

Decent work, democracy and labor policy: the role of civil society organizations in the Southern Cone

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1. Introduction

This report presents the main findings of an exploratory research project aimed at determining the extent and characteristics of civil society organizations' (SCO) contribution to the promotion of decent work in the Southern Cone Countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay). The analysis focuses on the organizational structures and main strategies of CSOs involved in labor policy fields and discusses the significance of variations across countries and policy arenas. Based on this analysis, ways to estimate and improve the contribution of CSOs to each component of decent work are suggested.

Decency of working conditions in each country has been estimated as indicated by available “opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.” According to the established definition, these opportunities depend on: “the promotion of rights at work; employment; social protection; and social dialogue.”² The evolution of each component of decent work depends on multiple factors and is subject to complex social processes. The conscious intervention of organized actors and the uncoordinated actions of individuals shape all of them, to some extent. The extent to which conscious action by organized actors is able to influence outcomes varies across fields, institutional settings and over time; as does the ability of each particular actor to orient results according to her preferences. Respect for labor rights and social dialogue, for example, are typically more easily subject to policy decisions and, also typically, within this policy game it is the state the actor most able to shape final results. Employment and effective social protection, on the other hand, are subject to more complex causal mechanisms of which policies and decisions are only a part. Conscious interventions, then, are not always the main force driving the evolution of working conditions. Additionally, civil society organizations usually occupy a subordinate position among actors interacting in labor policy fields. Why, then, the proposed focus on their contribution to the promotion of decent work?

The answer to this question is theoretical. The very complexity of the labor field raises both the costs of information for policy design and the costs of enforcement for policy implementation. Dialogue between states, businesses and labor unions helps labor policy precisely because it lowers those costs.

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Their contribution stems from their control of information resources for design and authority resources for implementation. Recent transformations in society, the economy, the state and the international system have significantly altered the terms of this equation. The institutional resources controlled by states, firms and labor unions seem no longer sufficient to set the fundamentals of social coordination. Many production units have evolved beyond the model of the traditional firm, many forms of production have evolved beyond the traditional model of work, as many consumption units have evolved beyond the model of the typical family. According to this rationale, organizations that are smaller, younger, closer to the local level and simpler should be better equipped to adapt to increasing labor heterogeneity than bigger, older, more remote and more complex organizations. There are reasons, then, to expect a contribution from institutions that fit the first description to the promotion of decent work. Civil society organizations do fit that description. Yet, would any civil society organization do?³ Which kind of institutional resources could civil society organizations contribute to decent work policies? Would these contributions supplement those already made by the state, labor unions and business organizations? And, more concretely, are some civil society organizations interested in promoting decent work? Through which actions do they express that interest? The answers to these questions are empirical. We have devoted our research endeavor to providing preliminary drafts for these answers. We devote the remainder of the text to exposing our main findings.

Section 2 of the report starts with a discussion of contextual political and economic settings and provides a cursory comparative diagnosis of the evolution of decent work indicators in each country over the period under consideration. The purpose of this diagnosis is determining priorities in decent work promotion and estimating the potential role of civil society organizations in achieving these priority goals. Section 3 discusses the most reliable available evidence about the size and structure of civil society in the region, with special reference to the cases of Argentina and Brazil, which are the two best documented. Section 4 presents the results of a survey of 87 civil society organizations performed for this study. The survey collects information about the degree of institutionalization, basic organizational structure, main goals and strategies of associations involved in the labor field. Section 5 briefly discusses the potential political contribution of civil society organizations to the promotion of decent work considering, on the one hand, the priorities and institutional structure of the labor field and, on the other, the institutional strength and weaknesses of institutions operating in each country.

² ILO.1999. Report of the Director-General: Decent Work. Geneva.

³ For interesting theoretical discussions and illustrations of the potential contribution of CSOs to promoting decent work see Baccaro 2000 and 2001.

2. Structural reform, democracy and decent work

2.1. General background conditions: the challenge of combining democracy and capitalism revisited

Several reasons justify a joint assessment of the Southern Cone countries. In spite of significant differences in territorial extension, social structure, size of the economy and, less significant, differences in social development, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay have faced similar political and economic challenges during the last twenty-five years. The four countries entered the last quarter of the twentieth century under bureaucratic authoritarian rule, with economies poorly equipped to compete internationally and amidst significant social unrest. Political institutions did not withstand the test of striving simultaneously for economic development and social integration. Democracy broke down not only in chronically unstable Argentina (1966 and again in 1976) and Brazil (1964) but also in highly stable Chile (1973) and Uruguay (1973). In the four countries military authorities justified their access to power in the needs to restore social order and restructure the ailing import substitution industrialization models (O'Donnell 1982). Beginning in the mid seventies efforts were made in the four countries to reduce state presence in production and price setting, lift barriers to international trade and decisively reshape political institutions.

Consistency and success of these attempts varied across countries and over time. Chilean military authorities adopted a highly orthodox approach to economic development and a highly restrictive approach toward organized social actors and political parties from the outset. The economic strategy reduced inflation and increased output between 1975 and 1982, experienced severe output and employment problems between 1983 and 1985 and eventually put Chile in a path of continuous output and income growth from 1986 onwards. Direct state intervention on industrial relations was replaced in 1979 with highly restrictive decentralized bargaining regulations (Cortázar 1997). Basic labor rights were only restored by the first democratic government. A reform to the Constitution was approved in a plebiscite held in 1980. This reform allowed the military government to transform their institutional preferences into law and firmly control political competition up to its replacement in 1989.

The development potential of import substitution industrialization was not completely exhausted when the Brazilian military step into power. Orthodox strategies, then, were not as dominant within their approach to macro economic management. Limitations on political competition and industrial interest representation were also less severe than in Chile. Political parties were allowed to compete, although under firm vigilance of the regime and only at the sub-national level. Wage indexation and other basic labor legislation was set by executive decree, but trade unions were not completely

banned. This strategy allowed the regime to slowly restore civil liberties, liberalize political competition and eventually determine the terms of its own withdrawal, which took place in 1985. Economic reforms implemented by the military government left Brazil with a sizable and robust industrial sector but were not sufficient to produce sustained output growth, price stability or solve many of the severe social and regional disparities that still affect this country.

The Uruguayan military government adopted goals of political and economic reform similar to those of the Chilean regime. Political parties and interest representation organizations were banned. On the economic front, efforts were made to stabilize prices through orthodox monetary policy instruments and modernize the economy through a gradual reform of foreign trade structures. Economic results were mixed in terms of output growth and price stability and deleterious in terms of job creation, which became a problem in the early 1980s. A constitutional reform was proposed to and rejected by the electorate thus compromising the ability of military authorities to determine the institutional outcome of an eventual return to democracy but yet offering them some room to negotiate with civilian leaders the terms of the transition which took place in 1984.

The Argentine case represents an example of almost complete failure of the bureaucratic authoritarian strategy. Restrictions on political and union activities were as decisively and violently enforced as in Chile. Yet efforts to institutionalize the political goals of the regime could not overcome divisions among the military. As in Chile and Uruguay, stabilization efforts through orthodox monetary management enjoyed a measure of macroeconomic success between 1977 and 1980. Economic problems started to be felt in 1981 thus reinforcing coordination problems among the long-term plans coexisting within the Junta. These problems led to the replacement of President Viola in 1981, fed urban social unrest and contributed to the decision of focusing national attention on sovereignty disputes with Britain over the Malvinas/Falkland Islands. This strategy of support building, which had been successfully tried between 1977 and 1978 in a territorial conflict with Chile, proved fatal for the survival of the regime. Military defeat led to the immediate lift of bans on political and union activities and severely weakened the position of departing authorities to negotiate the terms of their withdrawal.

The third wave of democratization presented the Southern Cone countries with the challenge of combining open political competition and unrestricted participation with efficient and stable capitalist economies. They entered this challenge under different institutional and macro-economic conditions. The Chilean dictatorship was able to significantly transform both the basic allocation mechanisms in the economy and the fundamental regulations of political competition and labor

relations. The Brazilian, Argentine and Uruguayan dictatorships, on the other hand, were less effective at transforming the basic pattern of development and varied in the degree to which they were able to reshape political and labor institutions. The Brazilian regime achieved a larger measure of success on this front, and the Argentine and Uruguayan regimes were less effective.

Our diagnosis of decent work focuses on the democratic period. However, efforts at democratizing political and labor relationships while producing sustained growth should be interpreted against the background conditions set by departing military authorities. In this respect, constitutional governments faced different problems in each country. The rigid institutional background set by the military regime restricted the ability of Chilean democratic governments to redress the inequitable pattern of development established during 18 years of military rule. Additionally, attempts to reduce social inequity and lift restrictions on union activities should also be compatible with protecting the fundamental workings of a revitalized economy. The nature of the task of democratic governments in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay was different. They had as much terrain to regain in terms of institutional democratization and social integration as their Chilean counterparts. Though they faced less severe institutional obstacles to intervene, they also had a less consistent and significantly less successful heritage of macro economic policy to rely upon.

The production of decent working conditions should be understood in the context of democratic administrations guided by different fundamental objectives. In the case of Chile this objective was to sustain economic stability and productivity at a lower cost in terms of social integration, participation and equity. This objective has been pursued through gradual institutional reforms in the fields of labor relations and social policy. In the cases of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay the main objective was to increase the productive capacities of their economies through macro-economic policy reform. An unorthodox path to economic reform was tried in Argentina and Brazil in the late 1980s. This strategy proved unable to boost productivity and curb inflation. Accordingly it was replaced in the early 1990s by decisive moves towards privatization, deregulation and liberalization combined with exchange rate controls (very rigid, in the case of Argentina; more flexible, in the case of Brazil). Macro-economic policy changes were less dramatic in Uruguay. Regulations and trade barriers, comparatively lower than in Brazil or Argentina, were lifted and privatization faced robust social opposition. These objectives still guide state policy in each country and set the parameters of labor market regulations and other policies affecting decent work.

2.2. Recent evolution of decent work in the Southern Cone countries: a cursory assessment

Our purpose of estimating potential contributions of civil society organizations to the production of decent work requires that we characterize the institutional environment in which these organizations operate. This characterization was offered in the preceding paragraphs and will be completed in section 3. Additionally it is also necessary to diagnose the recent evolution of decent work in each country in order to specify priorities and adapt the estimation of civil society's potential contribution to achieving these priority goals. We offer this diagnosis in the ensuing paragraphs.

2.2.1. Promotion of rights at work⁴

A look at ILO Conventions ratifications may give us a very basic yet useful idea of legal protection of labor rights in each country.

Table 1
Ratification of ILO Conventions

	Argentina	Brazil	Chile	Uruguay
ILO Conventions ratified	69	85	57	101
ILO Conventions currently in force	60	73	49	74

Source: Instituto del Derecho del Trabajo y de la Seguridad Social, Facultad de Derecho Universidad de la República. 2000. *El derecho laboral en el Mercosur Ampliado*. Montevideo: Fundación Cultura Universitaria / Cinterfor.

As shown in table 1, the extent of protection provided by internationally recognized legal instruments is significantly larger in Uruguay and Brazil than in Argentina. Chilean workers, on the other hand, are comparatively unprotected. This indicator, considered in isolation, tells a very small part of this story. The comparative disadvantage of Chilean workers is confirmed if other measures are taken into account.

Basic civil liberties are legally protected and commonly enforced in all four countries. However cases have been reported of unlawful repression of protesting workers in Chile, Brazil and Argentina. In Chile these cases have been isolated and consisted mainly in violent reactions by law enforcement officers towards workers striking in particular firms (ICFTU 2001, 2000). In Brazil and Argentina civil rights violations relate to wider social phenomena. Threats and murder of rural workers union representatives in North Eastern Brazil are frequent and seldom go punished (ICFTU 2001, 2000, 1999). In Argentina, public demonstrations of unemployed workers (piqueteros) registered since 1995, have resulted in clashes with the police and other law enforcement officers producing several injured and dead. It is difficult to assess the extent to

⁴ Indicators for this section have been selected according to the guidelines proposed by Kucera 2000.

which conflicts like those involving rural workers in Brazil and organizations of the unemployed in Argentina pertain to the field of labor relationships. However we classify them, they do indicate the relative (in)ability of the state to enforce civil liberties in general and thus the extent to which all citizens, not just workers, may expect their personal guarantees to be protected in case of conflict.

a) Freedom of association and collective bargain

The right of workers to form and join unions is legally protected in all four countries. This protection stems from international conventions, national constitutions and, with the exception of Uruguay, labor codes. These legal guarantees notwithstanding freedoms of affiliation and collective bargain are restricted, to different extents, in each case.

