

'Where' does childcare work happen? Analyzing the distribution of care in the Mexican case

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Our goal: we analyze 'where' care work occurs in Mexico using the care diamond model proposed by Razavi (2007) and an advanced formulation by Salvador (2007). We follow the diamond's four dimensions: **family/household - State - Market - Not-for-profit**. The model provides an encompassing depiction of paid (private and public) and unpaid (family/household and/or not-for-profit) childcare in the Mexican case.

We follow each dimension of the diamond conducting a sectorial analysis examining institutions, individuals, and arrangements that provide paid and unpaid childcare work. The analysis conveys the mix of responsibilities – institutional, private, public, and domestic – that configure and sustain care regimes that support social reproduction in a giving period of time.

Data and Methodology: the study uses descriptive statistics and published studies. We use data from:

- National and satellite accounts from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI).
- Survey for occupation and employment (ENOE, 2022); Survey for care services (ENASIC, 2022); Survey for access to education (ENAP, 2021); Survey for time-use in domestic work (ENUT, 2019).
- Published studies are empirical research and in-depth policy analysis of the Latin-American region and Mexico with special focus on care, gender inequalities, vulnerability, and policies.

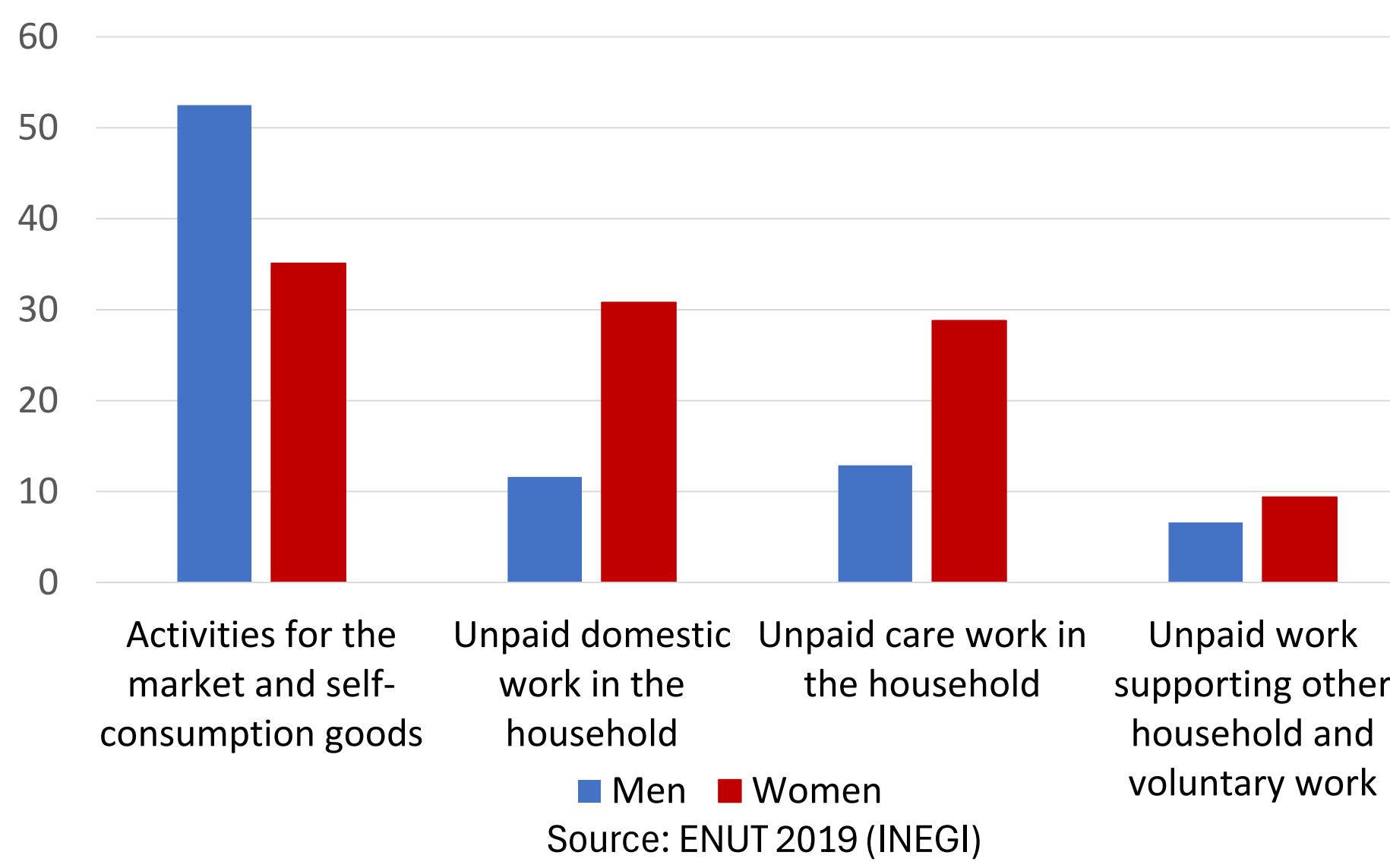
We sought to distinguish the multiplicity of actors, institutions, resources, and spaces involved in childcare provision. This was not possible in all four dimensions. Available data use different unit of analysis (i.e., children, families) and do not differentiate income or social class background. We consider these limitations in our analysis.

