

Measure, mediate, monitor, mobilize: actions to improve child support policies in Argentina

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Abstract

Child support is a financial responsibility of separated parents, where one parent is obligated to provide resources to the other to cover the expenses associated with raising their children. Non-compliance with child support obligations is common across almost all countries with available data on this issue, and this is related to gender roles and the unequal distribution of care responsibilities between men and women. In Argentina, non-payment of child support affects one million households headed by women and more than 1.8 million children and teenagers. This phenomenon has social, distributive, gender, and fiscal implications.

Available evidence suggests that the reasons why nonresident parents fail to pay child support in Argentina are primarily linked to relational and cultural motives, such as hostile bonds between custodial and nonresident parents and social meanings of child support, and institutional causes associated with a traditional family policy model and the fact that the courts are the only enforcement agency for child support.

Non-compliance with child support has received little public attention in the past. However, in the last ten years, some advances have been driven by the reform of the Civil and Commercial Code and the visibility provided by several governmental stakeholders. The Parenting Cost Index (PCI), launched in 2023, measures the cost of raising children, considering both essential goods and services and caregiving costs by age. Courts are using this tool in child support cases and helps to address some issues of child support policy, though challenges persist. This paper presents recommendations for improving Argentina's child support policy based on existing policies and considering the institutional landscape and family policy model. These proposals can be summarize into four actions: measure, mediate, monitor, and mobilize.

1. Why child support matters

Care work drives the social and productive life of a country. In Argentina, it represents more than 16.8% of the GDP (DNEIyG, 2023), involving a total of 146.1 million hours of unpaid work daily dedicated to domestic and care responsibilities. The distribution of care tasks is structurally unequal: nine out of ten women perform these tasks, averaging 6 hours and 31 minutes daily (INDEC, 2022). Considering participation and hourly intensity data, women dedicate nearly three times more hours to this work than men, contributing to 70.2% of unpaid domestic and caregiving responsibilities (DNEIyG, 2022). Consequently, they enter the job market under worse conditions than their male counterparts, 'paying' a maternity penalty of 33.7% (DNEIyG, 2022).

This unequal distribution of unpaid work is exacerbated in households headed by one adult person with children and no spouse, the single-parent households. Over 84% of single-parent households in Argentina are headed by a woman (EPH-Urban Total, Q32022). In the third quarter of 2022, there were over 1.6 million households of this

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type, representing 11.7% of total households –1 in 4 households with children and teenagers under 1– with over 3 million children living in them (EPH-Urban total, Q32022). In these households, domestic and care responsibilities fall entirely on womenⁱ, who dedicate an average of 7.5 hours to caregiving when they have one child and over 10 hours when they have two (DNEIyG, 2022). Economic survival also relies predominantly on them: 56.0% of single-mother households did not receive child support payments in the six months before the survey, and 11.0% only received support only sometimes. In other words, 2 out of 3 single-parent households do not receive child support payments on time and in full (UNICEF, 2023)ⁱⁱ.

Child support is the financial obligation of separated parents, historically falling on the father, to provide financial assistance (typically in the form of cash) to the other parent, historically the mother, to share the costs of raising their children (Skinner et al., 2007). While Argentine law stipulates that both parents are responsible for raising their children, even after the dissolution of a union, evidence shows that children predominantly live with their mothers, who bear most financial support and caregiving responsibilities. Moreover, child support is contingent upon court actions. The custodial parent, who lives with the children, must initiate legal proceedings against the nonresident parent to obtain child support. This, along with other factors, contributes to the observed low levels of enforcement.

Non-compliance with child support has social effects, as in the absence of this source of income, single-mother households must resort to complex strategies to meet their needs, which include (see **Table 1**): (1) *Part-time work*. Women in charge of single-mother households have significantly higher employment (71.9%) and activity rates (75.6%) than women in total (45.3% and 49.0%, respectively) and lower levels of unemployment (4.8% vs. 7.6%). However, these better employment rates coexist with higher levels of labor informality (46.8% vs. 41.5%) due to the sectors in which they are employed, which allow them to perform hourly jobs.ⁱⁱⁱ (2) *Household debt*. In the third quarter of 2022, 64.5% of these women had to resort to some form of financing^{iv}. As in the case of the United States, this can result in child support debt bubbles (Brito, 2018). (3) *Informal arrangements for care management*. Mothers rely on other family members and friends to address child care, mainly women (grandmothers, aunts, daughters, sisters, etc)^v. This leads to situations of inadequate care of children who are left alone (12.0%) or in the care of a sister or brother under 18 years of age (5.0%) (UNICEF, 2023).

Table 1 - Employment, income, and poverty in Argentina by type of household

Variables	Lone-parent households	Total households
Employment (head of household)	71.9%	66.1
Unemployment (head of household)	4.8%	4.3%
Informal employment (head of household)	46.8%	37.6%
Poverty (0-17)	58.6%	51.5%
Extreme poverty (0-17)	21.7%	13.2%
Average income (USD)	258.2	315.1
Heads of households with incomes below the poverty line	26.1%	20.2%
Heads of households with incomes below the extreme poverty line	4.6%	3.7%

Source: Author’s calculations on EPH-Urban Total, Q32022 (INDEC), and UNICEF (2023).

