

# FACES OF INEQUALITY:

Multidimensional Inequalities in Mexico City



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## OXFAM MEXICO:

Oxfam Mexico is part of a global movement that works in 70 countries to end the injustice of poverty and end inequality.

Together we protect and rebuild lives when a disaster strikes, we fight discrimination and violence against women, we defend the rights of indigenous people and communities, and we fight to guarantee equitable access to natural commons.

Through research and the implementation of programs and campaigns, we combat extreme inequality and work with other people to ensure that all human beings can fully exercise their rights and enjoy a dignified life.

## THIS STUDY WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF MANY PEOPLE.

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Faces of Inequality

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

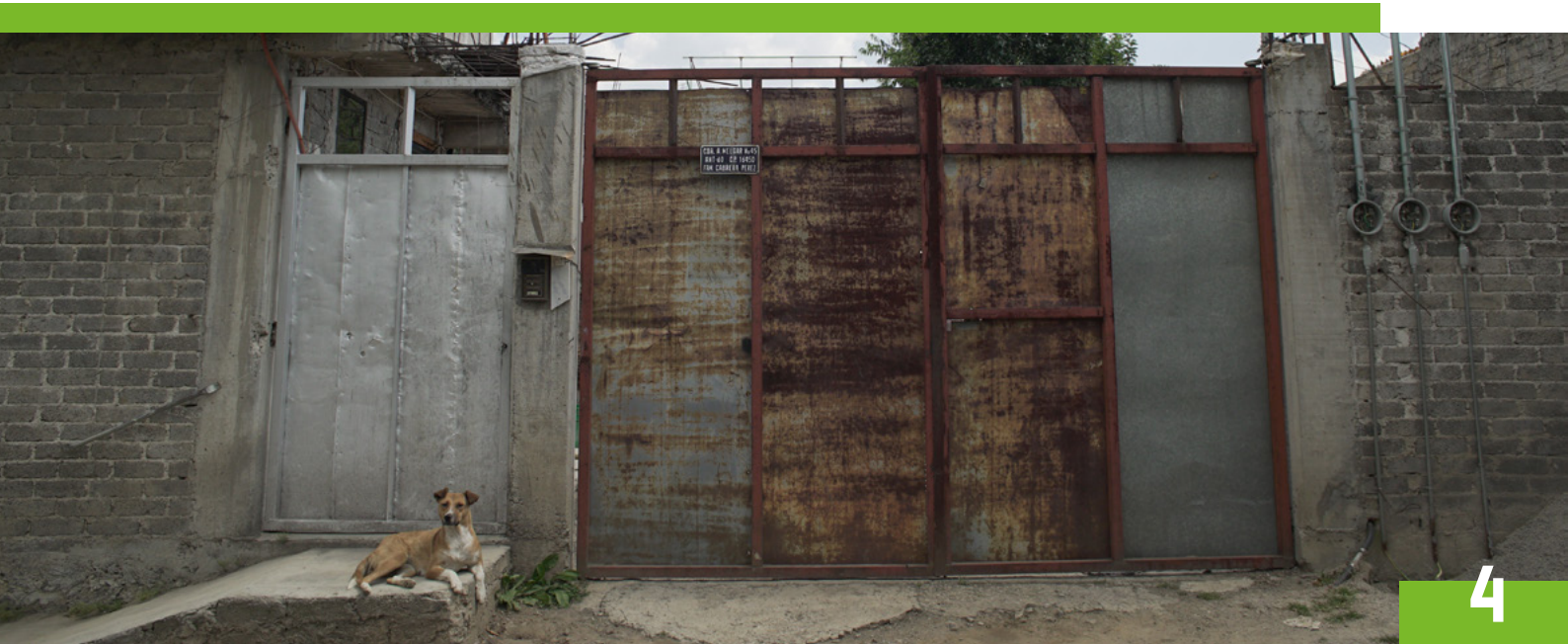
*"Inequality in Mexico City is more than having or not having money, or access to education and health services. It is the ability to dream, to go out with friends, and the ability to make those dreams come true. This is a portrait of the physical and psychological barriers that separate the citizens of the capital according to their social stratum."*

**-CHILANGO MAGAZINE**

Mexico City is a place of extremes: it contains pockets of material luxury and financial wealth, surrounded by a population struggling to get by with low wages and limited public services. Households in the richest 10 percent receive 45 percent of the total household income, or 20 times more than the poorest 20 percent.

These inequalities in livelihoods and material wellbeing are exacerbated by unequal interpersonal relations. Indigenous people and women face discrimination in the labour market and in their everyday lives, while whites and men tend to hoard the most valuable economic and social opportunities.

This report uses the new methodology Faces of Inequality to capture multidimensional inequalities. It goes beyond standard inequality analyses that are based only on economic inequality. Its focus is on the quality of life that individuals manage to live, their aspirations, experiences of discrimination and stigma, and of social mobility. It captures the interactions between inequalities in living standards





and living conditions, social status and stigma, as well as in experiences of the city, using new survey data, images and videos from 50 households, 5 from each income decile, combined with pre-existing quantitative survey data.

Low-income households have worse conditions in years of education, access to medical care, access to housing and basic services such as water, degree of food security and access to social security, compared to households in the highest deciles.

-Qualitative responses on health indicate that the bottom seven deciles rely primarily on public health provision, although those in informal work tend to have less access to these services. For those with access, in some cases they experience extremely long waits, out-of-stock medicines, negligence from medical personnel, ill-treatment, and an inability to see a specialist for days even during an emergency.

-In education we find that almost all children in the bottom seven deciles attend public schools while all children in the top three deciles attend private school. Within public schools there are wide inequalities in the quality of infrastructure, and teacher attention.





Households in the bottom deciles report poor or damaged infrastructure, teacher absenteeism leading to cancelled days of schooling, and larger class sizes. -People's experiences of work vary dramatically across the income distribution. In lower income deciles, people often report mistreatment in formal sector jobs, and for this reason many of them prefer informal work or self-employment even while they recognize the benefits of social security and healthcare that the formal sector provides.

-In housing, the poorest households often lacked basic infrastructure where they lived. In some cases, this lack of public infrastructure revealed strong community organization, as some neighbourhoods in the lower deciles worked together to overcome these deprivations.

-Social networks have a large impact on people's financial security. Households across the income distribution report that they could turn to family or friends to borrow money in an emergency, and often report having done so. They also have a large impact on people's job opportunities. Most households across the income distribution report using contacts to get their jobs.





-People's lived experiences of inequality varied by class, gender, race, and location. This was particularly marked for domestic workers who worked in rich neighbourhoods, who report being over-worked and receiving demeaning treatment from their employers.

-Gender violence and discrimination tends to be normalized, with one respondent saying her experiences were "nothing that has not been experienced by other woman here in Mexico at any [socioeconomic] level." This mistreatment includes discrimination at work, and sexual harassment or assault in the street as commonplace.

Addressing these many varieties of inequality therefore requires the policies that are known to bring incomes closer together. Yet for this very reason they face strong political resistance from higher income groups: higher minimum wages, greater worker rights, higher rates of taxation on better-off households, and higher spending on public services and public investment.





# 1 INTRODUCTION





Mexico City is a place of extremes: it holds great historic, artistic and architectural riches, and contains pockets of material luxury and financial wealth. Yet most of the population struggle to get by on low wages, and many cannot afford the basic needs of a secure life, and do not enjoy reliable or effective public services and infrastructure. These inequalities in livelihoods and material wellbeing are exacerbated by exclusion, as indigenous people and women face discrimination in the labour market and in their everyday lives, while whites and men tend to hoard the limited economic and social opportunities. This report, using the new methodology Faces of Inequality, aims to capture these multidimensional inequalities in order to better understand how inequality affects everyone's lives.

Faces of Inequality is a collaboration between King's College London, Oxfam Mexico, PeriodismoCIDE, and the Mexican magazine Chilango. The pilot project in Mexico City, which we use in this report, has collected survey data, images and videos from 50 households that are representative across the full range of incomes, which we combine with pre-existing quantitative data.

Our approach has four features that make it unique. First, it measures multidimensional inequality, meaning it captures multiple dimensions of well-being across the complete income distribution. We divide the population into income deciles – the poorest 10 percent, the next 10 percent, and so on up to the richest 10 percent. It then measures multiple dimensions of well-being for each income decile, allowing us to compare different dimensions of well-being across deciles. This provides more information than methods that consider multiple dimensions of well-being or of inequality, but which cannot demonstrate the correlation between different dimensions across the distribution<sup>1</sup>.

Second, it measures well-being in both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Quantitative dimensions include income, years of education, access to health services, and others. Qualitative dimensions include people's descriptions of their lived experiences of work, of public ser-

<sup>1</sup> For instance, the Multidimensional Inequality Framework (McKnight et al., 2018 and the dedicated website <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/inequality/>) measures multiple dimensions of inequality separately, not multidimensional inequality strictly speaking. On the other hand, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (Alkire and Foster, 2011) is a true multidimensional measure, but it is concerned with only the bottom of the distribution, and only quantitative dimensions. See Bleaney and Segal (2020) for a comparison of multidimensional methodologies.

vices and infrastructure, their social networks, and narratives of how they deal with a range of problems.

Third, we distinguish two different kinds of qualitative information: inequality of lived experiences and lived experience of inequality. When the poor have to wait longer to receive medical attention than the rich, or suffer worse insecurity in their neighbourhoods, then we can speak of inequalities in lived experience. Yet the lived experience of inequality is something further: when someone experiences stigma or is discriminated against because of their race or class, or when a domestic worker is dominated by her employer – or her employer enjoys commanding a subordinate – then these are cases where the experience itself is an experience of inequality. These experiences arise out of both social class hierarchies, where people from a higher class can dominate people from a lower class (Bourdieu, 2010), and out of categorical inequalities, where privileged categories such as whites or men discriminate against deprived categories such as indigenous people or women (Tilly, 2009). They involve ‘othering’, where people from different classes or categories are seen as fundamentally not the same kind of person or occupying a different world. These experiences are constitutive of what is sometimes called social inequality (Anderson, 2010).

Fourth, in addition to the quantitative and qualitative information captured in the semi-structured surveys, Chilango magazine used the audio-visual material collected to produce a special issue and microsite titled *No Somos Iguales*.

The microsite, <https://desigualdad.chilango.com>, is the most-viewed issue Chilango has ever produced, and presents articles based on the interviews along with a set of photographs and videos covering life across the income distribution in Mexico City. These videos and articles highlight a multitude of inequalities, from experiences of public health and education, transport across the city, access to parks, and experiences of discrimination. They have elicited startling responses from the public, many of whom found it hard to believe where the interviewees were located in the income distribution, and some of whom expressed prejudices against the poor and their lifestyles.

Our method allows us to analyse linkages between different dimensions of inequality that other methods cannot capture. Most obviously, our multidimensional inequality approach shows that higher-income households tend to have more education, access to a wider range of health services, and better housing. We also find that poorer households often lack basic infrastructure such as water or paving.

But our qualitative findings uncover additional aspects to inequality. We find that social life is fundamental to inequality in several respects: the local community determines the strategies that households use to compensate for missing public services; social networks have an important impact on both financial security in times of need, and on access to job opportunities; and how people relate to one another and feel about themselves depends in large part on their social background and where they live. People at different points of the income distribution also have very different experiences of the city, both in their own neighbourhoods and as they travel around for work and care responsibilities, and for leisure.

We identified the households to be interviewed by predicting the average income levels of small geographic units called AGEBs. Starting from the assumption that a household had the average income of its AGEB, we picked five households from each income decile. The top decile is more heterogeneous than the rest, however, so we included a mix from decile 10 neighbourhoods that





are close to poorer zones and decile 10 neighbourhoods that are the most exclusive and expensive by land values and rents, where we would expect the top one percent to live<sup>2</sup>. Then we asked the interviewees to identify the range in which their household income fell. In the analysis below we indicate predicted income decile D in parentheses. Where the predicted income bracket and self-reported income bracket are substantially different, we report this.

In section 2 we present a brief description of some quantitative dimensions of inequality, including the income dimension which we use to structure the overall distribution. Section 3 describes the further insights that our qualitative interviews produced on households' living standards in multiple dimensions. Section 4 considers spatial inequalities and people's experiences of the city. Section 5 turns to social aspects of inequality, covering the role of social networks, and people's lived experiences of inequality including discrimination and othering.



<sup>2</sup> Decile 10A AGEBS are in zones closer to poorer AGEBS and in municipalities that have less good infrastructure. These include Coyoacán and Tlalpan. Decil 10 B AGEBS are in municipalities with good infrastructure like Benito Juárez and Álvaro Obregón. Decile 10 C AGEBS are in neighbourhoods categorised by real estate websites as the richest zones in Mexico City in terms of the value of land and costs of rents, such as Polanco and Las Lomas.