FAMILY/ HOUSEHOLD

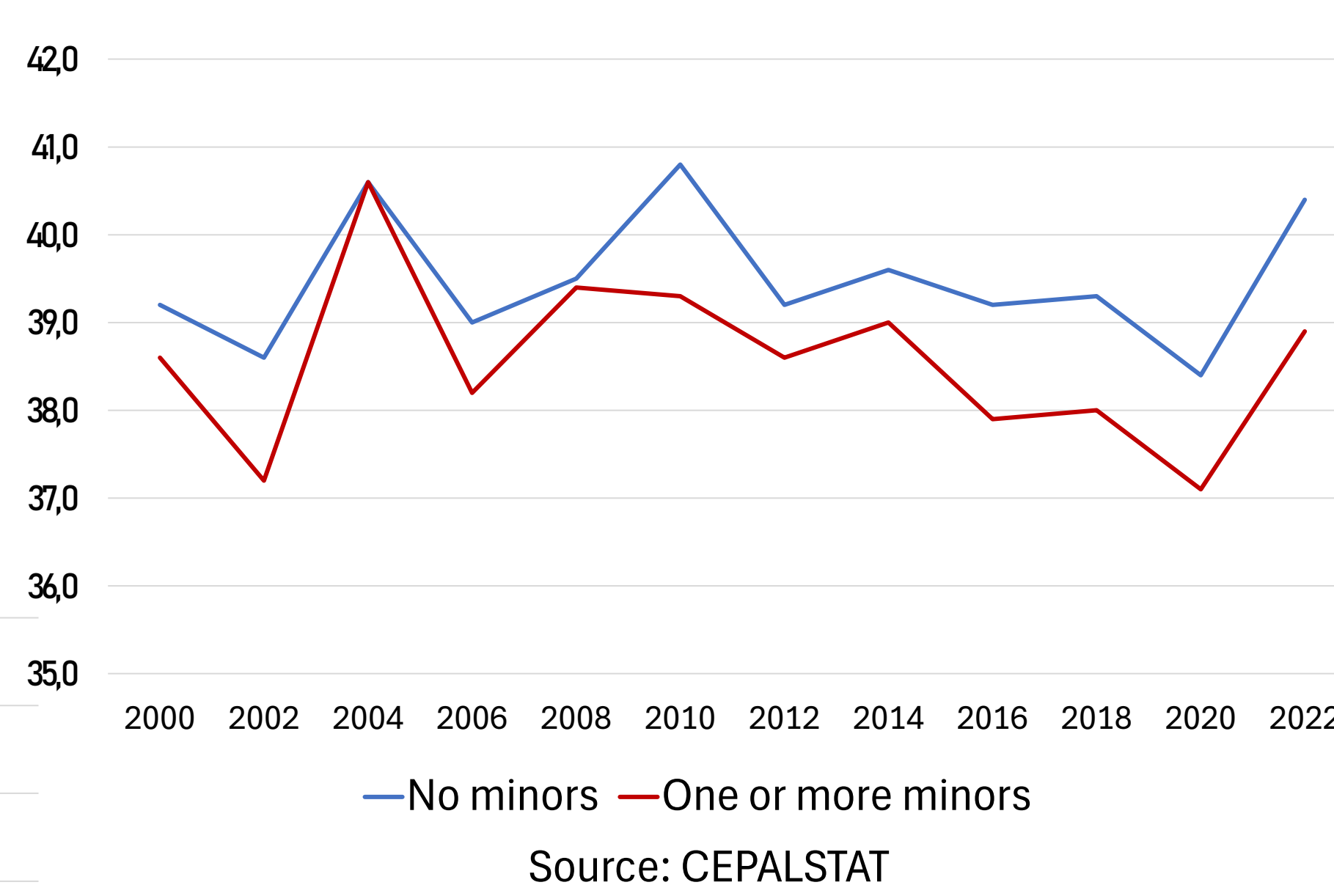
According to ECLAC, of 2024, Mexico has a **weekly average hours of unpaid work among women of 47hs per week, significantly higher than the OECD average for women of 28hrs**. As shown in graph 1 (below), with the caveat of using pre-pandemic data, women in Mexico in 2019 spent considerably more time than men in unpaid activities in their households.

