

Quality of Life and Dignity: The Importance of Reducing Working Hours in Latin America

Qualidade de vida e dignidade: a importância da redução da jornada de trabalho na América Latina

Calidad de vida y dignidad: la importancia de reducir la jornada laboral en América Latina

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Fecha de Recepción: 27 de marzo de 2026

Fecha de Aceptación: 6 de mayo de 2026

Fecha de Publicación: 14 de mayo de 2026

Financiamiento:

Este estudio no cuenta con financiación externa y, por lo tanto, está siendo financiado por el propio autor.

Conflictos de interés:

El autor también declara no tener ningún conflicto de intereses.

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Abstract

The article analyzes the reduction of working hours as an instrument for promoting the dignity, health, and quality of life of workers in Latin America. The research is based on the role of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in consolidating decent work and its fundamental principles, relating them to Sustainable Development Goal 8 of the 2030 Agenda and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The study highlights the importance of international conventions aimed at limiting working hours and protecting social rights in the context of labor precarization in peripheral economies. It also addresses contributions from contemporary Latin American literature on social inequalities and the intensification of labor. The research adopts a qualitative exploratory approach, using bibliographic and documentary methods. It concludes that reducing working hours is an essential measure to reconcile economic development, social justice, and the promotion of human dignity at work.

Keywords: Latin America; Human Dignity; Working Hours; ILO; Quality of Life; Decent Work.

Resumo

O artigo analisa a redução da jornada de trabalho como instrumento de promoção da dignidade, saúde e qualidade de vida dos trabalhadores na América Latina. A pesquisa parte do papel da Organização Internacional do Trabalho (OIT) na consolidação do trabalho decente e de seus princípios fundamentais, relacionando-os ao Objetivo de Desenvolvimento Sustentável 8 da Agenda 2030 e à Declaração Universal dos Direitos Humanos. O estudo destaca a importância das convenções internacionais voltadas à limitação da jornada laboral e à proteção dos direitos sociais, diante da precarização do trabalho nas economias periféricas. Também aborda contribuições da literatura latino-americana contemporânea sobre desigualdades sociais e intensificação do trabalho. A pesquisa adota abordagem qualitativa exploratória, com métodos bibliográfico e documental. Conclui-se que a redução da jornada constitui medida essencial para conciliar desenvolvimento econômico, justiça social e valorização da dignidade humana no trabalho.

Palavras-chave: América Latina; Dignidade da Pessoa Humana; Jornada de Trabalho; OIT; Qualidade de Vida; Trabalho Decente.

Resumen

El artículo analiza la reducción de la jornada laboral como estrategia para promover la dignidad, la salud y la calidad de vida de los trabajadores en América Latina. La investigación examina el papel de la Organización Internacional del Trabajo (OIT) en la consolidación del trabajo decente y relaciona sus principios con el Objetivo de Desarrollo Sostenible 8 de la Agenda 2030 y la Declaración Universal de los Derechos Humanos. El estudio destaca la importancia de los convenios internacionales destinados a limitar la jornada laboral y proteger los derechos sociales frente a la precarización del trabajo en las economías periféricas. Asimismo, aborda contribuciones de la literatura latinoamericana contemporánea sobre desigualdades sociales e intensificación del trabajo. La investigación adopta un enfoque cualitativo exploratorio, utilizando métodos bibliográficos y documentales. Concluye que la reducción de la jornada laboral es una medida esencial para conciliar desarrollo económico, justicia social y dignidad humana en el trabajo.

Palabras clave: América Latina; Dignidad humana; Jornada laboral; OIT; Calidad de vida; Trabajo decente.

Introduction

The International Labour Organization (ILO) was created in 1919, aiming at the promotion of social justice, being the only agency linked to the UN that has

tripartite representation¹, exercised under conditions of equality, by governments, employers' organizations, and workers from the 187 member states.

Although the ILO is affiliated with the UN, its emergence occurred after the Treaty of Versailles, on July 28, 1919, being an agency affiliated with the extinct "League of Nations," whose humanitarian, political, and economic arguments aimed at essential justice as a condition to achieve universal and lasting peace².

Since the mid-1950s, the ILO has carried out technical cooperation with countries from all continents and at all levels of economic development, given the cooperation among member countries, non-governmental entities, and the ILO agency, which has offices spread throughout the world.

The Declaration of the International Organization on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work declared the commitment of member countries and the organization to respect, promote, and make real the principles related to fundamental rights³:

- Freedom of association and the effective recognition of collective bargaining;
- The elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labor;
- The effective abolition of child labor;
- The elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation;
- A safe and healthy working environment.

In this sense, the ILO⁴ aims to promote opportunities so that all men and women can have access to decent and productive work, under conditions of freedom, equity, security, and dignity, considering decent work fundamental for the eradication of poverty, reduction of social inequalities, and the guarantee of democratic governance and sustainable development of nations.

Decent and productive work was addressed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations. It is the result of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), known as Rio+20,

¹ "Get to Know the ILO", International Labour Organization (ILO), October 22, 2025, <https://www.ilo.org/pt-pt/regions-and-countries/latin-america-and-caribbean/brasil/conheca-oit>.

"Get to know the ILO", International Labour Organization, October 22, 2025.

² Mariana Schafhauser Boçon, "100 years of the ILO", *Inclusiones Magazine* 8, Special Issue (2021):490.

³ "ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998), as amended in 2022"
— DGERT, July 29, 2022,
<https://www.dgert.gov.pt/declaracao-da-oit-relativa-aos-principios-e-direitos-fundamentais-no-tra-balho-1998-tal-como-emendada-em-2022>.

⁴ "ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998), as amended in 2022"
— DGERT, July 29, 2022,
<https://www.dgert.gov.pt/declaracao-da-oit-relativa-aos-principios-e-direitos-fundamentais-no-tra-balho-1998-tal-como-emendada-em-2022>.

involving the participation of 191 UN member countries and 88 heads of state who were present at the conferences⁵.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development introduced 17 objectives and 169 targets, being considered a global call by the UN to finally eradicate poverty; protect the environment and the climate; ensure that all people in the world can achieve peace and prosperity, aiming at the development and progress of nations in the social, environmental, and economic axes⁶.

Thus, the fundamental right to work came to be contemplated by the 8th Sustainable Development Goal – whose scope is “decent work and economic growth,” resulting in the adoption of actions to ensure inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and work carried out under decent conditions for all people everywhere in the world⁷.

The ILO conventions are directly aligned with SDG 8 and converge with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948, which recognized the inherent dignity of all human beings, equality in rights, and the inalienability of human rights, recognizing the dignity of the human person as the foundation of freedom, justice, and world peace⁸.

The UDHR inaugurated a universal code of ethics for the reaffirmation of human dignity, since the declaration arose from the extermination carried out in Nazi concentration camps, which broke the jusnaturalist paradigm, since human rights are natural and exist even before laws⁹.