# 2 QUANTITATIVE INEQUALITIES





We start with quantitative data from the National Survey on Household Income and Expenditures (ENIGH) on a variety of dimensions of well-being in Mexico City, defined in table 1. Figure 1 portrays incomes, education levels, and share of indigenous households arranged by income decile. The bottom two deciles receive an average monthly income per equivalent adult<sup>3</sup> of M\$1,240 and M\$1,877, compared with M\$30,600 for the top decile. This means households in the top decile receive 20 times the income of the bottom 20 percent, or 45 percent of total income, implying a very high degree of income inequality. The Gini coefficient for income inequality is correspondingly high at 0.51. Unsurprisingly, average years of education for adults has a strong positive correlation with income levels, increasing as we go up the income deciles; below we explore in more detail the differences in experiences of education across the income distribution.

We also see a positive correlation between income and the share of individuals who identify themselves as indigenous. However, this correlation is driven entirely by the bottom two deciles, which have a relatively high share of indigenous households at 22 and 20 percent respectively, and the top decile, which has a relatively low share of 6.3 percent. If we consider deciles 3 to 9 there is no significant correlation, and of those seven deciles it is decile 6 that has the highest share. Being indigenous therefore does not appear to be an obstacle to being in the middle of the income distribution, and even in the higher deciles up to the ninth. But individuals in households in the top decile are substantially less likely to identify as indigenous.

Figure 2 presents six further dimensions of well-being, displaying their relationship with income decile and indicating is a clear negative correlation between income decile and each of these dimensions. The implication is that multiple dimensions of well-being tend to go together: richer households have more education, are more likely to have health insurance, are less likely to suffer food insecurity, and so on.

<sup>3</sup> The use of adult equivalents allows comparison between the real income of households of different composition (CONEVAL, 2014).

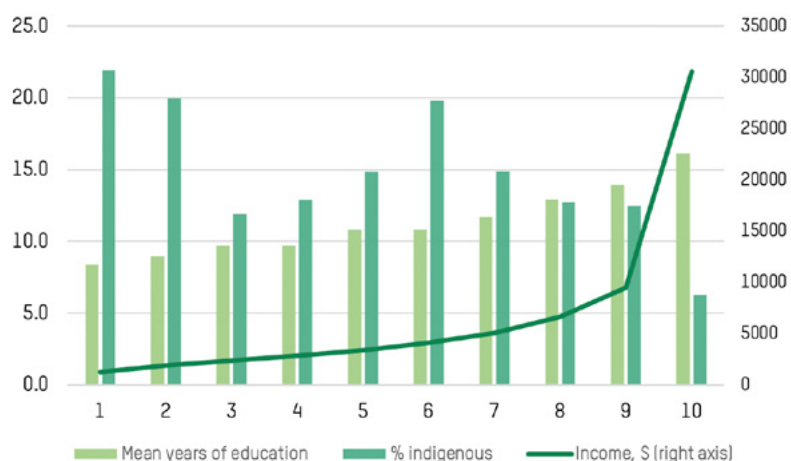
It is also interesting, however, to notice not just the inequalities but also what is not unequal. For instance, some deprivations are experienced even in the top decile: even in the top decile, 10 percent of people have no health insurance and 29% have no social security. At the same time, if 77% of people in the bottom decile have no access to social security, it is also true that 23% do have access to social security – and it is striking that despite the connection to the formal labour market that this implies, they remain in the bottom decile, in extreme.

**TABLE 1: DIMENSIONS OF WELL-BEING**

Income	Average household monthly income per equivalent adult, M\$1,000s
Education	Mean years of education people over 15 years old
% Indigenous	% people who consider themselves to be indigenous
No access to healthcare	No access to social security health insurance or private insurance
No access to social security	No access to formal social security- link to labour position (good proxy for informality)
No access to proper housing	A person who lives in a house with one or more of these conditions: earthen floors, bad quality walls or roofs, or overcrowding
No access to services within the house	A person who lives in a house with one or more of these conditions: no water connection, no sewerage, no electricity, no gas service
Has moderate or severe food insecurity	Food insecurity as defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
% People with a disability in the household	Permanent disabilities

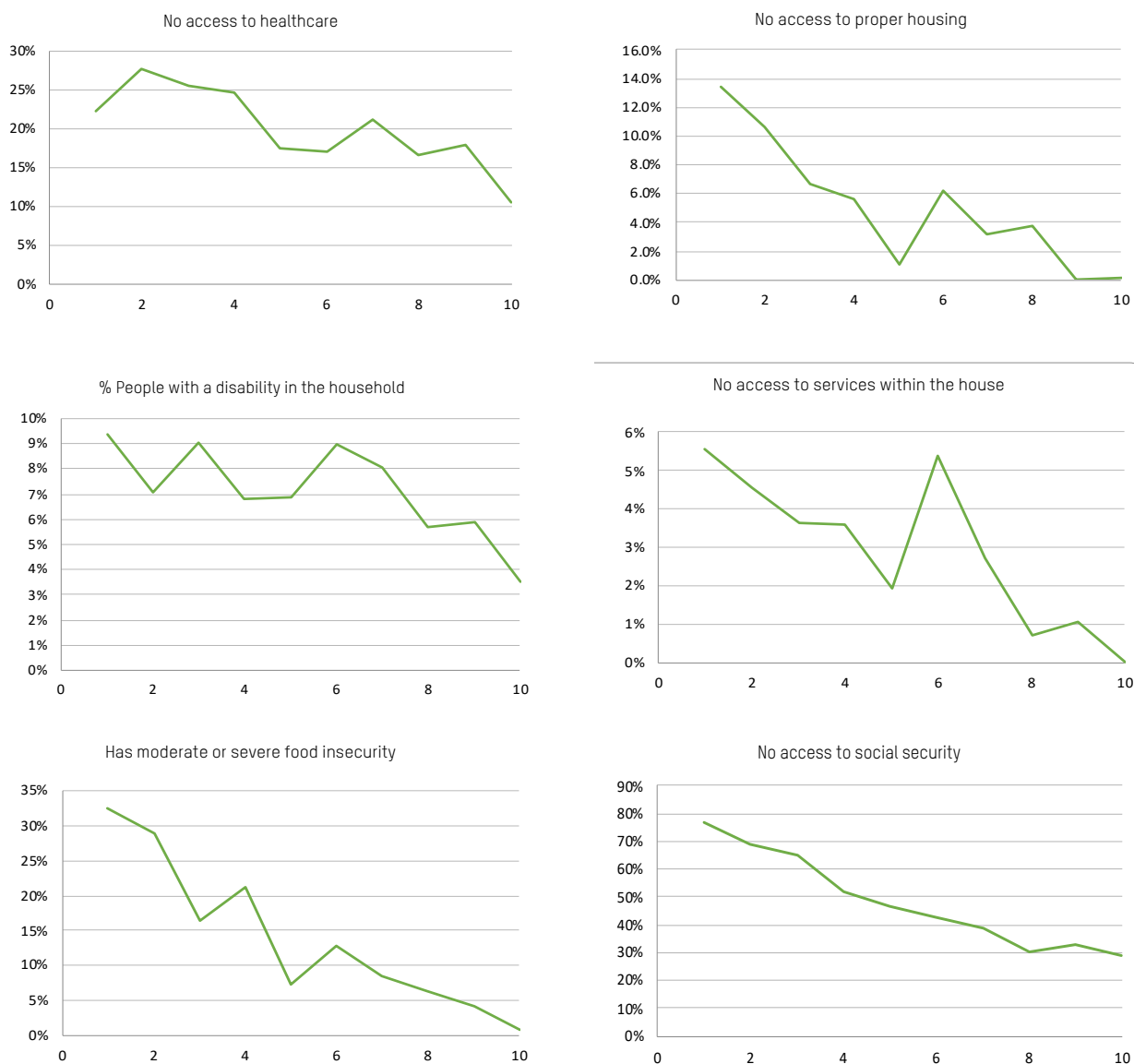
Source: Made by authors using ENIGH 2018

**FIGURE 1: INCOME INEQUALITY, EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY, AND RACE**



Source: ENIGH 2018.

**FIGURE 2: MULTIDIMENSIONAL INEQUALITY**



Calculated from CONEVAL data based on ENIGH 2018.



# 3 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS ON LIVING STANDARDS



The data above provide important information on the multiple dimensions of inequality to be found in Mexico City. But we gain additional insight into the lived experience of the different dimensions by turning to qualitative analysis. We start with the qualitative aspects of living standards. We find that experiences of health and education, of work, food security, housing, and public infrastructure, all vary substantially across the income distribution. Moreover, interviewees<sup>4</sup> told us about the strategies they use to access the best services they can, or to compensate for absent services.

## 3.1 HEALTH

Households in deciles 1 to 7 rely mostly on health services provided by the state: IMSS, ISSTE, Seguro Popular, and the National Institutes under the purview of the Secretary of Public Health. Experiences with these health services vary. Among households in the first 7 deciles there is a range of deficiencies in their experiences of public health services provision. These range from long waiting times, including patients having to arrive at hospitals or other health centres at 4 or 5 am, or even having to spend the night in a queue, in order to be able to obtain a ticket to see a specialist later that day, to out-of-stock medicines, medical personnel negligence, including inability to see a specialist for days even during an emergency, and ill-treatment.

How do households in the first 7 deciles deal with the challenges posed by public health services? Our study shows that despite relying mostly on state provision, households throughout these 7 deciles supplement it with private health services. To deal with long waiting times people might choose to attend the consulting rooms attached to certain pharmacy chains, where they report feeling heard and respected. When conditions require blood tests, ultrasounds, and other investigations, all of which have long waiting times, many households report seeking them from private providers. The ability to pay for these services increases, as expected, with incomes, so that it is easier for people in decile 7 than for people in decile 3.

<sup>4</sup> The names of the interviewees were modified to preserve their anonymity.



But other factors also play a role. Several interviewees explained that they resort to borrowing to cover the costs, with those with stronger community bonds and social networks more able to do so, as discussed above. In one case from decile 1, where lack of money and irregular state provision of medicines meant that the patient could not always acquire drugs needed for a chronic condition, members of their church often directly buy them or supply the cash to obtain it. It is also important to highlight informal work as another axis of inequality in access to health services. In a case from decile 6, the combination of level of income with self-employment means a lack of coverage, and difficulty accessing treatment and medicines for chronic conditions.

On the other hand, deciles 8 to 10 opt for private insurance and private services. Among our interviewees in the higher 3 deciles, we find dissatisfaction with health service provision, with patients feeling they need to try multiple specialists before they can get the treatment they need. We also find accounts of negligence in private sector provision, in particular pertaining to maternal health, which suggests a gendered dimension to the experience of inequality in health services (which we return to below). Just as those who typically rely on public health services are sometimes resort to private provision, we also find that those with the means to pay for private insurance and services sometimes need to engage with the public sector. This is the case when they need medical certificates for sick leave, or for the check-ups that allow them to claim maternity leave. In these cases, people who do not often experience what it is like to seek medical support for those poorer than them cross their class frontier. They feel horrified at the long waiting times, as well as at what they see as problematic behaviour of the public sector patients.





## 3.2 EDUCATION

All households in deciles 1 to 6 attend or have attended state schools. In decile 7 one household out of five opted, with much effort, to send their child to private school. In contrast all those in deciles 8 to 10 send their children to private schools. While our data does not allow us to identify differences among private schools, in the case of public education it is evident all schools are not the same. From our interviews we learn that the quality of the infrastructure correlates with the average income level of the area in which schools are located. This is not just due to spatially regressive government expenditures, but to the ability of parents organizations to contribute financially to improve it. Another difference among public schools is the level of reported teacher absenteeism, which also appears more prevalent in those parts of the city where lower average incomes predominate.



There are clear inequalities among the 7 deciles that attend state schools. Some of them are spatial. As we have already seen, households in the first decile of income tend to reside in isolated areas where all type of infrastructure is lacking. This manifests itself, among other things, in long traveling times. The grandson of an interviewee from Milpa Alta, for example, leaves his house at 5:40 am to arrive to his high school in Xochimilco at 7am. Households in deciles 2 and 3 might have schools closer to home, but they report several deficiencies including poor or damaged infrastructure, teacher absenteeism leading to cancelled days of schooling, and large class sizes, with a case in Cuatepec of up to 55 pupils in one class. There are also complaints about the social environment around the school area, especially high schools, as in the case of a grandmother in Tepito who, half-jokingly, recounts her grandson's classmates claiming they do not value education because their career options are limited to peddling alcohol or drugs, or pickpocketing. In these deciles the range of responses to these challenges include participating in parents organizations to contribute funds to buy materials and carry out repairs; supporting schools financially for their operating costs, to the extent they can; and spending time and resources to send children to better schools further away from their neighbourhoods. This latter strategy works for those who can afford to transport their children either because a member of the household is devoted to care work, or because they own a car, as in the case of a household in decile 2 where the main breadwinner is a taxi driver.