In graph 2, we show the **incidence of childcare** (by the presence of at least one child in the household) in working hours. **Women caring for at least one child have restricted paid work time. While they show less paid hours of work, it is germane to consider the burden of unpaid work. Thus, their total amount of worked hours is considerably high, increasing stress and exhaustion.**

Graph 1: Weekly average of hours spent by women and men on activities, per type of activity in 2019



Graph 2: Weekly working hours of employed women (15 years or more) according to presence of children (0 to 5 years) in the household 2000-2022

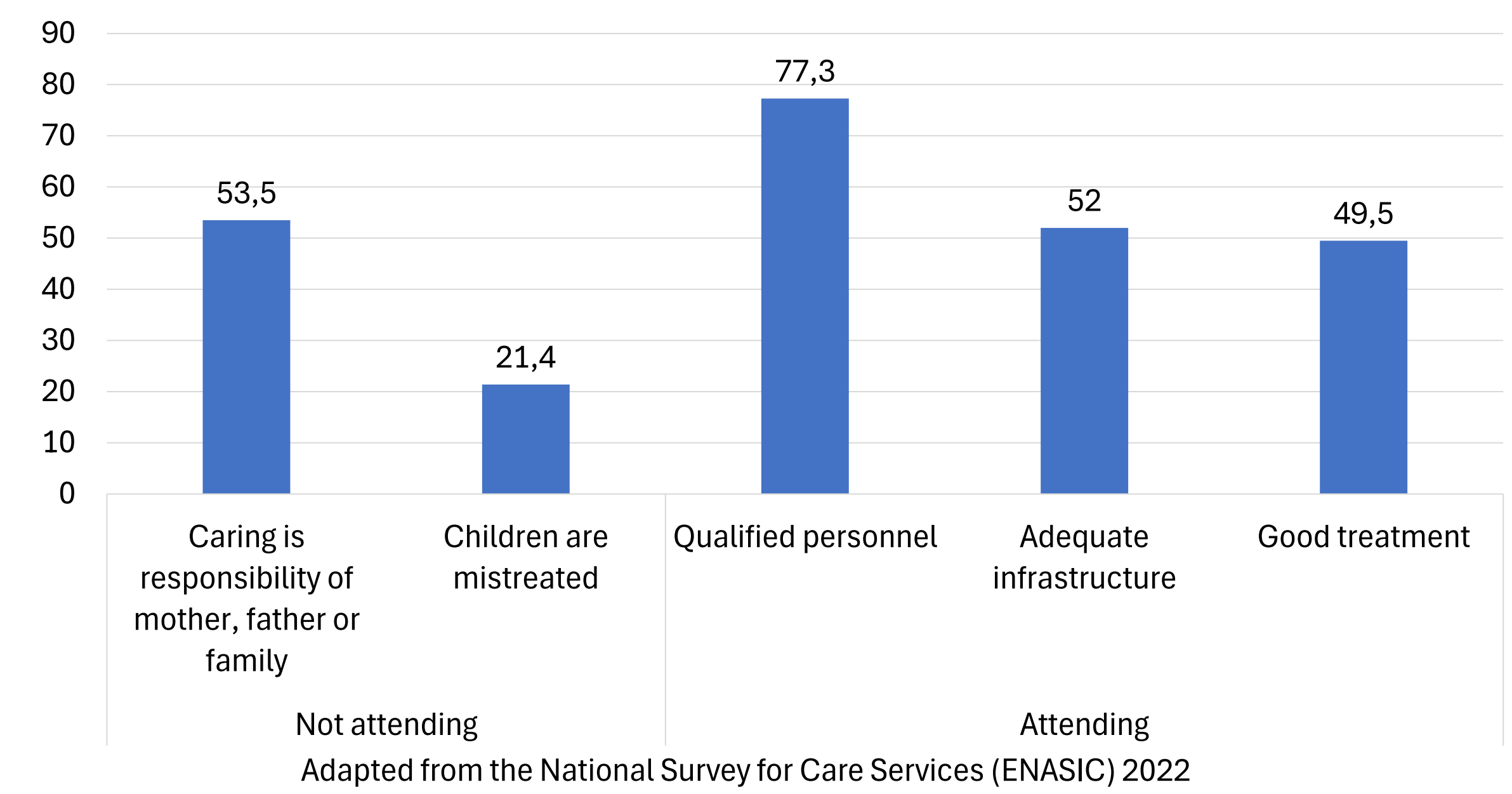


STATE

According to the ENASIC (2022), **91.5% of children 0 to 2 years old do not attend CAIs** (childcare centers). Of this group, **85.5% of families reported they are too young and caring is a family responsibility**. Among children **3 to 5 years old not attending CAIs**, the same reason was reported for **73% of families in the ENASIC (2022) and 65.8% of families in the ENAPE (2021)**. **Positive and negative perceptions** regarding services play a key role in opting for public CAIs (graph 3) which are also articulated to expectations around mothers and families, as reported on the surveys (Muller and Jean, 2020; Carrión et al, 2022).

Changes in the program Estancias infantiles (2018) **reduced funding** for centers, transferring financial support to families. This has increased the number and demand of private CAIs (graph 4) and, simultaneously, has **enhanced limitations** for in low-income groups **due to the cost of private child care, reduced vacancies, and closing of centers**. Unequal geographical distribution of CAIs is an **impediment for indigenous and rural families**. In 2022, the CONEVAL registered that more than 90% of children in public CAIs and schools are taken there by foot by a family member.

Reasons for children attending and not attending in public childcare centers (CAIs) 2022



Graph 5: Number and distribution of registered Childcare Centers (CAI) according to funding and public program in 2022

