Understanding gender differences in poverty: A global snapshot
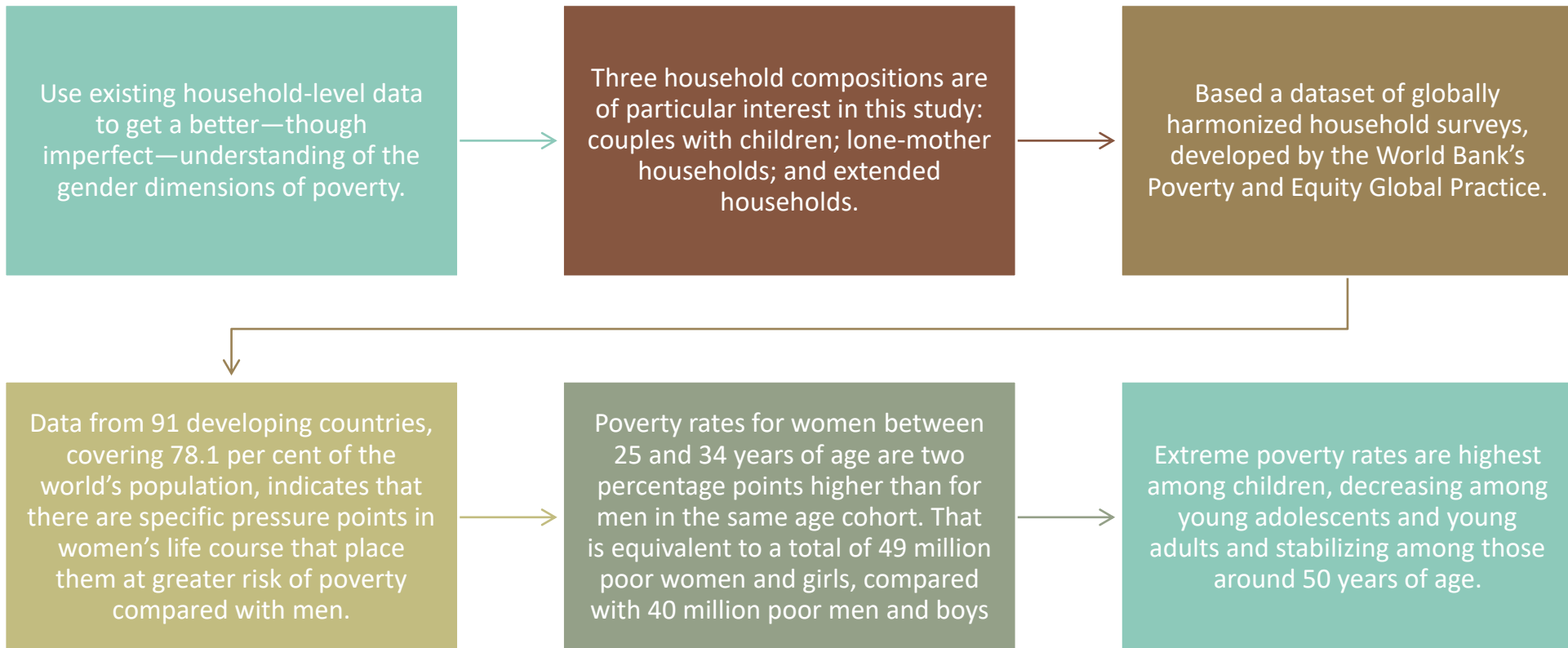
AUTHORS: GINETTE AZCONA (UN WOMEN) & ANTRA BHATT (UN WOMEN)