In this sense, Article 23 of the UDHR establishes that every person has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work, and to protection against unemployment. It also determines that workers have the right to fair and equitable remuneration, allowing them and their families to enjoy a dignified and complete life¹⁰.

Human work must be carried out under conditions of dignity, in accordance with what was established at the General Conference of the International Labour Organization held in 1944 in Philadelphia, and in Convention No. 47 of 1935, which recommended a 40-hour workweek, aiming at improving working conditions, health, well-being, and leisure of workers. The duration of working

⁵ Samuel Felipe Weirich et al., “Human Rights and Decent Work: Analysis of Contemporary Challenges to Ending Forced Labour”, *Journal International Review of Research Studies* 1, no. 02 (March 4, 2026): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.66104/fa9g2s60>.

⁶ Pisco De Luz Org, “Sustainable Development”, 2026.

⁷ “Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education | United Nations in Brazil,” accessed March 25, 2026, <https://brasil.un.org/pt-br/sdgs/4>.

⁸ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2026), accessed March 25, 2026, <https://www.oas.org/dil/port/1948%20Declara%C3%A7%C3%A3o%20Universal%20dos%20Direitos%20Humanos.pdf>.

⁹ Cinara L. Rosenfield and Jandir Pauli, “Beyond the Dichotomy between Decent Work and Dignified Work: Recognition and Human Rights”, *CADERNO CRH*, vol. v. 25, 2012.

¹⁰ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2026).

time was addressed in Conventions No. 1, 14, 30, 47, 52, 89, 101, 106, 132, 153, 171, and 175¹¹.

Contemporary Latin American literature has deepened the critical analysis of labor relations from the perspective of the centrality of labor in the reproduction of social inequalities. Authors such as Ricardo Antunes¹² and Ruy Braga¹³ highlight that the intensification of labor in peripheral economies is directly associated with the precarization of working conditions and the erosion of social rights. In the same sense, recent empirical studies indicate that reducing working hours can generate productivity gains and significant improvements in workers' mental health, reducing levels of stress, burnout, and absenteeism¹⁴. Such evidence reinforces the need to rethink the organization of working time in Latin America from not only an economic perspective, but also a social and humanitarian one.

Recently, the Chamber of Deputies of Mexico unanimously approved the reform of Article 123 of the Mexican Federal Constitution to determine the gradual reduction of working hours, which will decrease from 48 hours per week to 40 hours by 2030. The measure aims to balance the nation's economic development and workers' well-being, making Mexico, Chile, and Ecuador the only three Latin American countries with the lowest weekly working hours. The decision substantiates the report presented by the ILO, which highlighted the importance of reducing working hours for improving workers' health, well-being, and productivity¹⁵.

This article analyzes the reduction of working hours as a strategy to promote dignity, health, and quality of life for workers. Taking as reference the reforms implemented in Chile, Ecuador, and Mexico, the study investigates the challenges and prospects for expanding this model to other countries in Latin America.

1. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

1.1 The Epistemology of Work

¹¹ "Manual of Procedures Relating to International Labour Conventions and Recommendations.", Department of International Labour Standards. International Labour Office Geneva. International Labour Organization 2006, Portuguese Version 2010. (International Labour Organization, 2010), accessed March 25, 2026.

¹² Ricardo Antunes, *The Privilege of Servitude: The New Service Proletariat in the Digital Age* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2018)

¹³ Ruy Braga, *The Rebellion of the Precariat: Work and Neoliberalism in the Global South* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2017).

¹⁴ International Labour Organization (ILO), *Working Time and Work-Life Balance Around the World* (Geneva: ILO, 2022); John Pencavel, "The Productivity of Working Hours," *The Economic Journal* 125, no. 589 (2015): 2052–2076. <https://doi.org/10.1111/eoj.12166>.

¹⁵ Igor Gomes, "The Reduction of the Work Week to 40 Hours Placed Mexico in an Unprecedented Position: Among the 3 Latin American Countries with the Shortest Work Week", *Terra*, March 9, 2026, <https://www.terra.com.br/byte/a-reducao-da-semana-de-trabalho-para-40-horas-colocou-o-mexico-em-um-a-posicao-inedita-entre-os-3-paises-da-america-latina-com-a-semana-de-trabalho-mais-curta,78416efdfab0fd14d492240620604565n45ke39s.html>.

The discussion regarding the reduction of working hours in Latin America demands a critical and interdisciplinary approach capable of articulating labor, development, coloniality, sustainability, and quality of life. In this context, Alberto Acosta¹⁶, Aníbal Quijano¹⁸, and Enrique Leff¹⁹ constitute fundamental references for a Latin American sociological analysis aimed at critiquing the productivist model and the historical forms of labor exploitation in peripheral capitalism. From these authors, it becomes possible to understand that the expansion of free time, social well-being, and dignified conditions of existence goes beyond a merely economic dimension, also involving cultural, environmental, political, and civilizational elements.

Alberto Acosta²⁰ proposes a strong critique of the traditional development paradigm based on unlimited economic growth and the centrality of capitalist productivity. From the conception of Buen Vivir (Good Living), inspired by Andean and Latin American indigenous worldviews, the author argues that quality of life cannot be reduced to the logic of consumption or material accumulation, but must encompass social, community, environmental, and human balance. In this sense, the reduction of working hours can be interpreted as a strategy for reconstructing social relations and valuing life beyond alienated labor, fostering greater possibilities for community coexistence, mental health, social participation, and sustainability. For Acosta, the contemporary civilizational model produces intense forms of human and environmental exhaustion, requiring alternatives that reposition labor within a perspective oriented toward collective well-being and human dignity²¹.

In this same critical direction, Aníbal Quijano develops the concept of “coloniality of power,” demonstrating that the structures of labor exploitation in Latin America remain deeply marked by colonial legacies and global economic dependence²². According to the author, capitalist modernity organized an international division of labor based on racial, social, and economic hierarchies that still condition contemporary forms of labor precarization in the continent. The intensification of working hours and inequality in access to free time therefore reflect not only economic mechanisms but also historical patterns of domination. From this perspective, the reduction of working hours may represent a way of confronting the structures of overexploitation that characterize Latin American peripheral capitalism, contributing to the

¹⁶ Alberto Acosta, *Good Living: an opportunity to imagine other worlds* (São Paulo: Autonomia Literária; Elefante, 2016), 45. (The final number refers to the cited page).

¹⁷ Alberto Acosta and Eduardo Gudynas, “The renewal of the critique of development and Good Living as an alternative”, *Revista Utopia y Praxis Latinoamericana* 17, no. 53 (2011): 75. (Replace "75" with the specific cited page).

¹⁸ Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism and Latin America”, in *The Coloniality of Knowledge: Eurocentrism and Social Sciences*, ed. Edgardo Lander (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2005), 115; Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of power and social classification”, in *Epistemologies of the South*, ed. Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Maria Paula Meneses (São Paulo: Cortez, 2010), 85.

¹⁹ Enrique Leff, *Environmental Rationality: The Social Reappropriation of Nature* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2006), 120; Enrique Leff, *Environmental Knowledge: Sustainability, Rationality, Complexity and Power* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2001), 45.