Argentine workers can form and join unions and collectively bargain at all levels (firm, federation, confederation) according to their profession or economic activity. Job stability to union representatives is granted by law and enforced in practice. Although the formation of unions does not require previous state authorization, only contracts subscribed by unions recognized by the National Ministry of Labor (enjoying *personería gremial*) and underwritten by this authority are binding. In practice this constitutes a restriction on the freedom of affiliation of workers and a privilege to organizations enjoying union status, although around 70% of the working force in the formal sector is covered by collective contracts (Márquez and Pagés 1998: 43). This privilege is further strengthened by a regime of compulsory contributions from all workers (irrespective of union affiliation) to a health system fund that is administered by and constitutes the first source of income of unions enjoying *personería gremial*.

The 1988 reform of the Brazilian Constitution lifted many of the restrictions on the right to associate and collectively bargain that existed previously. Between 1960 and that date only registered unions were allowed to operate and only one union per occupation in each territorial unit could form (Amadeo et al 1995) with a prohibition to constitute one central national union. The new constitution does not require registration, permits the formation of central organizations, and allows for the formation of councils in firms with more than 200 employees but still prohibits the constitution of a second union in a given activity and territory. According to reports (ICFTU 2001), this provision has not been completely enforced in recent practice, for collective contracts at the firm level have not been hindered. Yet Brazilian workers enjoy no more freedom of choice than their Argentine counterparts. Additionally, isolated cases have been reported of union representatives unlawfully dismissed (ICFTU 2000).

Labor law is not codified in Uruguay. Labor rights are considered part of the individual rights protected by the constitution and civil law. Disputes involving private sector workers are decided by Labor tribunals and those involving state employees (which represent a sizable portion of total employment) by Administrative Tribunals (Cassoni et al 1995). Union pluralism is generally accepted as a principle and organizations can form at all levels. However collective bargaining is subject to one important restriction for the law does not require that employers negotiate (Mantero de San Vicente 2000). As a consequence, only 21.6% of workers in the private sector were covered by collective contracts in 1995 (Márquez and Pagés 1998: 43). This does not entail that collective bargaining does not take place. In the Wage Councils (Consejos de Salarios) Uruguay has a tradition of tripartite wage-setting at the national level between state authorities, central unions and employers associations. This councils were not in place between 1985 and 1990 (when salaries were adjusted according to non negotiated state policy). The government has withdrawn from the Consejos since 1992 but they remain in place and weigh significantly over compensation policies in the country (Cassoni et al 1995).

Recent changes in labor legislation have tried to reduce the restrictions on the freedom of association and collective bargaining imposed by the military government in Chile. Between 1979 and 1990 agricultural workers and state employees were prohibited to form unions. Other workers could constitute them complying with demanding requirements and only at the firm level. National central unions were banned, the right to strike severely limited and legal protection to union representative feeble. The 1990 law lift the ban on agricultural and state unions, permitted the constitution of national confederations and eased some of the restrictions on the right to strike. However, collective bargaining continued to be performed basically at the firm level and the right to strike subject to important limitations. As a result only a very low 12.7% of salaried employees were reported as covered by collective contracts in 1995 (Márquez and Pagés 1998: 43). After a protracted discussion the Chilean Congress approved a new labor law on September 11 2001 that provides for collective bargaining at the national level if employers agree. The decentralized bargaining structure resulting from Chilean labor institutions has been credited for the low level of industrial conflict registered in the country during the first years of democratic government (Cortázar 1997). The limitations on the level at which bargaining could be legally performed, in contrast, may have concentrated on workers the internalized costs of social cooperation.

Enforcement of labor legislation basically rests on labor tribunals in all four countries. Compared with the standard of more developed economies resources devoted to labor law enforcement are insufficient. Even within this overall low level of protection some differences can be detected.

Table 2
Number of Labor Inspectors, 1993

	Number of workers per inspector
ARGENTINA	25.000
BRASIL	20.000
URUGUAY	13.000

Source: Víctor Tokman and Daniel Martínez. “Los temas laborales en el MERCOSUR,” *El mercado común del sur: MERCOSUR*. Page 15

As table 2 reports, labor law enforcement in Uruguay should be more effective than in Brazil and Argentina not only because their work load is lighter but also because policing the sizable public sector should be easier than controlling private firms.

Available evidence indicates that labor law enforcement has consistently improved in Chile over the 1990s

Table 3
Workers covered by Ministry of Labor Law Inspections in Chile

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Number of workers favored	538,500	589,400	757,000	1,161,600	1,096,363	1,324,903	1,365,253	1,418,636	1,637,588
% of total employment	11.9%	12.9%	16.1%	23.5%	21.3%	25.6%	26.3%	26.8%	30.5%

Source. Author’s calculation from data on Inspections from the Ministry of Labor and Employment, Chile. Department of Fiscalization. Methods and Projects Unit. <http://www.dt.gob.cl/fisca/estadis/>.

Data on employment: Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas. www.ine.cl

We can conclude from this brief survey that fundamental labor rights enjoy reasonable legal protection in the Southern Cone countries. Joining and forming unions entails no systematic risk for workers and workers can influence the determination of working conditions and compensation policies. The extent of this influence varies across countries. It is in this regard that existing restrictions on freedom of association and collective bargain become important. Significant limitations exist in Chile on the level at which collective bargaining can be performed. Less severe limitations in this respect are registered in Brazil as well, where the most significant restrictions affect freedom of association. These restrictions also affect Argentine

workers. Workers in Uruguay seem to enjoy the most ample room for union pluralism. Yet the system is biased towards bargaining at the national level and only on wage setting which rises significantly the costs of social dialogue, prevents workers from effectively discussing working conditions other than compensation and might compromise the efficacy and ability of labor policy to adapt to changing economic environments.

b) Elimination of child labor⁵

As it is well known child labor is a particularly opaque phenomenon. Its incidence increases significantly in rural populations, which usually are not adequately represented in national statistics. It is also difficult to operationalize, for many forms of domestic work, sometimes as intense and compromising of the ability of children (especially girls) to perform well at school as working outside the household, are not considered or reported as “work.” However, valuable efforts have recently been made to more accurately estimate the incidence of child labor in the Southern Cone countries. It is also worth considering that the four governments have put in place programs for the eradication of child labor. Civil society organizations are active and helpful partners in the design and implementation of these programs.

The most reliable available estimates indicate that although the incidence of child labor in these countries is not high there is still some distance to achieve the goal of complete eradication.

Table 4
Incidence of Child Labor

	Argentina ^a	Brazil ^b	Chile ^c	Uruguay
Participation rates 10-14 year olds	6.5 %	2%	4.2%	8.1%

a. Data for 1994. Estimate from Silvio Feldman, 1997. *Los niños que trabajan*. Unicef. Buenos Aires. .

b. Source: IPEC. 1998. Trabajo Infantil en el Mercosur. Data for 1995. Excludes certain rural populations.

c. Source: IPEC. 1998. Trabajo Infantil en el Mercosur. Data for 1996. Participation rate is for 12-14 year-olds.

Data in table 3 present some problems to comparative interpretation. Participation rates for Chile and Uruguay might overestimate the incidence of child labor compared with the other two countries for they report data for the 12-14 year old segment. Rates should be lower if 10 and 11 year-olds were included. The participation rate for Brazil, in turn, reports only data for urban centers. The international evidence indicates that rates should increase significantly if rural

⁵ No significant evidence of cases of forced or compulsory labor has been found. Thus this topic is omitted from this survey.

populations are taken into account. The information for Argentina should be updated. As the incidence of child labor increases when the income situation of families deteriorates, it is possible that in spite of official efforts at eradication, participation rates have increased.

Measurement systems should improve before any definite conclusion is reached about the distance Southern Countries should go to completely eliminate child labor. More sensitivity to domestic and rural labor is required. The conventional wisdom suggests that significant efforts to prevent young children from entering the working force will still be required any time the employment situation worsens, especially in the case of children residing in households with low skilled parents. Civil society organizations already perform an important task in effecting this prevention. Their nearness to the concrete situations of families allows them to produce early warnings more easily than other actors and to propose more adequate solutions once the problem occurs. The complete eradication of child labor will require their continuing contribution in the near future.

c) Elimination of discrimination

Discrimination in hiring decisions, compensation policies and social protection may occur at different levels in spite of legislative provisions banning them. These forms of unfair treatment are shaped by different mechanisms, some of which are commonly difficult to detect and understand.

Our analysis of labor discrimination in the Southern Cone countries concentrates mainly on gender discrimination. This is one of the best understood and documented and yet difficult to eliminate forms of discrimination. Gender discrimination may be registered at the level of labor legislation. In order to determine the extent to which labor regulation attends to the special needs of female workers we analyze maternity leave rules in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. These rules cover only one part of the special needs of female workers and prevent only some egregious forms of gender discrimination. Yet they allow for a more straightforward assessment than rules covering other forms of gender discrimination like sexual harassment and obstacles to promotion. In the three countries with a Labor Code maternity leave rules satisfy basic ILO requirements. Working mothers are allowed a leave of absence with full payment before and after giving birth, enjoy protection of job stability during and immediately after pregnancy (stronger in the cases of Argentina and Brazil), have access to basic health services and are given time to breast-feed their children. Protection of mothers and children extends longer in Brazil

and Chile than in Argentina, where the right to child-care services, though recognized by law, has not yet been regulated by the Executive.

Table 5
Legislation Protecting Maternity Leave and Child Care

	Argentina	Brazil	Chile	ILO Requirement
Maternity Leave (weeks)	12	16	18	14
Salary during leave	100%	100%	100%	At least 66%
Medical coverage during pregnancy and birth	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Prohibition of firing during pregnancy, leave and immediately after reincorporation	Up to 7.5 months after birth	Up to 5 months after birth	Up to 1 month after birth	Burden of proof on the employer except for reasons not related to pregnancy
Health Coverage to pregnant mothers and their children	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Breast Feeding time	Up to 1 year after birth	Up to ½ year after birth	Up to 2 years after birth	According to national legislation
Right to child care services	Unregulated law	Firms with 29 female employees or more	Firms with more than 20 female employees	Does not include
Leave to take care of sick children	No	No	Yes	Does not include

Source. OIT. 2000. Panorama Laboral 2000, N°7. Lima.

The existence of these legal protections might not entail that all female workers who wish to become mothers enjoy them but raises the costs of infringement upon these rights and offers a chance of judicial redress to victims of maternity rules violations.

Obviously motherhood is only one part of womanhood. Not all female workers can or wish to become mothers. Our assessment of gender discrimination should then include other practices with systematically gender-biased outcomes. Table 6 reports on the evolution of an index of gender discrimination. The index estimates differences in earnings between male and female workers controlled by educational achievement (as measured by average years of schooling for each gender group). It has been developed by Kucera (2000) and represents the extent to which gender considerations filter productivity considerations (assuming similar levels of correspondence between qualifications and occupations in each gender group) in determining compensations. Gender discrimination is very high. Female workers in the Southern Cone earn

significantly less than equally qualified male workers. The wage differential ranges from 26.6% in Argentina, 1990 and 43.5% in Uruguay, 1999.