Despite all these survival strategies, single-mother households face disproportionate levels of poverty. This phenomenon is extensively documented in the literature as both a global phenomenon (Boudet et al, 2021; Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012; Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2017; Maldonado & Nieuwenhuis, 2015) and specific to Argentina (Cerrutti & Binstok, 2009; Cavallero & Gago, 2022; DNEIyG, 2021; Paz, 2022) (see **Table 1**). In 2022, average income in single-mother households was 19.3% lower than in other households. 26.1% of the mothers heading these households had incomes below the poverty line (compared to 20.2% for total households), and 4.6% had incomes below the extreme poverty line (compared to 3.7% for total households) (EPH-Urban Total, Q32022). Child poverty in single-parent households was 58.6% (compared to 46.9% in nuclear households), and child extreme poverty was 21.7% (compared to 11.3% in nuclear households) (UNICEF, 2023). Just as non-compliance with child support increases child poverty, evidence shows a positive and significant anti-poverty effect of child support on single-parent households in all studied countries of Latin America (Cuesta et al., 2018)^{vi}.

However, beyond its impact on poor households, non-compliance with child support cuts across various socioeconomic segments: 2 out of 10 women who do not receive child support in Argentina live in the wealthiest 40% of households (UNICEF, 2023). In fact, available data shows that the economic condition of nonresident parents, such as unemployment, is not considered the primary cause of non-compliance (UNICEF, 2023; MMPBA, 2022). This leads to a different aspect of this problem, which concerns women. While children are directly affected by non-compliance with child support, women also bear a high cost both directly—since they shoulder all the expenses—and indirectly. Due to the disproportionate burden of caregiving work and the responsibility of providing the goods and services necessary for their children, they must resort to strategies such as those mentioned, which reduce their time to access education and better jobs and diminish their credit as they must incur debt to support their households.

Finally, public spending is also affected by child support default. In 2023, the annual accumulated child support debt amounted to 1.2 billion dollars, an approximate sum that could cover almost three years of Argentina's most significant food policy (AlimentAr) or triple the investment in childcare infrastructure^{vii}. Similarly, in the latter half of 2022, 68.7% of poor single-parent households with children received monetary assistance from the government (SIEMPRO, 2023). However, while mothers receiving social security benefits face stigma in both society and the media (Nadasen, 2007; Abal Medina, 2016), the issue of fathers failing to provide economic support to their children remains largely invisible to the eyes of public opinion.

In sum, the issue of unpaid child support presents significant social and economic challenges, impacting both individual incomes and public spending. This matter also intersects directly with the care economy debate in a genuine and widespread way: In Argentina, it is a common experience to know a friend, sister, or aunt who is sustaining her children without financial support from their father. These women, their families, and the State are creditors of child support debt. Child support debt is not merely an individual concern but a public issue that requires policy solutions.

This research aims to present evidence-based recommendations that enhance child support enforcement. To achieve this goal, the paper is organized as follows: the next section (Section 2) includes a review of literature and data on the reasons behind non-compliance, followed by an examination of different classifications of child support policies (Section 3), an analysis of the policies implemented in Argentina (Section 4), and concludes with a set of targeted recommendations (Section 5).

