

# ARGENTINA'S ECONOMIC CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION (1970-1994)

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## Resumen

En este trabajo se analiza el impacto de las crisis económicas en Argentina en la participación de las mujeres en el mercado de trabajo, entre 1970 y 1994. Estas décadas marcan, por un lado, un gran avance en la incorporación de las mujeres en el mundo laboral. Por otro, desde la crisis de 1975 (y las subsiguientes) los cambios en la economía argentina impactaron en la estructura del mercado de trabajo, y, en particular, la participación de las mujeres. En base a los registros oficiales (censos, legislación, etc.) se reconstruye la evolución de la participación de las mujeres en el trabajo (tanto general como por sectores). Se intentará explicar la variación en la participación de las mujeres en diferentes ramas y sectores, en el contexto de las crisis económicas severas sufridas por la Argentina. Una de las principales conclusiones es que la crisis aceleró la tendencia al ingreso de las mujeres al mundo del trabajo.

Palabras clave: Argentina, mercado de trabajo, género, crisis económica

## Abstract

This paper analyses the impact of the economic crises in Argentina on women's participation in the labour market between 1970 and 1994. These decades marked, on the one hand, a great advance in the incorporation of women into the workforce. On the other hand, since the 1975 crisis (and subsequent ones), changes in the Argentine economy have had an impact on the structure of the labour market, and in particular on women's participation. On the basis of official records (censuses, legislation, etc.), the evolution of women's participation in the labour market (both in general and by sector) is reconstructed. An attempt will be made to explain the variation in women's participation in different activities and sectors, in the context of the severe economic crises suffered by Argentina. One of the main conclusions is that the crisis accelerated the trend of women's entry into the world of work.

Keywords: Argentina, labour market, gender, economics crisis

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## 1. Introduction

Gender inequality in labour's environment is a field that has been addressed from different perspectives and with greater intensity in recent years, as a consequence of the increase of women's participation in economic activity since the second half of the 20th century. Some theoretical frameworks have developed the "U" theory about its evolution over the last 150 years. Based on this theory, various discussions have arisen regarding its scope and the possibility of applying it to processes in countries at different levels of development. Without entering this debate, historiography has verified the increase in women's participation in the labour market from 1960 onwards, which can be explained as much by cultural and social issues as by economic ones. Among them, different variables such as age, education, social position, family structure, etc. stand out.

The increase in women's participation in the labour market must be understood considering the local and regional context. In Latin America, the Industrialisation by Import Substitution (ISI)<sup>1</sup> model reached its peak in the middle of the 20th century. In this context, from 1930 until 1970, Argentina was among the countries in the region with the greatest relative industrial development but limited by the so-called "stop & go" cycles (Gerchunoff and Llach, 1999), related to external restrictions. Beyond the strictly economic aspects, it also suffered the consequences of instability and political and institutional violence. The cleavage in the 1970s is largely explained because of global changes: the oil crisis in the 1970s and the external debt crisis in the 1980s conditioned Latin American economies (Bértola and Ocampo, 2012). The last military dictatorship (1976-1983) also defined the context of the change of cycle. Although the period of institutional instability and military coups ended in the 1980s, giving way to democratic restorations, the economic crisis devastated the region (the so-called "lost decade"). Finally, the 1990s were marked by the process of globalisation and the shift towards "neoliberal" policies, with deep consequences at the global level (both in the productive structure and in employment).

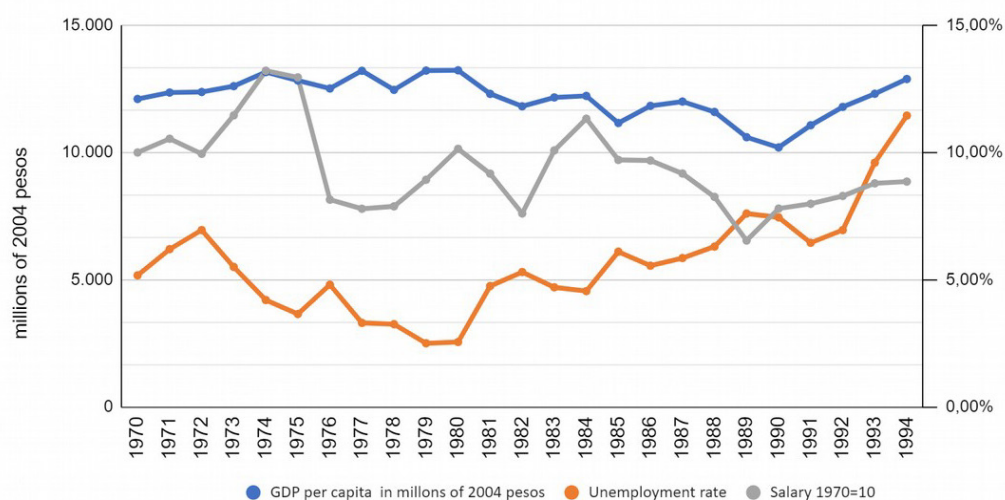
Our analysis period is characterised by three different economic crises. We understand as crisis a fall in the output and, therefore, the level of activity. Clearly, this has an impact in the employment level and the salaries. This phenomenon is particularly interesting while studying female participation since the fall in the household income could induce women's enter to the labour market.