In contrast with the first three deciles, households in deciles 6 and 7 report higher satisfaction with the quality of the state schools their children attend. This is because the schools in their neighbourhoods are better, or because they are able to travel to better schools further away from home. An interviewee that had a predicted income level of decile 6 based on location, but reports an income in decile 2, praises the small size of her child's school and the psychological support that pupils receive. A father in decile 7, for his part, celebrates the fact that the school his children attend has access to a swimming pool, computers, theatre lessons, and cultural outings. The main complaint in these deciles is that the school directors ask for monetary contributions towards the school, and that those children whose parents give money to the school are treated with favouritism. It is interesting to highlight that while our interviewees in deciles 1-3 did not complain about having to contribute money or resources to their schools, several in deciles 6 and 7 did, which might reflect different expectations according to income level.

As we mentioned above, households from deciles 8-10 choose private schooling for their children, because they believe this would help them develop and flourish as individuals. Parents are proud of their choices, highlighting what they see as the differences between the schools their children attend and what they construe as what is traditional or standard in Mexico, both in terms of the breadth of knowledge the teaching teams help pupils acquire (including visual arts and music), and on the type of learning, which in their view tends to be innovative and foster independent thought. They particularly like the foreign aspects of their schools: one set of parents in decile 8 claim that their school follows an “American system”; a mother in decile 9 when enumerating what she likes about her son’s kindergarten lists tae kwon do and English lessons alongside swimming and Spanish; a mother in decile 10 praises the fact that her kindergarten-aged child has Chinese and Indian teachers, who teach the children their language and their culture. While they claim that their schools are academically demanding, at least one mother is willing to accept that selectivity is not based on academic merit, but on how expensive the school fees are.





### 3.3 WORK

For the great majority of people, the great majority of their income is from work, whether through employment or self-employment, formal or informal. Average income levels and living standards, the stability of income, and therefore the sense of financial security, comes above all from work. But work is also much more than a source of income: it determines where we spend most of our day, how we experience the city, and how people treat us, whether co-workers, bosses, or customers. In our interviews we find a pattern of more informality and more self-employment in the lower parts of the income distribution. But it is not an unambiguous relationship, as we now describe.

#### EMPLOYMENT AND SELF-EMPLOYMENT

Many individuals from deciles 1 and 2 have firm roots in informal and locally based economies and report sporadic incomes. Luisa Sanchez (D1) sells home-made ice lollies and household cleaning products; Doña Roselia's husband (D1) is a builder who cannot find regular work; Rosario (D1) is currently unemployed and relies on the variable incomes of family members, none of whom have regular work; mother and daughter Viviana Gonzalez Mendoza and Sofia Ochoa Gonzalez (D2) sell various items on the street and also rely on support from other family members; and Doña Maria Castellanos (D2) sells breakfasts to people working in the city centre.



Despite the insecurity of incomes, these individuals report being reasonably content with their work and working conditions, though to what extent it is a contentment borne of resignation we can only speculate. Doña Maria (D2) likes that she lives close to her workplace, and Sofia (D2) enjoys the freedom and flexibility; she believes that the reliability and level of her income is a matter of individual responsibility: "There are no time restrictions to open or permits. The more you work, the more financial security you have." Similarly, Oscar (D3) enjoys a steady work in his own business, which is close to his home, selling flour, chiles, and everything related to "tamales", and says that "being the owner has a plus."

What is more, some interviewees report that previous negative experiences in formal work, such as poor working conditions and exploitation, makes informal work preferable. Doña Roselia's (D1) former work at a restaurant badly affected her health, and only paid 18 pesos a day. Rosario (D1) reports poor treatment in past employment as a reason for her current irregular work habits: "Some bosses are very rude, and I couldn't tolerate it anymore and I dropped out." Jesus (D1) claims that the intended benefits of formal sector employment are misinterpreted to the point that they do not improve the conditions of workers: In his

previous job, "Last year they gave us a pay increase of about 600 pesos, but it was fictitious, because they put us down as employed by another company. And in the end, we have to pay that increase to the SAT, because this company generates other taxes. What they are giving us as a raise, at the end of the fiscal year we have to pay it. Also, there are many other legal practices that harm employees."

These negative reports of previous low-wage employment are consistent with the experiences we find among those in the same deciles who are currently in formal employment. Ana (D2) now works at a natural foods store, but suffered bad treatment in her previous workplace where, nonetheless, she stayed for 28 years out of necessity. Joaquín and Rosa (D2), of the Valdéz family, work respectively in a wire factory and car factory, and give similar accounts: Joaquín's work is extremely stressful, and workers are treated badly, receiving fines when they do not arrive on time. When he lost two fingers while working some years ago, he was told he was 'obsolete' and was not given proper medical attention. He managed to keep his job, but he has now had his hours reduced, with the concomitant lower pay. Rosa feels discriminated against in her workplace for being a woman, and although she receives basic benefits such as maternity leave, a pension,





and a small contribution towards work-related travel, she reports that the workers at the factory are 'not allowed' to get sick and will be sent home unpaid when they do.

Those in lower-middle income deciles also look back on previous waged employment negatively. Mirna (D3) remembers the 2- or 3-hour journeys she took to get to previous jobs. Fabian Palacios (D4) feels he was exploited by his employer: "I really did everything, I ended up painting the house from top to bottom. From the poet Noemí Vargas, who was my teacher. I spent a year and a half there and she took advantage of my cheap labour and I painted all the furniture in her house and her whole house. "

Still, the potential benefits of formal employment are not lost on this group. Taxi driver Omar Olguin (D2) recognises that he is missing out on healthcare cover and other benefits that would come with being formally employed. Fernanda (D3) also notes the absence of state protections through her work. She sells glasses in Tepito and has her own employees, and the work seems reliable and consistent, but she feels the lack of the state's support for her line of work, in particular pertaining to insecurity in her market: "the government instead of protecting us, and eradicating crime, has let this go out of control."

Formal employment becomes more of a regular occurrence as we move up the deciles into the middle of the distribution. However, several individuals also note certain 'hidden costs' of this kind of work. Mirna (D3) has had stable work as a high school teacher for the past 8 years, but she has yearly renewable contracts that feel insecure. Elizabeth (D6) left her previous job doing domestic work through an online agency and began working 'independently', because they were requesting her to register with the tax authorities, which would have meant tax contributions that she felt she could not afford.

Complaints about formal employment do not change substantially in quality as we rise up the income distribution, though they are less common. Monica Barbosa (D7) enjoys her current work teaching in a kindergarten but is not happy with working conditions. Her boss, who is the owner of the school, treats her staff badly. They never receive holidays, "not even for important national holidays." Monica was permitted, for example, to take time off for her daughter's 15th birthday, but had pay deducted. She says her boss "believes he has slaves, instead of having workers." Mario (D8), who works in human resources, says that his work isn't as secure as it once was: he works part time for one company and freelances for





another. He does not receive the benefits he would like or the salary he thinks he deserves, and believes he is discriminated against for his age (he is 50 years old). Valeria (D9) notes that, when working at TV Azteca for several years, she was contracted through an agency so had no benefits, unlike unionised full-time employees.

There are a small number of positive accounts of formal work in the bottom half of the distribution, though far fewer than the negative accounts. Brando Cazadero (D1) works in a shopping mall and has always had formal though low-paid work and has even had the chance to travel abroad in a previous job. He enjoys his current work environment and has two days off a week to spend with his family. Aldo's (D3) work in sales comes with a "healthy" work environment, with good colleagues and bosses. Bruno (D5) very much enjoys his job at an insurance company and gets along with his colleagues and boss. He feels he is building the skills to move up the ladder and earn more at his current job or go elsewhere for better pay. Mariana (D5) always wanted to work for the public sector and managed to do so, working for SEP since finishing her studies 30 years ago. Aracely (D5) is rather neutral but does not report any grievances. While she is currently a housewife with a 6-month-old baby to look after, she recalls past work experiences: she got her first job in a call centre, which she notes was not difficult to get, and later became an English teacher.

Interviewees in the middle of the distribution complain more about their incomes than those at the bottom. Israel (D5) left a job as an Uber driver where he had been making round M\$1,000 per week, when all of the sudden the company reduced the fares, and it no longer made financial sense for him to stay. Both Aldo (D3) and Jonathan (D6) are reliant upon commission to top up a low basic salary. Jonathan (D6) reports that benefits are unsatisfactory: "we have social security, INFONAVIT and nothing else." Those who are not on commission also do not believe they earn enough. Mariana's (D5) partner, Bruno, would like to earn more because "The prices of everything are through the roof." Eduardo (D6) has been a taxi driver and chauffeur for 18 years but on weekends also works painting cars and preparing food for events on the side for extra income as he is unhappy with the amount he is earning.

Those in the upper deciles report positive aspects of their work. Valeria (D9) has a good salary, benefits, pension, and savings, and is paid triple for national holidays. Andrea (D9) is happy with her work and the benefits, especially while she was pregnant and needed to go to doctors' appointments. Still, it is noteworthy that she did not take this for granted.

In decile 7 and above, self-employment can be an attractive option for those wanting flexibility. For Elsa (D7), opening her own business allowed her to raise her son. She has always worked in her area of interest, design, across website design, prestigious television channels, a printing press, but now runs her own business focusing on prints, invitations, cards, and so on, and a retired mother works with her. Carlos (D7) studied Visual Arts at UNAM and has worked in set design and teaching. He now manages his own studio as a sculptor and has achieved international prestige.

This work allowed him to dedicate seven years to renovating family properties in order to rent them out, and he is able to spend some of his free time engaging with his community through a radio program. For Francisco (D10), self-employment was a natural choice. He found his first real 'lasting' job as an employee at Televisa. Now that he runs an agency for digital content, he looks back and notes that he was

uncomfortable being an employee, feeling that it did not foster enough innovation.

It is interesting to note the difference between Emmanuel, of decile 8, and Sonia, of decile 2. Sonia presents the fact that her economic security relies on how much she works in a positive light, while Emmanuel (D8), a producer with his own studio in the same building as his home, complains that he is unhappy with his working conditions precisely because he is reliant on his own efforts to create security and growth "I need to work harder to make more money. As it is my own business, I want to make it grow."

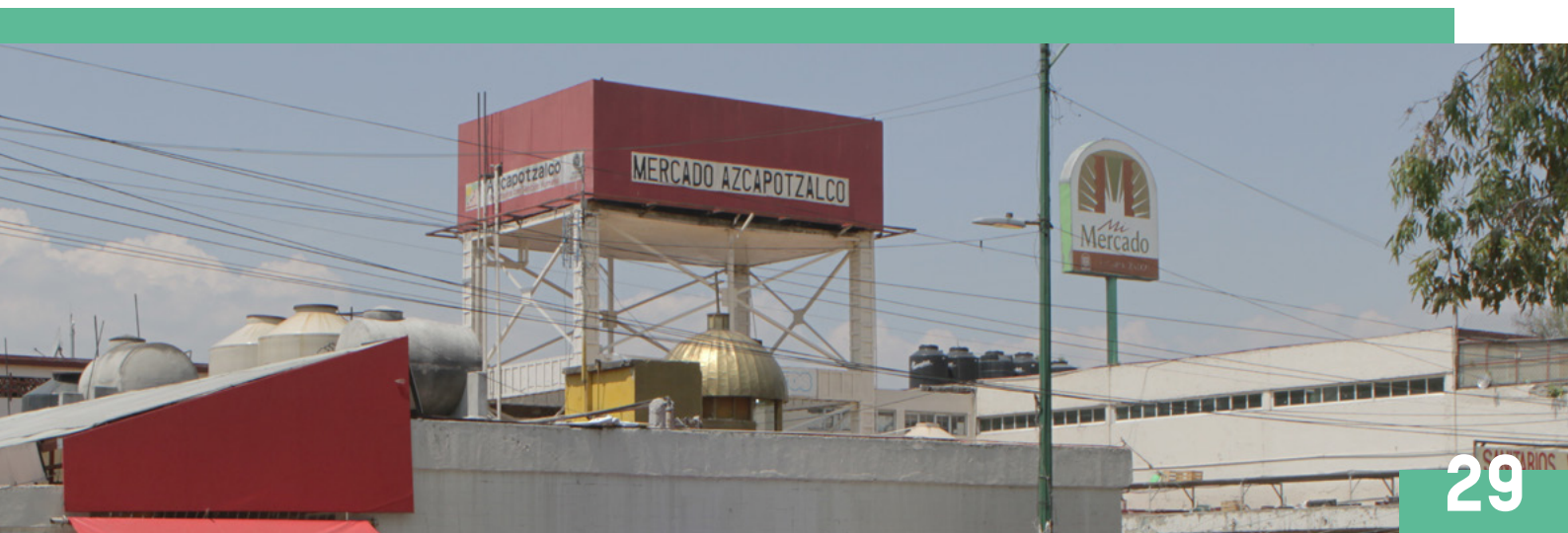
## CHAOTIC CAREER PATHS AND UNEMPLOYMENT

What is clear from deciles 3 to 6 is that many of those who find themselves in more or less stable formal employment today, have not always had it so easy. Many began work young, and present disjointed career paths: Mirna (D3) began working at age 14 in a liquor store (a job she had to lie about her age in order to secure), but also worked in department stores where the pay was very low and bosses were abusive and mistreated with the staff. Later on, to get through university, she turned her hand to selling cars and candy. Fabian (D4) had his work experience as a child through his family's



business and went on to earn low wages as a greengrocer, painter, and IT broker (which allowed him to buy his own house and car) before becoming a taxi driver. Maria de los Ángeles (predicted D4, reported D1) began work aged 8 as a babysitter, and has also been a cook and cleaner; Beatriz a (D4), began working age 15 with a baler and other machines, she says: “I held many positions in medical laboratories.” Armando (D5) began working aged 17 in restaurant, then worked on statistics for the 2000 elections, before rediscovering his skills for writing. Israel (D5) worked for Televisa, as an Uber driver, and then sold software; Bruno (D5) has worked at Cinemex, as a chauffeur, and is now an operations analyst for Chubb Security. Jonathan’s (D6) first job was in Tepito at the age of 4, which he got through family; Eduardo (D6) worked since the age of 8 in a brakes workshop, which he got through a family friend, and did not finish school; Elizabeth (D6) dropped out of preparatory school to begin working at age 17, working in sales, as a street vendor, and then as a cleaner; and Cuauhtémoc (D6) began cleaning at his father’s friend’s carpenter as a child, studied a technical degree in fish farming, and is now a blacksmith. When similarly, non-linear professional trajectories appear in the upper deciles, particularly decile 10, it is clear that it is less out of necessity than opportunity.