2. Why parents don't pay

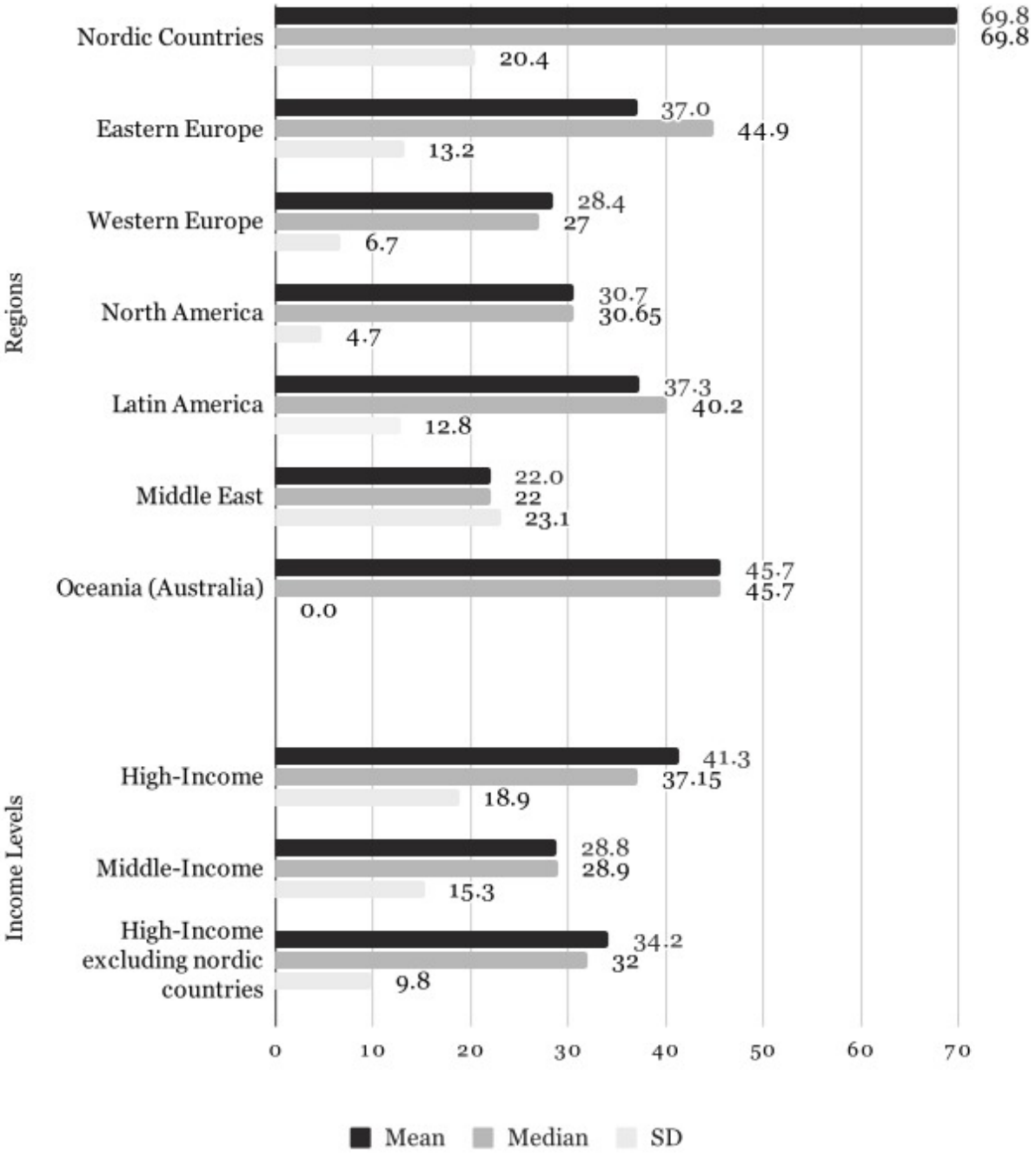
Literature review and available data^{viii} show that non-compliance with child support is a widespread phenomenon –except for the Scandinavian countries, which have the highest levels of child support enforcement (**Figure 1**). Indeed, middle- and low-income countries are not the only ones facing challenges in providing child support (Cuesta et al., 2023); high-income countries encounter similar difficulties (Hakovirta et al., 2022; Chung & Kim, 2019; Hakovirta, 2011; Maldonado, 2017). Although the average child support receipt rate in high-income countries (39.9%) surpasses that of middle-income countries (28.8%), the gap narrows when excluding Nordic countries from the analysis (see **Figure 1**).

While there are no systematic studies on the reasons provided by child support debtors, other approaches explore different aspects. There are a few surveys and analyses on *motivations and beliefs* to understand the perspectives of stakeholders involved in child support debt (UNICEF, 2023; OCSS, 2021)^{ix}. These analyses yield some insightful findings. In the United States, the reasons for non-compliance reported by custodial parents (mothers) are primarily economic: 39.0% consider that the other parent cannot afford to pay, and 38.0% believe that the other parent provides what they can^x. In contrast, in Argentina, only 14.0% of the surveyed mothers said that the father does not pay because he is unemployed. Instead, relational or emotional reasons are more common. 39.0% of the mothers believe that the father does not pay because he has a poor or hostile relationship with her, and 37.0% because he has a poor relationship with their children (UNICEF, 2023). In the United States, however, reasons of this nature represent a smaller percentage: 23.0% do not receive child support because they do not want the other parent to pay, and 21.0% do not want to have contact with the other parent (OCSS, 2021).

Furthermore, qualitative studies on representations surrounding child support in Argentina tend to confirm the 'relational' hypothesis. According to specialists and key informants consulted by the Ministry of Women of Buenos Aires (MMPBA), some nonresident fathers do not pay child support to undermine their ex-partners' autonomy. This attitude is based on the idea that child support will be used by the children's mothers for superficial and selfish purposes (Zelizer, 2005). Another perception captured through these qualitative studies is that parents perceive the child support obligation as a 'penalty' or a 'fine' rather than a shared responsibility and obligation (MMPBA, 2022).

On the other hand, there are explanations based on *predictor analyses*. Within this group, there are no significant differences between countries. Evidence shows that in most countries with data on child support compliance, children of women who were married are more likely to receive child support than those whose were single; children whose mothers are employed are more likely to receive child support than those who are homemakers or unemployed; and children whose mothers have higher educational levels are more likely to receive child support than those whose mothers have lower educational levels (Härkönen, 2018; Hakovirta M, Mesiäislehto, 2022; Hakovirta & Hokela, 2019; Skinner & Meyer, 2006; Arévalo & Paz, 2024). These facts suggest that socioeconomic status influences the likelihood of receiving child support, such that women with higher socioeconomic status have greater access to child support^{xi}.

Figure 1- Percentage of lone-parent households receiving any child support. Means, medians, and SD by region and income level



Source: Author’s calculations on LIS 2020 except for Argentina and the United States. Data for Argentina is from UNICEF 2023 and data for the US is from OCSS 2021.

Finally, there are explanations focused on *policies and institutions*. Briefly, countries may have approaches to caregiving responsibility that are more state-oriented in Nordic countries or more familistic (traditionalist or market-oriented) in the rest of the world (Hakovirta et al., 2021; Cuesta, 2022). Overall, neither the literature review nor the data analysis reveals issues regarding the Nordic model. In contrast, several problems are identified within the familistic approach, especially in countries where the courts are the

only stakeholders involved in child support enforcement, such as Argentina. The following two sections provide a brief comparative analysis of policies for child support enforcement and the progress and challenges in Argentina.