Objective of the Study & Key Findings

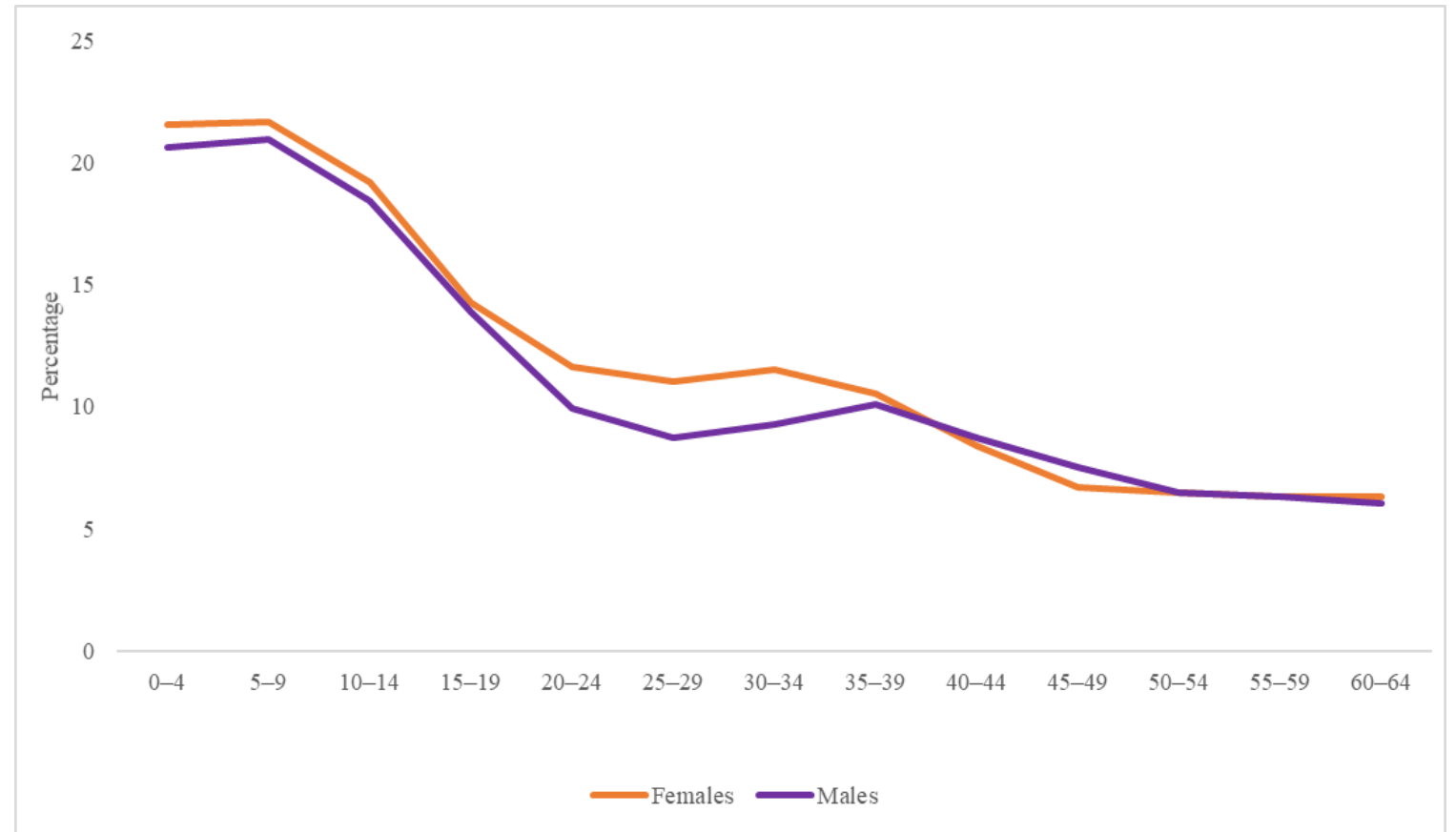Use existing household-level data to get a better—though imperfect—understanding of the gender dimensions of poverty.

Three household compositions are of particular interest in this study: couples with children; lone-mother households; and extended households.

Based a dataset of globally harmonized household surveys, developed by the World Bank's Poverty and Equity Global Practice.

Data from 91 developing countries, covering 78.1 per cent of the world's population, indicates that there are specific pressure points in women's life course that place them at greater risk of poverty compared with men.

Poverty rates for women between 25 and 34 years of age are two percentage points higher than for men in the same age cohort. That is equivalent to a total of 49 million poor women and girls, compared with 40 million poor men and boys

Extreme poverty rates are highest among children, decreasing among young adolescents and young adults and stabilizing among those around 50 years of age.
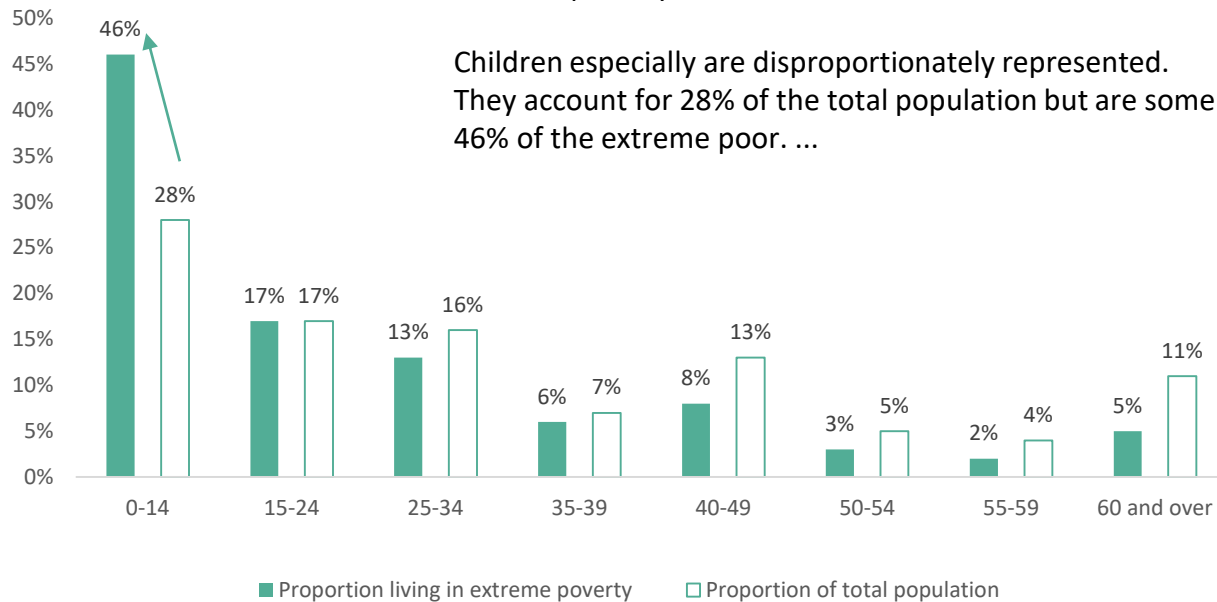
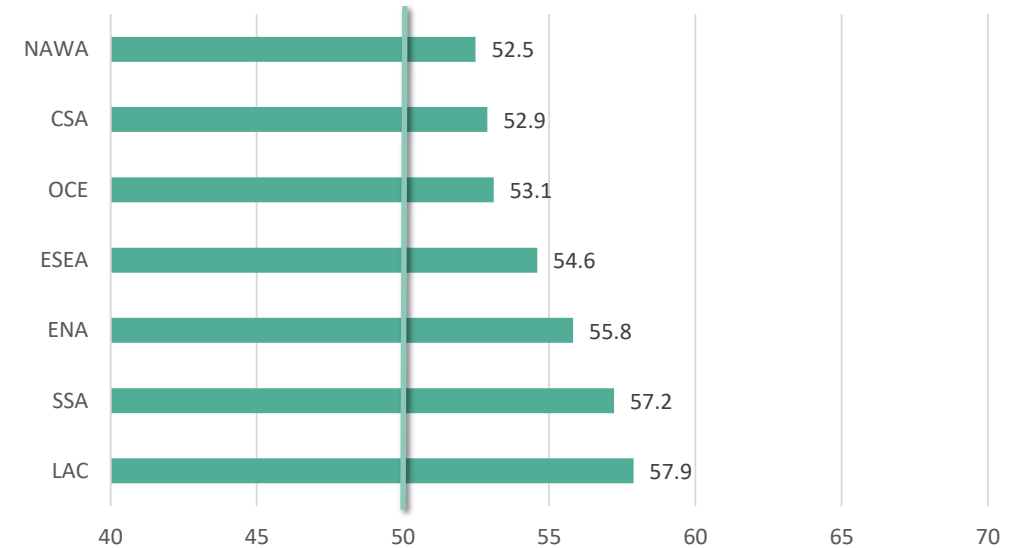# Results