While the individuals looked at so far emphasise that they have always managed to find work to get by, others provide a window into what it means to be unemployed. Gaps between employment is also an interesting point of comparison across the spectrum. For Armando (D5), irregular employment did not stop once he found his calling as an author: he often has to borrow money from family as he can’t earn much working as a writer with editors. He also has other sources of income such as through teaching or video production: “I do a thousand things to survive.” Israel (D5), too, once had a three-year ‘insecurity crisis’ during which he could not find stable work. For Bruno (D5 – of Mariana and Bruno), time out of work meant taking up odd jobs “doing different tasks, here and there.” When Luis (D6) was left without work at the same time as his wife got pregnant, his only



option was to sign up to the army, which he did not like: “Then, I left as fast as I could, I didn’t find a place for myself.” However, once we reach the higher deciles, time out of employment is less of a struggle. When Arturo’s (D7) employers went into liquidation, he used his pay-out to begin trading shoes. When Valeria (D9) had a year without work, she simply dedicated her time to studies. Andrés (D9), a lawyer, spent four years without work, and made a living from his real estate investments.

## ATTITUDES TO WELFARE POLICIES

There are several welfare policies that many of our interviewees are entitled to. But we find a notable reticence to discuss social support among interviewees, which we interpret as due to the stigma associated with them. Those who mentioned them come from deciles 1 to 7, and never describe social programmes as a “right”, instead calling them “aid” with connotations somewhere between assistance and charity. Roselia (D1) reports that she receives payments from “Prospera” every two months, and that it helps her “a bit.” Maria (D2) recalls receiving government support when she was a single mother but does not specify what policy. One interviewee from decile 3 claims that his mother receives help as a pensioner, in-

cluding help for her “pantry.” Beatriz (D4) tells us that “Two years ago they gave me the card for 68 and over, it’s about 1200 a month. It’s good because my pension is very meagre, and my husband’s is worse.” A father from decile 4 seems particularly embarrassed by the question, insisting that he has never received government assistance, though his daughter, under his care, benefited from the programme that provides school uniforms. In the same interview he mentions that he eats daily at a community kitchen. Israel and Diana from (D5) complain that for two years they have been expecting “pantry aid, I think M\$1,000 every two months, but that never came.”

## 3.4 FOOD SECURITY

The answers pertaining to food security reveal as much about attitudes to food as they do about availability and affordability. We asked interviewees whether they find food expensive, and whether they ever lack money to buy enough food for their households. We found that inequality informs understandings of what having enough food means: for people at the bottom of the distribution it can mean being able to afford a meal a day, while for somebody in the top deciles, it means being able to buy whatever food their household has grown accustomed to. In our study, nobody in the first



## REFRIGERATORS ACROSS THE INCOME DISTRIBUTION



decile claimed to lack food, explaining that they always have enough for a daily meal of beans and rice. In contrast, a head of household in decile 9 claims that when his children were little, he experienced extreme financial hardship, which made it difficult for him to feed his family. However, when relating the same period at a different point in the interview, he explained that he managed to keep enough capital to invest in real estate.

The higher frequency of responses recounting experiences of food insecurity are in deciles 2, 3, and 6, especially in the latter two deciles. Here too we can see how multidimensional inequalities inform both the understanding of the question, and the ways households cope with these episodes. Interviewees in decile 2 do not equate economising by skipping meals to not having enough to eat.



A woman working long hours informally as a street vendor, for example, while acknowledging that she had enough to prepare a soup or similar at home, problematised not being able to afford ready-made food outside of her home, presumably because it was impossible for her to carry her homemade food with her to work. Another woman in this decile, who is one of the two earners in a household of 10, joked by offering a gendered reinterpretation skipping meals as a choice to “keep one’s figure.” Most of the people we interviewed in deciles 3 and 6 report often having or having previously had problems buying enough food for their households. These interviewees reported having borrowed money to deal with these episodes. However, while the poorer



households resorted to their communities and networks for informal credit, some of those in decile 6 used a credit card to see them through.

The importance of food to the bottom deciles is also indicated by their responses to our question of what they would do if there were given a gift of M\$1,000 (about US\$52). Several interviewees replied that they would use it to stock up on basic foodstuffs, highlighting preoccupations with food security.

### 3.5 HOUSING

In our sample of 50 households, only 7 rented their home. For deciles 1 to 6 renting is difficult to afford, which helps to explain why so many poor families live on the outskirts of the city where they can construct their own homes. Within deciles 2 to 5 renters often rely on family members to make ends meet: Vivian and Sofia (D2) rely on family members who do not live at home to pay the rent each month. Armando (D5) says he has to regularly had to ask for money from family members to help pay his rent. Israel and Diana (D5) also rely on their parents to get through each month and pay M\$3,500 of their rent. Aracely (D5) indicates that her husband earns around the decile 4 average of M\$2,576, and that they sometimes need money from her mother to help pay the

rent of M\$3,000 and are signing up to benefits to help feed their baby.

From decile 7, however, additional property becomes a supplementary source of income for some people. For some households, renting out property is the largest source of their income. Leonardo (D7) earns around M\$2000 himself selling juices from a stall right outside his home, but his wife owns their home and rents out apartments for around M\$16,000 a month. Olivia (D7) and her husband earn around M\$6,500 a month between them, but they own their home and can top up their income by renting out land to coffee growers for around M\$12,000 a month. Cesar (predicted D8, reported D10) lives with his wife and son, and though he reports his salary as already putting them in the top decile, he argues that this is not enough for a family, only just about covering their basic costs and their rent, which comes to M\$11,500 a month. Renting out two apartments therefore contributes towards their costs. For those in top end of decile 10, renting is not a necessary source of income but still takes place. Gerardo (predicted D9, reported D10) is in the top 1%, inherited the home he and his partner live in, and earns extra income by renting out his apartment for TV productions. Teresa (D10) is also in the top 1%, owns the home she and her family and full-time domestic workers live in, and rents out an





apartment in Polanco, one of the city's most affluent areas. Michelle (D10) owns her own home and rents out another apartment.

### 3.6 PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

We asked interviewees about their access to public infrastructure including water, electricity, and pavements. Those at the middle and the top of the income distribution paid little attention to basic services, probably because they had them readily available. In the lowest deciles households tend to have very limited access to these utilities. But we find striking responses to these limits among those poorer locales that report a stronger sense of community: as Jesus (D1 locale, reported D7) puts it, living in the poor neighbourhood of Jardines de San Juan, delegacion Tlalpan: "there are many things that we as a community join together to do, given the lack of services we face. Just as there are people dedicated to bad things, there are many people dedicated to helping the community, including outsiders."

Our interviewees in decile 1 report differences in how they access water. The prices they pay for water also vary greatly. Yet they all agree on the need to rely on water trucks and discuss the difficulty of having a place to store water when it is delivered. Doña Roselia (D1) from Milpa Alta feels she pays a lot for water and has no place to store it. Running out of water is one her most important concerns and the thing she likes least about the place where he lives is that she has to buy water. When asked what she would do if someone gave her a thousand pesos, she answers without thinking, "I would buy my water!" She pays 200 pesos for "a rotoplast" of water for washing, "and they put it in my buckets, I have nowhere else to put it", one of 650 litres and another of 500 litres. She adds, "they say it's cheaper if you buy it from a "waterpipe", but I have nowhere to put it." She reports not being able to afford water regularly: "Yes, there are times when I have not had a single peso to buy water. But the water seller knows me and says he will give it to me. There is friendship already." In these cases, the water seller sells her water on credit, until her husband gets an odd-job and they can pay him.

<sup>5</sup> Isla Urbana [<https://islaurbana.mx/project/tlaloque/>] describe themselves as "un grupo interdisciplinario de diseñadores, urbanistas, ingenieros, antropólogos, educadores y artistas dedicados a demostrar la viabilidad de la captación de lluvia en México."

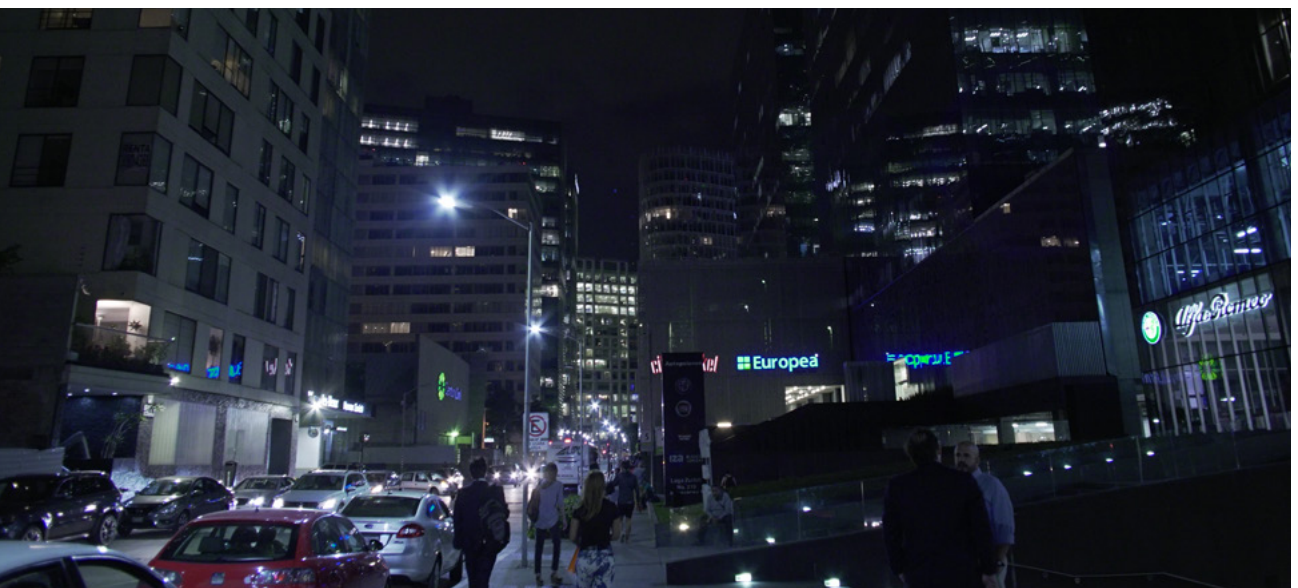
Jesus and Isabel (D1 locale, reported D7) on the other hand have a rainwater collection system called Tlaloque that is installed on their roof, which was provided by an NGO called Isla Urbana<sup>5</sup>. Jesus explains:

Every month we have the right to a water delivery from the delegation. 90 pesos for 30,000 liters of water... the delegation gives us one every month and we fill our cistern. Sometimes it takes too long because the service is complicated, three weeks, 15 days... and you measure how much water you have. If you see it is going down, you have to ask for it. It costs 90 pesos, that is 30,000 liters. The tlaloques are only in the rainy season, so you have to wait until August. At this time, it is more like acid rain and you have to wait until the components are cleaned, waterproof the roof, buy the chlorine capsules."





## PUBLIC SPACE ACROSS THE INCOME DISTRIBUTION





He notes that the local government does not have the capacity to reach all households, and the rain collection systems reduce the demand on the government water trucks. He is very happy with the Tlaloque, saying “For me, it is magnificent”, and emphasizes that in Isla Urbana “there are people who care about communities.”

Antia (D1) says that water trucks arrive once a week. Brando Cazadero (D1) and his parents comment that there are two different water truck services: some come from the delegation and others from private individuals, and report that “the local government trucks to bring us water are the only thing we have to fight for.” They say that for the water from the delegation they just have to pay “a tip” [“for the soda”], while the private trucks sell it for M\$1500 or more for 5000 litres. And to store the water, they do it in “whatever one has to fill.”