Table 6
Evolution of gender discrimination by country⁶

Year	Female/Male Wage earnings	Average schooling male workers	Average schooling female workers	Female Achiev- ment C / b	Gender discrimination [100-(a / d)]	
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)		
Argentina	1990	76	8.6	8.9	1.0	26.6
(Greater Buenos Aires)	1994	76	9	9.7	1.1	29.5
	1999	79	10	11.1	1.1	28.8
Brazil	1990	65	6.3	7.2	1.1	43.1
	1993	61	6	6	1.0	39.0
	1999	70	6.9	7.9	1.1	38.9
Chile	1990	66	10	10.6	1.1	37.7
	1994	70	10.4	10.9	1.0	33.2
	1998	74	11.5	12	1.0	29.1
Uruguay	1990	64	8.2	9.2	1.1	43.0
	1994	63	8.4	9.3	1.1	43.1
	1999	68	7.9	9.5	1.2	43.5

Source: Cepal. 2001. Statistical Yearbook. Gender discrimination index calculation based on one of the methods suggested by Kucera (2000).

Gender wage discrimination might be affected directly by cultural factors, operating through firm compensation decisions and information systems, union bargaining focus, and the relative disposition of some women to accept lower wages and act collectively to fight discrimination. Indirectly, gender wage discrimination operates through the labor market, as wages are negatively correlated with unemployment and unemployment tends to hit female workers harder. Cross-country variations seem to represent direct cultural effects and other factors relating to national idiosyncrasies. In this regard Argentina seems to offer an overall less discriminatory social environment while in Uruguay the opposite occurs. Brazil and Chile fall somewhere in between these two poles. Over-time changes within each country are more difficult to interpret. Oscillations in gender-wage discrimination in Argentina seem to parallel the evolution of unemployment (higher in 1994 and 1999 than it was in 1990). The same conclusion can be reached analyzing the stability of gender wage discrimination in Uruguay, for unemployment remained relatively high over the period. The significant reduction operated in Chile in a context of relatively stable unemployment might either represent an institutional transformation of gender relations at the firm level, an efficiency gain prompted by market factors (female workers are better qualified than male workers) or both. The reduction

registered in Brazil seems to reflect changes in the size of the informal sectors. As this sizes decreases wage discrimination should also decrease because wages are lower in the informal sector and women tend to be over represented there.

Our analysis of cross country and overtime variation suggests that advocacy and cooperation with labor unions and business associations can help reduce the wide margin of gender wage discrimination registered in the Southern Cone. Advocacy campaigns might help erode the cultural patterns sustaining lower pay to female workers. Cooperation with businesses and union might help highlight the efficiency gains than can be expected from more equitable compensation policies and might also be conducive to set up institutional protections for gender equity at work. Civil society organizations can significantly contribute to both tasks. As we shall see later civil society organizations have already recognized the importance of this contribution and have made the problem of gender equity the most significant focus of their intervention in the field of labor relations.

The operation of labor market in the Southern Cone reflects other social mechanisms of unlawful discrimination besides the one already analyzed and render other groups vulnerable. A short analysis of social security coverage will help us illustrate this point.

Table 7
Proportion of dependent workers without social security by country, gender, years of schooling and age

		Country and Year		
		Argentina	Brazil	Chile
		1996	1995	1994
		%	%	%
Gender	Male	69.1	59.7	80.41
	Female	65.21	53.6	77.26
	O	33.27	30.5	52.40
Years of schooling	1-8	56.67	50.77	70.02
	9-12	69.16	75.4	81.72
	> 12	73.31	87.8	90.92
Age	15-25	53.52	39.6	69.68
	26-55	73.75	66.1	82.77
	56-65	69.65	58.8	78.37

Source. Márquez and Pagés. 1998: 23.

Social security coverage is incomplete in the three countries included in the analysis. The extension of the social security system is lowest in Brazil and highest in Chile. Retirement protection is lower for female, less educated and especially young workers. Patterns of discrimination are especially acute in Brazil. Differences between Chile and Argentina could be

interpreted as an effect of unemployment and the relative efficacy of labor law enforcement mechanisms.⁷

Labor markets and social settings produce significant discriminations in working conditions that circumvent institutional protections offered by labor laws in the Southern Cone countries. The effect of these discriminations is especially acute with regards to gender equity. Legal protections are less effective at covering populations more vulnerable to unemployment, especially the young and the uneducated poor. In contexts of increasing labor force participation the elimination of discriminations becomes a priority with a view to ensuring decent work. Discriminations do not encourage their victims to abandon the labor market but systematically condemn them to an unfair and unlawful subordinate position. Some of these discriminations might be reduced through advocacy and cooperative strategies. Civil society organizations might contribute to the key tasks of uncovering and eroding social mechanisms of discrimination in the field of labor relations.

2.2.2. Employment, income and skill generation: the effect of labor institutions.

To what extent have Southern Cone countries been able to offer their populations enough income opportunities? What are the main determinants of that ability? Do these determinants vary across countries and over time? Is there a trade-off between the quantity and the quality of employment opportunities a developing economy is able to produce? Which are the institutional and macro-economic conditions most conducive to effectively solving this trade-off?

These questions have spurred intense debates among economists, sociologists and demographers. A conclusive theoretical solution to the mystery of the dynamics of labor markets is yet to be produced. Theoretical disagreements drive to conflicting assessments of the available evidence. Acknowledging the difficulty of the task, this section will summarize the most widely accepted interpretations of the workings of Southern Cone labor markets over the last two decades.

Over the last twenty-five years three of the four countries under scrutiny (Argentina, Chile and Uruguay) have experienced severe unemployment problems at some point. Argentine and Uruguayan workers still suffer them. Chilean workers have enjoyed higher employment rates, although

⁷ These differences are also telling about the limitations of systems of social security contribution. The Argentine case indicates that the disposition of workers to contribute to private pension funds decreases when wages decrease in a context of high unemployment. The higher contribution rate registered in Chile might be reflecting the effects of a context of continuous job creation.

unemployment sharply increased during the 1999 recession. Brazil, on the other hand, presents comparatively lower open urban unemployment rates but employment problems manifest themselves in higher degrees of informality and higher turn over rates. Changes in employment, unemployment and wage levels have been attributed to different reasons in each country and period. We will summarize the evolution of these three indicators in each country over the last decade.

The 1990s presented Argentina with a novel social problem: very high rates of open urban unemployment. Employment problems existed before, but they tended to manifest themselves in increasing degrees of informal employment rather than in high open unemployment rates (Altimir y Beccaria 1999). The inability of the Argentine economy to produce income opportunities resulted all the more surprising for GDP increased at very high rates during the between 1990 and 1994. Some interpretations attributed the increase in unemployment to a growth of rates of participation in the work force, especially among women (Llach and Llach 1998). Data reported in Graph 1 exhibit an increase in the slope of participation growth beginning in 1991, thus seemingly confirming this impression. However Pessino (1997) makes a more convincing case that the growth in unemployment should be attributed to the tendency of firms under productive restructuring to lay-off workers. This tendency proves robust even when controlled by the growth in participation rates. The lay-off wave affected all workers, regardless of gender, age and qualification, but reached more vulnerable workers first. Coinciding with this approach Altimir and Beccaria (1999) suggest that the combination of price stability with low trade barriers made capital goods relatively inexpensive compared with labor, thus encouraging firms to replace labor force. The 1995 recession further reinforced employment problems. After that, employment resumed growth now paralleling GDP growth and thus reversing the counterintuitive tendencies registered during the first years of the stabilization plan. Unemployment rates remained high but decreased consistently between 1995 and 1998. In the last quarter of 1998 Argentina entered into a deep recession from which it has not recovered yet. The deterioration of macro-economic indicators resulted in a dramatic deterioration of employment opportunities. Unemployment increased sharply, as did informality. Both employment and wages plummeted under the strains of recession and rising inflation. The extent to which the Argentine economy might regain part of the terrain lost depends on the behavior of sectors that lead the eventual economic recovery.

To what extent did labor institutions hindered or helped the Argentine economy produce income opportunities during prosperous times? To what extent did they provide workers with protection

from more difficult times? Interestingly the effect of institutions regulating salaries, job stability and social protection seems to vary according to the timing of macro-economic policy. Immediately after the introduction of liberalizing and deregulating measures hiring decisions by firms seem to have been relatively independent from the set of incentives posed by labor laws. Forced to restructure their production processes firms will lay-off workers no matter what. After production is restructured, once firms adapt to new macro-economic environments, more flexible hiring, firing and compensation rules seem to produce a better fit between output and employment. Argentine contract regulations were “flexibilized” in 1991, with little or no impact over the employment level. After 1995, in contrast, more flexible institutions and reductions in labor costs for employers seemed to have helped reduce unemployment rates. A similar conclusion can be sustained by an analysis of the Chilean experience.

Chile enjoyed unemployment rates close to 5% up to 1975. Following the deep recession starting in that year unemployment reached a new peak of 15%. The orthodox adjustment policies introduced by the military regime helped recover production but not employment. In spite of continuous growth unemployment figures remained in two digits. The 1982 recession hit workers extremely hard. Open unemployment climbed to a maximum of 24%, which does not include beneficiaries of emergency programs. Employment began to parallel GDP growth in 1986. (Romaguera, Echevarría and González, 1995) From that moment on the Chilean economy has been able to produce a reasonable level of income earning opportunities (See graph 5). Real industrial wages grew by more than 50 points between 1990 and 1999. The effect of labor institutions seems to have been similar to the one registered in Argentina. High restrictions on collective bargaining and political contestation and flexible labor contract regulations and social security reform were insufficient to prevent high unemployment between 1975 and 1985. Since 1986 labor regulations seem to have helped increased both employment and wages as a result of economic growth.

Employment evolution followed a different pattern in Brazil during the 1990s. Unemployment remained low and employment opportunities rose with relative independence from economic performance (See graphs 3 and 4). In Brazil, changes in macro-economic conditions tend to reflect more on income than on employment opportunities. Output declines like those experienced in 1990 and 1999 turn workers over from the formal to the informal sector of the economy (Amadeo and Camargo 1997) and wages in the informal sector are significantly lower than in the formal one. Under difficult economic times workers and employers tend to adjust compensation by informalizing contractual relationships. This style of *de facto* decentralized bargaining implied a smaller income reduction for workers and important savings in pay roll taxes for employers. Such a short-term

flexibility helped maintain unemployment rates low but conspired against productivity and social protection in the longer term.

The combination of GDP growth and rising unemployment has also been registered in Uruguay. Liberalization of trade and finance policies introduced by the military regime in 1973 produced high rates of output increase between 1976 and 1978 accompanied by a climb of unemployment figures. The recession associated with the 1982 debt crisis lasted three years in Uruguay. After that, growth resumed but employment grew at a much slower pace. Open urban unemployment rates oscillated between 9 and 12% (See Figure 8) between 1990 and 1999. Labor policy followed an erratic path in Uruguay. The restrictions on collective bargaining imposed by the military regime were repealed in 1985. The new democratic government decided also to consistently increase pay roll taxes between 1986 and 1982 (Cassoni et al 1995). Thus Uruguay constitutes a particular case of redressed labor reform. The available evidence is insufficient to make a conclusive case, but the slower pace of employment growth in periods of increasing GDP would indicate that the proposed interpretation about the effect of labor institutions is correct. Flexible labor regulations (small pay roll taxes and no collective bargaining) did not reduce job losses in the first years of macro economic deregulation. After that, increased pay roll taxes and comparatively high wages in highly unionized sectors prevented employment from keeping pace with output growth.

The ability of Southern Cone economies to provide their populations with income opportunities in times of macro-economic reform has depended on the timing of macro-economic policy, economic growth and labor institutions. The adaptation of firms to changing macroeconomic settings entails a loss of jobs for which more flexible labor institutions do not compensate. Growth under more certain macro-economic horizons helps increase employment. Relative flexibility of labor institutions in conditions of macro-economic certainty seems to accelerate (or reduce) the rhythm of job creation. Recessions, on the other hand, always hit job creation, either through increases in unemployment rates or through increases in the proportion of workers in the informal sector. More flexible labor institutions do not seem to smooth the slope of job losses or wage reductions under bad economic times. Although there is an obvious trade-off between wage levels (as an indicator of the quality of jobs created) and employment levels, rising productivity may help achieve both more jobs and better jobs. Available knowledge does not provide a conclusive estimation of the effect of labor institutions on productivity.