3. How States manage and enforce child support

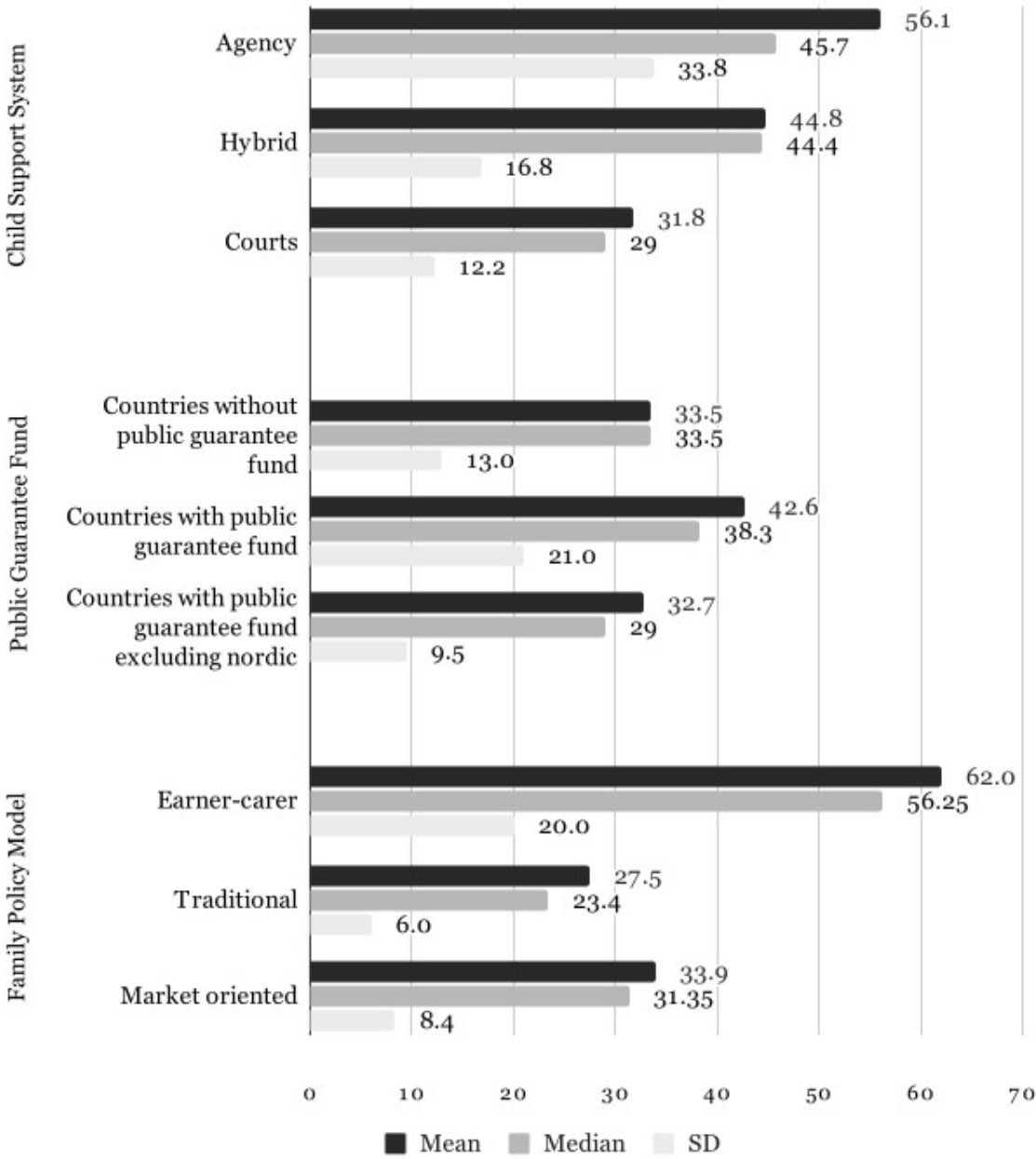
Child support policies can be classified in different ways. In early comparative studies (Corden, 1999; Skinner et al., 2007), countries have been grouped into three types of *child support systems* based on the institutions involved in setting and enforcing child support: (1) *court-based* systems, where courts are responsible for both setting the amount and ensuring compliance; (2) *agency-based* systems, where an administrative agency is responsible for setting and enforcing child support obligations; and (3) *hybrid* systems, where both courts and agencies collaborate in setting or delivering child support. The analysis of available data on child support systems (**Figure 2**) shows that the average child support receipt rate in countries relying exclusively on agencies (56.1%) is higher than those with hybrid systems (44.8%). These, in turn, have better rates than court-based systems (with an average of 31.8%). However, the data from the first group must be considered with caution, as it includes the country with the most extreme value (Denmark, with 93.8%) and has a high standard deviation. The comparison between the medians, in fact, shows little difference between countries with agency systems (45.7%) and countries with hybrid systems (44.4%), although the difference with court-based countries remains (29.0%). These findings seem to indicate that the presence of an agency improves child support enforcement, regardless of whether it operates exclusively or in coordination with the courts.