Rosario Campos was the only interviewee in decile 1 who does not need the water distributed by truck, but this is a recent development: “Now we have water service... which we didn’t have before. Before we had to carry water from the washing places to here [a thousand meters] ... now the water comes, even if it is in hoses, not like before.” But being connected to water pipes is no guarantee of access. Joaquín and his family (D2) have piped water but without sufficient availability: “Because of the water shortage, we go and ask for a water truck delivery [from the delegation]. And sometimes they come, sometimes they do not. Sometimes we have to wait in line from 3 or 4 in the morning.” Regarding the charge for the service, he said: “The service is free. But the driver sometimes asks 30, 50 pesos... as a tip [for a soda] ... so the water is not free.” When this interview ended, it started raining and they ran to put an inflatable pool and other containers to fill with the rainwater.

Turning to electricity, access to this utility is also problematic for those who live in the more isolated parts of the city. Neighbours find informal, collective ways to obtain the service. They usually solve it by buying a cable to “connect it” from a nearby pole. It is illegal but the Federal Electricity Commission, formerly Luz y Fuerza del Centro, does not offer service in these places. From the interviews it is not altogether clear how it works.



Rosario (D1), for example, expressed herself in this way: “We already have a transformer out there. Everyone in the neighbourhood has cooperated to get that transformer in place, and the same goes for the cables.” Since they are not charged for the service, we suppose it is some arrangement outside the law, but what is clear is that the neighbours organized to pay for the existing infrastructure. Antia (D1) also reports getting electricity from a local transformer without offering much information on how it functions: “CFE comes and so far, as far as I know, they have not charged anything. Now that was an agreement made by [the political organization] Antorcha, they were the ones who mobilised the most.” There are no meters in the area, so it is unlikely that households receive regular service.

Jesus (locale D1, reported D7) gives us a better insight into the situation in his neighbourhood of Jardines de San Juan, delegación Tlalpan: “Since there are no formal services provided by the government, there is something called *faenas*. The neighbours organize themselves to change a power cable, everyone has to participate and must contribute money.” He continues, “I know of families that are without electricity. The delegation gave us two transformers, and then the community organized to

buy the wiring, pay for the installation... but those two [transformers] are not enough. Fortunately, those on the edge of the neighbourhood have already been given electricity... but in the center we don't have it and there are two options: the leader of the association, TyNV, who charges you a fee, or you enter with another association (in which we are), which also charges you but is a little less conflictive... The service is provided but it is somehow illegal. If it is not being provided by CFE, it is not regularized. And at some point, the CFE may arrive and say: this is not authorized." Brando (D1) from San Gregorio, Xochimilco, also lets us know something about the strategies used to get access to electricity in his neighbourhood: "CFE hasn't come in here yet. The moment they want to come in and install their meters, we have to join them, but right now... we have to steal from them.... They sold us the line, so we're not really "hooked up." There are very few transformers here in the neighbourhood, and we pay a fee, money for services. You pay the person who is in charge of electricity, a person who takes care of electricity, who has contacted the engineer and checks it. He's independent, but he links with CFE."

Javier and Daniela (predicted D2, reported D7), despite having a higher income also face challenges in accessing public services due to where they live. "Here [San Miguel Xicalco] it is at the insistence of the neighbours. If we wait for the local government [delegación], they will never do it." And about electricity specifically, he said, "We were clients of corruption. The disappeared Luz y Fuerza used to come every month for the 'mochada'<sup>6</sup>. So, we said let's get organized and buy the poles ourselves." Daniela added, "We paid them to put the poles up and the wiring in and they stopped bothering us."

In the case of road paving, we find a similar lack of public infrastructure in poorer neighbourhoods, with a corresponding response by some communities. The neighbourhood where Jesus and Isabel live (D1 locale, reported D7) in Jardines de San Juan, delegación Tlalpan, is not paved. So, "when the main street has lots of holes, we have to throw in rubble and compact it." Where land is informally owned it is even harder. In Antia's neighbourhood (D1) there is no pavement (nor drainage) either. She reports, "We have plans to pave when they grant land use. We can't do that before. But until now, no one has given us with anything. In other colonies there is pavement, drainage and that."

<sup>6</sup> An extra payment in addition to the official price of the service that is delivered. The money is given to public service workers as a bribe.



Brando's neighbourhood (D1) is an unpaved grid between the pavement (of Colonia Conchita) and the canal that separates it from San Gregorio Xochimilco. The family did not talk much about public services, except when they were asked what they liked least about the place where they live, when they cited "the [lack of] drainage, paving, lamp posts." The situation is somewhat similar in terms of pavements in San Miguel Xicalco, where Javier and Daniela (D2 locale, reported D7) live. However, unlike the collective action drive described by Javier above, Daniela complains just as much about the attitude of her neighbours as the absence of the state: "What we lack is the paving of the street. If the neighbours had wanted to have it paved, it would be there already..." "But there are neighbours who like to live like that. I have told them, wouldn't they like to have a nice, paved road? And no...They do not like to see improvements. Sometimes out of laziness, or out of envy." Javier's attitude towards his neighbours is usually one of understanding and support, and he often offers them a ride when he takes his mother to the bus stop. Daniela, on the other hand, seems to blame her neighbours for the situation they find themselves in and their lack of contribution to the community.





# 4 SPATIAL INEQUALITY





We saw above that people's access to public services and infrastructure depend a great deal on where they live within Mexico City. Here we describe how people's experience of the city and their own neighbourhoods, and how they negotiate travelling around it for work, for care responsibilities, and for leisure.

Transport issues, and especially long commuting times (both to work and to take children to school) trouble people throughout the income distribution. Still, not everybody faces the same problems, nor has the same opportunities to design coping strategies. This translates into further inequalities, including of opportunities both in terms of education and jobs. At the bottom of the distribution, in decile 1, people tend to live more isolated lives as a result of distance and lack of public transport options. Among people in deciles 1 and 2, owning a car, however old, is a marker of intra-decile inequality, and translates into very different lived experiences. At the top of the distribution, people have cars, which allows them to spend their sometimes long commuting times in the privacy of their vehicles. At the very top, some even have chauffeurs to whom they outsource the stress of driving in Mexico City.





In addition, women throughout the distribution face challenges men do not face in our sample taking children to school and other educational activities falls almost exclusively on them, and they experience gendered insecurity in their commutes, both of which constrain their job prospects, their education opportunities, their socialising, and their leisure choices.

## LOWER INCOME DECILES

People in deciles 1 and 2 have long, difficult commutes, marked by crowded means of transport and, in many cases, insecurity. Men are more likely to commute for work, while women's economic lives tend to be more local, but still, they need to commute to take their children to school. This means that during weekends or holidays, when it is not absolutely necessary to go out, most of our interviewees choose to stay home. (It is worth noting that all of our interviewees in decile 1 lived in isolated areas. This is certainly common for households in this decile, but there are also individuals in the bottom decile who live more centrally.)

Doña Roselia (D1) goes to the market, or wherever she needs to go, first by walking along a local road. She says that it is very quiet. The interviewer points out that it lacks public lighting, so that when she walks there in the tran-

quillity of the night she refers to, she does so in total darkness: "I walk, on the road, the whole road walking to San Bartolo. I do about 20 minutes. When it gets dark (...) it's very quiet, I'm used to it." Doña María (predicted D4, reported D2), for her part, walks everywhere, including to deliver the milk she sells, but she says she never leaves Milpa Alta. She and her husband work the fields and take care of their animals.

Rosario's house (D1) is at the end of a narrow path. There is a one-kilometre paved road, where there is no room for cars, between single-story block houses and the orchards of Xochimilco. To go to the market, she takes a bicitaxi, but before that she walks the kilometre that separates her from the main avenue. On weekends they do not go out, reporting "we stay here. Oh, no, I don't feel like going out, everything is so far away." Antia (D1) takes between forty and sixty minutes by public transport to get to Xochimilco where her children's school is. They have no places of recreation nearby, nor a park, the closest being forty minutes away. Brando (D1) lives in Ampliacion Conchita and he complains that there is nothing nearby. The nearest market is ten minutes away by public transport. They also do not have a park nearby. He commutes to work for an hour and a half, first walking, then taking a combi, then the subway, and then walking again. The combi and the subway would be very crowded at the time he needs to take them. Javier and Daniela (decile 2)

also live relatively isolated in the town of San Miguel Xicalco. It takes him two and a half hours and four transfers to get to work. Daniela's job "is close by."

As mentioned above, having a car makes a big difference to the lived experience of the city. Jesus (predicted D1, reported D7) leaves his house at 6 a.m. and returns at 10 p.m. to avoid the traffic on his way. "Luckily, I have a car and I leave at the time my mother goes out, so she doesn't have to struggle with public transportation. Here it passes every half hour, with no specific timetable, and there are vans, which are much faster, but all the people go out to work and fill up. There are 50 of us waiting in line for a combi." He finishes work at 7:30 pm so he could be back home by 9 or 9:30pm but he sometimes prefers to stop at Ciudad Universitaria for run and to avoid the worst of the rush hour traffic. Isabel appreciates Jesus's gesture of taking her to work because otherwise she would have to walk some blocks and it is dark and there have been robberies in those streets at those hours. On the way back, however, she takes the minibus: "In the afternoon, the truck can take 2 or 3 hours, but that doesn't worry me."

For taxi driver Omar (D2), having a car means they can leave their neighbourhood for leisure activities at the weekend, away from their local parks which are too full and dirty. He starts working from the moment he leaves his house on the border with Malacates, after taking his son to school. Concha, his wife, takes their daughter to school, which is half an hour away by public transportation. They leave at 7:30am at the latest and at 12:00pm she goes to pick her up. From there she goes to pick up her other son at the high school, so they return home until 3:00pm.





Slightly higher up the distribution, in deciles 2 or 3, we find households in the centre of the city. This implies a very different set of experiences. Mary (D2) lives in La Merced, a fifteen-minute walk from the Zócalo where she sells breakfast at the different workplaces. She walks to the market to buy the supplies she needs for her house or to prepare the breakfasts she sells. She only needs to use public transportation when she goes to Herbalife (for products she also sells) and uses the subway, which is cheap and quick. Viviana and Sofia (D2) also live in La Merced. Viviana can solve almost all her needs by walking, despite being 93 years old. When asked if she would move, she answers: "Noooo from here I'm going to the hole [laughs]. I would not get used to it. Because here we are in the historical center, and you can walk everywhere. To Liverpool, to the Palacio del Hierro, to the Garcia stores. There are fabrics here and there is everything. I could not! That's why I wouldn't move anywhere else." Fernanda (D3) lives in Tepito and also walks to work. "I make 5 minutes to work, cross the two markets, market 23 and market 14 of Tepito, and arrive at La Rincónada, to my stall. On weekends she also likes to go to the Zócalo "I am fascinated by the Zócalo... you don't need to go to a shopping mall. There you find Zara, Bershka, everything. You can go to eat, for a walk, to a museum."

## MIDDLE INCOME DECILES

In deciles 3 to 7, interviewees talk about connectivity as one of the most important benefits or drawbacks of living where they live. Commuting is a challenge people do not take lightly. In our sample the average commuting times for those who do not work locally are between an hour and an hour and a half each way. Andres (D3) lives in San Pablo Chimalpa, Cuajimalpa with his wife, daughter, and mother. He uses public transport to get to work in the Santa Fe Shopping Center, which can take him anything between 45 minutes and an hour and a half each way. However, he says that they have green areas and other places for family recreation near where they live, which he enjoys when he is not working or commuting. Bruno (D5) walks one block to take a bus that takes him to Metro Normal, from there he goes to Metro Hidalgo where he takes another bus that leaves him at Reforma. It takes him an hour to get there. On the way back a corporate taxi takes an hour or an hour and a half to get him home. Luis (D6) lives in a central area (Santa María la Ribera), which he likes because it is well connected to schools, medical and leisure services, and has different transportation systems nearby. But he works in Santa Fe, with a commute that typically takes fifty minutes though with traffic it has taken him up to two and a half hours.

What Fabian Palacios (D4) least likes about the place where he lives (in Cerro del Judío) is that public transportation options are limited and unsatisfactory: “You go out and find that you can’t get on public transportation, because there is only one type of transport and it comes full.” However, he is a taxi driver, so he does not need to commute by public transport to work. He can also use the car for recreation, though he sometimes cycles or takes public transport if necessary.

Those who can work from home or from near home choose to do so. Oscar’s work (D3) is adjacent to his home in Cuajimalpa, which saves him from commuting. He has a shop selling flour, spices, and dried chili (items related to tamales), where he works from 8am to 6pm. Although he lives far from the city, this does not trouble him, for he has a car. In his free time, he likes to go to the theatre, to the cinema or to go out to eat something typical in the nearby areas. Leonardo (D7) lives in Azcapotzalco. He has a juice stand outside his house and they also rent some apartments (owned by his wife) next to his house. He buys the necessary supplies for the juices in the Central de Abastos, and he chooses to go in the early morning, when there is less traffic. He also owns a car. It takes him thirty minutes to go and thirty minutes more to come back. On weekends he likes to drive to Chapultepec to walk their dogs.