Cross-country comparisons suggest that there is no best generally applicable solution to the problems of creating income opportunities for citizens of Southern Cone countries. Only Chile seems to have

found an acceptable working equilibrium. The other three countries face different problems of job creation. Overcoming these problems seems to require both discipline in the pursuit of the priority goals of labor policy and consistency in the combination of different policy instruments. Both attributes, in turn, require robust political support and administrative capabilities to traduce that support into effective implementation. It is unlikely that small, grass root entities like civil society organizations can contribute decisively to producing these two key resources. However, they can perform an important task in the alleviation of the concrete manifestations of structural problems. Increased sensitivity of employment levels to output changes, in economies vulnerable to external shocks, is likely to result in sudden increases in unemployment rates. Under those circumstances civil society organizations may offer helpful remedies.

2.2.3. Social Protection

All labor systems, both flexible and inflexible, aim at consistently providing sources of regular income for workers. Job stability is then a goal of all labor policy. Successful labor institutional models in developed countries define regularity in income sources in different ways. In the US job turnover is high, short periods of unemployment frequent and emergency sources of income in the form of unemployment insurance comparatively less generous. In continental Europe job turn over is lower, prolonged unemployment more frequent and unemployment coverage more significant. In Japan, in turn, job turn over is low and, at least until the early 1990s, unemployment periods short. Measures to compare social protection for workers have been developed and applied to Latin American countries (Márquez and Pagés 1998). We present a qualitative application of these measures to comparatively assess the extent of social protection awarded to workers in the Southern Cone. We also include information about the proportion of people working under informal conditions.

Table 8
Indicators of Social Protection for Workers

	Argentina	Brazil	Uruguay	Chile
Size of informal employment (a)	49.3 % (1998)	47.1 % (1999)	43.1% (1999)	37.5% (1998)
Definition of just cause for dismissal (b)	Does not include economic needs of the firm.	Does not include economic needs of the firm.	Does not include economic needs of the firm	Includes economic needs of the firm
Tenure related severance payment (b)	1 month of wages per year on the job with a maximum of three months 1 month advanced notice (15 days if tenure ranges between 1 and 3 months)	Amount deposited in the FGTS ⁸ plus 40% in case of unjustified dismissal 1 month advance notice	1 month of wages per year on the job with a maximum of six months No advance notice	1 month of wages per year of service with a maximum of 11 months 1 month advance notice 30% surcharge if dismissal deemed unfair (2001 reform)
Length of probationary period (b)	Between 3 and 6 months	3 months	Only exceptionally accepted by the courts	3 months (2001 reform)
Unemployment insurance availability and coverage (c)	Since 1991. Coverage up to 13 months. Benefit between \$ 200 and \$ 300. Does not cover workers in the informal sector. Estimated recipients 7% of the unemployed (1998). Since 2002. Insurance for unemployed heads of household school age children. \$ 150 a month Approximately 400.000 beneficiaries.	Since 1986. Benefits of up to 4 months. Recipients: 77.1% of all workers fired (1993)	Since 1982. Coverage for up to 6 months. Benefit around 50% of average industrial wage 40% of employed fulfill requirements. 14.560 recipients.	Since 1974. Recipients of welfare assistance who have lost their jobs in the formal sector. Up to 12 months and decreasing over time. Estimated recipients 37% of the unemployed

(a) Source: ILO, Based on Home Surveys and other official sources (revised series) Panorama Laboral 2000 – INFORMA, 59-61.

(b) Castells 2000

(c) Sources: For Argentina, Altimir and Beccaria 1999. For Brazil, Amadeo and Camargo 1997. For Uruguay Cassoni et al 1995. For Chile Cortázar 1997.

The proportion of workers whose employment conditions do not fully coincide with legal prescriptions is high in all four countries. The extent of legal coverage varies across sectors and over time and is positively correlated with the structural conditions that restrict employment growth. Not surprisingly, informality is lower in Chile, where the employment situation is better and labor law enforcement has improved over the last decade. However, social protection should be higher considering the general performance of the Chilean economy. One of every two workers does not enjoy full social protection in Brazil and Argentina. The determinants of informality in each country might be different. Informality could be reduced in Brazil through reforms that modify incentives for

⁸ Fundo de Garantia por Tempo de Serviço.

employers and workers. Argentine informality, in turn, appears to be more closely related with structural factors. The incidence of informality in Uruguay is strikingly large considering that the state—a typically formal employer—is the most important source of jobs in the country. Controlling for state employment, the incidence of informality in Uruguay indicates a significant vulnerability of its labor market.

Even when they are fully applied, labor laws in the Southern Cone fall short of providing a reliable source of regular income for workers, independently of general economic conditions. Severance payments are prescribed in order to raise the costs of firing workers and promoting job stability. The size of these payments, however, relates imperfectly to job tenure. The closest fit between severance payments size and job tenure is found in Brazil. Yet the high turn over rates and the incidence of informality neutralize the influence of this provision. Severance payments are capped in Argentina, Uruguay and Chile. In this last country, in addition, labor law recognizes as just cause the economic needs of firms, thus making severance payments mandatory only in cases of grossly arbitrary dismissal. Recent labor reforms in Chile have tried to restrict the scope of causes that may be deemed just, first by requiring their specification (1990; Cortázar 1997) and recently by imposing a 30% fine on severance payments for dismissals found unfair by the courts.

Recent reforms that allow short-term contracts for trial periods with reduced or no benefits for the workers involved have further compromised job stability in Argentina, Chile and Brazil. Argentine law allows for longer trial periods but subject the validity of these contracts to collective agreements. The probability that a given worker loses her job if economic conditions worsen is higher in Southern Cone countries than in most OECD countries.

The chances that she finds a supplementary source of income are poor. With the partial exception of Brazil unemployment insurance systems coverage is insufficient. Unemployment benefits in Chile, Argentina and Uruguay are targeted at workers previously covered by a formal contract. Since unemployment is more likely to hit first and worst workers in the informal sector of the economy, there is a systematic gap between the distribution of unemployment benefits and the distribution of needs for unemployment protection. This gap has been especially significant in Argentina, where only 7% of the unemployed received payments in 1998.

Imperfect social coverage has been supplemented in all Southern Cone countries with employment and income promotion programs targeted at populations facing specific difficulties to access labor markets. Available estimations indicate these programs reached 3,544,300 people in Argentina,

7,333,600 in Brazil and 76,800 in Chile between 1990 and 1995 (Verdera 1998: 31). Civil society organizations have participated actively and in different roles in the implementation of employment and income programs. The potential efficacy and comparative advantages of these strategies *vis a vis* more traditional macro approaches to social protection are widely debated. An interesting alternative has recently been proposed in Argentina. An income program aimed at unemployed heads of household with school age children has recently been implemented by the national government. Data about the results of this program will provide a useful standard to comparatively assess the efficacy of targeted interventions.

The insufficiency of social protection magnifies the deleterious social effects of employment creation problems. It should be born in mind that we are setting our assessment of decent work at a very aggregate level. Distinctions by age, income group and region would provide a more accurate but certainly not more optimistic picture. It is possible that incomplete social protection stems from the very same institutional ills that hinder robust product and employment growth. If this is the case a fundamentally sound approach to macro – level problems should be given priority over local or targeted solutions.

As we have seen only one (Chile) of the four countries under scrutiny has been able to consistently provide meaningful income earning opportunities to its working age citizens. Brazil faces the challenge of bridging the gap between the formal and the informal sector and reducing disparities between rural and urban areas. Argentine and Uruguayan workers have seen their employment opportunities and living standards deteriorate over the last few years. The identified tendencies indicate, however, that if and when growth resumes, employment indicators should improve in these two countries. In the meantime, available social protection measures appear to be vastly insufficient not only to Argentine and Uruguayan workers but also to their Brazilian and Chilean colleagues. Efforts are required to reduce the incidence of informality in labor relations and to put in place stronger and more easily accessible protection systems. Even in the case that all Southern Cone countries solve their basic structural problems, social mechanisms of discrimination in labor relations are likely to remain in place, especially with regards to gender. It is in this last field that civil society organizations could make their most significant contribution.

2.2.4. Social dialogue: arenas of decent work promotion in the Southern Cone

Which are the institutional settings under which decisions affecting decent work are taken? How do the main partners in decent work promotion interact? Do civil society organizations partake of those interactions? Which roles do they perform?

Policies affecting the decency of working conditions are taken at the intersection of two institutional arenas: the collective bargaining system and the political system. This intersection adopts peculiar forms in each country. In a valuable effort to systematically analyze this intersection Lesley O'Connell (1999) focuses on the degree to which collective bargaining operates autonomously from state authorities and on the extent to which decisions made at lower levels of aggregation (subnational in contrast with national, firm in contrast with activity) are able to effectively shape labor relations. O'Connell's analysis highlights the economic dimensions of collective negotiations. Institutional features become relevant to the extent that they render productive units more or less able to efficiently allocate resources and labor relations partners more or less able to internalize the costs of changes in resource allocations. These dimensions are relatively less important for the purpose of our inquiry. Our interest is to determine to what extent different forms of decision making affect the ability of a society to consistently produce (more or less) decent working conditions. With this aim in mind we bring into our analysis more strictly political variables. First, because decent working conditions depend not only on legally binding agreements between workers and employers about the structure and content of labor contracts but also politically binding agreements (or lack thereof) among these social partners about the fundamental goals of macro-economic management. Secondly, because the state, the institutional actor that controls the decisive resources that make all agreements binding, is subject to peculiar institutional constraints (partisan and constitutional). These constraints affect not only the ability of the state to partake of tripartite instances of social dialogue but more importantly its capabilities to put the agreements resulting from dialogue into effect. Finally, because the state is not the only actor who plays on two tables at the same time. Some labor unions and business associations are firmly identified with political parties and thus have a stake as high in the partisan game as in the social arena.

Table 9
Institutional shape of labor policy arenas

	Argentina	Brazil	Chile	Uruguay
Centralization in collective bargaining	Higher	Higher	Lower	Lower
Is collective bargaining allowed at all levels of aggregation?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Do collective agreements require validation from the National Government?	Yes	No	No	No
Is there social dialogue at the national level?	No	No	Yes	Yes
Does government intervene?	-	-	Yes	No
Do unions or business associations have clear partisan identifications	Unions	Neither	Business	Neither
Probability of divided government	High	High	High	High
Patterns of executive legislative relationships	Conflictive	Conflictive	Cooperative	Cooperative

Negotiations between employers and workers enjoy the highest degree of autonomy in Uruguay. The dominant pattern of collective bargaining is decentralized, bargaining can occur at all levels of aggregation and agreements require no formal validation from state authorities. However, it should be kept in mind that employers are not legally required to negotiate and that the proportion of workers in the private sector protected by collective contracts is low. Restrictions on the level at which negotiations are allowed limit the autonomy of Chilean partners, especially workers, and also in this case collective contract coverage is low (around 9.9% in 1992, Romaguera et al 1995). However social cooperation occurs in the setting of national goals for the regulation of labor markets. This cooperation is promoted and endorsed by the national state in the case of Chile and conducted without state participation in Uruguay.

In countries with more centralized patterns of collective bargaining cooperation over overarching policies does not take place. The reasons for this correspondence are not completely clear. The correspondence can simply represent the institutional inertia of inherited highly corporatist models of interest representation and histories of subordination of societal actors to state guidance. It could also represent rentistic strategies of collective actors who prefer to let the state bear the cost of setting the fundamentals of social cooperation and eventually veto initiatives that affect their short-term interests.