Global poverty rates by age and sex

Children and their caregivers are overwhelming majority of the extreme poor
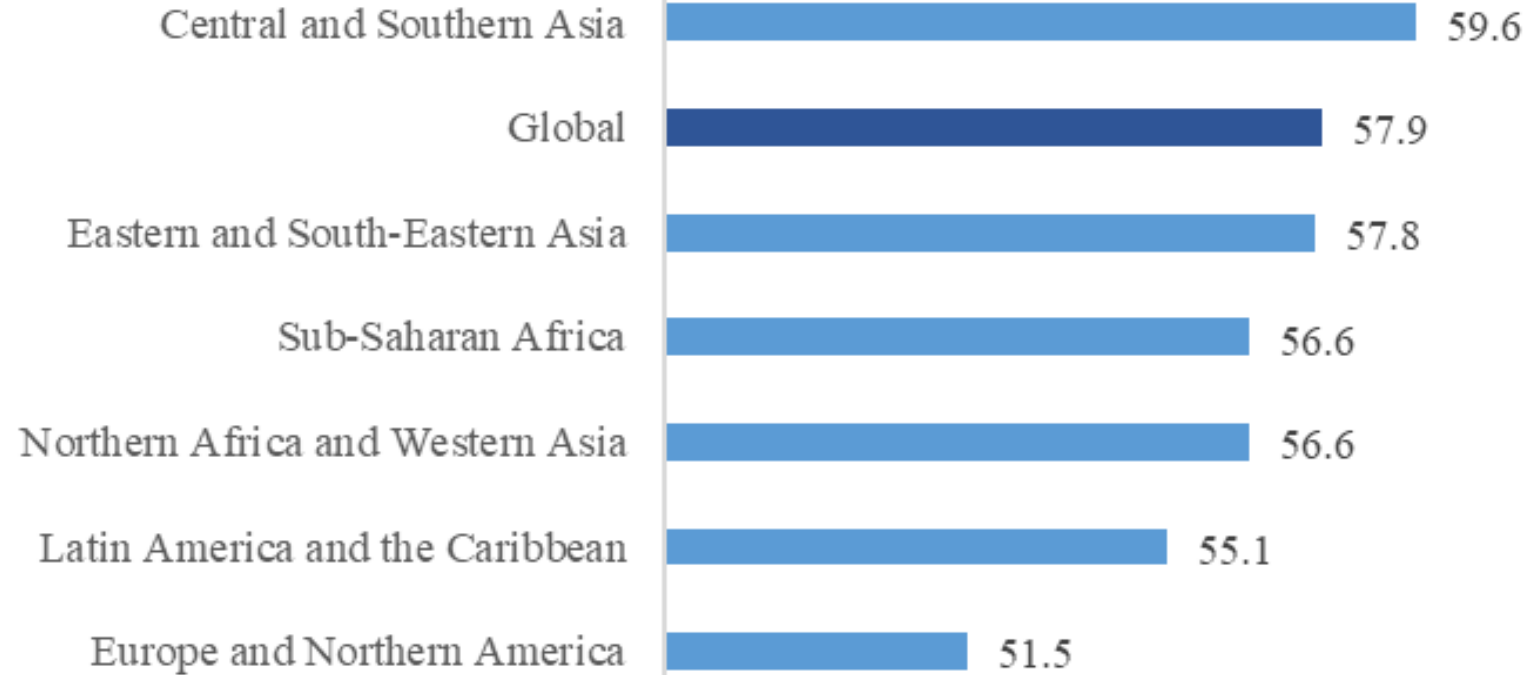
Individuals below age 35 account for 76% of those living in extreme poverty.