The first crisis took place in 1975. The rise in the international prices after de OPEP's crisis was a strong pressure in local prices which accelerated de inflation rate. Despite the activity and employment rate, the investments were falling, and the economy was leading to a stagflation situation. In this context, the government of Isabel Martínez de Perón (who assumed the presidency after her husband's death) relied on the right wing of the party. Therefore, the answer to this process was a strong and sudden devaluation of the local currency that was supposed to limit the inflation pressure. This action was known as "rodrigazo" and was the start of the high inflation regime (Frenkel, 1989) that conditioned Argentina's economy for the following 15 years. This crisis was the end of the ISI model and deepened the social and political situation which concluded in the last military dictatorship of the country.

The second one, in 1982, showed the failure of the dictatorship's model. In order to modernize the economy, and dismantle the ISI model, the military government opened it. The lack of regulations produced a high volatility and the entry of speculative capitals which increased the national debt. When the foreign capitals were withdrawn, the inflation rate accelerated, and the government was forced to devalue the local currency. This economic crisis was aggravated by the popular rejection of the dictatorship and the military conflict with the United Kingdom which marked the end of the process.

The democratic government's policy was highly conditioned by the debt's level. They tried to return to the intern market model with high employment levels and wages that would track the aggregate demand. For the first years, the government was able to control the macroeconomic variables. However, towards the end, the government's strategy was incapable of stopping the rise of the prices. This process ended in the 1989 hyperinflation crisis which wrecked the economic structure, the wages and the labour market.

<sup>1</sup> Bértola and Ocampo (2012) coined the concept of State-Directed Industrialisation to refer to this period. Unlike ISI, this notion emphasises the central role that public policies played in developing the manufacturing sector.

**Figure 1.** Evolution of GDP per capita, unemployment and real wages (1970-1994)

Source: based on IIEP (2019).

Figure 1 shows that, before 1976 the unemployment rate did not usually exceed 5 per cent and poverty levels were very low. Since the crisis of the early 1980s, unemployment rates have risen steadily, as have poverty numbers. The changes of the 1990s, with the opening of the economy and the downsizing of the state (partly because of the privatisation of public enterprises), increased the structural level of unemployment. In this context, the economic activity and real wages fell during the 1980s. However, from 1990 onwards, a new cycle of output growth began with a small recovery in wages, which remained at levels well below those of the end of the ISI. The transformations in the production structure gave rise to a new growth process that was marked by lower wages and higher unemployment.

Taking as a starting point the works that analysed the female's labour participation increase in Argentina in the second half of the 20th century, we will make progress with the source data on aspects that have not been analysed yet. For example, we will look in detail at the economic sector (and activities) in which women were employed between 1970 and 1994. This will make it possible to observe the impact of economic changes and crises. We will observe the boom and the crisis of the secondary sector, as well as the significant growth of the tertiary sector, related to women's employment.

Therefore, the proposal of this paper is to analyse the evolution of women's participation in the labour market in Argentina between 1970 and 1994, by sector, in relation to economic conditions. Specifically, this evolution will be observed and described considering crises and structural economic changes.

For this purpose, we will work with the Argentinean population and economic censuses (see appendix). Other works use the Permanent Household Survey (Encuesta Permanente de Hogares, EPH) as the main source, which has been available for Argentina since 1974. Although the detail and frequency of this source is excellent, for our purposes we prefer to work with censuses, because of the continuity of the data since 1970, as well as their national scope<sup>2</sup>.

Several hypotheses and ideas will serve as working guides. First, we will study to what extent the crises, with rising unemployment, falling real wages (in addition to inflationary trends) and household income, would have encouraged women to enter the labour market and favoured female labour participation. Moreover, the long process of the end of the ISI, as a framework for interpreting the sources, should reflect the contraction of the secondary sector, in particular the textile industry, which demanded a large part of the female labour force. In a similar way, the tertiarization and primarization of the economy should be highlighted by the sources, as well as the role of the state as employer and the evolution of women employed in domestic service. Elements such as the increase in the number of employed women as a percentage of the female working age population, and the absolute and relative number of women by sector and activity should be revealing. Finally, the question is whether structural change and crises enhanced were neutral to, or hindered women's entry into the labour market.

<sup>2</sup> The EPH is carried out based on representative samples of 31 urban centres and one urban-rural centre.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Gender inequality as a cultural matrix has an impact on different aspects of society, including the labour market<sup>3</sup>. This labour inequality translates into discrimination, vertical and horizontal segregation. Horizontal segregation highlights the existence of jobs with high rates of masculinisation or feminisation (such as construction and domestic service). Feminised jobs tend to have lower wages, while public policies aimed at employment generation focus on masculinised jobs. Vertical segregation highlights the difficulties women face in moving up the hierarchy. The notion of the "glass ceiling" illustrates this idea. In addition, the notion of "sticky floors" questions the high rate of feminisation of lower positions. Finally, the difference in participation between men and women is, in part, a consequence of unpaid domestic work.

Economic theory has proposed some interpretations of this inequality from different points of view. For classical economics, gender-based labour inequality is not possible. Since the labour's supply and demand maximise profit, and tend to equilibrium, the supply side could not accept a wage that is "different" from the market wage. Human capital theory argues that these differences stem from different productivities because of investments in human capital (Mincer, 1974). Becker (1987) follows this proposal to explain why female specialisation in domestic labour would be rational. In this way, he explains the wage differentials and, with them, the entry and exit of women from the labour market<sup>4</sup>.

A different approach, based on a theory of social reproduction, is proposed by feminist economics. Breaking with previous positions, it focuses on the reproductive work that is carried out daily. The notion of care work emphasises its centrality for the reproduction of life, while that of unpaid domestic work highlights its invisibility<sup>5</sup>. It is also argued that the simple incorporation of women into the labour market is not enough, as it translates into a double working day (paid in the market and unpaid in the household).