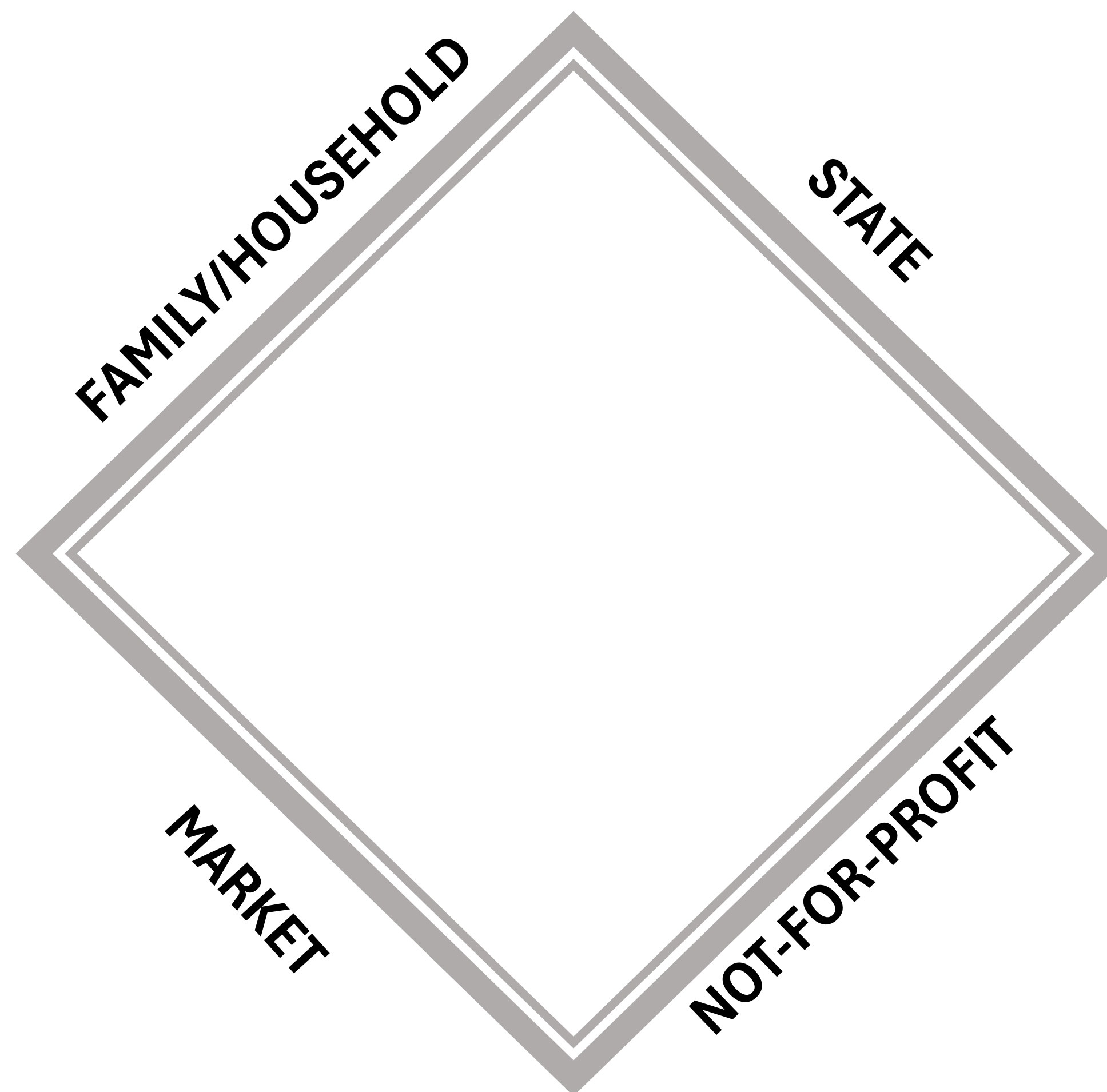