Children especially are disproportionately represented. They account for 28% of the total population but are some 46% of the extreme poor. ...
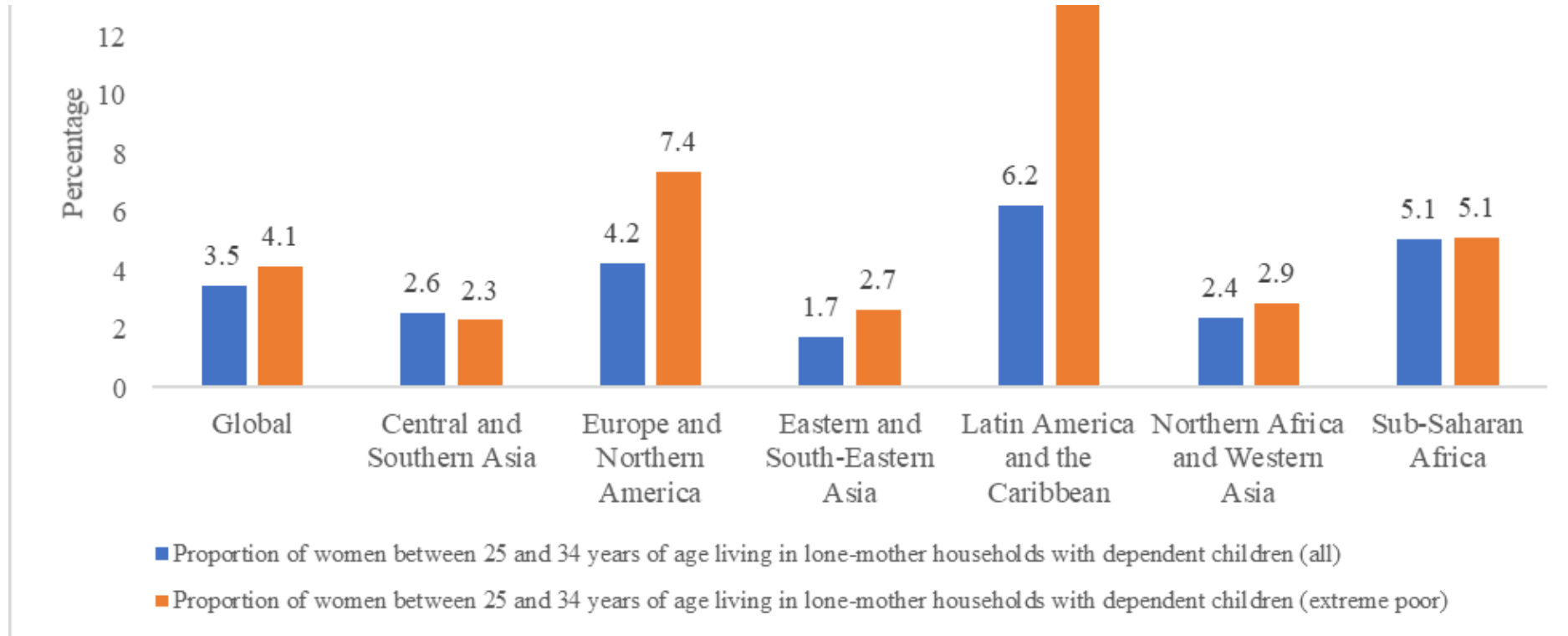
.... women are a greater share of the extreme poor aged 25-34. This coincides with a period in their lives when they are most likely to have young children at home.

Left chart (Proportion living in extreme poverty / Proportion of total population):

Age group	Proportion living in extreme poverty	Proportion of total population
0-14	46%	28%
15-24	17%	17%
25-34	13%	16%
35-39	6%	7%
40-49	8%	13%
50-54	3%	5%
55-59	2%	4%
60 and over	5%	11%

Right chart:

Region	Value
NAWA	52.5
CSA	52.9
OCE	53.1
ESEA	54.6
ENA	55.8
SSA	57.2
LAC	57.9

Proportion of women between 25 and 34 years of age among those living in extreme poverty in households of couples with children, by region

Proportion of lone mothers between 25 and 34 years of age in extremely poor households with at least one child under 18 years of age, by region

Women represent a greater share of individuals between 25 and 34 years of age living in extreme poverty in extended households

Women's income poverty and additional deprivations….