These studies have been based in developed countries. The first debates raised around the "U" theory and the relationship between development and female participation in the labour market. Silvana Maubrigades (2018, 11) explains the "U" in terms of three stages. In the first one, the agricultural sector was the one with the highest employment while small industries were assimilated to domestic production where women had the greatest weight. With industrial progress, women were relegated to reproductive tasks while production was associated with the male role. Finally, economic diversification opened the door to female participation through the expansion of the service sector.

In this way, two different situations can arise. On one side, the dictatorial context meant a modification in the accumulation model and its levels of male unemployment have only been able to be relatively offset by a growing but scarce female insertion. On the other side, the worsening social and economic conditions brought with it a greater participation of women, whose importance would be fundamental in the sectors that channelled growth during the subsequent decade.

For the Latin American region, Maubrigades (2018a,b) also addressed the issue of women's labour market participation in the 20th century. In addition to considering the "U" theory, and the differences between northern and southern economies, she observes a long-term and structural trend in the increase of their participation in the labour market. In this way, she shows that there is not a single relationship between GDP and labour market insertion, but that there are different trajectories with their own nuances in each country, related to the demands generated by the development models.

Another idea for the Latin American region was proposed by Vásquez (2012). On the one hand, it establishes that structural inequality in the market continues to affect female participation, despite having been reduced. On the other hand, the countercyclical process of female work is explained in relation to crises, the trend towards the feminization of poverty and the levels of informality and underemployment in women. The gender gap and wage inequality are, from this perspective, two common ways to promote growth after crises.

In Argentina, Recchini de Lattes (1980), Ana García de Fanelli (1991), Catalina Wainerman (1995) and Nicolás Águila and Damián Kennedy (2018) used national population censuses. García de Fanelli

3 Esquivel (2005) argues that the labour market takes existing inequalities and amplifies them.

4 For an alternative approach from game theory see Sen (1990).

5 Federici (2013) understands that this work enables the reproduction of the labour force. In this way, surplus value is extracted from women doing domestic work through hired workers.



(1991) analyses the factors involved in female labour segregation to discuss the association between modernisation and higher female employment. In addition to refuting the "U theory", the proposal articulates interdependent variables (age, education, income, etc.) that define labour insertion in contexts of industrialisation and deindustrialisation. Moreover, the idealisation of women as workers hides the gender biases implicit in the socio-cultural paradigm and grounded in common sense.

Wainerman (1995) describes the process of feminisation of the labour force between 1970 and 1990. In the context of a crisis of deindustrialisation, inflation, and adjustment policies, increased male unemployment leads to an increase in female employment in order to maintain family income. This article also highlights the permanence until older age, higher education, gender segmentation and the precariousness of jobs that are related to Argentina's socio-economic characteristics.

Águila and Kennedy (2018) also add the Permanent Household Survey (EPH from now on) for the period 1974-2010. Thus, they find that GDP growth hides the reduction in wages as employment increases due to the inclusion of female workers. This incorporation presents particularities and suffers from gender biases in almost all activities. One of the elements referred to is the notion of the "secondary worker", linked to the strategic mechanism of compensating the deterioration of household income through the incorporation of women into the labour market. The authors' proposal is to consider this phenomenon as a vehicle for the conformation of women as an active labour force and not as an end. Linked to this, the motives that bring women into the labour market must be understood in context. Those whose work is seen as a product of their skills may remain in their jobs, achieving a "fuller" incorporation than others who enter because of the economic crisis. Along these lines, Águila and Kennedy (2020) analyse earnings by household (rather than by individual). This innovative approach allows them to find that despite the greater number of members with paid work in the household (due to the incorporation of women), total income experiences a reduction. According to the authors, this would be evidence that the labour force was being sold below its reproduction cost.

In short, there is a great deal of work to be done with the National Population Censuses, as well as with the EPH. This reveals that there is still room for progress on these issues, analysing the National Population Censuses in conjunction with the National Economic Censuses.

### 3. Women's participation in the labour force in Argentina (1974-1994)

The major transformations experienced by the Argentine economy, as well as by the region, had a considerable impact on the labour market. The decline of the industrial sector and the fast growth of the services sector changed the productive structure and the job opportunities available to workers. Also, cultural changes (lower birth rates, greater access to education for women, increase in the age of marriage, etc.) facilitated the incorporation of women into the paid labour market. Finally, the reduction in wages made it impossible for many families to maintain their standard of living on a single wage, so that both spouses sought income-earning occupations. It is therefore of great interest to analyse in detail the sectors and activities in which women were employed.

Pursuing this objective, the evolution of the distribution by sector of workers in the economy will be analysed in the first place. Based on what has already been said, it is to be expected that there will be significant changes over the years, due to the increase in their participation in the labour market. Table 1 shows the percentage of employed workers in each sector by sex.

**Table 1.** Employed population by economic sector, by sex and total, in % (1970 to 1991)

Sector	Total			Men			Women		
	1970	1980	1991	1970	1980	1991	1970	1980	1991
Primary	15.3%	12.5%	11.4%	19.1%	16.1%	14.9%	3.9%	3.0%	5.1%
Secondary	28.6%	31.0%	24.9%	31.9%	36.3%	31.4%	18.9%	16.8%	13.1%
Tertiary	47.4%	49.6%	62.7%	40.3%	40.8%	52.7%	68.2%	73.1%	80.8%
No specified	8.7%	6.9%	0.2%	8.7%	6.8%	0.2%	9.0%	7.2%	0.3%
Total	9,011,450 (100%)	9,989,190 (100%)	12,368,328 (100%)	6,722,500 (100%)	7,249,658 (100%)	7,975,899 (100%)	2,288,950 (100%)	2,739,487 (100%)	4,392,429 (100%)

Source: based on DNEyC (1974, 41-43), INDEC (1983, 47), INDEC (1996, 76-78).