²⁰ Acosta and Gudynas, “The Renewal of Criticism”, 78.

²¹ Acosta, *Good Living*, 50.

²² Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America”, 120.

democratization of living conditions and the expansion of workers' social rights²³.

Complementarily, Enrique Leff²⁴ contributes to the debate by problematizing modern economic rationality and its socio-environmental consequences. For the author, the contemporary crisis is not only ecological but also civilizational, resulting from the predominance of an instrumental rationality oriented toward accumulation and the commodification of life. In this context, excessive work and productive intensification become constitutive elements of an unsustainable development model. Leff advocates the construction of an "environmental rationality," based on the valorization of cultural diversity, sustainability, and the expanded reproduction of life. From this perspective, the reduction of working hours can be understood as part of a transition toward more sustainable social models, capable of promoting balance between production, health, leisure, social relations, and environmental preservation²⁵. The improvement of Latin American workers' quality of life would therefore depend on overcoming the productivist logic that historically subordinated human life to market demands.

Latin American sociology of work has developed important contributions to understanding contemporary transformations in labor relations and their impacts on workers' quality of life. In this field, Ricardo Antunes highlights that contemporary capitalism has intensified mechanisms of exploitation through productive flexibilization, outsourcing, and the expansion of labor precarization. According to the author, new forms of work organization, especially in the digital and platform era, produce fragmented working hours, instability, and increasing physical and emotional exhaustion among workers²⁶. For Antunes, the intensification of work directly compromises possibilities for social coexistence, leisure, mental health, and individual autonomy, making the discussion on reducing working hours a central element for building more dignified conditions of life and work in contemporary society. In his most recent analysis, the author argues that the "privilege of servitude" emerges precisely from the false autonomy promoted by digital capitalism, in which workers remain subjected to sophisticated forms of temporal control and continuous exploitation²⁷.

In the Latin American context, Laís Abramo and Cecilia Montero demonstrate that productive transformations since the late twentieth century have expanded structural inequalities in the regional labor market. The authors observe that processes of economic flexibilization have been accompanied by the deterioration of working conditions, increased informality, and the weakening of labor rights, directly affecting workers' quality of life. This scenario shows that the reduction of working hours cannot be analyzed solely as an economic

²³ Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Social Classification", 90.

²⁴ Leff, *Environmental Rationality*, 132.

²⁵ Leff, *Environmental Knowledge*, 58.

²⁶ Ricardo Antunes, *The Meanings of Work: An Essay on the Affirmation and Negation of Work* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 1999).

²⁷ Ricardo Antunes, *The Privilege of Servitude: The New Service Proletariat in the Digital Age* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2018).

variable, but as a potential strategy for social protection and redistribution of life time in societies marked by profound historical inequalities²⁸.

This critical perspective directly dialogues with the dependency theory developed by Ruy Mauro Marini. For the author, Latin American capitalism is characterized by the overexploitation of labor power, expressed through low wages, intensification of productive rhythms, and extension of working hours. Marini argues that dependent peripheral economies sustain their insertion into global capitalism precisely through the expansion of labor exploitation, reproducing structural inequalities and limiting access to social well-being. In this sense, reducing working hours may represent an important measure to confront the historical logic of overexploitation present in Latin America²⁹.

The contributions of Aníbal Quijano deepen this analysis by showing that inequalities in Latin American labor are associated with the coloniality of power, a concept that explains the persistence of social, racial, and economic hierarchies constructed since the colonial period. For Quijano, modern capitalism was structured based on the social and racial classification of the world population, producing differentiated forms of labor exploitation that remain in Latin American societies. Thus, labor precarization and unequal distribution of free time reflect not only economic issues but also historical legacies of colonial domination. The reduction of working hours, from this perspective, may contribute to the democratization of social relations and the expansion of human and social rights in the continent³⁰.

David Harvey also offers important contributions by analyzing transformations in contemporary capitalism under the logic of flexible accumulation. According to the author, productive restructuring driven by neoliberalism intensified competitiveness, accelerated production rhythms, and increased pressure on workers. Harvey notes that the space-time compression characteristic of postmodernity has produced new forms of control over social time, reducing the boundaries between work and private life. As a result, workers' quality of life is strongly impacted by labor intensification, stress, and economic insecurity³¹.

Within the same analytical horizon, Manuel Castells highlights that the network society has profoundly transformed labor relations, introducing flexible and decentralized forms of production. Although these changes have expanded technological and communicational possibilities, they have also contributed to the expansion of hyperconnectivity and the permanent availability of workers. The dissolution of boundaries between working time and rest time constitutes one of the main contemporary challenges for the health and well-being of Latin American workers³².

²⁸ Laís Abramo and Cecilia Montero, "The Sociology of Work in Latin America: Theoretical Paradigms and Productive Paradigms," *Brazilian Journal of Social Sciences* 10, no. 29 (1995).

²⁹ Ruy Mauro Marini, *Dialectics of Dependency* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1973).

³⁰ Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Social Classification," in *Epistemologies of the South*, ed. Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Maria Paula Meneses (Coimbra: Almedina, 2009).

³¹ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (São Paulo: Loyola, 1992).

³² Manuel Castells, *The Network Society* (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1999).

In opposition to the dominant productivist rationality, Domenico De Masi proposes the valorization of “creative leisure” as a fundamental dimension of human fulfillment. For the author, contemporary society has sufficient technological conditions to significantly reduce the time dedicated to repetitive work, expanding spaces for creativity, leisure, family coexistence, and intellectual development. The reduction of working hours could therefore favor not only better physical and mental health conditions but also broader processes of human emancipation and quality of life³³.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos contributes to this debate by questioning Western modern rationality based on unlimited productivity and the economic centrality of labor. The author argues that the construction of more just societies requires valuing other forms of sociability, solidarity, and organization of collective life. In this sense, policies aimed at reducing working hours may strengthen democratic practices, expand social rights, and promote a greater balance between work, citizenship, and well-being³⁴.

The discussion also involves dimensions related to governance and public policies. Jan Kooiman emphasizes that contemporary governance processes require social participation, institutional articulation, and collective construction of solutions to complex problems. The regulation of working hours and the implementation of labor protection policies therefore depend on integrated action among the State, social organizations, unions, and the productive sector³⁵.

Márcia de Paula Leite highlights that Latin American sociology of work has specificities related to informality, social inequality, and the structural heterogeneity of regional labor markets. The author emphasizes that understanding labor dynamics in Latin America requires considering the impacts of neoliberal reforms, precarization, and new forms of exploitation on workers' daily lives. In this context, reducing working hours emerges as a strategic issue for promoting health, human dignity, and improved living conditions in the continent³⁶.

Finally, Karl Marx establishes that the working day is the central axis of capitalist exploitation, serving as a means for extracting surplus value and accumulating capital. Marx argues that the intrinsic tendency of the system to expand surplus labor time subordinates human life to production, resulting in the temporal alienation of the worker, who loses control over their own life time³⁷. In this context, the historical struggle to reduce working hours goes beyond an economic agenda, constituting an essential form of resistance to

³³ Domenico De Masi, *Creative Leisure* (Rio de Janeiro: Sextante, 2000).