Across the globe, women and girls do the bulk of the unpaid care work necessary for the healthy functioning of households and families.
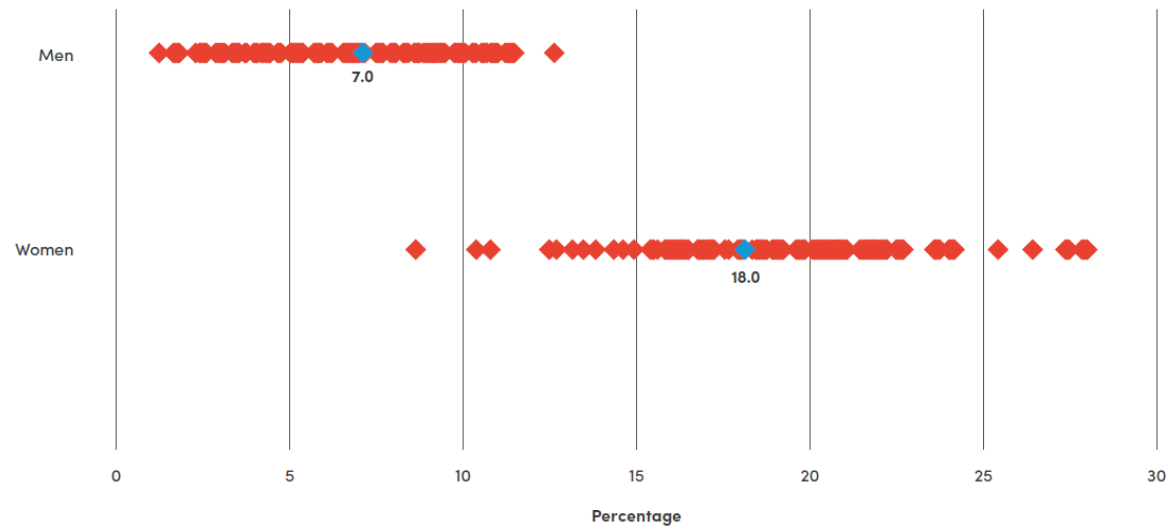
Women on average spend 18 per cent of their day on total unpaid care and domestic work, while men allocate 7 per cent of their day. This leaves them with less time for education, income generation, political participation, rest and leisure.

Disaggregated by age, the time spent on unpaid care and domestic work is highest among women aged 25–44.

This coincides with the period during which they are most likely to have young children at home and, as we saw earlier, a period of elevated income poverty.

Differences among women also vary by other factors including household income, and whether there is access to drinking water, improved sanitation and clean fuel in the home.

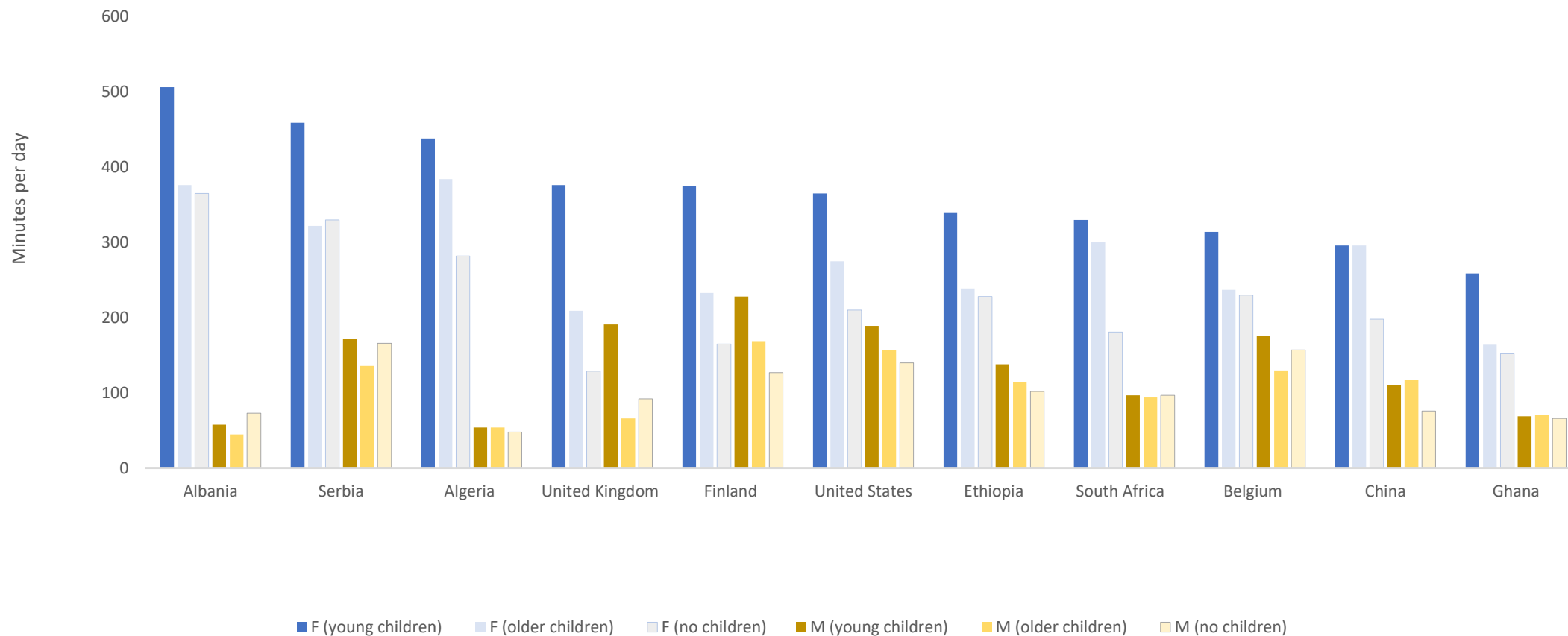PROPORTION OF TIME SPENT PER DAY ON UNPAID DOMESTIC AND CARE WORK, BY SEX, 2000-2016

Men

7.0

Women

18.0

0   5   10   15   20   25   30

Percentage

◆ National values
◆ Average values

Source: UNSD 2017a.
Note: Data refer to the most recent available for 83 countries. Average values are unweighted means.