Table 1 shows a fall in the secondary sector linked to the process of deindustrialisation; the figures for male participation show a relatively stable trend (with increases and decreases), while the ones for female participation are clearly tending to fall. Between 1970 and 1980, there was a net increase in the percentage of jobs in the sector, even though female employment fell. However, by 1991 the fall is generalised and of greater magnitude.

This is associated with the growth in the tertiary sector, from 47% to 63%. The process of tertiarization is well illustrated by the rising female participation rates, reaching 81% by 1991. Thus, we could say that the situation of women reflects to a greater extent the situation of the labour market in general. The case of men is similar, with a lower, but also important, growth, taking participation from 40% in 1970 to 53% in 1991.

One particularity is evident in this same table, and it is the fact that there is a general fall in the participation in the primary sector, both for men and women, but in 1991 there is an increase in the latter, from 4% in 1980 to 5% in the 1991 census<sup>6</sup>.

However, it is also of interest for this work to study the rate of feminisation of all sectors. Beyond the growth that each sector may have experienced, it is important to analyse whether the increase (or fall) is due to a change in the proportion of women in employment or to a simple expansion or reduction in their overall size. Table 2, closely related to Table 1, presents these data.

**Table 2.** Female population in employment by economic sector, as % of total in each sector (1970-1991)

Sector	1970	1980	1991
Primary	6.5%	6.5%	15.9%
Secondary	16.7%	14.9%	18.7%
Tertiary	36.6%	40.4%	45.8%
No specified	26.1%	28.4%	46.4%

Source: see Table 1.

In a similar way to what has just been said, together with the tertiarization of the economy, there is a feminisation of the sector where women go from representing 37% to 46%. In other words, the tertiary sector is growing in importance in the economy and, at the same time, the percentage of women in it is increasing. However, the rise in the secondary sector is not incompatible with the process of tertiarization: although fewer women workers are employed, in its decline, the proportion of female labour increased by four percentage points between 1980 and 1991. In other words, in the contraction of the industry, male jobs are reduced to a greater extent than female jobs.

Besides the unspecified female participation is significant, the explanation for which reflects a growth in the total number of employed women who could enter the labour market under precarious and informal conditions. Just as emphasis is often placed on the incorporation of women into skilled jobs in the service sector, we should not lose sight of this important percentage of women in very low-paid jobs.

In the same way, this table shows the particularity of the growth in the primary sector in 1991 from 7% to 16% of female representation; in 1980 there were 80,831 employed women while in 1991 they increased to 224,721. This increase, which almost triples the number of female workers in the sector, contrasts with the trend decline and historically low percentages of feminisation in primary production.

Looking at the data as a whole, the rate of feminisation remains relatively constant between 1970 and 1980 (the primary and secondary sectors fall, and the tertiary and unspecified sectors grow). However, in the following period, all sectors grow by a greater magnitude, with women's participation in the economy increasing considerably. This seems to mark an essential difference in the causes of growth between the two sub-periods.

Therefore, it is interesting to analyse the magnitude of this growth and its relation to the total number

<sup>6</sup> In the case of Africa and Asia, Kabeer (2016) describes a similar phenomenon of growing female participation in the primary sector. The cause would be the large-scale production of non-traditional primary goods. In the case of Argentina, it should be considered that there was a change in the survey methodology of the 1991 census. Given the high percentage of female family workers, this census included all members of the family (in previous censuses only men were counted). This could explain part of the growth of women in the primary sector.

of women. Table 3 shows the total number of employed people by sex and their share of the country's working-age population. The employment growth rate is also calculated.

**Table 3.** Working-age population, employed and intercensal growth rates, by sex (1970-1980-1991)

	Census		
	1970	1980	1991
<b>Total female working-age population</b>	8,607,300	9,289,448	10,861,687
<b>Female workers</b>	2,288,950	2,739,487	4,392,429
<b>Percentage of female workers</b>	26.6%	29.5%	40.4%
<b>Total male working-age population</b>	8,086,750	8,154,576	10,017,352
<b>Male workers</b>	6,722,500	7,249,703	7,975,899
<b>Percentage of male workers</b>	83.1%	88.9%	79.6%
		<b>1970-80</b>	<b>1980-91</b>
<b>Female workers growth rate</b>		19.7%	60.3%
<b>Male workers growth rate</b>		7.8%	10.0%

Source: based on DNEyC (1974, 19-20), INDEC (1983, 189-190), INDEC (1996). The 1970 census includes people from the age of 14. With the modification of the Labour Agreement Law (Law 20.744) in 1974, the minimum age was set at 18. Therefore, the figures for the 1980 to 1991 censuses start at 18 years of age. The intercensal growth rate was calculated on the basis of the formula  $(\text{figure } t/\text{census period } t-1)^{1/(\text{number of census periods})} - 1$ .

Table 3 illustrates the steady increase in the number of employed women out of the total female working-age population, since, as the number of working-age women increases, so do the number of employed women. In contrast to the small increase between 1970 and 1980, the greatest expansion of this process occurs between the 1980 and 1991 censuses, where the representation of female employment is 30% in 1980 and reaches 40% in 1991.