We have then two basic models of labor policy making. One with comparatively high social cooperation at the national level another with lower levels of cooperation. The basic tendencies of

these two models are further reinforced if we take political variables into account. The effectiveness of the state as a player depends on the extent to which it is able to solve its internal coordination problems. We should keep in mind that the state is not a unitary actor but a bundle of institutional actors legally entitled to intervene in the production of collectively binding decisions and legally mandated to control each other's intervention. In other words, these states are republics, with some measure of division of powers and a requirement to produce agreements between players with different interests who are constitutionally endowed with reciprocal veto powers. The extent to which the state is able to solve its coordination problems at the national level depends on the probability that the executive is backed by a majority of representatives in Congress. If this is not the case, if there is divided government, it is more likely that state interventions in industrial relations are less effective for other players will be able to use the state's internal differences to their advantage. Independently of the size and discipline of the group of legislators supporting the national executive, state interventions should be more effective if the pattern of interaction between the President and Congress is predominantly cooperative. National states in Argentina and Brazil suffer both from problems to provide their Presidents with robust support in Congress and conflictive relations between the executive and the legislature. This does not necessarily entail that Presidents are blocked, for Constitutions endow them with powers to legislate without Congress involvement. Yet this kind of legislation is very costly and faces the possibility of being repealed at any time. Chilean and Uruguayan Presidents, in contrast, may build upon a more cooperative relationship with Congress, even though they sometimes have to face opposition majorities.

Within each model, the relationships between social actors and political parties introduce a complementary source of institutional variation. Dominant labor unions have a firm compromise with the electoral success of the Justicialista Party in Argentina. In Chile business leaders are actively involved with and ideologically committed to the positions defended by UDI and Renovación Nacional in Congress (especially in the Senate). The link between functional and territorial representation is not as clear in Brazil or Uruguay. Certainly the PT has built its electoral success on the support of Southeastern labor unions. Yet the PT is far from being a dominant force in Congress and the reproduction of these unions is independent of the electoral success of the party. Similarly, some unions are identified with the positions of Frente Amplio in Uruguay. Yet this identification entails no long-term institutional compromise. The partisan commitment of societal actors may, under certain conditions, bring them closer to adopting nation-wide policy goals (Murillo 1994). In this respect Peronist union leaders may be expected to support national initiatives by Peronist Presidents and oppose initiatives of non-Peronist presidents, thus sometimes helping overcome and sometimes reinforcing the obstacles to social cooperation presented by the larger institutional

structure. Partisan business Chilean leaders, in turn, have faced Presidents with strong constitutional prerogatives and had them an incentive to use their influence to moderate the legislative impetus of the governing coalition. The access of a right of center party to the presidency might alter this equilibrium either through the adoption of a more independent agenda by business organizations or through the unilateral imposition of a business oriented agenda in Congress.

What sorts of roles could civil society organizations perform in each policy arena? Do different institutional models of social dialogue and labor policy making offer different opportunities for the productive involvement of civil society organizations? To answer these questions it is necessary to keep in mind what kinds of resources do civil society organizations control and later estimate how valuable those resources might be in different policy arenas.⁹ Civil society organizations control valuable political resources: credibility, mobilization capacity, and information about the particular needs and views of their constituencies. These resources should be more valuable in less competitive institutional arenas. Organizations enjoying monopoly rights over representation have a weaker incentive to produce credibility and detailed information about their constituencies. They might control big and powerful mobilization machines but these are likely to be more costly and less reliable than grass roots mobilization networks constructed by civil society organizations. Civil society organizations typically do not control another valuable political resource: money. Monopolistic networks or the state might be interested in paying for civil society credibility, mobilization capacity and information in order to legitimize policy design and optimize policy implementation. This partnership could be virtuous as long as civil society organizations do not become financially dependent on payments from bigger social partners. As financial dependence increases the currency in which civil society organizations trade loses value. Therefore civil society organizations should be expected to be invited and willing to cooperate in low competition policy arenas but to jealously preserve their status of fellow traveler.

Participants in more competitive labor policy settings face stronger incentives to produce credibility and mobilization capacity on their own. In this respect the contribution of civil society organizations loses value. However their information production capacities remain important for they may help bigger organizations internalize the interests of third parties or interests defined at lower levels of aggregation (Baccaro 2000). If this is correct their contribution should be more significant for policy design than for policy implementation.

⁹ For a complete theoretical discussion of this matter see Baccaro 2000 and 2001.

According to these considerations we expect to find more involvement of civil society organizations in labor policy networks in Argentina and Brazil. We also expect the dangers of co-optation and “vicious” cooperation to be greater in these cases. We expect civil society organizations to play a less prominent role in Chile and Uruguay and that their contributions concentrate at the policy design stage. In all cases we expect that civil society organizations concentrate on the representation of interests defined at a lower level of aggregation than those represented by business associations, labor unions or political parties. With regards to decent work promotion, their contribution should be more significant to raise awareness about discrimination problems and supplement defective social protection than to promote employment and enforce fundamental rights.



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3. Size and structure of the Civil Society field in the Southern Cone

According to the most widely accepted estimates, the number of voluntary associations operating outside the fields defined by market and state relations has grown considerably over the last decade. The reasons for this growth are still unclear. Conceptual ambiguity testifies to the weakness of the theoretical grasp on this phenomenon. Negative denominations prevail. The most widely used is to refer to this sort of association is “non governmental organization.” As this denomination does not clearly distinguish between business firms, which are also voluntary and non governmental, and other kinds of associations, some authors prefer the equally negative qualification of “not for profit” organizations. Then again, the state is also “not for profit.” Recurrence to negative names underlines the fact that we seem to know what voluntary associations are not but still cannot agree in determining what exactly they are. In keeping with the terminology proposed by the project to which this report contributes, we have preferred here the denomination “civil society organization” and have adopted for our investigation the pragmatic approach of considering civil society organizations all voluntary associations which are neither the state, nor firms or labor unions. This denomination has problems of its own, for the classical political theory literature offers significantly different yet equally influential understandings of what counts as civil society. Additionally, everyday uses of the term would certainly place both firms and trade unions under this rubric. In spite of these terminological problems, “civil society organizations” has been preferred to already available negative names.

Participants in one of the most ambitious comparative studies of recent civil society development (Salamon et al 1999) propose as distinctive attributes of these social entities:¹⁰

- their *organization*, that is, the fact that they are formally constituted and enjoy some form of legal recognition;
- their *private* character, e.g. the fact that they are institutionally independent from government
- their *self government*, that is the fact that no external actor determines their goals and strategies
- their *non distribution of benefits*; e.g. even though they do generate benefits, they are not redistributed among members of the institution but reinvested, and
- their *voluntary* character; that is, the fact that members can enter and leave the organization at will.

¹⁰ They use the term “not for profit” with for all relevant purpose should be considered semantically equivalent to our “civil society organizations” with the important caveat that labor unions are counted as “not for profit” and have not been considered by us as “civil society organizations”.

The ensuing tables offer an approximate comparative idea of the size and maturity of civil society organizations in Argentina and Brazil. Including trade unions in the count, civil society organizations account for 6.03% of total employment in Argentina and for 2.54% in Brazil. The mass of people involved grows considerably if volunteers are taken into consideration.

Table 10
Non for profit Sector. Employment and Volunteers by region/country, 1995

Region/Country	Employees	Share of total employment %	Employees + Volunteers
Developed Countries	27,790,424	9.79	306,487,968
Latin America (5 countries)	2,561,803	3.24	95,932,420
Argentina	659,425	6.03	10,935,317
Brazil	1,173,766	2.54	46,202,316

Source: Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, Phase II. : <http://www.jhu.edu/~cnp/>

Even though the economic significance of civil society organizations in Argentina is significantly higher than the Latin American average, it exhibits a ratio of volunteers to employees much lower than the regional average and the one registered in the Brazilian case. In this respect the economic structure of civil society in this country resembles the pattern registered in developed ones. The meaning of this difference is ambiguous. It might reflect the fact that Argentine associations can afford to rely on more specialized help (the inclusion of labor unions in the survey, which control vast amounts of money, might account for this difference). It might also be the case that they are not as effective at motivating compromise in the wider public as their regional counterparts. In any case, a cursory glance at the information of civil society organization employment in Argentina and Brazil indicates that they constitute a significant presence in both countries.

During 1995 civil society organizations collected 13.2 billion dollars in revenue in Argentina and 11.4 billion in Brazil.

Table 11
Nonprofit revenues by source and region, 1995

Region/Country	Revenue Sources (does not include voluntary input from members)			Total Revenue (millions of dollars)
	Public Sector %	Private Giving %	Fees, Charges %	
Developed Countries	48.4	7.4	44.2	1,255,799
Latin America (5 countries)	15.3	10.3	74.4	29,256
Argentina	19.5	7.5	73.1	13,321
Brazil	15.5	10.7	73.8	11,390

Source: Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, Phase II: <http://www.jhu.edu/~cnp/>

Three quarters of this revenue comes from the collection of fees or charges for services. State contributions run a distant second as a revenue source but are comparatively more important in Argentina (probably owing to the weight of labor unions whose funds are collected as wage taxes by the state and then distributed to labor organizations). The structure of revenue is significantly different in the developed countries where state funds account for a much larger share. This difference becomes even more noticeable when contributions from members are brought into the picture. This inclusion brings the average share of private giving to 32.8% in the case of developed countries and to only 19.4% for Latin American ones. Private giving for Argentina stands above average (23%) and in Brazil below average (16.3%). Why aren't civil society organizations in Latin America able to translate their ability to motivate voluntary contribution of time into voluntary contributions of money? The available evidence does not suffice to conclusively answer this question. The fact that the ratio of voluntary help to employees decreases as relative affluence increases seems to indicate that the disposition to donate money is simply a direct proportion of average per capita income or that time becomes more scarce in more affluent economies or both. Independently of the causation of this structure the important conclusion to keep in mind is that civil society organizations are entities that need to sell services to survive and that depend to a large extent on financial efforts made by their own members.

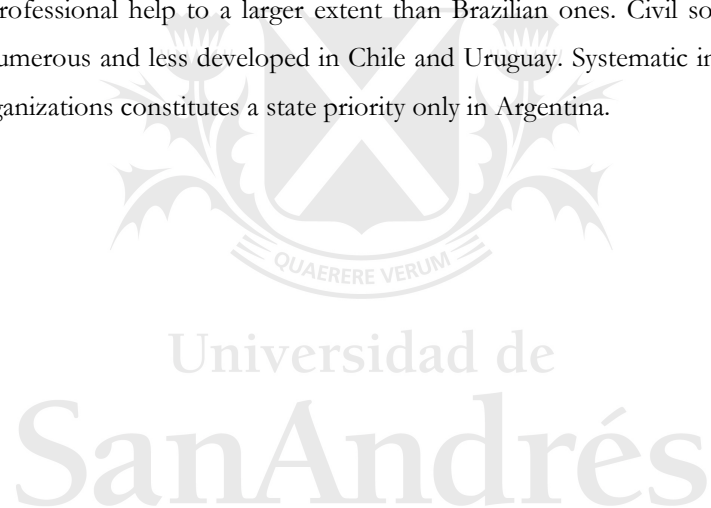
The predominant field of activity of these organizations is education and research (35% of employment in Argentina and 34% in Brazil). Unfortunately the classification of activities used in this study does not allow us to estimate the weight of organizations involved in the labor field. The National Argentine registry of NGOs lists 1186 not for profit organizations devoted to "labor issues" in the whole country, 204 of them in the Greater Buenos Aires Area.¹¹ No equivalent information is available for the rest of the cases.

The number and complexity of websites devoted to civil society organizations in each country could be used as a very rough proximate estimate of the size and weight of this sector. There is only one official registry published on line, the Argentine site [particip.ar](http://www.particip.ar/default.htm) (<http://www.particip.ar/default.htm>). The Argentine is the only Southern Cone government with a dependency strictly devoted to Civil Society Organizations, the CENOC, located within the Ministry of Social Development. Efforts are being made at updating registries of voluntary associations at the city and national levels. There are

¹¹ Source: Particip.ar: Portal del estado argentino para las organizaciones de la sociedad civil. <http://www.particip.ar/default.htm> A complete assessment of sources of information about NGOs in Argentina is offered by Roitter 2000.

no comparable official sources in the other three countries, either on or off line. The most complete online source for Brazilian organizations is the portal run by the Associação Brasileira de Organizações Não Governamentais: <http://www.abong.org.br/>, itself a civil society organization. Chilean (<http://www.ong.cl/>) and Uruguayan (<http://www.socwatch.org.uy/2000/esp/index2000.html>) on line sources are significantly less developed.