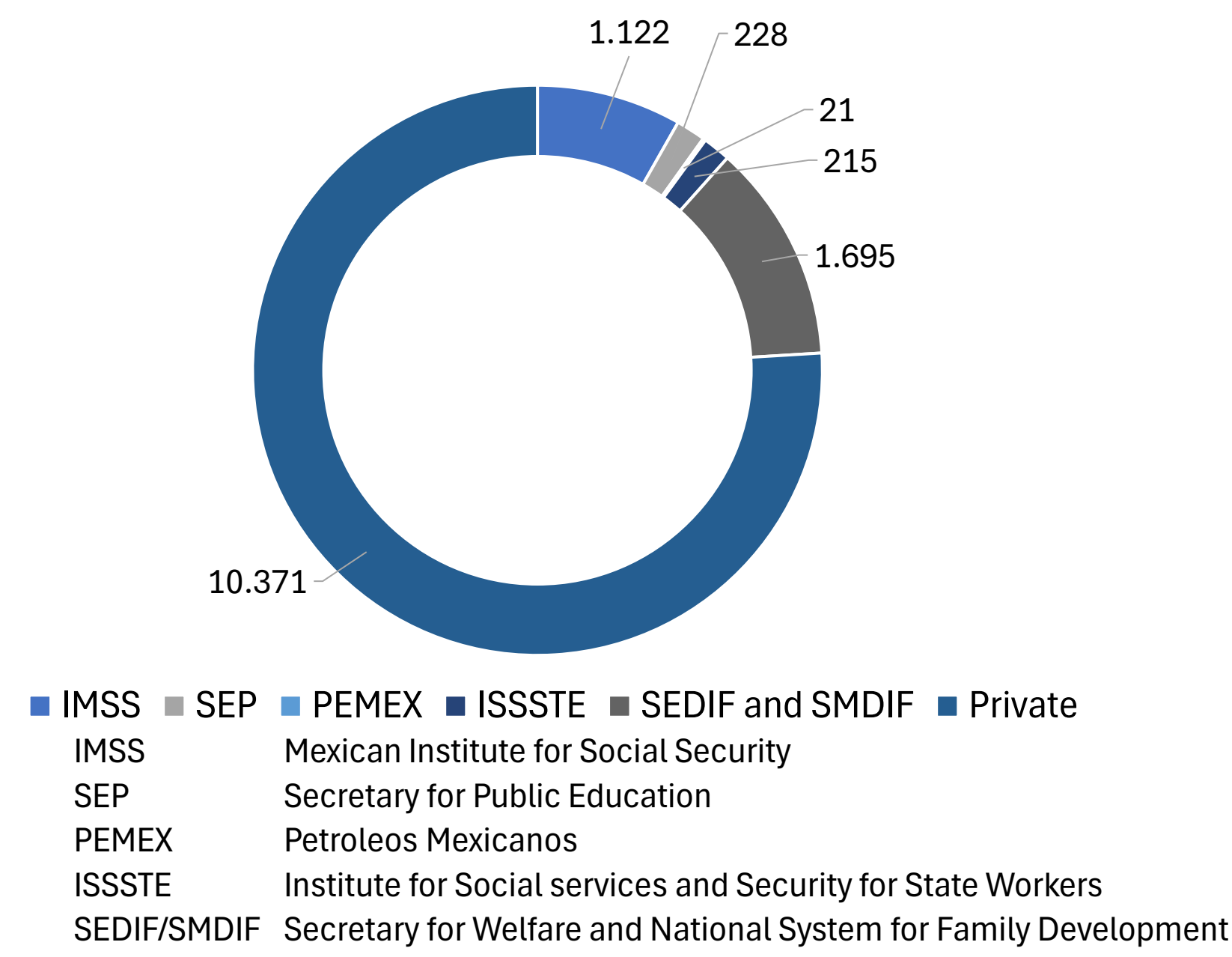