³⁴ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Critique of Indolent Reason* (São Paulo: Cortez, 2000).

³⁵ Jan Kooiman, *Governance as Governance* (London: Sage, 2003).

³⁶ Márcia de Paula Leite, “The Sociology of Work in Latin America: Its Themes and Problems,” *Sociology & Anthropology* (Rio de Janeiro, 2012). Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Book I (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2013), 320.

³⁷ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Economic Manuscripts of 1857-1858* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2011), 580.

preserve the physical, mental, and moral integrity of the working class in the face of extreme exhaustion imposed by the productivist logic³⁸.

In the Latin American scenario, marked by structural inequalities and labor precarization, the reduction of working hours acts as a civilizational mechanism for democratizing labor relations. Marx emphasizes that the excessive extension of labor compromises social reproduction, limiting rest, education, and family coexistence. Therefore, establishing legal limits on working time not only reduces the overexploitation characteristic of peripheral economies but also enables a qualitative transformation in individual existence, allowing time to cease being merely productive and become time for a dignified life³⁹.

Finally, Marxian theory associates the expansion of free time with human emancipation and the full development of intellectual and creative capacities. Although technological advancement under capitalism tends to intensify control and productivity, reducing working hours proposes converting these gains into social well-being, combating the dissolution of boundaries between private life and work, intensified by the digital era. Thus, the redistribution of social time emerges as a fundamental strategy to promote mental health and civic participation, reaffirming that quality of life depends on the guarantee of rights and the worker's autonomy over their own temporality⁴⁰.

The articulation among these authors allows us to understand that the discussion on reducing working hours in Latin America goes beyond the strictly labor field, involving disputes over development models, social justice, sustainability, and the democratization of social time. In societies marked by profound structural inequalities, colonial legacies, and labor precarization, reducing working time may represent not only an economic policy but also a strategy for expanding citizenship, collective health, and quality of life⁴¹. Thus, critical Latin American sociology offers important theoretical contributions to interpret the reduction of working hours as part of a broader process of social transformation and human emancipation.

1.2 Work, Sustainability and Ethics of Care: The Reduction of Working Hours as a Paradigm of Human Development

The discussion on the reduction of working hours and its influence on the quality of life of Latin American workers can be enriched by the contributions of Wilson João Zonin and collaborators, especially in the field of sustainable rural development, ethics of care, sustainability, and the critique of exclusionary economic models. From an interdisciplinary approach, the authors argue that development cannot be understood solely through the increase of economic productivity, but must consider the social, environmental, cultural, political, and ethical dimensions of human life. In this sense, the organization of work and the

³⁸ Marx, *Capital*, 320; Marx, *Grundrisse*, 580.

³⁹ Marx, *Capital*, 320; Marx, *Grundrisse*, 580.

⁴⁰ Marx, *Capital*, 320; Marx, *Grundrisse*, 580.

⁴¹ Marx, *Capital*, 320; Marx, *Grundrisse*, 580.

social distribution of time become central elements for the construction of more just and sustainable societies⁴².

Zonin et al. argue that universities and professional training processes need to incorporate a critical perspective oriented toward the ethics of care, the strengthening of democracy, and the construction of alternatives to the exclusionary global capitalist model. In dialogue with Paulo Freire⁴³ and Boaventura de Sousa Santos⁴⁴, the authors emphasize that education, work, and development must be oriented toward human emancipation and the improvement of the population's living conditions. From this perspective, the reduction of working hours can be understood as a mechanism for valuing social life, family coexistence, community participation, and collective well-being, especially in Latin American contexts marked by structural inequalities and intensification of labor exploitation⁴⁵.

Another relevant aspect present in the analysis of Zonin et al. refers to the critique of the productivist paradigm and the dominant technical-instrumental rationality in Brazilian rural development. The authors state that the contemporary socio-environmental crisis requires a paradigm shift, based on new forms of relationship between society, nature, and work. According to the authors, the economic logic centered exclusively on growth and productivity has intensified processes of environmental degradation, social exclusion, and human illness. In this way, policies aimed at reducing working hours can contribute to decreasing the physical and emotional impacts of work intensification, expanding the conditions for a more balanced and sustainable life⁴⁶.

When discussing the ethics of care, Zonin and collaborators highlight the importance of constructing new social practices guided by solidarity, social justice, and collective responsibility. Inspired by Leonardo Boff⁴⁷ and Paulo Freire⁴⁸, the authors argue that sustainable development requires strengthening more cooperative human relations, less subordinated to market logic. In this context, the expansion of free time resulting from the reduction of working hours may favor practices of care for oneself, for the family, for the community, and for the environment, directly contributing to the improvement of the quality of life of Latin American workers⁴⁹.

⁴² Wilson João Zonin et al., "Ethics, environment and rural development: issues that challenge agricultural sciences in Brazil", in *Agricultural Sciences: ethics of care, legislation and technology in agriculture*, ed. Maximiliane Alavarse Zambom et al. (Marechal Cândido Rondon: Unioeste, 2017), 15.

⁴³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Autonomy: Necessary Knowledge for Educational Practice* (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1996), 22.

⁴⁴ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The University in the 21st Century: Towards a Democratic and Emancipatory Reform of the University* (São Paulo: Cortez, 2011), 60.

⁴⁵ Zonin et al., "Ethics, Environment and Rural Development", 2017.

⁴⁶ Zonin et al., "Ethics, Environment and Rural Development", 2017.

⁴⁷ Leonardo Boff, *Sustainability: What it is and what it is not* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2012), 45.

⁴⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Autonomy: Necessary Knowledge for Educational Practice* (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1996), 22.

⁴⁹ Zonin et al., "Ethics, Environment and Rural Development", 2017.

Furthermore, Zonin et al. emphasize that historical development models in Latin America have been marked by land concentration, overexploitation of labor power, and the deepening of social inequalities. The conservative modernization of agriculture intensified processes of rural exodus, labor precarization, and environmental degradation, reinforcing the need to overcome exclusionary economic structures. Thus, the reduction of working hours is directly related to the promotion of human dignity and to the principles of the 2030 Agenda, especially SDG 3 (Health and Well-being), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), by expanding the balance between work, personal life, community participation, and quality of life of Latin American workers⁵⁰.

Therefore, the contributions of Zonin et al. allow us to understand that the reduction of working hours goes beyond a merely economic issue, constituting a theme related to ethics, sustainability, social justice, and the democratization of life. In Latin American societies historically marked by inequality and the intensification of work, policies aimed at the redistribution of social time may favor broader processes of human emancipation, community strengthening, and improvement of quality of life⁵¹.

1.3 Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) represents the inaugural milestone of human dignity as the foundation of social rights. Although originally devoid of binding effect, its normative force was consolidated by subsequent treaties, such as the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). A crucial aspect of its genesis was the terminological revision, driven by female leadership, which replaced “men” with “human beings,” ensuring universality and gender equality from the first article⁵².