Another explanation for variations in child support receipt rates relates to the presence of *public child support guarantee funds* (Hakovirta & Mesiäislehto, 2023; Cuesta, 2022), which are funds financed by the state to cover child support when the nonresident parent fails to provide it. This explanation may seem intuitive, as it implies that in cases where the nonresident parent fails to pay, children receive state support, which should translate into higher rates of lone-parent households receiving any child support. However, available evidence does not seem to support this hypothesis (see **Figure 2**). While countries with public child support guarantee funds exhibit a higher enforcement mean (42.6%) than those without (33.5%), this difference diminishes when excluding Nordic countries from the sample. In fact, the mean of this subgroup drops to 32.7%, even falling below countries without a guarantee fund.

Why do the results change when excluding Nordic countries? The answer to this question may be related to the *family policy models (FPMs)* (Korpi et al., 2013; Korpi, 2000). These models are sets of policies reflecting the assumptions and vocations of states regarding gender equality, responsibility for childcare, and the state's role in this equation. For this reason, some relevant dimensions to analyze FPMs include family leave policies, tax policies, cash transfers, food policies, and investment in care and early childhood education. A recent study by Hakovirta et al. (2022) examined the extent to which different FPMs are related to child support policies, defining three FPMs: (1) *earner-carer*, which works under the assumption that both parents work outside the home and participate equally in care and domestic responsibilities; (2) *traditional*, where gender roles of male-breadwinner and female-carer are assumed as the core of social life and reproduction; (3) *market-oriented*, where there are no relevant economic or social incentives for family life. Hakovirta et al. (2022) categorize countries based on two dimensions: the dual-earner support dimension, which focuses on policies like accessible childcare and egalitarian parental leaves tied to prior earnings to encourage female

employment, and the traditional family dimension, which focuses on cash benefits for families without labor force participation requirement. Both dimensions are measured as spending percentages of the GDP. Within the earner-carer model, public spending in the first dimension is high, while in the second dimension, it is low. In the traditional family model, public expenditure in the second dimension (money transfers) is high, while investment in childcare facilities and early child education is low. In the market-oriented FPM, there are low levels in both dimensions.

Figure 2- Means, medians, and SD of child support receipt rates by type of Child Support System, Public Guarantee Fund, and Family Policy Model



Source: Author’s calculation based on LIS 2020, UNICEF, 2023; and OCSS 2021. Data on enforcement institutions of child support systems are from Cuesta, 2022 Cuesta et al., 2023; and Hakovirta and Mesäislehto, 2023. Data on the Public Guarantee Fund are from Hakovirta et al, 2022. Data on FPM are from Hakovirta, 2023, except for Argentina and Uruguay, added by the author.

The analysis of data according to the FPM of 15 countries^{xiii} shows that this variable is related to the child-support rate and could explain the ‘Nordic effect’ previously observed in the analysis of countries both according to income level and according to the Public Guarantee Fund. All Nordic countries share the earner-carer model. While it is crucial to explore the causal mechanisms behind these results further, it stands to reason that a model with more fathers' involvement in childcare would lead to a higher level of economic commitment from them following union dissolution.

The analysis of different classifications of child support policies leads to some preliminary conclusions. The FPM appears to be a relevant factor for child-support policy, followed by the child-support system, where the presence of agencies seems to improve the level of enforcement of child support. Public guarantee funds do not decisively affect the child-support receipt rate. According to Korpi's definition (2013), Argentina presents a *traditional FPM* and a *court-based child support system*. Therefore, child support policy recommendations should base on these features.

4. Progress and challenges in Argentina

Historically, child support has not held a prominent place in Argentina's public agenda. While feminism highlighted care issues in the 1990s (Faur, 2014), child support was not generally considered part of this agenda. There has also been little mobilization to demand political responses on this issue beyond a few small organizations of single mothers. However, the Civil and Commercial Code reform in 2015, involving renowned feminist lawyers, introduced significant changes to family law. Child support was included in these changes. The new Civil Code expanded recognized forms of union beyond traditional marriage, narrowed the rights gap between marriage and other forms of union, and emphasized parental co-responsibility in child-rearing, replacing the notion of ‘guardianship’ with the principle of progressive autonomy for children and adolescents (Herrera & De La Torre, 2022; Herrera et al., 2023). These changes indirectly impacted the institution of child support but also brought about two more direct changes: the paramount consideration of children's rights, allowing judges to act *ex officio* without party requests, and the recognition of the economic value (and thus, the opportunity cost) of caregiving time, typically spent by the mother (Biscardi, 2014; Jeandidier & Lin, 2015; Starnes, 2011; Parkinson, 2011).