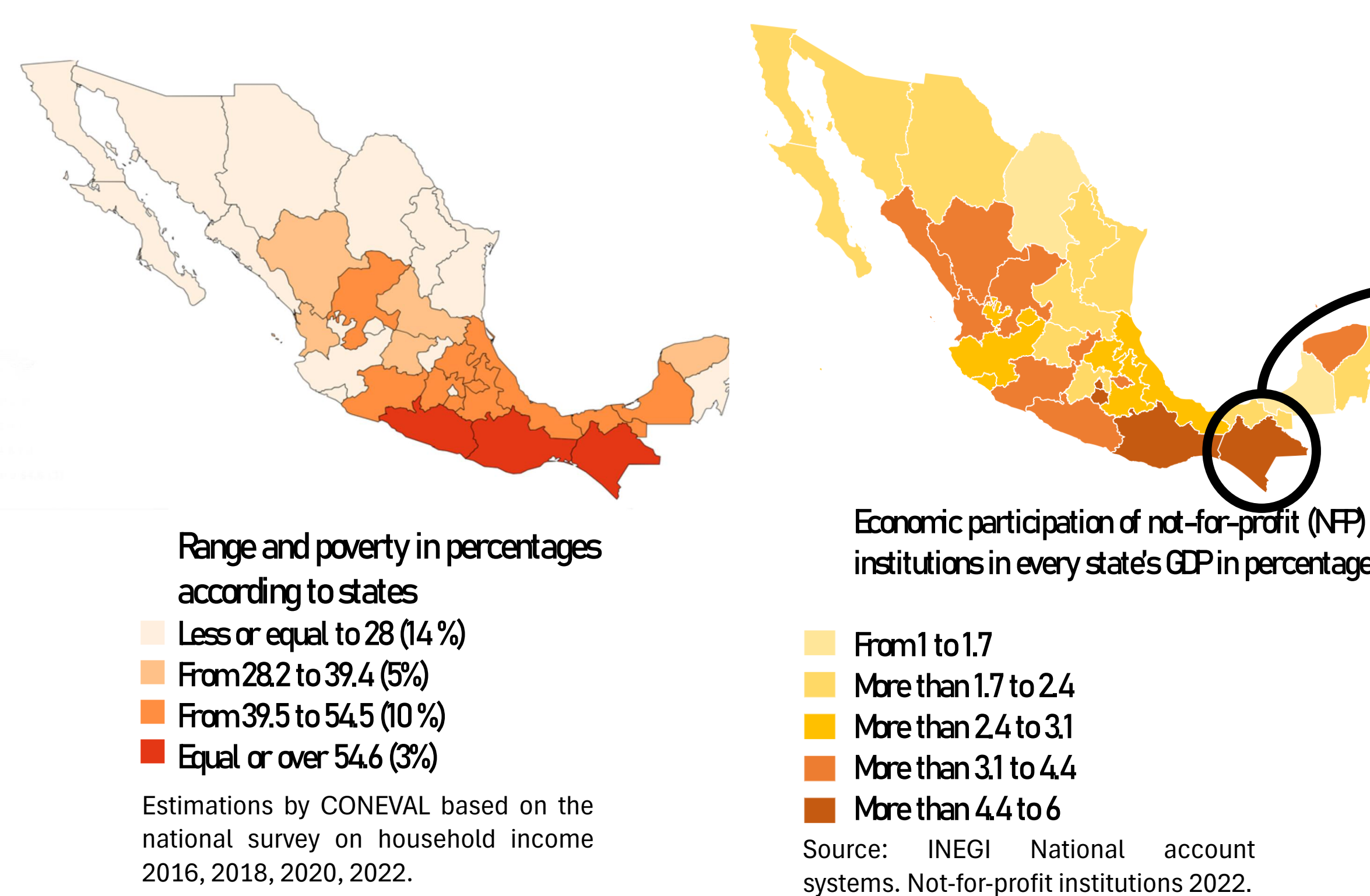