Cuauhtémoc (D6) lives in San Juan de Aragón. He is a blacksmith and has a workshop in his house: “Usually I work in the neighbourhood and I visit clients by bike. If I have to deliver locally, I use a cart [diablito]. If I have to go further, I tell the customer to hire a delivery service. I don’t have a car. I only have a bicycle and my two pieces [touching his legs].”

Transport is also a challenge for those who do not work. Beatriz (D4) is 72-years old and lives in Cerro del Judío. She tries to stay indoors, because as she explains she does not have the strength in her legs to take buses that are always full. When she has to go to the doctor she goes by taxi, but it is very expensive for her family, because she and her husband are pensioners.



For women, on whom responsibility for children disproportionately falls, working close to home is very important. Elsa (D7) is a single mother who lives in Colonia Federal. She is a graphic designer, and her office is at home. Her mother works with her. Her son's daycare is two streets away from her house. She has a car and often uses it to visit clients or get the necessary supplies, and she says she has gone to deliver everywhere: to the exit to Cuernavaca, to the city center, to the south, to the Linda Vista. Having her mother working with her is what makes this possible. Erica (predicted D6, reported D2) also relies on her mother. It takes her between forty-five minutes and an hour to get to the houses where she works as a cleaner and cook. On the way she drops her son off at school or picks him up, although some days her mother, who lives with her and is also a domestic worker, does the school runs. The school is a ten-minute walk from Metro Izta-calco and also a ten-minute walk away from their home.

Monica Barbosa (D7) lives in the colony of Santa María la Ribera. What she likes best about it is that it is very central, and she finds everything at hand. Like Elsa she is also a single mother. Her day starts at 7am when she takes her teenage daughter (17) to school. When she gets



back, she gets ready to go to work by 9am in a school three blocks away from her house. When her teaching job ends, she eats with her daughter before going to her second job in a cafeteria that is a twenty-minute walk away. Her daughter is old enough to take care of herself at home, completing her homework while she waits for her mother. Monica finishes at the cafeteria at 9:30pm.

Claudia Álvarez (D7) lives in Colonia Federal with her husband, two of her daughters, their partners, and several grandchildren. She used to have a beauty salon in front of her house. Now she is planning to open one in her own home. When she goes to La Merced to buy leaves for tamales that she makes and sells with one of her daughters, they usually go by bus and it takes them 45 minutes. If they go by subway, it is 25 minutes. She walks to pick up one of her grandsons from school every day. If they need to go further, or when she goes to see her doctor at the Colonia Obrera they go in her husband's van which "serves them well."

Women suffer more insecurity in their commutes, which also pushes them to live more local lives. Mirna (D3) is 32 years old. She chose both her home in Rio de los Remedios and her job so that they would be close to each other, because she had spent much of her life traveling long distances to go to college or to work. Still, she makes mobility decisions motivated by insecurity: To go to work "I leave around 6:30 am. I can get there on foot, but since the colony is unsafe, I take a minibus that stops in front of here, and my partner accompanies me to the stop. On the way back, I walk because it's a little safer as there are more people around (early in the morning you have to be vigilant, once I was harassed by a man without clothes)." When she goes out to see friends, she usually uses the subway. Although there are lines that would reduce travel time, she prefers to go to Montezuma because there she can take a local bus that leaves her at the corner of her house. She reports that there have been robberies on other routes and that one seems safer to her. She also highlighted the number of signs of missing women in her area. Glotis (D3), is currently a housewife and mother of three children (7, 5 and under 1) and who lives in Iztacalco. She says she likes that everything close by, although she does not feel safe, and as a result she restricts the places she goes to and the times of the day she does.

Insecurity also affects how some men plan their days. Mariana and Bruno (D5) live in Iztapalapa. They like the fact that their home feels very centrally located. They are 15 minutes away from the



metro or 300 meters away from the line 8 of the metrobus. They are also close to Periférico and Eje 5, which is useful because they have a car. But Bruno tries to pick up his daughters from the metro when they come back from school for reasons of security.

## TOP INCOME DECILES

As we move up in the income distribution it is not surprising to find that people have more choices, and less constraints when it comes to where to live, where to work, and at what time to start the working day. Still, our interviewees experience significant trade-offs, especially in terms of commuting times. Families in these deciles are not always able to find areas to live that are convenient for the needs of all their members. While those who live in more central areas have more options for recreation and public transport, they still spend a lot of time moving around the city. Commuting may be the most egalitarian challenge posed by life in Mexico City: everyone finds it difficult.

Mario and his wife (predicted D8, reported D9) live in Coapa. It takes him an hour and ten minutes to get to work by car, or more than an hour and a half by public transport. He lives far from the center of the city, and he dislikes that, although he says that the part of Coapa where

they live is well connected because there are avenues and means of transportation to reach some of the subway stations.

Andrés (D9) lives in Coyoacán and avoids the traffic on his way to work by leaving very early and returning home very late: “I leave at 6:30 AM, because I work in Colonia Cuauhtémoc, so I don’t get hit by traffic and arrive at my leisure at 8. If I leave later, it’s already chaos. If I leave at 7 or 7:30 in the morning it takes me two – even three hours. When I don’t go in my car I take an Uber, because I don’t have a parking space there. If I leave early it costs me about \$170, and what with the parking and the scratches, it ends up being cheaper than driving.” He is divorced and two of his grownup children live with him.

Some in the top three deciles are overall content about where they live and their mobility, though often they face constraints. What Raul (D8) likes best about the place where he lives, Colonia Industrial, Gustavo A. Madero, is that his neighbourhood has become central. He is a lawyer and tries to get to the courthouse or to see clients by public transport because it is cheaper, though when he feels it is convenient (because there is no traffic or parking problems) he uses his car. Emmanuel (D8) lives and works in the same building in Mixcoac. He has a wife

who takes care of the home and a child. Unusually for a man<sup>7</sup>, he takes his child to kindergarten every day – facilitated by the fact that it is only one block away (he also puts him to sleep in the evening). He likes where they live because it is very close to the subway and he does not need to use their car often. He also likes that there are shopping malls and cinemas nearby. However, he would prefer to live in the Colonias Del Valle or Narvarte because he thinks they are less crowded and have more options for recreation such as restaurants, parks and more family-friendly spaces.

Alexis and Jessica (D8) have everything close by and feel that they live in an oasis (a Country Club in Coyoacán), and their daughters' school is just a few blocks away. They also have a park in front of their house. Alexis drives forty minutes to work, but on the way back it takes him almost an hour.



For some people in the top decile inaccessibility is both desired, as it marks exclusivity, and a drawback. The sidewalks in Lomas Altas, Miguel Hidalgo, the affluent part of the city where Francisco lives (D10) are very narrow, so it is difficult to get there without a car. The houses are so big that there are only a few per block. His office is only 6 minutes away by car, so he can enjoy lunch at home with his wife if he chooses to. Although he likes the tranquillity of living there, he dislikes the isolation and distance to meeting places such as cafes, restaurants, or bars. Marvin and Astrid (D10), on the other hand, live in Ampliación Granada. Marvin drives to and from work, taking forty minutes and an hour respectively, though he is able to do “home office” two or three times a week. Instead of feeling isolated, they love that they live in a mixed-use complex, where they have everything, they need within walking distance.

<sup>7</sup> In Mexico, women contribute an average of 22 hours to domestic work per week, which is equivalent to 2.5 times the time that men dedicate to these activities. (CONEVAL, 2021)



While as expected women in the top three deciles live more comfortable lives than women in the bottom seven deciles, they typically face the responsibilities for getting children to and from school. Valeria's job (D9) is an eight-minute walk from her home in Colonia Nápoles. Her son's school is about a 15-minute walk away and her gym is only two blocks from her house. Her mother, who helps her take care of her son, lives in the same block as she does. She tries to make most of her trips on foot or by public transportation, except to take her son to school, because from there she goes to her mother's place to bring the things she might take care of him in the afternoon. Her husband does not seem so constrained by care work and has a 40-minute commute to work by car in each direction.

Mothers who work typically have to juggle their commute with childcare responsibilities. Teresa (D10) lives in Lomas de Reforma. She is married and they have a 2-year-old girl, and some time ago she decided to slow down to pay more attention to her. She now works mostly from home, though she has to go to the World Trade Center twice a week (she is an entrepreneur in cat products and manages the brand of a jewellery store). It takes her forty minutes to make the trip, either in her car or in Uber. Sometimes she has to visit her clients. In her daily life she picks up her daughter from school and

sometimes takes her to music classes in the afternoon. Her husband drives their daughter to school in the morning. They have a domestic worker. What she likes about where she lives is that it is peaceful and centrally located, but she does not like that it is not possible to walk around, in part because of insecurity. The gym she goes to is nearby but if she walks there she faces a lot of sexual harassment. Her routines are built around the need to drive everywhere and her role as a mother.

Even at the very top of the decile 10 these concerns are visible. Michelle is a married mother of two living in one of the most affluent parts of the city, Bosques de Las Lomas. Most of her day is devoted to taking her children to their daily activities. Her children attend different schools. The first drop off takes twenty minutes and from there, another fifteen minutes more to the other child's school. In the afternoons they go to therapy or English classes or piñatas. They have a driver, but she always accompanies them because they are 7-year-old and spend a lot of time in traffic. She also volunteers with the Legionarios de Cristo offering literacy classes to underprivileged women.

Women who do not have care responsibilities feel more mobile. Tamara (D9) is a divorced 62-year-old doctor who lives in Colonia del

Valle and works in the consulting room attached to a pharmacy two blocks from her house. She also walks to the market. She likes where she lives because she can go out, walk around, and has “everything at hand.” She can also take a bus or the subway a block away from her house. The connectivity of her neighbourhood is the reason she gives for not having moved to a bigger house into Las Águilas when she had the chance.

Claudia Mata (D9) lives in Cuajimalpa and considers that she has everything she needs nearby. Her previous job was close, and now she makes and sells dog food. Every two weeks she visits the wholesale depot in Iztapalapa to buy supplies. She also delivers orders using her own car, planning circuits to make it more efficient. If there is one thing that she does not like about where she lives is that it is far from what she considers the center and has to take Constituyentes to go to Colonia Roma, because traffic tends to be so bad.

Alejandro Rodriguez (predicted D9, reported D10) feels she lives in an oasis (in Coyoacán). Her apartment, where she and her husband moved a year ago, is in a in a 600-unit development that has everything she could possibly need: bowling alley, ice rink, game room, swimming pool, gym, grocery store or even a bar. It is like living above a small shopping mall. It is also just a short walk away from the traditional town of Xoco. She feels safe at home, in part because only her and her husband’s digital footprint can open their door, but she does not walk around the neighbourhood because she believes there have been many assaults in the street. She works in Las Lomas and drives there every day, except on Fridays when she works from home. It takes her half an hour to get there and up to an hour to get back. She is pregnant with her first child, so her work and commuting might change.





# 5

## SOCIAL ASPECTS OF INEQUALITY





Both the mechanisms that reproduce inequalities, and the experience of inequality, are deeply embedded in social life. We find that social networks are essential both in determining financial stability, as people rely on their networks in times of financial need, and also in helping people to find jobs. Moreover, the experience of inequality itself is a social experience: when people feel looked down upon or discriminated against or feel that those in different social strata occupy a different world.

## 5.1 SOCIAL NETWORKS AND INEQUALITY

In a spatially segregated, unequal city such as Mexico City, people's social networks are largely constrained within their income levels, so social networks reproduce inequality. We find that people's social networks are important both for financial support in times of need, and for finding job opportunities.





## SOCIAL NETWORKS AND FINANCIAL SECURITY

To investigate the relationship between experiences of financial vulnerability, feelings of financial insecurity and social networks we asked households who would they turn to for support if confronted with financial difficulties or other emergencies. Throughout the distribution, interviewees consistently responded that they would turn to family (mostly parents, siblings, and parents-in-law), as well as friends. They felt supported by them and confident in their willingness to assist them if asked. However, as expected, those in deciles 1 to 7 reported finding it harder to borrow any given amount of money than those in deciles 8 to 10. Nobody in deciles 1 to 6 can identify a person who could lend them M\$10,000 (about US\$530), although they can typically think of several that can give them smaller sums, up to M\$2,000 (about US\$105). At the other end of the income distribution, among households in deciles 8 to 10 asking for help or money seems easy and interviewees convey the sense that it is a frequent occurrence. Examples include needing money for private education fees and an unexpected funeral. Nobody in these deciles believes that they would struggle to ask for M\$10,000, nor that it would be difficult to repay that amount in a matter of months. Women in these deciles claim that in addition to family and friends, they can also turn to their ex-husbands or in-laws.





While this variability between income groups is unsurprising – higher income groups find it easier to borrow the larger sum – there is a striking variability within the bottom three deciles. Among this income bracket families often need to borrow money for medical treatment and home repairs, which often also involve people contributing their labour. For these households, the quality or depth of community within their neighbourhood matters a great deal. Some live in communities that feel cohesive, such as San Pablo Chimalpa, or Nueva Totonilca in the hills to the south of Xochimilco, where they can turn to neighbours or religious groups for support. Others live isolated lives in communities that feel hostile, and therefore have a smaller circle of people to turn to.