This reform was significant from a symbolic point of view, and enabling courts to act proactively and recognize caregiving responsibilities prompted judges sensitive to this issue to seek tools to enhance the timing and amounts of child support. However, challenges persist regarding several issues: (1) *access to justice*, affected by factors such as access to information and available funds for legal representation; (2) *adversarial framing* of child support cases, which focuses more on separating adults than on the children and reinforces the common notion among nonresident parents that child support is used for their ex-partner's (selfish) expenses; (3) *lack of sanctions* linked to non-compliance^{xiii}; (4) *absence of mechanisms for updating the amount* of child support, which represents a problem particularly in contexts of high inflation; (5) *informal economy*, both as a structural feature and as a strategy used by nonresident parents in child support cases to pay lower amounts (MMPBA, 2022); (6) *procedural problems* in each State, stemming from issues in notification mechanisms and incentives for delaying tactics, among others. For these reasons, the entire process –regardless of every particular case– is not neutral but has a systematic bias against (mostly female) custodial parents. The obstacles for mothers to obtain a child-support order, ensure compliance,

and receive a sufficient amount are so strong that many become discouraged even before starting.

Despite the limitations of the reform, changes in the Civil Code inspired several bills aimed at improving child support compliance, addressing various aspects of the issue. In 2022, these bills merged into a single project for a National Registry of Child Support Defaulters, which included financial and administrative penalties for debtors. The Chamber of Deputies approved the project, driven by a multi-party coalition, but did not reach the Senate. Also, in 2022, for the first time, the MMPBA conducted a systematic study on this issue, the results of which circulated widely in public opinion, bringing visibility to the problem. On its part, UNICEF also included questions on this issue in its Rapid Survey on the Situation of Children and Adolescents.

The Ministry of Finance also played a role in this process by creating the Parenting Cost Index (PCI). This official indicator, updated monthly by the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INDEC by its acronym in Spanish), measures the cost of goods and services associated with raising children, as well as the cost of caregiving time, addressing the inequality in its distribution (DNEIyG, 2023; DENEyG y UNICEF, 2023). Like other monthly updated cost of living indicators, such as the poverty line, the PCI measures costs for Buenos Aires^{xiv}. This instrument should theoretically contribute to solving some of the problems of child support policy, as it: (1) provides an objective value that reports the minimum necessary floor for raising children, thus saving deliberation time; (2) serves as an updating mechanism, particularly useful in contexts of high inflation; (3) is a reference value, especially useful in cases where the nonresident parent does not report formal income; (4) simplifies agreement mechanisms between parents, whether the cases are judicialized or not. In addition to its potential advantages, the presentation of the PCI on March 8th by the Minister of Economy bestowed symbolic weight and visibility on single-parent households and the care economy.

But beyond its political meaning, does the PCI work? How do courts use it? Since it was published for the first time in July 2023 until December of the same year, at least 24 court resolutions were issued where judges used the PCI^{xv}. These rulings were issued by judges (18) and chambers (6) from 11 States^{xvi}. In all cases, child support was recognized as a parental responsibility and a legal obligation to ensure children's fundamental human rights. In 73.9% of cases (17 rulings), the PCI was used to determine the amount of provisional child support set by judges to meet the children's needs during ongoing legal proceedings. In 58.3% of cases (14 rulings), the PCI was employed to update previously established child support obligations. In these rulings, the average increase in child support orders was 219.0%. Available data also shows that, while child support processes between 2017 and 2023 averaged 336 days^{xvii}, rulings made after the PCI's first publication that relied on it averaged 56 days. Although this figure is promising, the sample size is too small to draw conclusions.

5. Recommendations

Literature review and analysis of comparative and specific data from Argentina lead to several conclusions. Child support default is a public problem with implications for society as a whole, and thus, it demands political responses. Perceived reasons for non-compliance with child support in Argentina are linked to relational and cultural issues, such as hostile relationships between separated parents (reinforced by the adversarial framing of child support cases) and the social meaning attributed to child support.

Institutional and political reasons are mainly related to Argentina's traditional FPM and court-based child support system.

These conclusions leave room for improvement in the current child support policy, albeit with certain limitations: FPMs are complex social constructs with a history that cannot be changed overnight. However, within the framework of the child support system, reforms can be made to shorten the process and improve the amounts and the level of enforcement in the medium term. Recent policies applied in Argentina align with this direction. These reforms can be summarized into four actions: *measure, mediate, monitor, and mobilize*.

- **Measure:**

What is not measured does not exist, and to address the issue of child support debt, it is necessary to have more and better information. At the *National Statistical System* (NSS) level, changes should be made to improve the question about child support in the permanent household survey (EPH)^{xviii} and to train interviewers on the importance of this question, which has a very high non-response rate. It is also urgent to include the Parenting Cost Index (PCI) in the NSS by law, as its continuity depends solely on the goodwill of the statistics office authority.

Another critical reform in this regard is improving *judicial statistics*. This involves systematizing non-criminal judicial data, particularly concerning divorces (including custody arrangements with children) and child support^{xix}. Additionally, the lack of availability of judges' and courts' resolutions is problematic, as there are no search engines or public records for these documents aside from those of the Supreme Court.

Creating *provincial or regional PCIs* is also necessary for improving child support policy. Argentina is a diverse country with different productive systems and varying living costs. Due to various factors such as higher logistical costs, increased expenditure on services, and parts of the population earning salaries in dollars, provinces in the southern region of the country have much higher costs of living than Buenos Aires. Similarly, provinces in the country's northern region have lower living costs. This translates into different child-rearing costs, both in terms of goods and services and caregiving. It is vital to have localized data on the cost of parenting to ensure that judges, parents, and other stakeholders can make decisions in line with the context^{xx}.