In contrast, the ratio of the employed to the working-age male population showed some growth until 1980 and fell in 1991, because of the increase in unemployment. Thus, in 1991, population growth is greater than the number of employed persons, since it is 9 percentage points lower than in the previous period. At the same time, the relationship between female inclusion in the labour market in parallel to the crisis is reflected in the increase in male unemployment.

It is also possible to observe the growth rates of employment between the census periods. The low rates for employed men are explained, as a general process, by the fact that their employment rates were historically higher. However, a trend decline is observed in the case of the male population.

When we look at the period 70-80, we can distinguish lower rates that can be associated with the crisis that began in that decade with the dictatorship in Argentina. Macroeconomic volatility and the dismantling of industry would have had an impact on the level of employment, reducing its growth.

The increase for the following period (80-91) is much greater for women. Its causes could be the economic crisis of the decade, which pushes women to enter the labour market; the advance in gender equality in the labour market and, finally, the process of deindustrialisation and tertiarization of the economy which incorporates a greater number of women in the labour market.

#### 4. Women's participation in the labour force by activity in Argentina (1974-1994)

From the data analysed, the increase in female participation throughout the period in question is clear. This is even more so when compared with the relative stagnation of male employment. As mentioned, this growth occurred in all fields of the economy. However, it remains to be seen how much influence it has had on the individual activities. Therefore, to deepen the analysis, tables 4 and 5 present the industrial and tertiary sectors, disaggregating the data by activity.

**Table 4.** Women employed by activity of the industrial sector in CABA, PBA and the Nation, as % of the total number of employed and of the sector, 1974-1994

Year	Activity	Female works in % of total workers			Female workers in % of total female workers		
		CABA	PBA	Nation	CABA	PBA	Nation
1974	Food-processing industry	26.9%	34.1%	19.9%	13.2%	30.5%	23.1%
	Textile industry	48.7%	44.3%	46.4%	48.4%	34.3%	40.9%
	Manufacture of wood products	16.2%	9.7%	10.0%	7.9%	3.7%	5.7%
	Chemical manufacturing	35.7%	18.3%	21.4%	13.8%	11.6%	11.3%
	Construction-related industries	15.4%	6.7%	6.6%	1.0%	2.4%	2.4%
	Metallurgical industry and machinery manufacturing	14.0%	7.9%	7.6%	12.9%	15.3%	14.3%
	Other industries	29.0%	27.5%	26.7%	2.8%	2.2%	2.3%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>29.0%</b>	<b>19.8%</b>	<b>18.3%</b>	<b>97,754 (100%)</b>	<b>134,676 (100%)</b>	<b>279,100 (100%)</b>
1994	Food-processing industry	26.6%	19.5%	20.2%	19.6%	25.0%	31.6%
	Textile industry	43.6%	33.7%	36.5%	34.1%	27.9%	28.9%
	Manufacture of wood products	22.7%	14.7%	15.5%	14.1%	7.1%	8.8%
	Chemical manufacturing	30.4%	18.0%	17.8%	16.7%	17.0%	11.0%
	Construction-related industries	13.5%	7.7%	6.2%	0.9%	1.7%	1.6%
	Metallurgical industry and machinery manufacturing	13.8%	9.6%	8.8%	11.5%	18.6%	15.2%
	Other industries	22.2%	13.2%	13.3%	3.1%	2.8%	2.8%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>26.7%</b>	<b>16.5%</b>	<b>17.3%</b>	<b>55,174 (100%)</b>	<b>80,705 (100%)</b>	<b>195,998 (100%)</b>

Source: based on INDEC (1974a, 133-142), INDEC (1974b, 91-99), INDEC (1974c, 175-188), INDEC (1975, 254-270), INDEC (1997a; 98-102, 116-118, 132-133, 159-163) and INDEC (1997b, 66-70).

Table 4 shows the percentage of employed women in relation to the total number of employed, i.e., the feminisation rate, and the percentage of employed women in relation to the total number of employed women in the sector in each of the industrial activities. These data show the contribution of each of them to total female employment, and which activities showed the greatest feminisation.



When we look at the totals, we can see that there is greater female participation in the industrial sector in the City of Buenos Aires (hereinafter CABA) than in the Province of Buenos Aires (hereinafter PBA) and in the country as a whole. Likewise, when observing the sharp decrease in the number of jobs between 1974 and 1994 in CABA and PBA, the fall in the national total is smaller. This necessarily implies a net creation of jobs in other provinces, which led to a decentralization of manufacturing activity. Nevertheless, both districts still accounted for more than 50% of the total number of industrial jobs in the country.

The textile industry is undoubtedly one of the main industries to be analysed. In 1974, almost 50% of its workers were women in all regions. However, there was a significant drop by 1994. Although CABA maintained a feminisation rate of 44%, this fell to a third in PBA and the country. Thus, the sector represented 41% of female industrial jobs in 1974, but only 29% in 1994. This national phenomenon was mirrored in PBA and, more sharply, in CABA.

These results reflect the characteristics of the Argentine textile industry. It was a sector oriented towards the domestic market with labour-intensive production. Its importance for the level of employment led the different governments along the ISI process to establish high tariffs to protect the industry. However, after the post-1970 liberalisation, the local market began to import products that competed with local ones and put the industry in crisis. This led to the closure of many factories, which reduced the number of workers, especially affecting women, who saw their main access to the manufacturing sector closed.