Time spent in unpaid care and domestic work by sex and presence of children in the household, selected countries, latest available year

Minutes per day

Countries (left to right): Albania, Serbia, Algeria, United Kingdom, Finland, United States, Ethiopia, South Africa, Belgium, China, Ghana

Legend:
- F (young children)
- F (older children)
- F (no children)
- M (young children)
- M (older children)
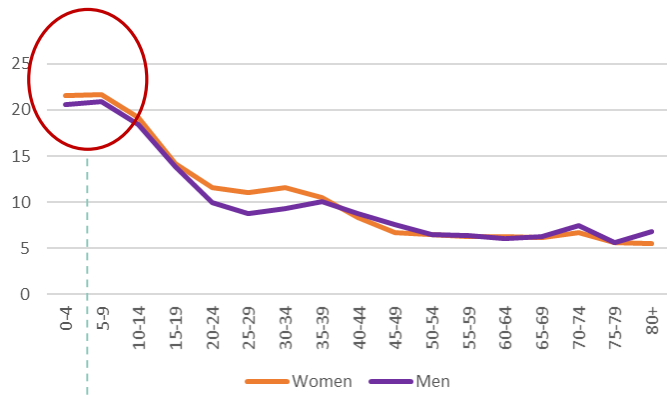- M (no children)

Conclusions

The present study provides a glimpse of the richness and complexity that can be seen when introducing a gender lens to poverty analysis.
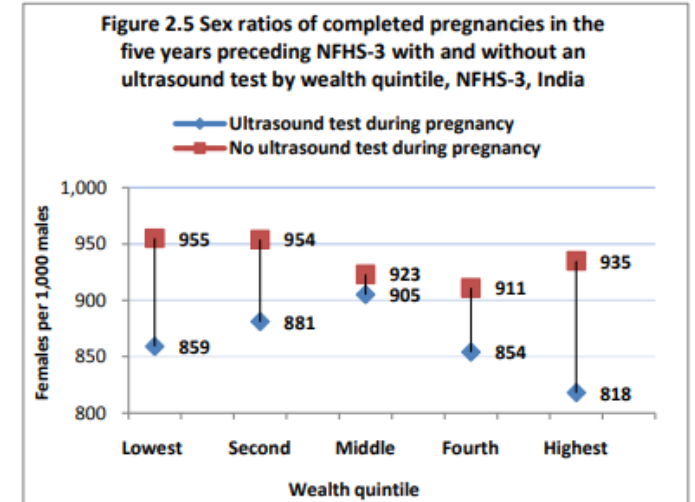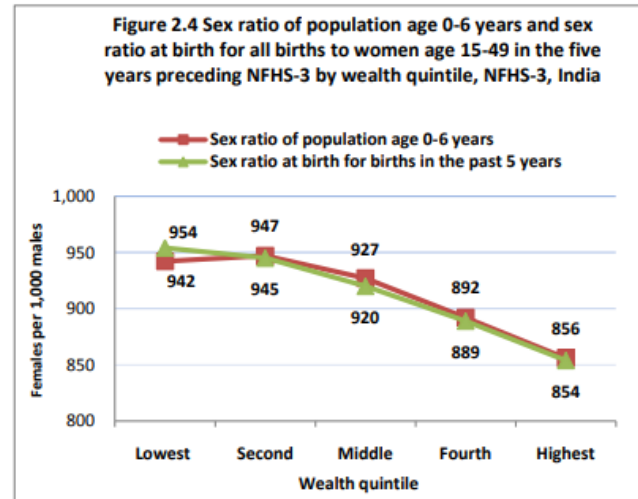
In summary,

- The disaggregation of the data by age and household composition shows how care responsibilities overlap with economically productive years. Having children increases the likelihood of living in poverty for both men and women, but women assume the risk earlier in the life course and are more likely than men to face poverty alone, for example, in a lone-parent household.