- **Mediate:**

The child support court-based system, due to court biases and gender economic inequalities, works systematically against women and reinforces the adversarial framing of child support processes. As mentioned, women have less available time, less money to pay for lawyers, and face frequent barriers in accessing justice and sustaining the judicial process. On the other hand, evidence suggests that agencies, whether combined with courts or working alone, improve child support enforcement. Therefore, to enhance the child support system in Argentina, taking into account the institutional context, it would be essential to move towards progressive dejudicialization through a *support and mediation agency*.

According to the Civil Code, judges can ratify agreements between parents to make them mandatory. However, available data suggests that only 10.2% of single mothers in Buenos Aires reported using this tool (MMPBA, 2022). The Agency's goal would be to function

as an accessible venue, offering faster and more direct methods to summon nonresident parents and providing tools to facilitate quick agreements and monitor compliance while the courts endorse them. There are already resources available that could serve this purpose. The federal government, for example, has an Access to Justice bureau with 108 offices in different parts of the country, a telephone helpline for advice, and operates in remote territories away from urban areas. In recent years, this area has provided free legal representation for child support debt cases and mediation to reach agreements between parents and monitor compliance. The state, at its various levels, has administrative infrastructure and resources for solving these types of problems that could contribute to expediting processes and alleviating the flow of court files, which contributes to slow and intricate processes, particularly for women. This could also be accompanied by a *practical guide of child support agreements for separated parents* using objective reference values such as the PCI, as in the case of Canada (Government of Canada, 2024).

- **Monitor:**

As part of the progressive dejudicialization and increased state involvement in shared parenting responsibility, the state at its different levels needs to *monitor enforcement*, which currently relies solely on the custodial parent. Currently, in case of non-compliance, the only option is for the custodial parent to file a complaint, triggering the judicial process. This represents an additional burden for mothers and perpetuates gender roles, as shared parental responsibility becomes, in practice, just one more task for women to bear. An agency could reverse this situation and partially dejudicialize child support. This office could thus contribute not only to mediation and reaching agreements but also to monitoring child support enforcement and verifying payment compliance.

A reform in the same direction would be to create a *National Registry of Child Support Defaulters*. This registry would ease the implementation of financial and non-penal sanctions at the national level, such as enrolling debtors in the Central Bank's Defaulters Registry. This would have similar consequences for financial debtors, including the inability to take out loans or use credit cards, travel restrictions, inability to obtain a driver's license in any district, and restricted access to sporting events, etc. Additionally, having a national registry would enable payment collection through public services, taxes, and other channels. Enforcement of sanctions is crucial for improving child support compliance, and the Federal Government, along with the various levels of government in Argentina, possesses more tools to achieve this. As mentioned above, this initiative received preliminary approval in the Chamber of Deputies in November 2022, so it is likely to be passed in the appropriate context.

- **Mobilize:**

Although the PCI marked progress, broadening its use by courts is still challenging. The *inclusion of PCI in jurisprudence* can be achieved through various means, each with distinct scopes of action. The most extensive scenario would entail a Supreme Court resolution recommending its adoption, yet this is not feasible shortly. Another impactful scenario would involve a Supreme Court ruling using the PCI to ascertain child support obligations. With a lesser reach but still significant impact, extension could be pursued through a resolution of the Supreme Court of the Province of Buenos Aires, housing nearly half of the country's child support cases. Another potential way is to mention the PCI as a reference value in the Civil and Commercial Code via specific legislation. In such a case, the responsibility would rest with the Legislative branch, and perhaps the optimal

approach to foster it would resemble the coalition supporting the National Registry of Defaulters project. A less sweeping and less conspicuous possibility lies in *judicial activism*. To some degree, this is already occurring with the PCI, albeit through isolated initiatives by legal practitioners and judges. Forming a *coordinated network* could bolster these endeavors.

In this regard, *training judges, lawyers, social workers, and involved stakeholders* is crucial. While the PCI is a simple indicator (with two components), many judges are still determining how to allocate these different components, especially when there is more than one child or what percentage of the PCI should be allocated as a monthly child support obligation. Moreover, it is challenging for the courts to use the PCI if lawyers do not request it, for which they must also understand how the PCI works. Additionally, training could have positive externalities beyond the PCI, such as raising awareness about the situation of single mothers' households and the costs they face and emphasizing the importance and economic value of care.

Enhancing judicial procedures is also crucial for improving child support policy. *Reforms of the civil procedural codes (at the national and provincial levels)* are essential to address evident issues such as flaws in notification mechanisms and unintentional incentives for delaying tactics by nonresident parents.

Finally, *raising awareness* is necessary to address the perceptions associated with child support, considering that these are also linked to representations of parenthood and family. There are different approaches to this issue: some emphasize individual responsibility and, therefore, take a more punitive perspective about child support defaulters, while others entail a proactive notion of parenthood and parental responsibility (Rush, 2015). *Media campaigns* about children's rights and the significance of child support as a means to ensure these rights and exercise parenthood in a shared and participatory manner by both parents is a way to address child support default more inclusively and to break away from the adversarial approach.

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ⁱDespite social progress towards more gender-neutral parenting roles, women continue to head the majority of single-parent households. This article, therefore, primarily addresses single-mother families.