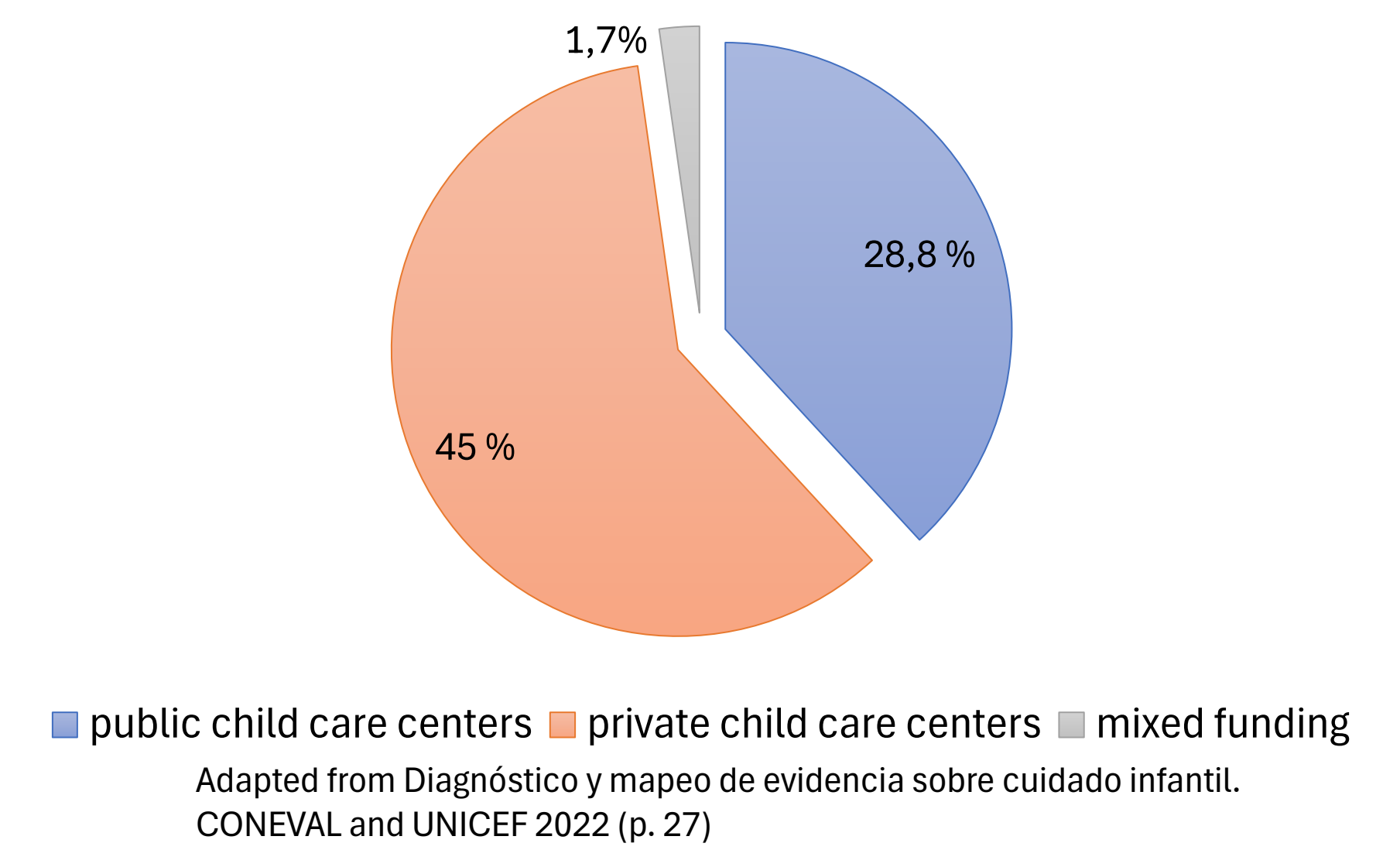