Another of the most important activities is the food-processing industry. In 1974 it accounted for almost a quarter of the total number of female jobs in the nation<sup>7</sup>. This weight was even greater in PBA, where it represented 31% of all jobs, with a high rate of feminisation (34%). In CABA, however, it was less important. By 1994, the sector underwent an important transformation. Its importance in employment in PBA fell (to a quarter of the total), but it grew in CABA and the nation, reaching 32% in the country, surpassing textiles as the activity with the highest female employment.

The case of the chemical industry is relevant for CABA. Although it did not have a significant weight in employment<sup>8</sup> (as in the nation and PBA), it had a significant feminization rate of 36%, which fell by 1994 but was still high (30%). In any case, this seems to be a point of interest because it would be an insertion in an activity that is not associated with traditionally female tasks.

The growth of the wood products industry should be highlighted. Despite the general fall in the feminisation rates, this activity shows a moderate increase and a greater weight in employment. Although it is an extremely heterogeneous activity, many women worked in the production of paper and cardboard and its derivatives and not directly on raw materials.

In short, as already mentioned, there was a general decline in the secondary sector, with a different impact in each activity. The textile industry is undoubtedly the one that suffers the most from the crisis of the substitution model, with a significant fall, while the food industry manages to maintain itself and even grow a little, thus increasing its relative weight. It is important to bear in mind that, although a fall in the rate of feminisation can be seen in most of the activities and in the sector in general, observing the data from the Population Censuses, it could be thought that there was a fall in the early years and a recovery in the later years which the length of the period prevents us from seeing in the Economic Censuses.

The tertiary sector will be presented below. As it has been said, this was the most dynamic sector of the economy, with significant growth. Moreover, in relation to the objectives of this paper, it was the main driver of the increase in female employment. For this reason, it is now interesting to analyse which activities boosted this process, either through greater feminisation or through their mere growth.

<sup>7</sup> However, the feminisation rate was only 20%.

<sup>8</sup> It never exceeded 17% of total female employment.

**Table 5.** Women employed by activity of the commerce and services sector in CABA as % of the total employed and of the sector, 1974-1994

Activity	Female works in % of total workers		Female workers in % of total female workers	
	1974	1994	1974	1994
<b>Hotels and restaurants</b>	19.0%	24.1%	16.1%	7.9%
<b>Personal services</b>	25.9%	54.0%	17.3%	4.1%
<b>Amusement and recreation services</b>	24.7%	30.1%	4.4%	4.5%
<b>Transport and storage services</b>	5.3%	27.6%	4.7%	5.2%
<b>Business services</b>	23.9%	33.7%	8.8%	28.2%
<b>Education</b>	66.7%	71.0%	26.9%	21.6%
<b>Health</b>	67.2%	59.5%	20.9%	20.5%
<b>Other services</b>	14.4%	49.3%	0.8%	8.1%
<b>Total services</b>	<b>26.9%</b>	<b>41.9%</b>	<b>60,195 (100%)</b>	<b>205,570 (100%)</b>
<b>Primary products commerce's</b>	13.5%	21.3%	1.2%	1.7%
<b>Food and beverage commerce's</b>	32.0%	37.2%	25.9%	25.6%
<b>Manufactured goods commerce's</b>	33.5%	28.3%	48.1%	41.6%
<b>Household goods commerce's</b>	33.3%	40.9%	18.0%	25.8%
<b>Others commerce's</b>	31.0%	24.9%	6.8%	5.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>32.3%</b>	<b>32.5%</b>	<b>89,326 (100%)</b>	<b>78,128 (100%)</b>

Source: based on INDEC (1975, 254-270) and INDEC (1997a; 116-118, 132-133).

Table 1 showed the high female participation in the tertiary sector. Much has been written about its growth from the 1970s onwards. Table 5 allows us to disaggregate the data for a more detailed look.

When looking at the rate of feminisation of each activity, it is evident that, except for health services, all of them experienced growth by 1994<sup>9</sup>. The case of other services is particularly interesting since it had the largest increase occurred (35 percentage points). This transformation of the activity is due to the emergence of social services, which became very important in those years. This phenomenon was accompanied by a growth of the sector that allowed the total number of employed women to increase substantially (from around sixty thousand to two hundred and five thousand).

A comparison of the weight of each activity shows that in 1974 most of the employment was distributed among the health, education, hotels and restaurants, and personal services sectors, which together accounted for nearly 80% of the employed women. By 1994, there was a significant growth in business services, which took first place in the table. This led to a fall in the other activities, except for other services, which also increased its relative share (thanks to the growth of social services)<sup>10</sup> and health, which

<sup>9</sup> The significant growth of personal services is explained by the compositions of the censuses. In 1974 and 1994 they included different activities, which led to a large change in the feminisation rate. Also, according to the census' methodology, domestic service that performs tasks in households and not in commercial establishments is outside its universe. Consequently, this activity is unlikely to be relevant in our analysis.

<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, social services have a fairly high rate of feminisation; on the other hand, the growth of this activity has led it to gain relative weight in the category.

remained constant. In summary, the causes of the growth are to be found in business services<sup>11</sup>, but the state made an important contribution to female employment by increasing social services.

This process is related to the evolution of the country's economic model. In 1974, health and education were the most important activities in terms of employment. The centrality of the State in the level of female employment was unquestionable, even more so considering the importance of public schools and hospitals in those years. By 1994, the picture was very different. These sectors, while still very important, had been overtaken by business services. Public employment was no longer the only possible path for women, as they could enter various activities in the private sector.