Available quantitative evidence indicates that civil society organizations constitute a significant social force in Argentina and Brazil. The whole sector mobilizes vast amounts of human and financial resources. In the two most thoroughly surveyed countries civil society organizations concentrate mainly in the field of education and research. The financial structure of the civil society sector, as measured by the main sources of funding, is largely similar in both countries. Argentine organizations tend to rely on professional help to a larger extent than Brazilian ones. Civil society organizations seem to be less numerous and less developed in Chile and Uruguay. Systematic institutional support to civil society organizations constitutes a state priority only in Argentina.



4. An indicative survey of Civil Society Organizations in the Southern Cone

Available data do not permit to estimate the relative weight of civil society organizations working on issues pertaining to decent work promotion. However a survey of centralized physical and virtual registries plus consultations with local experts allowed us to identify a core of civil society organizations with prominent activities and manifest commitment to promoting decent work in each country.

Authorities of these organizations responded to a brief structured questionnaire aimed at collecting basic data about the degree of institutionalization, structure, main goals, activities and strategies of these organizations. The results of the survey will be summarily exposed and analyzed in this section¹²

Table 12
Does your institution?

	Country				Total Yes %
	Argentina Yes %	Brazil Yes %	Chile Yes %	Uruguay Yes %	
Have centers in other cities in the country?	18	29	50	38	33
Have members or affiliate groups in other cities in the country?	41	52	50	25	41
Have centers or members in foreign countries?	18	5	-	13	9
Have a formal charter, code or set of rules?	91	100	95	100	97
Have a legal certification or other sort of formal recognition from the state?	100	95	100	100	99
Count on a group of voluntary collaborators who are members of the institution?	73	91	45	75	71
Hire administrative personnel?	36	95	95	92	79
Hire consultants or technical assistants?	46	81	80	75	70

The institutions included in the sample satisfy the requirement of organization proposed by the literature. All but one have been officially recognized by the state and only two do not have a formal charter or set of rules.

¹² Results are expressed as percentages to facilitate comparisons. The sample is not statistically representative. Interpretations of percent differentials should take into account that one case represents around 5% of the sample for each country. The survey covered 87 cases in total. Interviews were conducted between the first and the third week of April 2002.

The combined reliance on hired and voluntary personnel registered in representative quantitative studies is also confirmed. Figures for employment of administrative and technical personnel show no significant cross-country variation except for the intriguing figures registered for Argentina. Results of larger quantitative studies led us to expect a higher incidence of employees among organizations in this country. One possible interpretation is that our sample is simply biased towards smaller associations, which is unlikely given the expert advice upon which we relied yet possible given the case selection method implemented. One more interesting and equally plausible interpretation is that the field of organized collective action in labor matters is overcrowded by powerful, skillful and firmly rooted labor unions. If these were the case it should be expected that less financial resources are left for civil society organizations. Additionally it is also possible that recession affected negatively the financial capabilities of Argentine organizations.

Most organizations working in the field of labor relations are locally rooted. Only 33% percent of the consulted institutions have centers in more than one city in the country and only 41% have members or affiliate groups in more than one location. International organizations (those with centers or members outside the country) weigh very lightly in the field which is contrary with stereotypical images yet consistent with figures reported in the Johns Hopkins study of Argentina and Brazil (2% of expenditures and 1% of total employment in Argentina, and 1% of expenditures in Brazil are reported as devoted to international activities).

Focus on the local level does not prevent these organizations from partaking of networks at the national, Latin American or wider level. Yet larger than national scope is only significant for only a half of the sample. The more abundantly and widely connected associations are the Brazilian ones. Networking is less intense (though still dominant) in Argentina.

Table 13
Does your institution partake of networks or federations...?

	Country				Total Yes %
	Argentina Yes %	Brazil Yes %	Chile Yes %	Uruguay Yes %	
At the local or provincial level?	77	95	85	79	84
At the national level?	59	91	80	92	81
In Latin America?	50	57	50	63	55
Outside Latin America?	50	52	55	58	54

The typical civil society organization performing activities in the field of labor relations in the Southern Cone is relatively young. The average age registered for the whole sample is 15 years, with comparatively older institutions located in Uruguay and Brazil. How old is 15 years for a civil society organization? Considering that these are institutions working at the local level and heavily relying on voluntary work and contributions, and the fact that they have survived the economic volatility that affected these countries in the last 25 years, 15 years indicates a remarkable degree of institutional resilience.

Civil society organizations in the Southern Cone operate with relatively modest budgets. Brazilian organizations are comparatively more affluent. Total budget figures might indicate the combined effect of institutional fund raising capabilities, the intensity of competition with other kinds of institutions for available financial resources, general economic conditions in the country and exchange rates at the time of the survey (the figure is expressed in current US dollars). The very low value registered in Argentina should be interpreted in the context of economic crisis under which the survey was performed. In the opposite direction, more favorable economic conditions in Chile allowed organizations in that country more financial power than would have been expected considering previous information about their level of institutional development.

Table 14
Institutionalization Indicators

		Country				Total
		Argentina	Brazil	Chile	Uruguay	
Age (*)	Mean	11.5	17.9	11.5	19.6	15.3
	St. Dev	(10.4)	(9.2)	(7.3)	(10.2)	(10)
	Median	10	16	9	17	14
	Percentile 25	2.75	12	5	13	7
	Percentile 75	14	23.5	18	24	20
	Maximum	44	38	23	41 (92)	44
Budget (year 2000, in US dollars)	Mean	127,700	416,052	390,558	295,652	303,314
	St. Dev	(277,800)	(424,368)	(391,012)	(351,359)	(375,228)
	Median	28,950	300,000	200,000	100,000	150,000
	Percentile 25	12,000	153,800	112,500	55,000	60,600
	Percentile 75	117,500	515,000	627,500	500,000	380,000
	Maximum	1,200,000	1,731,000	1,300,000	1,200,000	1,731,000

(*): Mean for the whole sample excludes 1 case in Uruguay of age 92

There are no remarkable differences in terms of authority structures. Executive decisions tend to be taken by collective directing bodies. There is a slight tendency among Brazilian institutions to decide in a more deliberative manner.

Table 15
In your institution, executive decisions are taken by...?

	Country				Total %
	Argentina %	Brazil %	Chile %	Uruguay %	
One person (Executive Director, Secretary, President)	5	5	15	4	7
A group of members in the institution (executive board, directorate)	77	62	70	83	74
An assembly of all formal members	18	33	15	13	20

Table 16
To be a full member of your institution is it necessary to...?

	Country				Total Yes %
	Argentina Yes %	Brazil Yes %	Chile Yes %	Uruguay Yes %	
Register formally?	59	38	40	58	49
Pay regular membership dues?	50	19	35	33	35
Take part regularly in the activities of the institution?	73	76	45	71	67

Southern Cone civil society organizations are relatively open social orders. Typically membership requires no more than participating of activities organized by the institution. Formal registration is required only in one half of the cases and more stringent requisites (like membership dues) are imposed by only one third of the sample. However in close to 40% of the cases some eligibility requirement, generally relating to gender, age or social condition attributes. The more selective institutions are the Argentine ones. The less restrictive the Brazilian.

Interestingly, the analysis of basic institutional characteristics indicates that similarities predominate over differences across countries. Civil society organizations acting in the field of labor relations are basically the same kind of social entity. It is possible that the parameters of size, age and local focus influence more decisively than national contexts in the choice of institutional structures. It is also

possible that these are very simple social orders dealing with clearly identifiable and well-known social problems.

Cross countries differences manifest themselves in what civil society organizations do not in what they are. Respondents were presented with a series of activities and asked to indicate how frequently their institutions performed those activities. Results are reported grouping activities according to their dominant characteristic. Advocacy and mobilization activities are listed first (1-5). Cooperation with labor policy design and implementation activities are listed second (6-10). Direct service provision to constituencies are listed last (11-14).

Interestingly there are no clear patterns of concentration in one particular group of activities. The menu of frequent practices of these organizations combines a measure of information production and dissemination, a measure of striving for political influence and a measure of direct service provision to their constituents. The one activity on which coincidence extends beyond national borders is the offering of training courses for workers. This coincidence seems to be expressing the most efficient funding strategy these institutions have found and confirms data of the predominance of educational concerns reported in the Johns Hopkins study. These concerns do not appear to express a preoccupation with skill production in and of itself but a strategy of service provision ideally suited to the fund raising capabilities and financial needs of these organizations. The communication abilities and personal bonds developed over training courses might constitute valuable political resources for the consolidation of these organizations at the local level and could be productively exploited by coordinated initiatives in multiple communities.

Argentine organizations concentrate their advocacy efforts in the production and dissemination of studies and statistical information, their political efforts in the negotiating with state officials (perhaps mirroring the interest in CSOs-state cooperation that Argentine officials seem to have developed). and in training and job opportunity creation in terms of service delivery, an interest perhaps developed under the influence of the economic crisis.

Table 17
How often does your institution..?

		Country				Total
		Argentina	Brazil	Chile	Uruguay	
1) Partake of public demonstrations or mobilizes its members?	Regularly	14	71	20	46	38
	Seldom	36	24	20	46	32
	Never	50	5	60	8	30
2) Denounce labor rights violations in the media?	Regularly	27	10	25	21	21
	Seldom	32	62	25	38	39
	Never	41	29	50	42	40
3) Perform studies on the situation of workers?	Regularly	63	52	45	58	55
	Seldom	14	38	45	38	33
	Never	23	10	10	4	12
4) Collect and publish statistical information about the situation of workers?	Regularly	46	24	45	13	31
	Seldom	27	38	30	50	37
	Never	27	38	25	38	32
5) Conduct public information campaigns about the rights of workers?	Regularly	44	33	20	29	32
	Seldom	36	48	40	46	43
	Never	18	19	40	25	25
6) Partake of negotiations or discussions with state officials?	Regularly	72	24	70	71	60
	Seldom	18	33	15	21	22
	Never	9	43	15	8	18
7) Partake of negotiations or discussions with employers?	Regularly	45	-	50	46	36
	Seldom	32	43	35	42	38
	Never	23	57	15	13	26
8) Provide technical assistance to labor unions?	Regularly	18	29	40	33	33
	Seldom	18	14	35	29	24
	Never	64	43	25	38	43
9) Implement state designed social projects?	Regularly	36	30	40	50	39
	Seldom	23	33	30	33	30
	Never	41	38	30	17	31
10) Implement projects designed by international organizations (ILO, WB, IDB, IAF, etc.)	Regularly	23	19	20	46	27
	Seldom	36	33	40	33	36
	Never	41	48	40	21	37
11) Offer legal assistance to workers?	Regularly	27	24	30	54	34
	Seldom	36	19	35	17	26
	Never	36	57	35	29	39
12) Offer training courses to workers?	Regularly	68	76	75	71	72
	Seldom	18	5	10	17	13
	Never	14	19	15	13	15
13) Provide workers with information about employment opportunities?	Regularly	64	48	40	58	53
	Seldom	18	38	35	21	28
	Never	18	14	25	21	20
14) Produce employment opportunities for its members?	Regularly	46	43	35	50	44
	Seldom	46	38	50	25	39
	Never	9	19	15	25	17

Brazilian organizations, in contrast, seem to resemble more closely the social movement model. Studies are the most commonly used strategy of information production and public demonstration the privileged tool to gain political leverage. Few Brazilian institutions report to negotiate frequently with state authorities and none discusses regularly with employers. As in the whole sample training is the most frequent service provision strategy and, like in Argentina, job opportunity is also important. With regards to the interest in mobilization reported by Brazilian institution it is interesting to notice that denunciations of labor right violations in the media does not appear as an important tool in any of the countries. Given the size and financial restrictions of these institutions one would have expected that they resorted to media communication to more efficiently pursue their advocacy goals. On the contrary, massive, impersonal and widespread communication seems to be regarded as less efficient in comparison with focused, targeted and personal contacts.