Figure 1: Comparison of poverty range in states and incidence of not-for-profit (NFP) institutions in states' GDP in Mexico for 2022 in percentage



Graph 4: Distribution of Childcare Centers (CAI) according to funding in 2022



MARKET

In 2017, the main demand was of private establishments that charged up to 1 minimum wage for child care (44,7%), higher than the demand for public CAIs (43,15%) (CONEVAL, 2022). **Retrenchment in public CAIs (since 2018) was expected to increase the demand for private services.**

According to the CONEVAL and UNICEF (graph 5) by 2022 the number of private CAIs is almost ten times that of the main public providers (SEDIF/SMDIF with 1,695 and IMSS with 1,122). In the yearly evaluation of 2022, the CONEVAL indicates that **instability around formal employment is the main obstacle for children's access and permanence in public CAIs and schools.**

Private care services in households also show a continuous increase. Data from the Survey for Employment (ENOE) shows that **care givers working in private homes surpass those working in establishments since 2013**. Between 2021 and 2024, this difference has been of almost 200 thousand jobs more among care givers in private households.

NOT-FOR-PROFIT (NFP)

The NFP sector comprises diverse practices and modalities, such as collective actions, associations, and institutions, that emerge and are sustained amid socioeconomic vulnerability (Frega, 2022).

In Mexico, as in other countries, **regional inequalities** shape the presence and importance of most NFP initiatives. **Efforts in addressing childcare, family support, and food security emerge among low-income, indigenous, and rural communities to secure their sustain and territory.** Experiences such as **sorority networks** created by communities in Chiapas have provided safe space for indigenous and rural women to produce food and escape violence while facing the Covid-19 pandemic. Figure 1 shows the **importance of the NFP sector** (measured in its economic participation in states' GDP) in states with high ranges of poverty in the country. This illustrates the importance and presence of NFP initiatives in socioeconomic vulnerable contexts.

Within the sector, **social services institutions** (which provide housing for minors and babies, family planning and support) **produce a relatively low value** (8% of GDP) compared to educational services and professional associations (38% and 30% respectively). According to functional classification, social services produced a value of 4% of GDP, particularly low compared to education and research (42%) and housing development (15%) (INEGI, 2023).

Women are overrepresented in the NFP sector. While they have formal jobs, their positions are instable and provide below-average economic compensation. Women are inclined to choose these occupations as they a) **alleviate care and domestic work** (care recipients are included in the space where these women work); b) **allow flexibility** in hours; c) provide safe space from violence (Fournier, 2022). In Mexico, between 2017-2022, women **represented between 60% to 65% of those performing paid work in social services in the NFP sector** (INEGI, 2023).

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KEY FINDINGS.

Our study shows that in the Mexican case **limitations in public childcare services has strengthened pre-existing gender inequalities within the household**. Linked to **social perceptions that parents (mothers) should care for young children**, women experience a **heavy burden of unpaid care and domestic work and constrained participation in paid work**.

Limitations in public childcare provision happens mostly through **scarce availability of childcare centers (CAIs)**, including unequal geographical distribution and limited vacancies. **This impacts families differently**. For those with resources, this has **increased the demand for private care in establishments**. **Private care givers** at home appear to be a **buffer absorbing this demand**; yet, these working arrangements are scarcely regulated, allowing for exploitation and abuse. **For rural, indigenous, and low-income communities unpaid care work at home is bound to increase**. **Not-for-profit institutions** and actions have emerged in highly vulnerable contexts in the country and some experiences **show their potential role** in providing family support, empowering women, and alleviating poverty.

Unpaid care work is a permanent and considerable phenomenon with significantly negative impacts, especially among women with limited resources. Our analysis shows **unpaid childcare predominantly occurs within the family/household and in the not-for-profit dimensions**, both particularly opaque, with limited support and regulation from the state. Therefore, **we argue for policies, measures, and strategies tailored to the interdimensional character of unpaid childcare**. To support NFP initiatives, to increase and improve public childcare provision, articulated to family dynamics.