ⁱⁱThere are different approaches to addressing child support compliance data in Argentina. One way is to utilize the Permanent Household Survey (EPH by its acronym in Spanish) conducted by INDEC, as it is updated quarterly and provides a probabilistic sample of the entire country. However, the non-response rate to the child support question is extremely high, rendering the results insignificant. Additionally, the question's formulation captures both child support and any type of financial assistance from a family member. Another option is to turn to the National Household Expenditure Survey. This survey is also representative and was last updated in 2018. Furthermore, another strength of this survey is that it also captures the amount of child support. However, it also faces issues with question formulation and non-response rate. More recently, two surveys addressing this issue have been conducted. One is specifically on child support and was ran by the Ministry of Women of the Province of Buenos Aires. While it is not a probabilistic sample, it boasts a very high response rate and the question's formulation captures the concept of child support correctly. The other is a probabilistic survey by UNICEF (the Rapid Survey on the Situation of Children and Adolescents in Argentina) with waves from 2022 and 2023, without formulation or non-response issues. In this research, I rely on data from the latter due to these strengths.

ⁱⁱⁱIn fact, women heads of single-mother households are employed more frequently as domestic workers (20.5% compared to 14.9% of other women), the activity with the highest levels of informality in the labor market.

^{iv}In 73% of these cases, households resorted to financing for the payment of food and medication. Additionally, more than half of these households (59%) allocated almost all of their incomes to debt repayment or catching up on arrears (ECLAC and DNElyG, 2023).

^vThe available data show that the main strategy to ensure responses to these needs is found in care provided by relatives and friends (35%) and, secondly, by the respondent herself (23%). Only in 5% of cases they hire a person as the sole modality to cover care needs, and 4% use only daycare centers (Ministry of Women of PBA, 2022).

^{vi}In Colombia (8.3 percentage points), Peru (7.3), Paraguay (1.8), and Guatemala (2.1), analyses for all cases studied reveals substantial reductions in child poverty, highlighting a consistent effect across the countries examined.

^{vii} This estimate is the result of a methodological exercise, wherein 50% of the Parenting Cost Index is allocated to each child and teenager residing in a single-mother household who does not receive child support, spanning one year.

^{viii} Countries with available data on child support, harmonized in the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) database from the 2020 wave (LIS 2020), are 31: (1) from Nordic Countries: Denmark, Iceland, Austria, Finland; (2) from Eastern Europe: Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Russian Federation, Lithuania, Estonia, and Serbia; (3) from Western Europe: Germany, Belgium, United Kingdom, Italy, Greece, Luxembourg, Spain, Ireland, France; (4) from North America: Canada; (5) from Latin America: Chile, Uruguay, Dominican Republic, Peru, Panama, Paraguay, and Guatemala; (6) from the Middle East: Israel and Egypt; (7) from Oceania: Australia. In addition to these cases from the LIS database 2020, I included data for Argentina (UNICEF, 2023) and the United States (OCSS, 2021).

^{ix} These few studies on custodial parents are complemented by some analyses involving stakeholders in the judicial field, such as lawyers and judges (MMPBA, 2022).

^x The question posed by the OCSS, used as a proxy to understand the reasons for non-compliance as perceived by custodial parents, was: "Why don't you have a child support order?"

^{xi} Income-disaggregated data do not provide conclusive results, as in some countries households with higher incomes are more likely to receive child support, while in others, households with lower incomes have higher chances of receiving it. However, since these are harmonized data from different databases (LIS 2020), indicators such as educational level and employment may function better as predictors of socioeconomic status than income.

^{xii} I recovered the classification from Hakovirta et al. (earner-carers: Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Iceland; traditionals: Belgium, France, Estonia and Spain; market oriented: Australia, United States, United Kingdom); and added Argentina (traditional) and Uruguay (earner-carer).

^{xiii} Sanctions, defined by provincial laws, are economically irrelevant and never enforced.

^{xiv} The Greater Buenos Aires, defined by INDEC, encompasses Buenos Aires City and 24 districts of Greater Buenos Aires.

^{xv} This data is an author's calculation, as are those derived from the analysis of court rulings. These were compiled from the Ministry of Economy website, the Family Law Collective website, and exchanges with judges, lawyers and other stakeholders.

^{xvi} Buenos Aires, Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, Catamarca, Córdoba, Entre Ríos, Santa Fe, La Rioja, San Luis, San Juan, Río Negro, and Santa Cruz.

^{xvii} This data was computed by the author using the Non-criminal Cases database from Judicial Powers, provided by the Open Justice Program (Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, Secretary of Justice, Subsecretary of Criminal Policy).

^{xviii} As formulated, it includes any assistance provided by any family member who does not live in the household. Another issue is the lack of data regarding the amounts of child support.

^{xix} Recently, on March 6, 2024, the only open data on this matter, which consisted of information provided by some provinces between 2017 and 2023, were removed from the government's public information website (www.datos.gob.ar). These data lacked crucial information such as amounts, criteria, custody arrangements, and updating mechanisms, necessary for a systematic approach to the issue. Essentially, the only information available in these datasets were the start and end dates

of the cases. Even with these limitations, they were the only public data on the subject, and now they are no longer available online.

xxAlready, two provinces in Argentina have their own estimations. In provinces with a Consumer Price Index, this statistic can be utilized, and in those without it, the Regional Basic Basket published by INDEC can be used.