Negotiations with state officials and, to a lesser extent, with employers, seem to be the most significant political activities for Chilean organizations. Unlike their Brazilian and Argentine colleagues, Chilean civil society organizations privilege technical assistance and implementation of state designed project to direct service provision (with the exception of training activities already discussed). This combination of strategies may probably reflect the comparatively high degree of political and labor relations institutionalization registered in Chile.

Uruguayan organizations, finally, adopt a set of strategies closely resembling the one typically used by Argentine organizations. The main difference between these two cases seems to reside in the higher frequency of public demonstration to which Uruguayan organizations resort. Reflecting the problems of employment in the country, job opportunity creation figure prominently among service provision activities.

Which objectives do these organizations pursue through these strategies? An analysis of average responses indicates that civil society organizations have a clear grasp of their competitive advantage in labor policy fields. Discrimination elimination goals are ranked first in all countries, especially gender discrimination. Besides this common trend, the rest of the answers reflect a particular reading of the main labor policy problems in each country. Fundamental rights to association and participation figure prominently in Brazil. Uruguayan organizations offer a less clear picture ranking very high almost all decent work goals. Chilean organizations, in turn, seem very selective and almost exclusively concentrated in female employment promotion. Argentine organizations, finally, appear to assume discrimination reduction goals in broader terms.

Table 18
How important is to your institution's mission..?
Average values, in a scale from 1 (less important) to 5 (most important)

	Country				Total
	Argentina	Brazil	Chile	Uruguay	
To promote female employment	4.24	4.45	4.35	4.67	4.44
To reduce gender discrimination at the working place	4.23	4.75	3.85	4.46	4.33
To reduce social discrimination in employment decisions	4.77	4.3	3.6	4.42	4.29
To promote youth employment	4.19	4.35	3.75	4.42	4.19
To reduce gender discrimination in employment decisions	4.36	3.75	3.8	4.58	4.15
To promote wage equity	4.05	4.15	3.85	4.33	4.1
To ensure safe and healthy working conditions	4.0	4.0	3.9	4.3	4.06
To protect workers' right to association	3.71	4.6	3.65	4.21	4.05
To promote dialogue between workers, employers and the state	3.73	3.35	3.7	4.42	3.83
To monitor labor law enforcement	3.8	3.9	3.65	3.96	3.83
To promote workers' participation in labor policy discussion	3.41	4.0	3.45	4.04	3.73
To offer social protection to the unemployed	3.86	3.55	3.5	3.88	3.71
To protect the workers' right to rest	3.52	3.8	3.55	3.75	3.66
To promote handicapped people employment	4.05	3.5	3.3	3.54	3.6
To protect workers' right to a limited work day	3.38	3.3	3.15	3.54	3.35
To offer social protection to retired workers	3.55	3.25	3	2.83	3.14

Analysis of organizational characteristics based on our survey confirms the results of recent studies. Civil society organizations performing activities in the field of labor relations are young, locally focused and institutionalized organizations relying both on hired and voluntary collaborators. The incidence of international organizations is lower than first expected and establishment of networks is common, especially at the national level.

Driven by the need to meet their relatively modest financial necessities these organizations resort frequently to direct service provision activities, especially training. Their disposition to cooperate with state authorities and, to a lesser extent, labor unions and firms is higher than commonly assumed. To pursue their advocacy goals production of specialized information and focused dissemination strategies are preferred over widespread awareness raising campaigns. Provision of employment opportunities to constituencies are frequent in countries facing severe unemployment problems.

Civil society organizations in the Southern Cone seems to clearly recognize the most productive ways in which they can contribute to promoting decent work in their countries. Their size, location and direct contact with constituencies equip them best to effectively partake in the struggle against discrimination. Other decent work policy goals more closely related with the traditional but still valid labor agenda are valued in countries with comparatively high ideological charge in labor discourse like Uruguay and Brazil.



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5. Concluding remarks

Yes, there is a sizable sector of civil society organizations committed to promoting decent work in the Southern Cone countries. Although predominantly young they seem to have successfully endured dramatic changes in political regime, labor regulations and economic conditions. A disciplined focus on the local level and a clear recognition of their most productive potential contribution appear to have contributed to this resilience. These institutions have established a mutually beneficial cooperative relationship with national states. Their disposition to cooperate with business and labor associations varies across countries and seems to reflect ideological preferences and styles to a larger extent than instrumental readings of political opportunities. It remains to be determined the extent to which civil society organizations will cooperate or compete with labor unions to represent the interest of workers across gender, age and education barriers. This cooperation should present more severe challenges in less competitive contexts of interest representation.

Some of the most significant obstacles to the promotion of decent work in the Southern Cone require untying major structural knots. The potential contribution of civil society organizations to the task of overcoming these massive obstacles seems to be lower. However they should constitute extremely helpful partners in the tasks of ensuring effective social protection at the local level and fighting job informality. These goals do not figure prominently in the agenda of civil society organizations in the region.

Finally, significant theoretical refining is required to understand more accurately the workings of voluntary associations which are neither official nor driven by the pursuit of benefit and, while committed to promoting decent work, differ from traditional labor organizations. Our findings allow us to state that there is a definite sociological profile of civil society organizations acting in the labor field. We need sharper theoretical tools to adapt our knowledge to entities already producing important effects.

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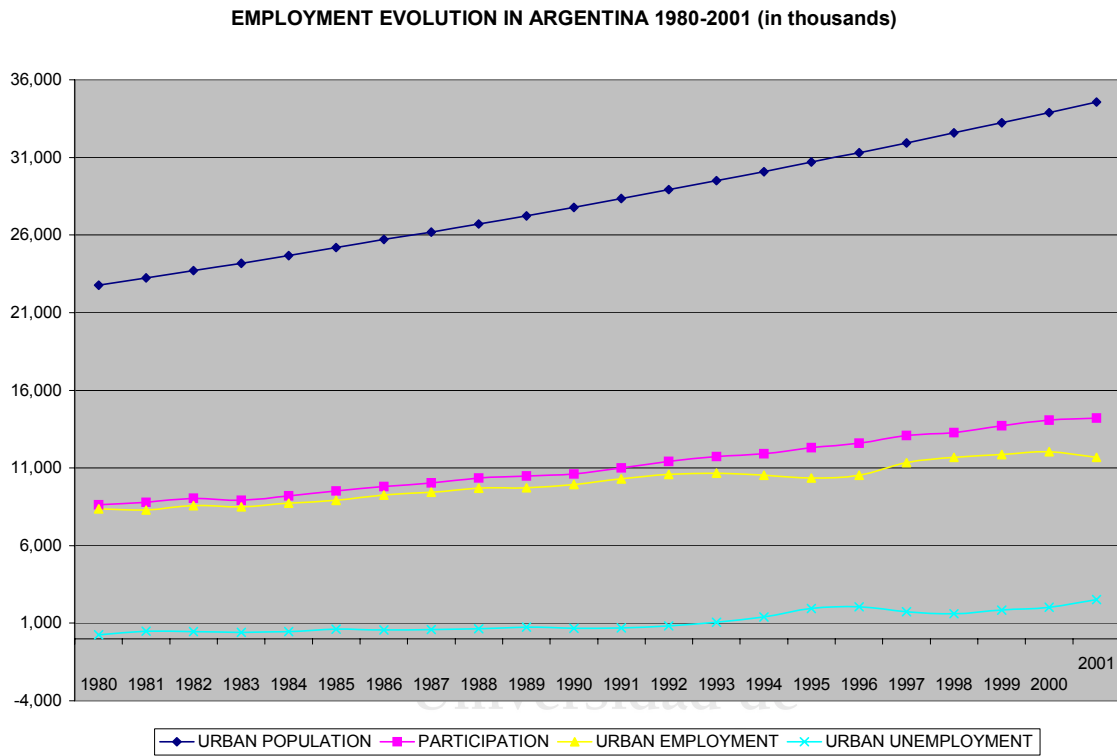
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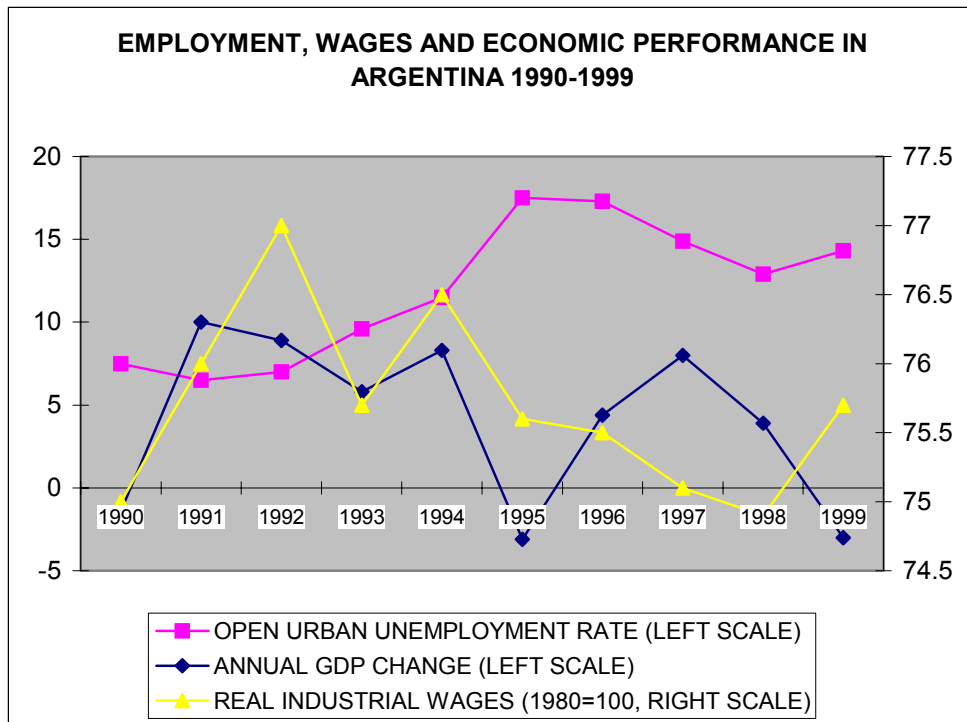
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Graph 1: Labor Market Evolution in Argentina (Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos)



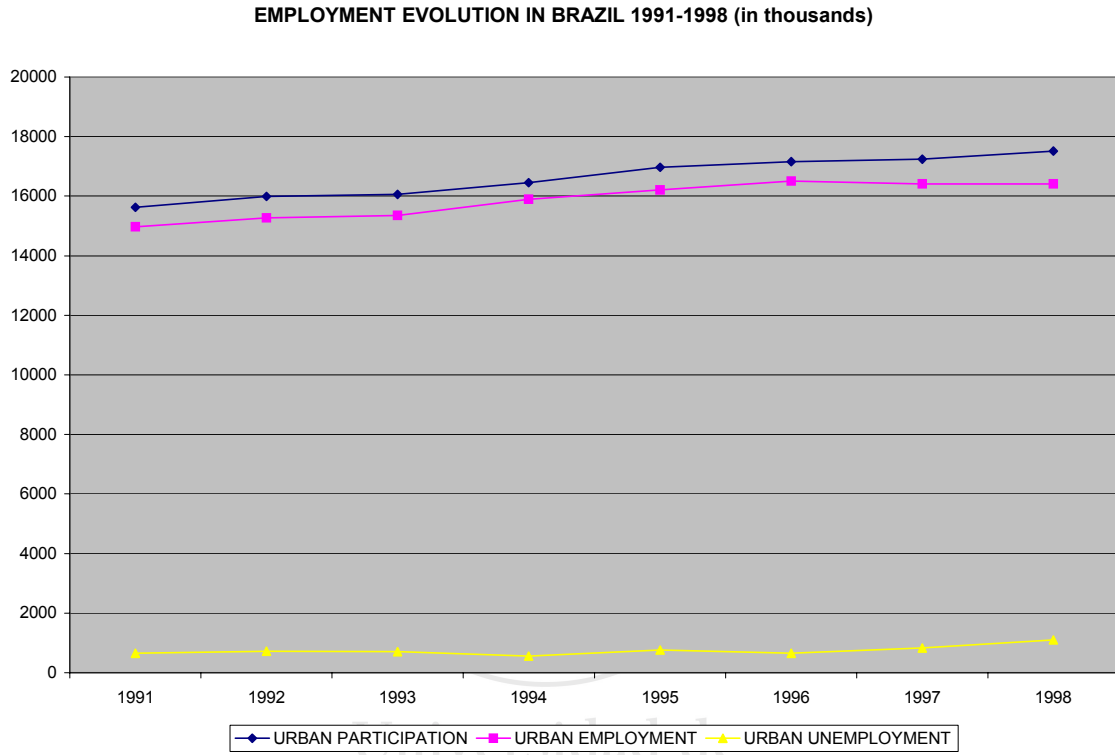
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Graph 2. Employment wages and economic performance in Argentina. Source: ILO, Informa. Panorama Laboral 2000.