The original text contained the statement that ‘all men are born free and equal’, however, the presence of some women was essential for the defense of gender equality and universal human rights. The text was modified to contain the expression: “All human beings are born free and equal”, clarifying that the UDHR would not make distinctions of gender⁵³.

In this context, Brazil and other Latin American countries played a relevant role in defending the inclusion of social rights — such as education, health, and social security — in the international agenda, which culminated in the robust set of fundamental guarantees of the 1988 Federal Constitution. The UDHR, in its Article 23, establishes that work must be provided with fair and equitable remuneration, ensuring a dignified existence for the worker and their family.

⁵⁰ Zonin et al., “Ethics, Environment and Rural Development”, 2017.

⁵¹ Zonin et al., “Ethics, Environment and Rural Development”, 2017.

⁵² Freitas et al., *Universal Declaration of Human Rights: What the Words Say*. Salvador: Juspopuli Human Rights Office, 2025, 112p.

⁵³ Freitas et al., *Universal Declaration of Human Rights: What the Words Say*, 10.

This perspective instituted International Human Rights Law, characterized by the universality, indivisibility, and interdependence of protection norms⁵⁴.

In the concepts developed by Smith and Marx, work was recognized and qualified as a space of interaction between the human being and the environment in which they live, both in natural and social terms. Such a requirement is fundamental for the political economy of labor in the 21st century, the production of an economy that centralizes the right to work as a fundamental human right⁵⁵.

The adherence of Brazil and other Latin American nations to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) consolidated the understanding of work as a multifaceted right. According to Articles 6 to 9 of the aforementioned Covenant, the right to work transcends mere occupation, encompassing equitable remuneration between genders and the guarantee of a dignified existence. In addition, the document establishes as fundamental prerogatives occupational safety and hygiene, leisure, reasonable limitation of working hours, paid rest, and the exercise of freedom of association and the right to strike, integrating them into the social security system⁵⁶.

1.4 Philadelphia Declaration (1944)

The Philadelphia Declaration (1944) consolidated the foundational principles of the International Labour Organization (ILO), establishing that labor should not be treated as a commodity and that freedom of expression and association is vital to progress. The document postulates that poverty represents a threat to global prosperity, arguing that combating need requires a continuous international effort. In this context, tripartite collaboration — among governments, employers, and workers — is presented as the basis for democratic discussions in favor of the common good.

The text reaffirms the universal right of all human beings, without distinction of race, creed, or sex, to material and spiritual development under conditions of freedom, dignity, and economic security. To this end, the ILO assumed the commitment to promote full employment, raise living standards, and ensure comprehensive social protection, ranging from guaranteeing vital minimum wages and recognizing collective bargaining to medical assistance and protection of maternity and childhood. Such guidelines must guide national and international policies to ensure that economic progress results in social well-being⁵⁷.

Finally, the Declaration provides for the strategic use of global productive resources to avoid economic fluctuations and promote the development of less favored regions. Through price stabilization and the expansion of international trade, the ILO seeks to collaborate with other organizations to foster global

⁵⁴ Freitas et al., *Universal Declaration of Human Rights: What the Words Say*, 10.

⁵⁵ Rosenfield and Pauli, “Beyond the Dichotomy between Decent Work and Dignified Work: Recognition and Human Rights”, 2012.

⁵⁶ Rosenfield and Pauli, “Beyond the Dichotomy”, 3.

⁵⁷ Declaration of Philadelphia, 1944 – DGERT”, [2019].

health and education. These principles have universal application, respecting the socioeconomic particularities of each people, aiming at the consolidation of a civilized and equitable world order⁵⁸.

1.5 The International Regulation of Working Time: An Analysis of ILO Conventions.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has a system of international labor standards that aims to promote opportunities for men and women to have access to decent, productive work, carried out under conditions of freedom, equality, security, and dignity⁵⁹. The organization was a pioneer in bringing aspects of human rights into its conventions and recommendations, referencing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and the adoption of the Charter of the United Nations (1946)⁶⁰.

In this sense, the ILO is the only UN agency that has a tripartite structure, ensuring that its standards are recognized by states, employers, and workers. Above all, it allows international labor standards to promote general social norms for all member states that participate in the global economy, enabling the promotion of decent work for all⁶¹.

The adoption of ILO international conventions by its member states constitutes progress toward fulfilling fundamental objectives, ensuring compliance with decent work, full employment, sustained and sustainable economic growth, in convergence with SDG 8⁶².

That said, the ILO international labor standards aim to establish minimum standards for work and can be subdivided into Conventions and Recommendations. Conventions are all binding international treaties that establish for adhering countries basic legal principles that must be applied in their states after ratification. Recommendations are all non-binding guidelines, but that in some way contribute to the Convention, providing specific guidance on how to proceed for the implementation of rights and principles addressed in previous conventions⁶³.

The duration of working hours was addressed in Conventions No. 1, 14, 30, 47, 52, 89, 101, 106, 132, 153, 156, 171 and 175 of the ILO⁶⁴.

⁵⁸ Declaration of Philadelphia, 1944 – DGERT”, [2019].

⁵⁹ International Labour Organization, “ILO Notes / Paid Domestic Work in Latin America and the Caribbean”, ILO Notes / Paid Domestic Work in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2011, 1–3.

⁶⁰ Leticia Trevizolli de Oliveira and Aline Michelle Dib, “Breaking the ‘Glass Ceiling’: The Rise of Women in the Labor Market in Light of ILO Policies and Conventions”, 2021, <https://revistainclusiones.org/index.php/inclu/article/view/1093>.

⁶¹ International Labour Organization, “ILO Notes / Paid Domestic Work in Latin America and the Caribbean”, 2011, 1–3.

⁶² Pisco De Luz - Sustainable Development,” Pisco De Luz, 2026.

⁶³ International Labour Organization, “ILO Notes / Work Paid Domestic Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean”, 2011, 1–3.

⁶⁴ “Manual of Procedures Relating to International Labour Conventions and Recommendations”, Department of International Labour Standards. International Labour Office Geneva. International Labour Organization 2006, Portuguese Version 2010.

ILO Convention No. 1 was approved under the terms of Provision XIII of the Treaty of Versailles, which corresponds to the other Peace Treaties. The convention determined the limit of 8 (eight) hours per day and 48 (forty-eight) hours per week, the number of working hours in industrial establishments, adopted by the General Conference of the International Labour Organization of the United Nations, held in Washington on October 29, 2019⁶⁵.

ILO Convention No. 14 established in its Article 1 the definition of industrial establishments as mines, quarries, and extraction industries of any kind, including the transport of people and goods, whether by rail or water. In this context, it was determined that workers employed in public or private industrial establishments must enjoy a rest period of 24 (twenty-four) hours every seven days worked⁶⁶.