- The findings highlight the importance of considering the influence of life stages (i.e. periods when individuals are most likely to care for dependents), household composition (i.e. presence of children) and gender differences in the distribution of unpaid care and domestic work in an analysis of gender inequality in poverty.
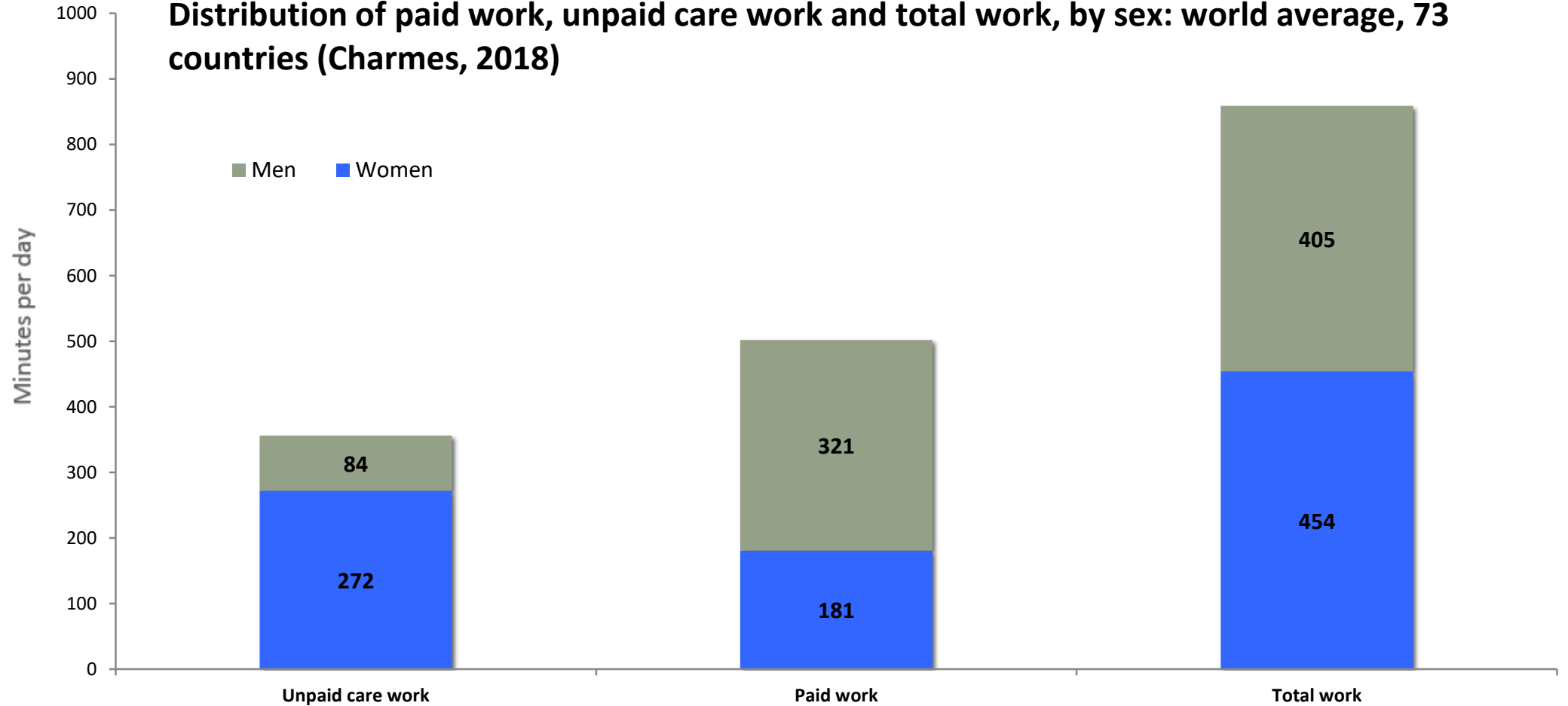
Annexes

What's driving the higher rates of poverty among girls?

Figure 2.4 Sex ratio of population age 0-6 years and sex ratio at birth for all births to women age 15-49 in the five years preceding NFHS-3 by wealth quintile, NFHS-3, India

Sex ratio of population age 0-6 years
Sex ratio at birth for births in the past 5 years

Figure 2.5 Sex ratios of completed pregnancies in the five years preceding NFHS-3 with and without an ultrasound test by wealth quintile, NFHS-3, India

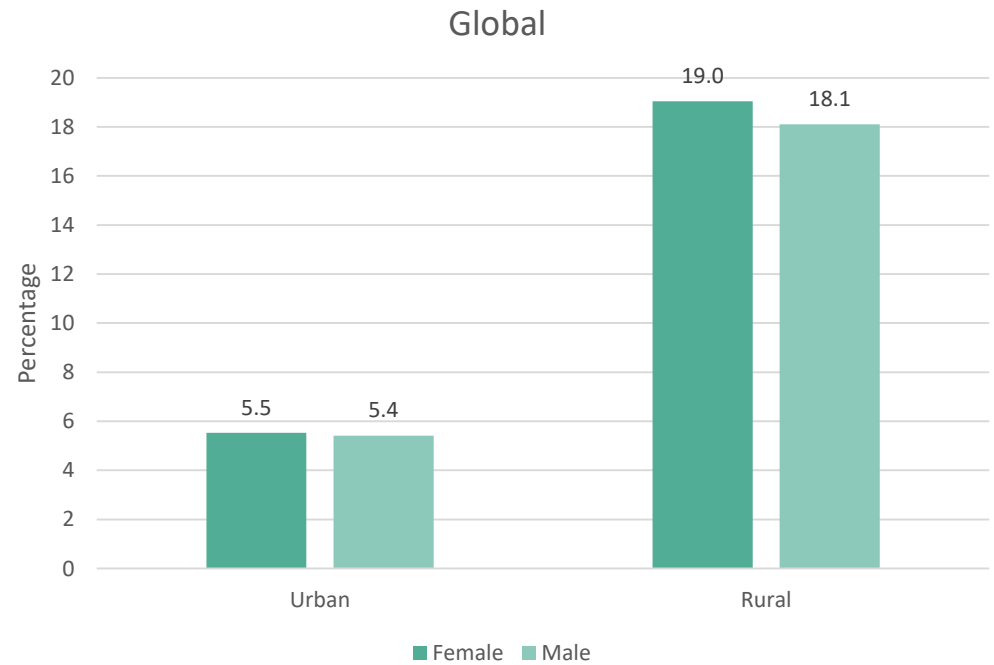Ultrasound test during pregnancy
No ultrasound test during pregnancy