## SOCIAL NETWORKS AND EMPLOYMENT

Social networks are also essential for employment opportunities. In the top two deciles we find that only two lawyers and one medical professional cite education as key to their professional trajectory, while all seven other interviewees talked instead about the contact who helped them to get their current job.

Networks of family and friends are key in fin-

ding jobs and economic opportunities throughout the income distribution. Households in the bottom deciles tend to have informal and irregular incomes connected to the local community, and also talk about “family tradition” or following in their family’s footsteps.

Antia’s (D1) husband is an electrician and works locally, based on neighbourhood recommendations. She sells cleaning products from her home through social networks. Rosario (D1) had multiple jobs in commerce, both formal and informal, over more than two decades, and is one of the most explicit in narrating how “compañeras” always helped her find work. Brando (D1) works in Liverpool/Fábricas de Francia thanks to his brother-in-law, though he dislikes his job. Omar (D2) drives a taxi thanks to a friend of his sister-in-law. Oscar (D3) is self-employed but remarks that if he had to look for work, he would ask family and friends. Cuauhtémoc (D6) learned the blacksmith trade from his father, and after disappointment with the economic returns to education (he studied aquaculture and worked for seven years in trout farming), he took over his father’s workshop and client list. Those who like in deciles 5 and 6 interviewees combine contacts and looking for jobs online, though they express a preference, in terms of outcomes, for the former. Of the 5 interviews from

decile 7, two were with educators, both of whom found their jobs by responding to adds. The other three got their jobs through personal connections: A man recalls how he got his first job at PEMEX when his father retired and left him the position; a migrant from Hidalgo started working in a store upon arriving in the city thanks to his brother who also worked there; a young started a career in design thanks to a friend who found her an internship.

Elizabeth (D6) does not have a network to help her find work turn to online platforms, in her case currently Zolvers, which coordinates cleaning services. It seems that in the case of domestic workers, these platforms enhance isolation, because her clients change all the time, and given the number of hours she works, and the commute involved she has no time left to develop other social bonds.

What becomes more common from decile five onwards, and is very pronounced in deciles 9 and 10, is finding work through a friend or acquaintance. Conversely, Alexis (D9) claims that the reason found it hard to find well-paid work was because he didn't have the contacts: "For me it was complicated by the fact of coming from another city because I did not know many people, the whole issue of networks and the first job that I already got with two girls just was not enough for me."





Interviewees in from deciles 8 to 10 are no less reliant on friends and family than those lower down the distribution. The difference is that their networks provide better opportunities. A mother from decile 8 got her first job as a research assistant to her historian father-in-law, and from there moved to leading publishing house, before going freelance. Emmanuel, also from decile 8 is also a freelancer who creates audio-visual content on demand. All his clients come from “acquaintances and friends.” A similar experience is narrated by Alexis, who freelances sound for films. However, in his case he feels disadvantaged because he was born in Guadalajara, so his circle is more reduced. The same pattern is discernible among households in decile 9 and 10, with increasing emphasis on the relationships developed throughout people’s working life. A Spanish immigrant in decile 10 got her first job at her uncle’s firm. A couple in the same decile recalls how the husband’s first job, in a bank was obtained through a contact, while his wife got into PEMEX thanks to her mother.

In the top deciles we observe some discomfort with the question of contacts, probably because it suggests they may not have got their position through a fair of meritocratic process. However, even these interviewees described in detail the contacts that helped them get

the jobs and opportunities that allow them to have, and maintain, high incomes. A woman that complained at the question, stating that she has always been very hardworking, then proceeded to recount how an influential boss kept promoting her. A man who studied at a private university and ended up working in TELEvisa disliked that his colleagues asked him who his “godfather” was, but later explained that one of his professors had got him his first lasting job at a large media group.

Women often attribute their access to work to the support of husbands or brothers. Both Olivia (D7) and Monica (D7) mention the help of their brothers. Ana (D2) explains that she got her job because her husband left and offered her as a replacement; Tamara (D9) seems to have relied on her husband for work, at times doing the jobs that he didn’t want, and Michelle (D10) explains that she set up her first business with the help of her husband.

## 5.2 LIVED EXPERIENCE OF INEQUALITY.

Inequality means not only different people having very different experiences of financial security, health, education, and the built environment around them. It also means that people treat each other differently and see each

other differently. There are social hierarchies and differential treatment on the basis of class and education, gender, ethnicity, and location.

## CLASS, GENDER, AND EDUCATION

In our interviews, female domestic workers report the most explicit mistreatment by others, especially when working in the most affluent parts of the city. Elizabeth (predicted D6, reported D2) stressed that her experience in the rich neighbourhood of Polanco was very unpleasant: “The people there, with the people I have to go to, are very arrogant people. They are people who demand too much work and want to pay you a peso for what you do. They are very slave-driving people.” Olivia (D7) described it this way: “When you work as a domestic, they treat you the way they want. Because they pay us, they want everything done for them. And they tell you that either you do as they say, or you do not get paid. You have already cleaned, and they go and tell you it’s not clean, ‘clean it again and if not, we won’t pay you’. I have worked in houses like that. That is when I worked in Condesa. I did everything I had to do, I washed, I ironed, I cooked, and when the bosses arrived, there were the little casseroles with the dishes lying there so that they could serve themselves and not tell me anything. I went through a lot of trouble because the women were very jealous and thought I had something with their husbands. I was pretty when I was young, although I am running out of pretty. Yes, even with some vegetarians [I worked for]. At 6 a.m. they were ringing the bell for me to make them lunch, so I got annoyed and left the key downstairs. The lady’s daughters wanted me to wax their bikini line just because they were paying me!”

Other interviewees discuss feelings of discrimination, though they are not always happy to call them that. Regardless of their gender, they talk about feeling they do not get treated like others do in the shops, or about feeling deliberately ignored. Some notice marked distances: “In my work [in a factory], then, people come in nice clothes, in a suit, and approach us and ask what you do, and leave a distance of half a metre. ‘I’m not going to eat you and I’m not going to make you dirty because I’m not going to touch you. Tell me what you want to know’ but they have their distance, they see you as a freak, from top to bottom and from bottom to top”, says Joaquín (D2). Glotis (D3) expresses her perception in this way: “There





are some people who don't care about the social difference and think that we are all equal, but many people don't, they are idiots. I do not like that people feel superior to others. They do not even look at you. I've never worked there [in Santa Fé], I don't think they even give work in those places."

A few of the interviewees reported feeling discriminated against because they do not have higher education or have not completed it. Glotis (D3) says that she felt discriminated against "once in a job, yes, for not having studied. "Aracely (D5) mentions having felt discriminated against "a little when I mention that I have not finished my degree, but nothing else. This transcends gender divides. Joaquin (D2), an employee in a factory, said that he was not considered by his superiors, in his opinion, because he did not have a higher academic degree: "They restrict us, we cannot give an opinion." Not everybody was that straightforward. Fabian (D4) considers that the discrimination he has experienced for not having studied is rare and only happened to him while working as a messenger. Cuauhtémoc (D8), while he considers that he has never been discriminated against, he adds: "Although I have a friend who discriminates against people without a university, but I'm the one who's asked for advice the most and I don't have a university career."

We also find a sense of distance, alienation and sometimes inferiority expressed by those at the bottom end of the income distribution with respect to the rich. They often refer to the fact that people living in the more affluent areas live in “another world”, “among clouds” or “flying.” Mary (D2) reported her feelings this way: “Well, it feels... I feel very small over there” [she says, laughing, as if ashamed]. “I feel that because... I feel very simple and you see people there,... fly, don’t you think?” Mirna (D3) had to go to Polanco for work and expressed herself thus:



“My perception is that it is another world (...) The way people dress, or what they eat.” She adds that “the people who were contemptuous or rude were the people from those places.” Eduardo (D6) goes almost daily for work (he is a driver for a water company and brings members of the technical team to water plants) and says “I don’t know anyone who lives in those areas. I would not know what they look like... They are people who live... they feel like they live on another planet. (...) I have no dealings with them. I have never spoken to any of them.” Elsa (D7) also worked at Polanco and went there every day, and she relates her experience as follows: “I don’t have any friends who live in that area. It’s nice Polanco, pretty-taken care of, “very poshy.” It is kind of high class, so to speak. Some people are very nice but other people who seem to live in a cloud ‘don’t look at me, you’re at my door, get off’. There are people who abuse that, who think it gives them more rights over one who’s not from the area. People have treated me well, except for those who



live in the clouds.” Monica (D7) used to deal with people who live in these areas in her youth while her brothers were studying at university and later when she studied for her degree. Her perception is that “Yes, there are suckers. Very materialistic people. Who live in another world. In other dimensions, who solve everything with money, with brands. There is everything, but there are some very hollow people. Obsessed with money, brands, cars, who has more and who has less. I know what those people are like because I co-existed with them when my brothers were studying at the university. And when I was in La Anáhuac del sur. I don’t have any friends from there.”

Gerardo (predicted D9, reported D10) corroborates these perceptions with respect to his own high-income neighbours in Polanco, reporting that “My neighbours are that kind of people, they have a very stark social class consciousness and not because they are bad people. People who live here were born and grew up in a very privileged environment and they believe they are different, they believe they are a different type of person.” He also reports “classism” in the college he attended.

## LOCATION

Another strategy that allowed us to learn about experiences of class discrimination was to ask

our interlocutors if they had felt discriminated against because of their place of residence. The female residents of La Merced, Tamara and Sonia (D2), reported that when they were studying for their high school diploma they used to say that they lived in the centre, generically, to avoid the stigma of prostitution and the questions about it from their classmates: “Yes it is true, a lot happened to me in high school, I said about the centre because, if I said about La Merced, they would change with you.” Fer (D3) from Tepito, proud of her neighbourhood, told us that people are always surprised to learn that she lived there: “Yes, even in my church. They told me it is not possible for you to live in Tepito, and I told them, it is not possible for me to be so happy. They think that Tepito is the birth place of criminals, that there is no good person here, that everyone here is a criminal, so when they meet us, they are surprised.”

Mirna (D3) grew up in Ecatepec and said that when she was still living there, she experienced discrimination because of it: “Yes, I remember that there were people who insinuated to me that how could I live there, one person even once told me that he could offer me a dignified life and I broke up with him because he was more than discriminating against me, nullifying me. Popularly, the expression is that they are slums, shantytowns. At the school where I work, they call it Ecaterro.”

Mariana (D5), a resident of Iztapalapa, says she has trouble getting a taxi to take her to her destination: "Yes, suddenly you say you live in Iztapalapa and you take a taxi and they say 'Oh, I'm not going there.'"

Israel and Diana (D5), neighbours of Iztacalco, said that their relatives and friends have distanced themselves from them since they moved there (for economic reasons) because they avoid visiting them in an area they consider complicated: "But we do have relatives who don't come because we live here, my brother-in-law, my sister, they tell us that they don't come because they only come here and steal and kill." Israel: "My brother-in-law once came and saw a guy get shot back here, so he doesn't want to come anymore." Diana: "The family itself distanced from us because we live in a bad area. Because we have to be careful with the cars. The first time my mother-in-law came to see us, they stole her mirrors." Another of Iztacalco's neighbours, Erica (predicted decile 6, reported decile 2) reported that she has lost her jobs (as a domestic worker) when her employers found out where she lives: "Yes. There are people at my job, whom I had had to tell where I live in the city and they have cancelled my job. The colony and the place have a bad reputation." (Interviewer: What did they think you were going to steal from them? Erica: yes). "I think the rest of the city sees us as a violent area."





## HOUSING ACROSS THE INCOME DISTRIBUTION



People in the top two, or even three deciles do not visit the areas of the city considered dangerous. The exception is Michelle (D10), who volunteers with different “When I worked in a foundation for the empowerment of abused women, we went to Neza, I did not feel so insecure.” She claims that probably didn’t feel insecure because she wasn’t informed about the area she was visiting: “Maybe because I wasn’t so clear about how insecure it was. In Tepito, and that’s where I’m a bit afraid.” Jessica (predicted D8, reported D9) reports that “We have [visited those areas]. We know people living in these areas, we feel insecure, but people treat us well, people treat us differently. Her husband Alexis remarks, “What an incongruity!” For him it was incongruous to feel afraid because they have always been treated very well when they went.

## GENDER

Our female interviewees generally did not identify structures of gender discrimination within their homes, but they did so in relationship to the workplace or in public. This occurs across the entire income distribution. Rosa (D2) reported feeling discriminated against for being a woman in her work environment (in a factory). She sums up the feeling of being treated by her superiors in this way: “You

are a woman, and you don’t know anything.” Elsa (D7) also reported her experience of discrimination: “In a job interview, yes. For being a single mother. Everything was going well until that moment in terms of professionalism and academic data, until they asked if I had a family, if I was married and they changed the questions to who you depend on, what condition you are in.” Aracely (D8), when asked if she had faced discrimination, hesitated, and said something very general about Mexico being sexist, claiming that what she has experienced was “nothing that has not been experienced by other women here in Mexico at any [socioeconomic] level.” Teresa (D10) lives in Lomas de Reforma. The gym she goes to is nearby but if she walks there, she faces a lot of sexual harassment.