ILO Convention No. 30 regulated working hours for commerce and offices, establishing 8 (eight) hours per day and 48 (forty-eight) hours per week, applied to all commercial establishments, post offices, telecommunications services, administrative offices, and mixed services not covered by previous conventions. However, the convention exceptionally allowed workers to work up to 10 (ten) hours per day, provided that the weekly limit was not exceeded⁶⁷.

ILO Convention No. 47 became known as the Forty-Hour Week Convention. Its objective was to reduce working hours from 48 hours to 40 hours, without resulting in a reduction in workers' standard of living. The rule aimed to safeguard workers' health and dignity, allowing for a reduction in unemployment rates, since reducing working hours would lead to the hiring of more workers. The convention, later revoked, had a strong economic motivation, aiming to mitigate the effects of the economic crisis of the 1930s. Brazil and other Latin American countries did not ratify ILO Convention No. 47, remaining with the limit of 44 hours per week, as provided in the 1988 Federal Constitution⁶⁸.

ILO Convention No. 52, internationally known as the "Paid Holidays Convention," was the first international standard to guarantee the right to paid rest time, transforming annual rest into a universal human and labor right⁶⁹. Brazil ratified Convention No. 52 in 1938; however, the current Consolidation of Labor Laws⁷⁰ and the 1988 Federal Constitution⁷¹ guarantee not only 6 days of rest as per the Convention, but 30 days of paid vacation plus an additional one-third.

⁶⁵ "Conventions", International Labour Organization, January 30, 2024, <https://www.ilo.org/pt-pt/resource/convencoes>.

⁶⁶ International Labour Organization. "Conventions", 2024.

⁶⁷ International Labour Organization. "Conventions", 2024.

⁶⁸ Brazil. "Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil", Brasília – DF, Presidency of the Republic, 1988; International Labour Organization. "Conventions", 2024.

⁶⁹ International Labour Organization. "Conventions", January 30, 2024.

⁷⁰ "Del5452compiled", [1943].

⁷¹ Brazil. "Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil", 1988.

ILO Convention No. 89 of 1948 specifically addressed night work for women in industry, being a norm of social protection for women, aiming to establish equality in rights with men. The convention established that, regardless of age, women could not be employed during the night in industrial enterprises, public or private, except in positions of trust, health and welfare services, or in exceptional cases⁷².

ILO Convention No. 101 was a fundamental milestone for the agricultural sector, which historically has always had weaker or later regulations compared to urban labor. The convention brought provisions regarding regular remuneration, in-kind benefits, flexibility of working hours, and the right to holidays for rural workers. As for ILO Convention No. 106, enacted in 1957, it introduced provisions regarding Weekly Rest in Commerce and Offices⁷³.

ILO Convention No. 132 modernized and unified provisions concerning weekly paid rest and workers' holidays, replacing Conventions No. 52 and 101⁷⁴. In this sense, Brazil adopted ILO Convention No. 132 of 1970, which modernly unified the rights of both classes, and later influenced Article 7 of the 1988 Federal Constitution, equalizing the treatment of urban and rural workers⁷⁵.

ILO Convention No. 153, enacted in the late 1970s, brought one of the most important standards for road safety and workers' health, as it addressed the duration of work and rest periods of road transport workers, aiming to protect workers' lives and avoid accidents due to excessive working hours and fatigue. The convention recommends that no driver be allowed to drive more than 9 (nine) hours per day, and driving time should not exceed the limit of 48 (forty-eight) hours per week⁷⁶.

The 67th Session of the General Conference of the International Labour Organization held in 1981 in the city of Geneva approved ILO Convention No. 156, on Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment for Workers of Both Sexes and Workers with Family Responsibilities. The Convention reaffirmed the organization's commitment to all human beings, regardless of race, creed, or sex, ensuring material progress, spiritual development in freedom and dignity, and economic security with equal opportunities⁷⁷.

ILO Convention No. 156 applies to all workers of both sexes with responsibility for dependent children, when these responsibilities limit the possibility of better preparation for economic activities, as well as preventing their participation, progression, and advancement. It also applies to workers of both sexes with responsibility for members of their immediate family, when there is a need to

⁷² International Labour Organization. "Conventions", January 30, 2024.

⁷³ International Labour Organization. "Conventions", January 30, 2024.

⁷⁴ International Labour Organization. "Conventions", January 30, 2024.

⁷⁵ Brazil. "Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil", 1988.

⁷⁶ International Labour Organization. "Conventions", January 30, 2024.

⁷⁷ General Conference of the International Labour Organization, "ILO Convention No. 156 concerning Equality of Opportunity and Treatment for Workers of Both Sexes: Workers with Family Responsibilities", June 23, 1981.

care for or support them, limiting the possibility of growth and participation in economic activity⁷⁸.

In this sense, Convention No. 156 aims to guarantee the dignity of workers with family responsibilities, so that they can exercise their right to work without being subject to discrimination, or conflicts between professional and family responsibilities. The convention extends care to workers with family members and children who require care or support. That said, it is expected that adhering countries adopt actions and legal plans to ensure equality of treatment and working conditions, allowing for reduced working hours and/or flexible working arrangements, access to full employment, and the availability of community assistance services, such as daycare centers and support centers⁷⁹.

In 2019, the ILO completed one hundred years since its foundation, whose policies and recommendations indicate a concern with equality between men and women in the labor market. In this sense, the ILO approved Conventions No. 100, 111, and 156, symbolizing the international recognition of the struggle for equal opportunities between male and female workers⁸⁰.

ILO Convention No. 171 specifically addresses night work, superseding Convention No. 89, which prohibited night work performed by women. In this sense, the provisions allow any worker, whether male or female, to perform night work, provided that special measures for workers' health and safety are adopted⁸¹.

Finally, ILO Convention No. 175 of 1994 brought provisions regarding Part-Time Work. It is a fundamental convention to ensure that workers who perform shorter working hours are not treated as second-class workers, aiming at equality of rights proportionally to the hours worked by workers⁸².

That said, the importance of conventions on working hours is evident, as they aim to safeguard workers' fundamental rights, guaranteeing them dignified conditions and equality of rights within labor relations⁸³.

In this sense, ILO member states, upon adhering to the conventions, have a period of 12 months to submit them to internal authorities — parliaments or legislative bodies, which must assess ratification and internalization of the decree, applying them in their legislation. The ILO provides technical assistance to member states, and it is possible to establish representation and complaint procedures against adhering countries that have violated the provisions⁸⁴.

⁷⁸ General Conference of the International Labour Organization, "ILO Convention No. 156, 1981.

⁷⁹ General Conference of the International Labour Organization, "ILO Convention No. 156, 1981.

⁸⁰ Oliveira and Dib, "Breaking the 'Glass Ceiling': The Rise of Women in the Labour Market in Light of ILO Policies and Conventions", 2021.

⁸¹ International Labour Organization. "Conventions", January 30, 2024.

⁸² International Labour Organization. "Conventions", 2024.

⁸³ "Conventions, Protocols And Recommendations", International Labor Organization, August 7, 2024, <https://www.ilo.org/international-labour-standards/conventions-protocols-and-recommendations>.