Data from NFHS-4, released in 2017, show that the sex ratios for births in last five years continue to be skewed: 866/1000 in the highest quintile, 955/1000 among those in the lowest quintile.
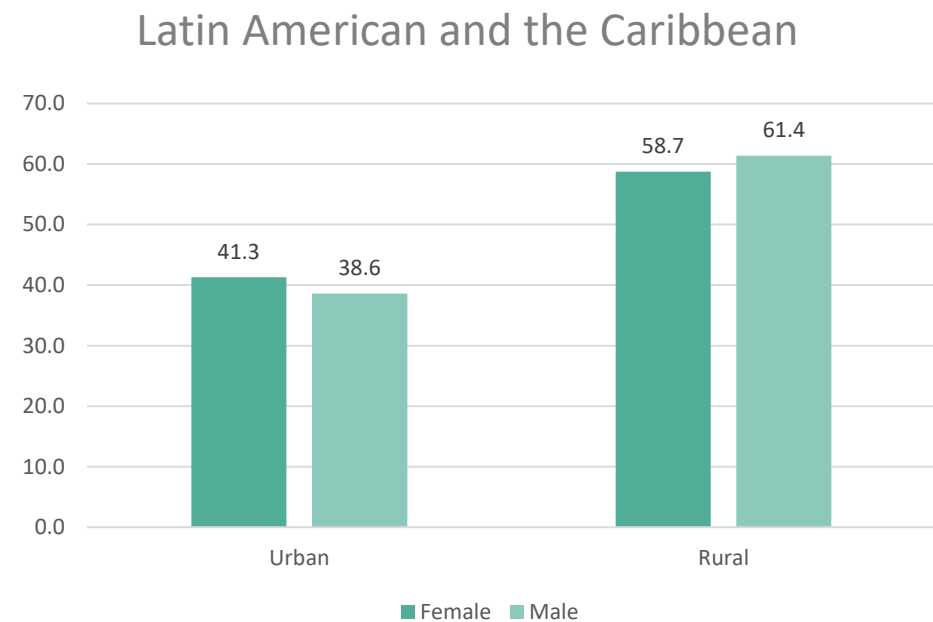
Distribution of paid work, unpaid care work and total work, by sex: world average, 73 countries (Charmes, 2018)

Extreme poverty by sex and location

Global

Latin American and the Caribbean

Rural poverty rates are on average over three times higher than urban poverty rates.

Across regions around 20% of extreme poor live in urban areas. In LAC, the share is even higher...

Proportion of poor by poverty thresholds, region and sex

	Total			Male		Female	
	IPL ($1.90)	$ 3.20		IPL	$ 3.20	IPL	$ 3.20
Central and Southern Asia	**14.5%**	**43.9%**		14.0%	43.3%	15.1%	44.6%
Europe and Northern America	0.2%	0.6%		0.2%	0.6%	0.2%	0.5%
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	2.2%	11.2%		2.2%	11.1%	2.3%	11.3%
Latin America and the Caribbean	3.8%	8.1%		3.8%	7.9%	3.9%	8.4%
Northern Africa and Western Asia	5.4%	14.5%		5.4%	14.2%	5.5%	14.8%
Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand)	10.7%	26.0%		10.7%	25.8%	10.7%	26.2%
Sub-Saharan Africa	**42.5%**	**61.7%**		42.4%	60.4%	42.6%	62.9%
World	**12.3%**	**26.3%**		12.1%	26.0%	12.5%	26.6%

Note: Population coverage is extensive in sub-Saharan Africa (87.0 percent), Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (88.6 percent), Latin America and the Caribbean (91.2 percent) and Central and Southern Asia (92 percent). But does not reach the two-thirds threshold in: Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) (14.3 percent), Europe and Northern America (20.9 percent) and Northern Africa and Western Asia (51.3 percent).

IPL too low for some regions, in CSA for example captures less than 20% of population. But moderate poverty too high? In SSA 62% of population live on less than $3.20 a day.

The DHS wealth index capture quintiles, we use this for the gaps in services and infrastructure – in LAC the majority of the bottom 20% live on a lot more than $3.20 a day.

TIME SPENT ON UNPAID CARE AND DOMESTIC WORK IN LATIN AMERICA, BY SEX AND INCOME QUINTILE, 2009-2014

Source: ECLAC undated.

Note: The simple (unweighted) regional average is based on latest available data points for a set of nine countries (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay).