

Guatemala

Guatemala City

A Focus on Working Women and Childcare

Far fewer Guatemalans live in urban areas - 39 percent - than is generally the case in Latin America, where three quarters of the population typically reside in cities. Nonetheless, urbanization in Guatemala, the most populous country in Central America, is on the rise and is currently outpacing the rest of the continent. One fifth of all Guatemalans now live in the capital, Guatemala City. Substantial rural to urban migration over the last two decades is partially attributed to the civil war of 36 years that lingered on until late 1996 and especially affected the rural highland areas. Shifts into less labor-intensive crops as well as adverse terms of trade for important products of the agricultural sector have also forced many traditional migrant workers to seek out new livelihoods in the city - or even further north, in Mexico and the United States.



Guatemala City Profile

Population (2000)	3,240,000+
Growth rate (annual)	3.5%+
Average urban household size (persons)	5.2
Women employed	37%
Adult literacy rate	M-76%# F-61%#
Child malnutrition (stunted 5 yrs & younger)	27%

IFPRI, 2002 (sample households)
#UNICEF, 2002 (countrywide)
+UN World Urbanization Prospects, 2001

Guatemala possesses the largest economy in the region, yet it is renowned for having one of the most unequal income and land distributions in the world.

Despite its reasonable level of per capita GDP (\$3700 est. in 2001) for a developing economy, the country stands out for having an inordinately high rate of poverty (56 percent). Although poverty is particularly egregious in the rural areas of the country where 75 percent of residents are poor, it is also a predicament for a growing and significant portion of the city inhabitants, of whom over 27 percent are impoverished.

High rates of urbanization have brought more women into the labor force, particularly women from poor households. This phenomenon, in turn, has created additional demand for childcare, especially in the urban slums. In response to this need, a government-sponsored public daycare program, the Hogares Comunitarios Program (HCP), was launched in 1991 specifically to alleviate poverty by providing working parents with low-cost, quality childcare within their community. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) has worked with this program to review its effectiveness and to evaluate its impact on beneficiary children and their mothers.

Rapid Population Growth in a Diverse Demographic Setting

This mountainous nation, susceptible to hurricanes, tropical storms and violent earthquakes, has a particularly young population that is growing rapidly. In 2000 the median age for the population was only 18 years compared to an average of 24 years for the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean. Guatemalan women have an average of five children, or nearly twice as many as the average female in Latin America. A large percentage (45 percent) of the population is indigenous, belonging to various Mayan ethnic groups. The various regions of the country are poorly linked by an inadequate road system, helping to create and accentuate deep divisions in Guatemalan society along ethnic and socioeconomic lines. The

indigenous Guatemalans tend to suffer the highest poverty rates throughout the country.

Rapid urbanization has meant an increase in the number and percentage of households headed by single women. Almost one quarter of households in the city are now headed by a female. This trend is due to various factors including a decline in the proportion of multi-generational households, divorce and widowhood; this latter group is unusually high in Guatemala City due to the violent civil war in which many women lost their husbands and then moved into the city. Because at least half of these urban female-headed households are poor, this group is particularly vulnerable to food insecurity and needs help with employment opportunities and childcare alternatives.

Low Social Spending

Although neither the poorest nor the only country in the region to have suffered conflict, Guatemala is afflicted with some of the worst socioeconomic conditions of the continent. Traditionally public spending on health, education, social security, housing, and water has been very low. For example, Guatemala has the lowest schooling coverage in Latin America, and relative to GDP spends less than half the regional average on education. As a result, levels of education and literacy, particularly for women, are low for Latin America. Urban female heads of household tend to have less education than male heads which ultimately reduces their relative chances of obtaining work as well as their earnings. Older and indigenous women who migrated to urban areas as adults generally have very minimal education because they were raised in rural areas where schools were not widely available or accessible.

In the late 1990s Guatemala also had the second lowest per capita public spending on health in Latin America.

Infant mortality (45 per thousand) is the highest in Central America. Of particular concern, chronic malnutrition among Guatemalan children under age three is the highest in all of Latin America. In total, 44 percent of children in the country are chronically malnourished (short for their age) - including half of rural children and one third of urban children.

Among indigenous children malnutrition rates are as high as 70% no matter where they live. Not only is the prevalence of malnutrition among Guatemalan children among the worst in the world but it is declining at a slower pace than is the case in other countries with similar levels of development.



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Urban Living

On average, urban dwellers benefit from better infrastructure than those living in rural areas. For instance, urban households are more likely to have flush toilets or piped water either in or near their home as compared to households in the rural areas. Furthermore, urban residents are much more likely to live near a health center than is the case in the rural areas. However, socioeconomic differences in the use of and access to these facilities are much larger in urban compared to rural areas. For example, the coverage of measles immunization in urban areas ranges from 62 percent among the lowest socioeconomic quintile, compared to 91 percent among the highest. In rural areas, these numbers are 70 percent for the lowest and 76 percent for the highest socioeconomic quintiles - a difference of only 6 percentage points, compared to the 29 percentage points found in urban areas. Note also that the lowest income quintile in urban areas has an even lower coverage of measles immunization - 62 percent - than the lowest quintile in rural areas, which has 70 percent. Thus, in spite of the greater availability of services in urban areas, the poorest segments of the population often continue to be left out of programs or available public services. This, in turn, perpetuates their vulnerability and risk of being poor, food insecure and malnourished.

Urban Women in the Workforce

The share of urban women who work for an income in Guatemala increased to 28 percent in 1999, 20 percent more than at the beginning of the decade. Low-income mothers of young children are even more likely to work for pay - 37 percent - according to the IFPRI survey. A disproportionate number of these working mothers are single, separated, divorced or widowed and tend to be poorer than non-working mothers. They are also more likely than non-working mothers to be of indigenous ethnicity.

Women tend to work in occupations that are low-paying and that are viewed as typically female. Few managers and employers in the workforce are women, as these positions are traditionally filled by men. The majority - 63 percent - of urban Guatemalan women hold jobs in the informal sector where they work in petty trading, domestic service, tortilla shops and other eateries. However, shifts in the structure of urban production toward more manufacturing and industry means that employment opportunities in the formal sector - that is, in electronics, food processing, textile, and small consumer good industries - are increasingly becoming available to women. Formal sector employment pays three times more than the

average informal sector job and often provides additional benefits, although working conditions may be harsh and the hours excessively long.

The Need for Childcare

Childcare is a significant issue affecting the employment of low-income working women in urban areas. This group relies heavily on informal childcare. Almost 30 percent of the children of low-income working mothers surveyed were being cared for by another member of the household while another similar number were being cared for by relatives or neighbors in their homes. Yet the availability of informal care is limited for many women, particularly those who have migrated from rural areas and thus left behind their extended family and other easily accessible informal caregivers.



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The limited availability of childcare options, including formal childcare, is thought to be one of the reasons why women in many urban areas, including Guatemala City, suffer higher rates of unemployment or under-employment than male household heads. Further, the lack of available childcare also limits the ability of many women to take advantage of the better paying jobs in the growing formal sector, where children cannot accompany their mothers to work. As a result, many single women heading households have little choice but to work in the informal sector, despite the low pay, because it offers them the flexibility to care for their children while they work. Over 40 percent of the randomly sampled mothers working in the slums of Guatemala City were caring for their children themselves while working for pay.

Formal childcare is only beginning to be available in developing countries. IFPRI's study indicated that more educated mothers were more likely to choose formal daycare as long as it was conveniently located. A quarter of the children of the working mothers surveyed in Guatemala City were in formal daycare, the overwhelming majority of which were privately run, and thus can be relatively expensive.

The Government Sponsored Hogares Comunitarios (Public Daycare) Program

To address the childcare needs of poor women as well as the appalling levels of malnutrition and lack of preschool attention received by the poorest children in the city, in 1991 the government of Guatemala initiated a pilot

program of "Community Daycare Centers", or Hogares Comunitarios, in particularly destitute communities of the city. Each hogar (daycare center) was established by a group of families who chose a local woman to provide childcare in her home for up to 10 of their children. The government provided food for the children in addition to subsidizing the caregiver's services.

The program seems to be reaching its targeted population, families of working parents with few resources and particularly families where mothers are the main income-earner. Beneficiary mothers appear more likely to have salaried - and possibly more stable - employment than mothers who use other childcare arrangements, which often results in higher wages and a larger number of employment benefits. Also



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benefiting from the program are the caregivers themselves, who tend to be older, less educated mothers with possibly fewer opportunities to work outside the home. Moreover, IFPRI's evaluation highlights the significant impact of the program on the diets of participating children. Compared to other children whose mothers are also working outside the home, but who use different childcare alternatives, children cared for in the Hogares Comunitarios program consume larger amounts of energy and proteins and have diets of greater overall quality (containing greater amounts of essential micronutrients such as iron and vitamin A).

Policy Implications

At this time, few poor urban households in Guatemala City opt to use public childcare services; however, IFPRI's survey suggests that this is because of the low supply (limited number of hogares) rather than a lack of demand. Given its important contribution in enabling mothers to work and their children to be well cared for, the Hogares Comunitarios program has proven itself worthy of expansion.

Reducing barriers to obtaining employment is crucial for helping to lift women and their families in the urban slums of Guatemala out of poverty. Access to reliable and affordable daycare can enable mothers to work in settings not compatible with caring for their kids and often in higher paying work. Increasing the availability of subsidized formal daycare in poor urban areas is a viable option, which can increase the labor participation rates of women and ensure safe and reliable childcare for preschoolers.

Related Publications

Guatemala -- The Community Day Care Centers Program. IFPRI Issue Brief No. 9 Addendum. Washington D.C.: International Food Policy Research Institute. 2002.

Do Subsidized Childcare Programs Work? An Operational Evaluation in Guatemala City. Marie Ruel. Food and Agriculture Organization Journal. 2002.

Does Subsidized Childcare Help Poor Working Women in Urban Areas? Evaluation of a Government-Sponsored Program in Guatemala City. Marie Ruel, Bénédicte de Brière, Kelly Hallman, Agnes Quisumbing, and N. Coj. Taking Gender Into Account in Social Protection and Poverty Programs: Case Studies from Latin America. The World Bank. 2002. (Also FCND Discussion Paper #131)

Evaluación Operacional del Programa de Hogares Comunitarios de Guatemala. Marie Ruel. Unpublished work. 2001.

Operational Evaluation of the Hogares Comunitarios Program of Guatemala. Marie Ruel. Unpublished work. 2001.

IFPRI City Profiles are a production of the *Food Consumption and Nutrition Division* of IFPRI and its urban research program **Urban Challenges to Food and Nutrition Security**. Funding for City Profiles is provided by the UK's **Department for International Development (DfID)**.

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The Hogares Comunitarios Program (HCP) was established in Guatemala City in 1991 as a direct response to the increased need for affordable and reliable childcare for women in urban Guatemala. The government-sponsored pilot program was designed as a strategy to alleviate poverty by providing working parents with low-cost, quality childcare within their communities. The program aimed at promoting child development and at filling the existing gap in preschool education in Guatemala. The pilot program rapidly expanded to both urban and rural areas of all 22 departments of the country. By 1998, the HCP comprised 1,200 hogares comunitarios (community daycare centers) that cared for approximately 10,000 children aged 0–7 years. In 2001, IFPRI performed an evaluation of this program's effectiveness.



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