⁸⁴ "Conventions, Protocols And Recommendations", International Labor Organization, 2024.

1.6 Sustainable Development Goal 8

Sustainability has become a major challenge for humanity, as the growing demands of proactive actions, conceptual imprecisions, ambiguities, controversies, denialism, advances, and setbacks are part of a diversity contained in the term environment. In this sense, as environmental degradation increases and the collapse of the environment becomes more visible, doubts are gradually overcome and environmental issues begin to be debated, with the Stockholm Conference and the dissemination of the Brundtland Report serving as initial milestones for the redefinition of the concept of sustainability⁸⁵.

That said, in light of global environmental and ecological emergencies, the United Nations convened to establish a global plan for the Sustainable Development of Nations, known as the 2030 Agenda. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), known as Rio+20, included the participation of 88 heads of state, in addition to the 191 UN member countries that sent their representatives to the event⁸⁶.

Within the 2030 Agenda, 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets were established, representing a global call by the United Nations to eradicate poverty, protect the environment and the climate, and ensure that people everywhere can achieve peace and prosperity, aiming at the development and progress of nations along social, environmental, and economic dimensions⁸⁷.

That said, the fundamental right to work and the promotion of full employment have also gained support within the SDGs. This is SDG 8 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and its specific targets, whose motto is “Decent Work and Economic Growth,” aiming to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all people worldwide⁸⁸.

The targets of SDG 8 of the 2030 Agenda focus on promoting sustainable, inclusive economic growth capable of generating decent work for all people. The set of targets seeks to strengthen economic productivity through innovation, technological modernization, productive diversification, and support for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, encouraging entrepreneurship and the creation of formal jobs. In addition, it highlights the need to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation by promoting sustainable patterns of production and consumption, while expanding access to financial services and economic opportunities, especially in developing countries⁸⁹.

⁸⁵ Wilson João Zonin et al., 50 Years of Stockholm-72, 30 Years of Rio-92, 10 Years of PPGDRS: An Analysis of the III International Seminar on Postgraduate Studies in Sustainable Rural Development, book (CRV Publisher, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.24824/978652514533.4>.

⁸⁶ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, Brazil, [United Nations in Brazil, 2020.], <https://brasil.un.org/pt-br/91601-declara%C3%A7%C3%A3o-universal-dos-direitos-humanos>.

⁸⁷ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, United Nations in Brazil, [2020].

⁸⁸ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, United Nations in Brazil, [2020].

⁸⁹ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, United Nations in Brazil, [2020].

Another central axis of the targets refers to the promotion of social justice and dignity at work, advocating full employment, equal pay, protection of labor rights, and safe environments for workers, including migrants and people in vulnerable situations. The targets also emphasize the eradication of child labor, modern slavery, and human trafficking, as well as the reduction of youth unemployment and the implementation of policies aimed at the productive inclusion of young people. At the same time, SDG 8 values sustainable tourism and international cooperation as strategies to strengthen local economies, preserve cultures, and expand opportunities for sustainable human development⁹⁰.

Due to the challenges faced by Brazil and other emerging countries, the United Nations committed to achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all people, including youth and persons with disabilities, aiming to reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education, or training by 2020⁹¹.

Thus, the objective is to address situations that threaten the effectiveness of the fundamental and social right to work, as nations have committed to eradicating forced labor, modern slavery, and combating human trafficking by 2025, ensuring the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Nations have committed to eliminating child labor in all its forms⁹².

There has also been the promotion of labor rights and a safe and secure working environment for all workers, including migrant workers, women, and individuals in precarious or inhumane conditions⁹³.

1.7 Quality of Life

In view of the actions, conventions, and recommendations of the ILO, aimed at democratization and recognition of equality of conditions within the labor market, it appears that there are still obstacles to achieving equal conditions between male and female workers. This is a social reality and a subject of many debates, especially with the adoption of gender perspective protocols in contemporary justice systems. In this context, having a good job is related to quality of life in various social fields and intrinsically affects the fight against poverty, injustice, and inequality, while enabling access to social rights such as education, culture, and social security⁹⁴.

Quality of life is deeply linked to decent work, full employment, and the socioeconomic growth of individuals. According to the ILO, the right to decent work means that work performed must be of acceptable quality in terms of working conditions, value and satisfaction, employer-employee relations, and

⁹⁰ United Nations in Brazil, "Sustainable Development Goals", 2026.

⁹¹ United Nations in Brazil, "Sustainable Development Goals", 2026.

⁹² United Nations in Brazil, "Sustainable Development Goals", 2026.

⁹³ United Nations in Brazil, "Sustainable Development Goals", 2026.

⁹⁴ Oliveira and Dib, "Breaking the 'Glass Ceiling': The Rise of Women in the Labor Market in Light of ILO Policies and Conventions", 2021.

remuneration. The organization seeks to value work and ensure fair and equitable remuneration between men and women, since, from a human rights perspective, the right to work means the right to fair remuneration and, therefore, one that ensures a dignified quality of life for workers and their families⁹⁵.

One of the objectives of the ILO is to promote opportunities for men and women, under equal conditions, to have access to decent and productive work, carried out in conditions of freedom, equality, security, and dignity, considering decent work fundamental for the eradication of poverty and social inequalities, ensuring democratic governance and fostering sustainable development of the United Nations⁹⁶.

Full and productive employment and decent work were addressed in SDG 8 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, as set out in targets 8.5, 8.6, 8.7, and 8.8. Target 8.5 establishes that, by 2030, full and productive employment and decent work should be ensured for all individuals, including women, men, youth, and persons with disabilities, with equal pay for work of equal value. Target 8.6 aimed to reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education, or training by 2020⁹⁷.

Target 8.7, of great importance, aims to reaffirm the commitment of the UN and the ILO to the eradication of all forms of forced labor, the end of modern slavery and human trafficking, ensuring the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor, including the recruitment of child soldiers, and by 2025 aimed to eliminate all forms of child labor. This represents recognition of the inherent dignity of human beings⁹⁸.

Within this scope, target 8.8 promotes the protection and reaffirmation of labor rights and the provision of safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrants, female migrants, and individuals subjected to precarious labor conditions⁹⁹.

Quality of life is related to the relationship of human beings with everything that surrounds them. It involves the recovery and incorporation of ethical values, solidarity, fraternity, respect for differences in beliefs and races, cultures and knowledge, respect for the environment, and human rights. The human being is a totality; thus, quality of life means the prevalence of justice, peace, and joy, in which human beings are able to overcome hunger, disease, ignorance, servitude, anguish, and fear¹⁰⁰.

⁹⁵ Simões Barata, Mário. "Decent Work and the Question of Fair Remuneration in the European Union". *Inclusiones Magazine* 8, Special Issue (2020): 579–88.

⁹⁶ Get to Know the ILO, International Labour Organization, 2025.

⁹⁷ United Nations in Brazil. "Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth". United Nations in Brazil, [2026], <https://brasil.un.org/pt-br/sdgs/8>.