However, in the case of commerce, the overall share remained the same, so the changes affected only its internal composition (primary products, food and beverages and household goods grew, while manufactured goods and other commerce fell). The highest points were the cases of household goods and food and beverages. This stability meant that the total number of female jobs followed the behaviour of the sector as a whole and experienced a slight fall in the number of total jobs. These data illustrate that when we talk about the tertiarization of the economy, we do talk about a greater weight of the service sector, since this is where the growth is taking place and not in the tertiary sector as a whole.

Trade in manufactured goods accounted for almost 50% of female employment in the sector in 1974. If 26% of food and beverages and 18% of household goods are considered, almost all female workers were in these three activities. By 1994 there is a fall in the manufacturing trade in line with the decline in the feminisation rate<sup>12</sup>. Nevertheless, it remains (by a wide margin) at the top of the table. Household goods trade experiences a growth reaching 25% of the total. To sum up, employment in 1994 is concentrated in the same three activities as in 1974.

In short, the growth is mainly explained by services and not so much by commerce. In fact, despite starting from a higher base than the other sectors of the economy, commerce is the only case in which there is no increase in the rate of feminisation between the 1970s and the 1990s. In the case of services, there is a large growth in business services, mainly driven by the private sector, leading to a fall in relative terms of other traditional sectors such as personal services and hotels and restaurants. The role of the state remains important, perhaps to a lesser extent than in the past with a large contribution in the cases of health and education.

To deepen the analysis, we elaborated the Karmel and MacLachlan index (from now on KM index) (Karmel and MacLachlan, 1988) to study the evolution of women segregation in the economy as a whole and in each sector. Table 6 shows the KM index of the economy.

**Table 6.** KM index of the Argentinean economy (1970-1991)

Year	1970	1980	1991
KM	10.7	13.0	12.9

Source: See Table 1

The KM index shows an increase in segregation between 1970 and 1980 and stability for the following period. In the case of the first period, the greater segregation can be explained by the textile industry's contraction and the entry of new female workers in the tertiary sector. In the 1980s, this trend continued in the case of women; but, as can be seen in Table 1, there is also an important tertiarization of male labour and, therefore, the index remains stable.

It could be thought that the manufacturing sectors in which women were inserted were the first to be harmed by the end of the substitutive model, so that the process of tertiarization of the economy affected them before men. To further explore this hypothesis, the KM indices by activity are presented for each sector.

11 This does not necessarily mean that they were qualified women in high-paying jobs. Business services include, for example, the category of building cleaning and disinfection services.

12 This drop could be related to the lower participation of women in the industrial sector..

**Table 7.** KM index of each sector of the Argentinean economy (1974-1994)

Activity	District	Year	
		1974	1994
Industry	Nation	10.6	6.5
	PBA	12.8	5.4
	CABA	12.8	6.9
Services	CABA	15.4	14.3
Commerce	CABA	1.4	5.6

Source: See Tables 4 and 5

In the case of industry for the period 1974-1994, there was a considerable decrease (of about 50%) in all districts. To a large extent, the reduction is due to the contraction of the textile sector which accounted for many women workers in 1974 and a much smaller percentage in 1994.

In the service sector, there was a slight drop as a consequence of the incorporation of women in new activities, but in general terms the image remained largely unchanged. The commerce sector, on the other hand, started from very low values in 1974 and experienced a growth that placed it at values close to those of industry.

### 5. Closing remarks

This paper has looked at the impact of economic changes on the labour market in Argentina, with a focus on women's participation, between 1970 and 1994. The context had a decisive influence. The economic crisis led to a fall in GDP, real wages, and employment. In addition, a structural change of the economy took place which implied its deindustrialisation and tertiarization. This local economic process, in line with the regional one, took place in the context of important cultural changes that drove demands for gender equality, which also had an impact on the labour market. Undoubtedly, the first conclusion is that the rate of growth of women's participation in the labour market accelerated substantially: from 27% of the total working-age female population in 1970 to 40% in the 1991 census.

Another remarkable point is that in the general context in Argentina since 1970 there has been no growth of the national economy but rather a downward trend in per capita GDP throughout the period. This factor could have promoted the greater participation of women in the labour market to avoid impoverishment. However, it can be argued that the increase in women in the labour market is not only related to the economic cycle. The crises mentioned above led to the abandonment of the import substitution process and the adoption of a model of economic openness. Logically, this change had an implication on the economic and social structure of the country. The contraction of the industrial sector was counterbalanced by the expansion of the tertiary sector, which historically has a higher feminization rate. Thus, it could be argued that the crises favoured the entry of women into the labour market based on the change in the accumulation model.

In this sense, it was possible to distinguish two sub-periods within the years analysed. The increase in women's participation seems to have different causes in the 1970s than in the 1980s. At the beginning, the growth of the female economically active population (FEAP) was due to the expansion of the tertiary sector, where mainly women were incorporated. In the 1980s this phenomenon deepened, but at the same time there was a feminisation of the labour force. Consequently, the process accelerated as it was driven by the growth of the tertiary sector and by the general trend towards feminisation of the labour force, showing higher participation rates.

The literature on the relationship between crises and the increase in women's formal work is clear. In crises, such as World War I and II, the significant entry of women into the secondary sector is evident. In the case of Argentina between 1975 and 1994, it can be assumed that the crisis may have forced women, who were in the process of incremental insertion into the labour market, to increase the speed of incorporation (Table 3). However, it was found that the increase occurred in both business services (skilled) and domestic service (unskilled). At the same time, state employment grew in the areas of health and education, but with a neutral result as a percentage of the employed FEAP. In other words, the net increases were in business and domestic services<sup>13</sup>.

