reason, this research objective was to carry out a theoretical work that questions economic development and is based on the definition of ‘social reproduction’ in a monetary production economy where patriarchal relations are deeply rooted in public policies that are detrimental to women’s economic empowerment.

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