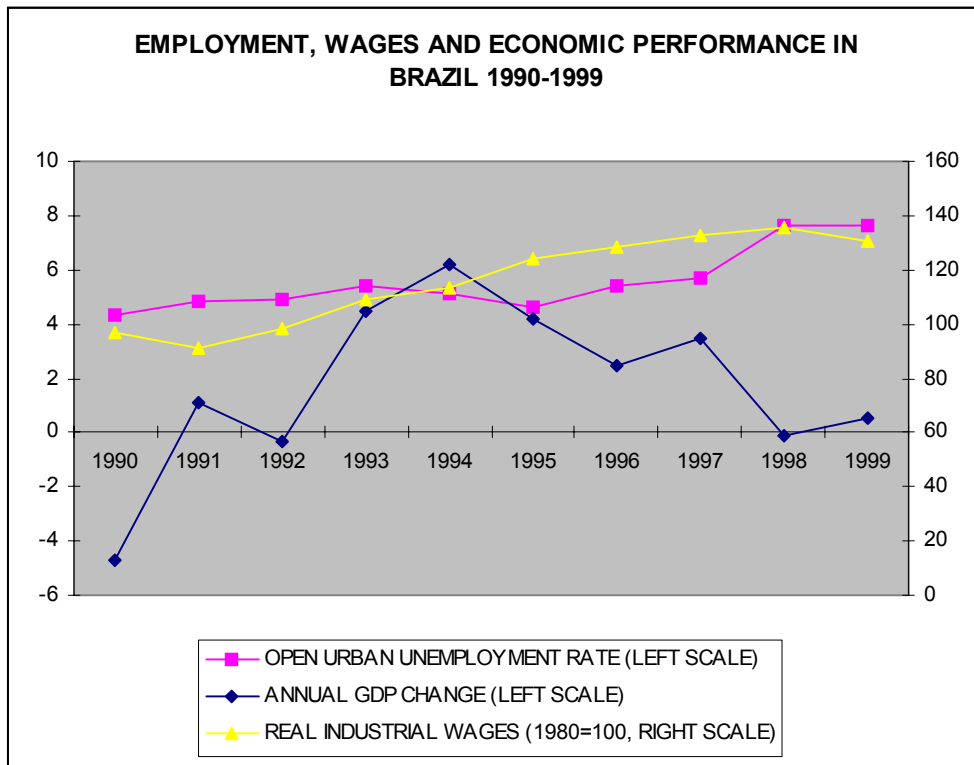
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Graph 3. Employment evolution in Brazil. Source: Brazilian Institute of Statistics and Geography.



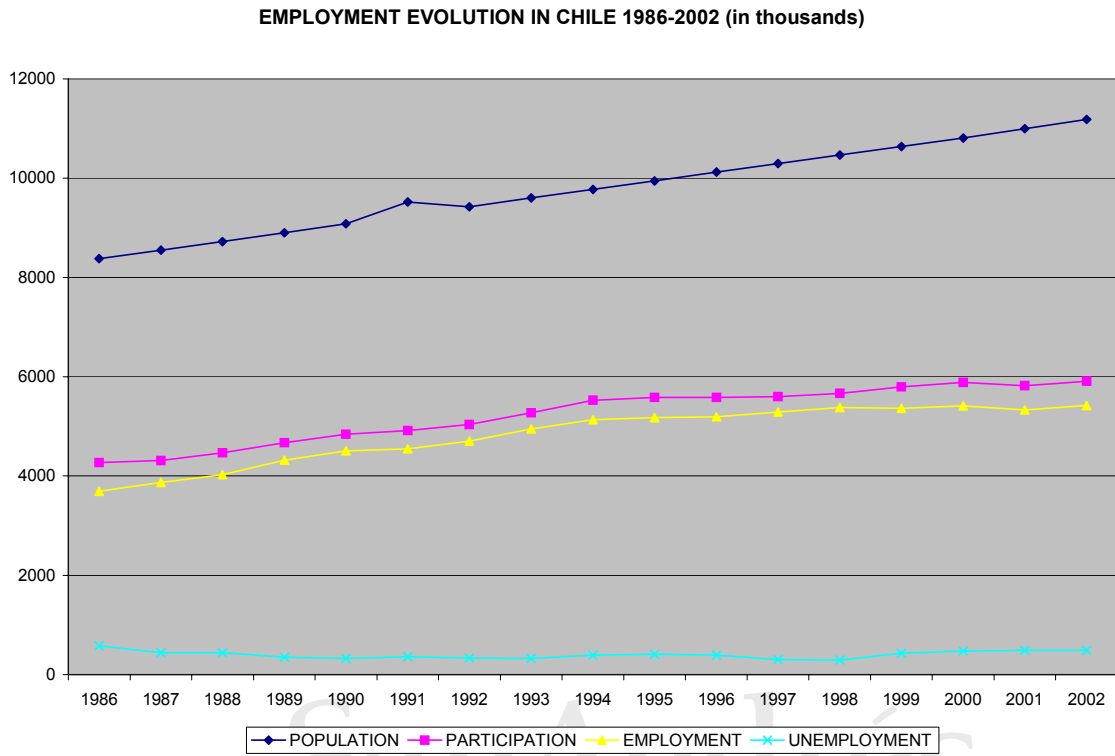
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Graph 4. Employment wages and economic performance in Brazil. Source: ILO, Informa. Panorama Laboral 2000.

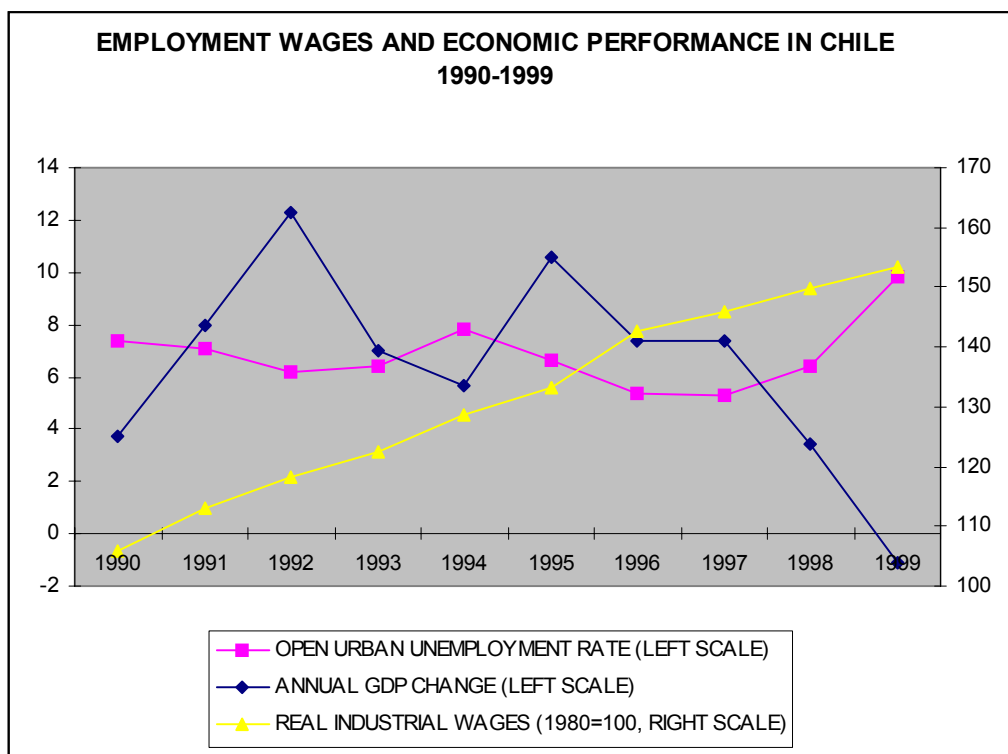


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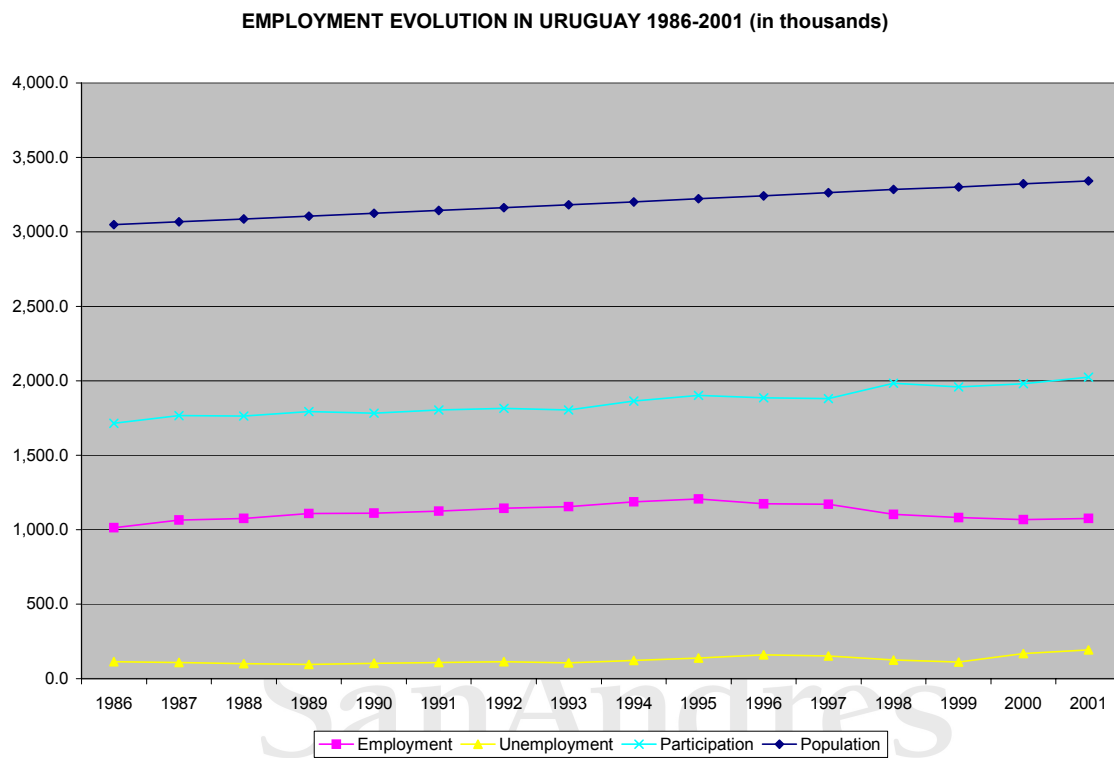
Graph 5. Employment evolution in Chile. Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas.



Graph 6. Employment wages and economic performance in Chile. Source: ILO, Informa. Panorama Laboral 2000.



Graph 7. Employment evolution in Uruguay. Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas.



Graph 8. Employment wages and economic performance in Uruguay. Source: ILO, Informa. Panorama Laboral 2000.