While these women do not report feeling oppressed due to the gender at home, there are many indications of entrenched gender roles. Some men referred to the performance of care tasks or domestic work as “support” for their partners: When Eduardo (D6) was asked about days off, he replied: “Well, the chores don’t stop. Washing clothes, that is my wife. I help her with the chores.” Luis (D6) tells us “If I can, I’ll support Laura by taking [our child] to school”, or also, about the days off “If I’m not going for a run, I’ll stay home and do some



housework to help Laura.” Omar (D2), while relating his routine, expressed “sometimes I support my wife and I take the children to school.” Most men did not mention doing any reproductive labour, suggesting even less involvement than these reported cases. Oscar (D3), for example, when asked about his routines, what time he got up, what he ate, responded “I eat the traditional breakfast, eggs, bread, beans, coffee, milk, fruit, vegetables. Depending on what my wife has for the morning, and at lunchtime the same thing.” Raul (D8) was recently widowed and says of the new dynamics “We have been organizing ourselves little by little in the absence of the mother to help with all the domestic chores.”

Bruno (D5) was the only interviewee who related his involvement in domestic work and care tasks with the naturalness that implies co-responsibility. This was later reinforced by his partner Mariana. When she was asked if they received help with domestic or care tasks, she answered that the four of them (including their two daughters) shared responsibilities. Valeria’s husband (D9) did not participate in the interview, but her story suggests that he is involved in domestic and care work.

Other women related how they adapt their economic lives to their care responsibilities. This cuts across the income distribution. Some decided to stop working, such as Concha (D2), or Glotis (D3) who worked until her third child was born, because caring for her daughters was no longer compatible with her work options. Others can make adjustments in order to continue working. Tere (D10) takes advantage of the time her daughter Julia is in daycare to work from home and reports then working from about 8:30 pm (Julia’s bedtime) to 1:30 or 2am. Elsa (D7) decided when her son Sebastian was born to set up a design studio independently (with her mother’s support), so she works while Sebastian is in kindergarten. She adds that in the afternoon she tries to work, but Sebastian is restless, and the graphic design workshop becomes a playroom. Antia (D1) decided to set up a shop and open at times that suit her care and household chores. In addition, the children are with her in the store in the afternoons. There they eat and do their homework.

Only Olvia (D7) declared feeling limited by her partner: “I like cumbia (..) I like the tasty guaracha. All of tropical Acapulco. All the cumbias. I like them and I know how to dance them. I know how to dance very well, my husband does not. I dance with other people. I dance when I am invited to a

wedding when I go to Oaxaca. I need to go out dancing. But I am a locked-in woman. My husband is very jealous. He does not like me to go out alone. Sometimes I run away. The last time was in 2012 [six years earlier]. We would go out on foot [with friends from the beauty school] and not arrive until the next day.”

## RACE

We saw above that people identify as indigenous throughout the income distribution, but that the share is disproportionately large in the bottom decile and small in the top decile. Roselia (D1), a Tzeltal Indian without a regular income, reports having experienced discrimination due to her race: “when you feel most humiliated is when they tell you: Look she is an Indian. You feel trampled because that’s how I feel.” Although she also says that “there are good people who speak beautifully of you, they say, oh look, she has her language, she is an Indian, where will she come from, and how much will she say? I’m not ashamed now, I have my dialect and I have to go on. With my husband sometimes I speak my language, and my grandchildren say: what did you say, Grandma? They are curious. They know a little bit.”

Also, in the group of those interviewed was Raul (D8) of Japanese descent. He experien-

ces mocking due to his origin, but he does not consider it discrimination. He considers it friendly and does not believe it has affected his insertion in social and economic activities: “Obviously they make fun of the Japanese surname or some things, but it is a normal situation for the Mexican, they make fun of everything, they make fun or try to bother you, it is a normal situation.”

On the other hand, Andrea (D9), of Spanish descent, related her experience of preferential treatment: “I think that having half-light hair (blonde) was an advantage in this country. It sounds strange, but my maternal family is from Spain and they are all light-eyed blondes (my cousins), and when we are together, I have felt preferential treatment. Without a doubt (in Mexico) we’re racist and classist.”

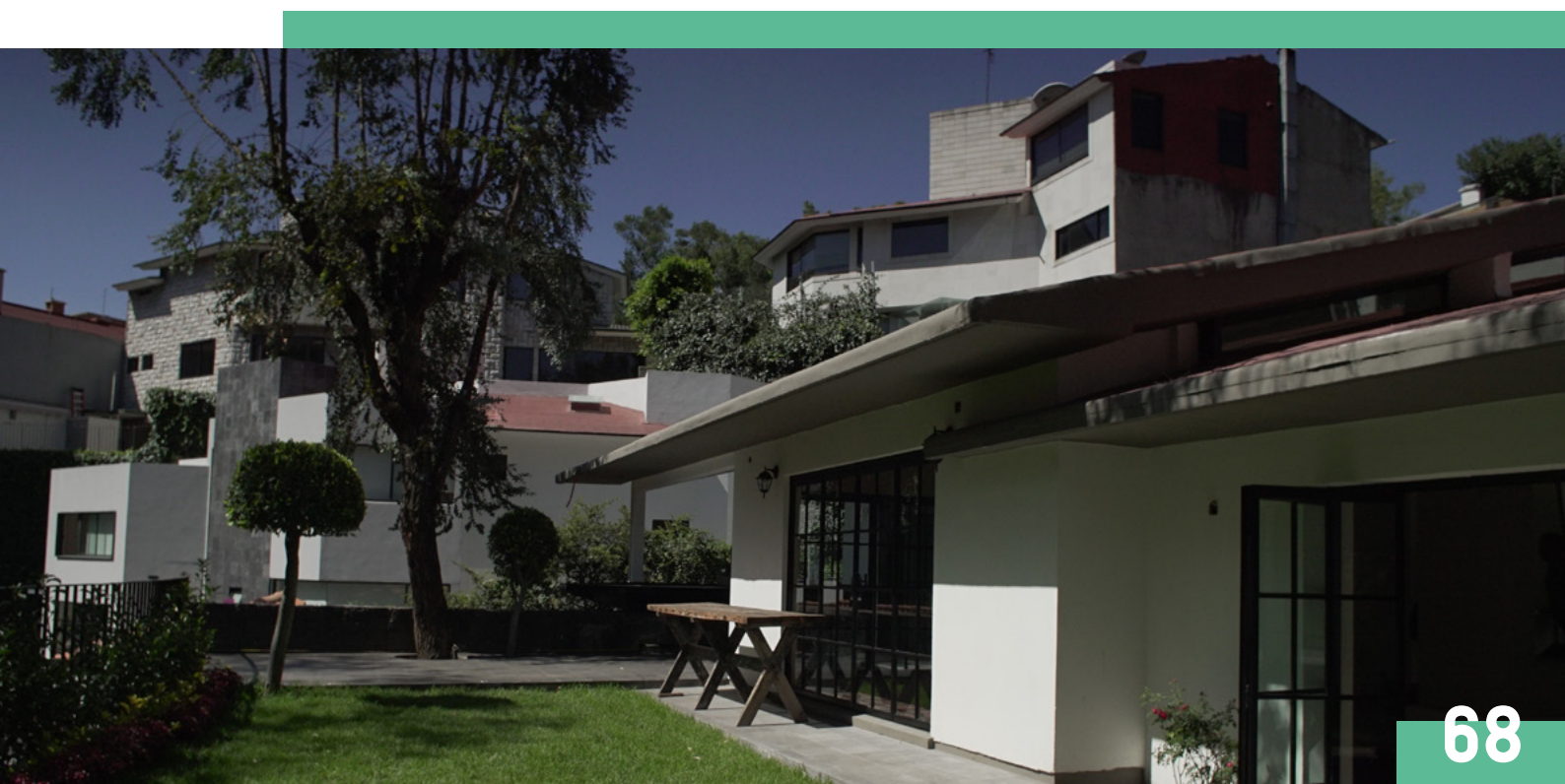
Some people at the top of the income distribution admitted their own prejudices with respect to race. When asked how they would feel if an indigenous family, a family from the southeast of the country, or a family from Haiti were to move in next door, they were quick to fall into stereotypes, conceding that they would think they were narcos, or at least that their neighbours would think so: Teresa (D10) recognized: “Maybe I would say ‘narco’, I don’t know, it sounds bad, but you’re right (it happens



sometimes)” and Francisco (D10) did not say that he himself would think so but that the rest of the neighbours would: “I have no doubt that they would be discriminated against. Here it is a very dis-integrated neighbourhood. Sometimes you hear: ‘those who moved there are probably drug dealers or nouveau riche’ and that, many times, has to do with the colour of your skin.” Gerardo (predicted D9, reported D10) referred to his neighbours’ prejudices, saying “I would be very happy, especially because my neighbours would be very upset.” He also describes a student with an indigenous name being bullied by a blond and blue-eyed student in the college he went to.

## DISCRIMINATION WITHIN THE TOP QUINTILE OF THE DISTRIBUTION

We find remarkable instances of discrimination in the top 20 percent of the income distribution. Inequality in the top income quintile is very high: decile 9 has an average per capita income of 9,508 pesos per month while the top 5 percent are nearly five times richer, averaging 45,241 pesos per month. This may be one of the reasons why some people in the highest income deciles report experiences of “feeling less”, especially “not properly dressed”, which seem to be related to a lack of the sense of belonging. Valeria (D9) reports the possibility of going to a nightclub in Las Lomas as seeming rather distant, as she could not afford it, and also suspects she would be discriminated against if she tried. While this is an expectation more than an experience, Andrea (D9), on the other hand, felt discriminated against in high school (Rossland): “I didn’t feel I had the money they had or the giant houses.”



In a similar experience, Tamara (D9) relates “I studied at Oxford College and when I arrived, I was the little girl who had just come from the Hidalgo de la Tolteca school. My grandmother lived in San Pedro de los Pinos and I was embarrassed to say.”

There are even those in decile 10 who feel “inadequate” because of where they live, though they claim it does not affect them: Tere considers “Maybe I dress unsuitably [fachosa] for the area [Lomas de Reforma], a little hippie.” Gerardo (predicted D9, reported D10), who lives in Polanco in a property that belongs to his grandmother, says he feels discriminated against: “In some places I go around here, I’m dressed differently from how people go. When I ate meat, I used to go to posh restaurants, those with three waiters on top you such as Astrid & Gaston. If I was badly dressed or in sports trousers, I felt uncomfortable. People made me feel that in that context I had to dress differently. There were places where they wouldn’t let you in if you were wearing tennis shoes, I guess they still exist but that’s not supposed to happen anymore<sup>8</sup>.”



<sup>8</sup> This is consistent with Krozer's (2020) finding that the very rich are highly conscious of being less rich than some of their acquaintances.



# 6

## CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS





Inequality affects all aspects of our lives. In Mexico City the unequal distribution of income across households is compounded by unequal access to public services and public infrastructure, such as good schools, health services, and even running water and street paving. Spatial inequalities have a large impact on people's experience of the city—but in this case the correlation with income is not so clear, as some poorer households live centrally and enjoy the amenities this brings, while many richer households still struggle with commuting. Women with children across the distribution face additional commuting burdens as they travel to and from school.

The social networks that people engage in often replicate these material inequalities. Richer households are embedded in networks of other rich households, making it easier to borrow larger sums of money in cases of emergency, and also providing access to better-paid work opportunities. Poorer households similar rely on their social networks for material support and for work opportunities, but these are correspondingly of lower material value.

Finally, life in Mexico City is not only experienced in highly unequal ways by people at different points of the income distribution, but it is also spun through with experiences of inequality itself. Women and people with an indigenous background experience discrimination socially and in the





labour market, and people experience discrimination on the basis of their class. Domestic workers in particular experience mistreatment and domination by their affluent employers. Those who live in the very richest neighbourhoods are perceived as alien, and as arrogant and aloof. For their own part, those at the top of the distribution rarely admit to feelings of superiority themselves but do report them among their neighbours and in their social circles. Even those in the top decile experience feelings of being out of place relative to those still richer than them, while the richest are highly conscious of the distance between themselves and the majority.

Mexico City is attempting to address many of the issues raised in this report through a variety of policies, including financial transfers and attempts to reduce violence and discrimination against women. The key question is whether they go far enough or dedicate sufficient resources to make a real difference.

Perhaps the most important lesson of this report on multidimensional inequality is that inequalities in health, education, status, housing, and services, as well as experiences of stigma and discrimination, are strongly correlated with income inequality. To address these many varieties of inequality therefore requires the policies that are known to bring incomes closer together. Yet for this very reason they face strong political resistance from higher income groups: higher minimum wages, greater worker rights, higher rates of taxation on better-off households, and higher spending on public services and public investment.



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