13 This large increase in domestic service may be suggesting the weight of economic reasons for entry into the labour market. In the case of CABA, it can be observed that most domestic service workers live in the near areas outside the city.

The analysis arising from the articulation between the Economic Censuses and the National Population Censuses shows the relevance of women in the tertiary sector. The large increase of women in the service sector demonstrates the feminisation of the sector either because of the increased supply of female labour, or because of the growth of the sector itself. On the other hand, there was also an increase in the feminisation of the primary sector, in absolute and relative values. There was a five-fold increase (1980-91) in the number of women in the primary sector.

This feminisation process could be explained by the need of several women to help with the household income in difficult economic contexts. Also, women's labour participation may be related with the social and cultural changes about women's role and their independence. The fastest growing activity is business services, which includes many activities. On the one hand, the incorporation into the liberal professions allowed an insertion into qualified and well-paid jobs. On the other hand, there was a large growth in low-skilled activities traditionally associated with women, such as cleaning work.

The case of the commerce sector does not show major changes. However, when analysing each activity, variations in the internal composition can be seen with the growth of some activities and the decline of others.

The construction of the KM index allowed us to observe the rise in women's participation led by the tertiary sector. This increase was a general tendency of the economy which caused the fall of the index when the men's participation followed this path. The dismantling of the textile industry induced a fall in the index values for the industrial sector as shown in table 7.

In summary, the participation of women in Argentina's labour market shows an important advance in the last decades of the 20th century. This was part of a long-term process of sustained growth in women's participation, locally, regionally, and globally. However, the context marked by the crises and the end of the ISI between the 1970s and 1980s marked the particularities of the Argentinean case. The deindustrialisation and tertiarization of the economy established the characteristics of women's insertion in the labour market. The vertiginous growth of the service sector marked the incorporation of women. The economic crisis generated unemployment, which strongly affected the male labour force, generating the need for a second family income (or a single income for single parents), which could have given a greater boost to the women's entry into the labour market, on a sustained long-term trend.

Given the economic context, it is difficult to elucidate from the analysis of the sources whether the incorporation of women influenced the fall in real wages and the rise in unemployment. There seems to be a relationship between these phenomena, but according to the current state of knowledge on the subject, it is difficult to establish a causal relationship and, even more so, the meaning of this relationship.

The next work agenda, remains to the possibility of including more sources and data by consulting the archives currently closed because of the Covid 19. It could be analysed as a long-term process. For example, the ISI impact on female workers. Finally, it could give us a regional perspective to understand the differences of the Argentina's case.

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## Appendix

The sources for this article are the National Population Censuses of 1970, 1980 and 1991, and the National Economic Censuses of 1974 and 1994. Unfortunately, the 1985 economic census volumes available online do not show data disaggregated by sex, so we were unable to analyse it. The closure of the archives because of the covid-19 pandemic forced us to work exclusively with digitised sources. We hope to complement this work with censuses not available online soon.

Tables 1 to 4 were drawn up based on the National Population Censuses of the Argentine Republic carried out in 1970, 1980 and 1991. Data on the working-age population by sex were collected, and the numbers and percentages of employed persons by economic sector, total, cohort and sex were calculated. Table 4 presents the calculations of the intercensal growth rate of the employment rate by sex. Tables 5 and 6 were elaborated based on the data available in the National Economic Censuses of the Argentine Republic for the years 1974 and 1994. As these take establishments as census units, it is possible that they present certain discrepancies with the population censuses due to lower precision. Based on the type of establishment, the economic censuses are broken down into 3 or 4 groups: industrial, mining, commercial and services (the latter are sometimes found together and sometimes separately). The total number of employed persons by sex in the industrial sector, commerce, and services in the city of Buenos Aires and in the industrial sector in the province of Buenos Aires and the nation were collected, as well as the total number of employed persons by sex in each activity. Based on these data, the percentage of employed women in relation to the total number of employed people was calculated for each activity and sector, and the percentage of employed women in each activity in relation to the total number of employed women in the sector and activity. Due to the difficulty of accessing the sources, this paper focuses on the industrial censuses carried out in 1974 and 1994, relying on those of the commerce and services sector for the city of Buenos Aires in those years. In all cases, we used the tables that disaggregated the labour force employed by sex. Although the tables offer information disaggregated by occupational category, the changes in the criteria used in the different censuses make it difficult to analyse their evolution. Consequently, we will focus on the total number of employed persons by activity to understand the rate of feminisation of the economy in general and of each sector.

Tables 6 and 7 show the KM index. The first one was drawn up based on the National Population Censuses of the Argentine Republic carried out in 1970, 1980 and 1991 while the latter was elaborated based on the data available in the National Economic Censuses of the Argentine Republic for the years 1974 and 1994. To elaborate table 6, we used the following formula:

$$\left( \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{T_i}{T} * \left| \frac{W_i}{W} - \frac{W}{T} \right| \right) * 100$$

Where T represents the total amount of workers in the economy,  $T_i$  the number of workers in a specific sector, W the total amount of women in the economy and  $W_i$  the number of women in a specific sector.

For Table 7 we used the same formula, but, in this case, T represents the total amount of workers in each sector,  $T_i$  the number of workers in a specific activity, W the total amount of women in each sector and  $W_i$  the number of women in a specific activity.