⁹⁸ United Nations in Brazil. "Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth", 2026.

⁹⁹ United Nations in Brazil. "Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth", 2026.

¹⁰⁰ Ahlert, Alvorí. "Corporeality and Education: The Body and the New Paradigms of Complexity". *Espacios en Blanco*, no. 21 (2011): 219–240.

The quality of life of workers is deeply linked to their fundamental needs. In the words of Alvorí Ahlert, quality of life is linked to human needs, that is, the guarantee of everything we need in life¹⁰¹:

- Physical space: housing, yard, common leisure areas, green areas;
- Clothing and housing compatible with hot or cold climates;
- Healthy food: based on vitamins, proteins, calories, free from pesticides;
- Social interaction: other people around, family members, neighbors, friends, co-workers, and leisure companions.
- Spaces/places to love, smile, play, and cry, allowing human beings to express everything related to their lives;
- Freedom to produce culture, consume culture, produce and consume art, the right to choose where to live, work, study, learn, train, and access information;
- Health and protection.

That said, for all this to be realized in the lives of individuals, it is essential to ensure that everyone has access to full employment and decent work, whose remuneration enables this social and human development in everyone's lives¹⁰².

2. Methodology

The choice of the bibliographic and documentary method is justified by the theoretical and normative nature of the object of study, which requires the analysis of international treaties, national legislation, and institutional reports, especially those of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Although empirical approaches, such as interviews or statistical analyses, may complement the investigation, the present study prioritizes the construction of a theoretical-analytical framework capable of systematizing the main normative trends and evidence already consolidated in specialized literature. Furthermore, secondary data from international reports were incorporated in order to provide greater robustness to the analysis of the impacts of working time reduction.

3. Comparative Analysis of Latin American Countries

TABLE 1: Latin American countries and their working hours:

Country	Weekly Hours	Daily Hours	Observations
Argentina	48h	8h - 12h	Recent reform increased flexibility (hour bank).
Bolivia	48h	8h	Maintains traditional standard.
Brazil	44h	8h	Ongoing discussions for reduction to 40h or 5x2 schedule.
Chile	42h	9h	In transition: reduced to 42h in April/2026; will reach 40h in 2028.
Colombia	42h	8h - 10h	42h target reached in July/2026 after gradual reduction.
Costa Rica	48h	8h	One of the highest annual workloads in the region.

¹⁰¹ Ahlert. "Corporeality and Education: The Body and the New Paradigms of Complexity", 222.

¹⁰² Ahlert. "Corporeality and Education: The Body and the New Paradigms of Complexity", 222.

Cuba	44h	8h	Follows specific state regulation.
Ecuador	40h	8h	One of the pioneers of the 40h workweek.
El Salvador	44h	8h	44h for commerce; 48h for industry.
Guatemala	44h	8h	Similar to El Salvador model.
Honduras	44h	8h	Lower limits for night shifts.
Mexico	48h	8h	Approved reform: gradual reduction to 40h starts in 2027.
Nicaragua	48h	8h	Maintains ILO maximum limit.
Panama	48h	8h	Night limited to 42h; mixed to 45h.
Paraguay	48h	8h	Traditional 48h weekly standard.
Peru	48h	8h	Reduction possible by agreement, with salary impact.
Dominican Rep.	44h	8h	Current focus on regulating telework.
Uruguay	44h/48h	8h	44h for commerce and 48h for industry.
Venezuela	40h	8h	40h workweek established since 2012.

Source: Prepared by the Authors (2026), based on ILO document¹⁰³.

According to data from the report presented by the International Labour Organization (ILO)¹⁰⁴, the reduction of working hours does not only express the fact that workers will work fewer hours daily or weekly, but it ultimately results in improved productivity and various benefits for workers, such as improved health and well-being.

The right to a safe and healthy working environment was recognized as one of the fundamental principles and rights of the International Labour Organization (ILO), inserted in 2022 after a historic decision by the delegates present at the 110th Session of the International Labour Conference. In this sense, the ILO hopes to create opportunities for decent work and full employment for all individuals, especially for people in situations of socioeconomic vulnerabilities, guaranteeing everyone a safe working environment, health, leisure, and well-being¹⁰⁵.

In this sense, excessive working hours or those above the permitted limit (48 hours per week) end up resulting in damage to the mental and physical health of workers. Recent studies have shown that workers who labor excessively end up being affected by "burnout syndrome," stress, physical exhaustion, and mental breakdown¹⁰⁶.

That said, the adoption of a more balanced work routine, developed within the "work-life balance" concept, ends up contributing positively to the worker fulfilling their family obligations, facilitating gender equality and obligations between men and women, and, finally, leads to an increase in productivity by workers and full employment, allowing individuals to enjoy social interaction and

¹⁰³ International Labour Organization, Working Time and Work-Life Balance Around the World (International Labour Office, 2022), https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms_864222.pdf.

¹⁰⁴ International Labour Organization, "Working Time and Work-Life Balance Around the World", 2022.

¹⁰⁵ United Nations in Brazil. "ILO Adds Safety and Health to Fundamental Rights at Work", Brazil, [2022], <https://brasil.un.org/pt-br/186004-oit-adiciona-seguran%C3%A7a-e-sa%C3%BAde-aos-direitos-fundamentais-no-trabalho>.

¹⁰⁶ International Labor Organization, "Working Time And Work-Life Balance Around The World", 2022.

leisure, intimately converging with ILO Conventions No. 89, 100, 111, and 156, and with the 8th SDG¹⁰⁷.

The report establishes a direct correlation between the reduction of excessive working hours and the increase in productivity per hour worked. The evidence presented suggests that human performance suffers from "diminishing returns": after a certain limit of hours, accumulated fatigue reduces concentration and efficiency, increasing rework. By reducing working hours, companies frequently observe higher workforce motivation and a drastic reduction in absenteeism and employee turnover. Economically, this translates into leaner and more sustainable operations, where the quality of the product or service prevails over the simple quantity of hours spent at the workstation¹⁰⁸.

The reduction of working time acts as a catalyst for more sustainable practices and broad social benefits. In the environmental aspect, fewer hours or days of work result in a significant decrease in commuting, which reduces urban congestion and the emission of polluting gases. Furthermore, the report suggests that workers with more free time tend to adopt more conscious consumption behaviors and are less dependent on "quick convenience" solutions, which generally have a larger ecological footprint. Socially, this reduction allows for a more equitable distribution of the work available in society, potentially assisting in the reduction of unemployment and the strengthening of the social fabric through volunteering and civic participation¹⁰⁹.

One of the most innovative points of the document is the emphasis on "time sovereignty," arguing that quality of life depends not only on the total number of hours but on who holds control over them. Flexible work arrangements—such as teleworking, staggered hours, or compressed weeks—allow individuals to adjust their professional tasks to their biological and personal needs. When the worker has influence over their schedule, the perception of well-being increases drastically, reducing work-family conflict. The report highlights that flexibility, when implemented in a balanced and negotiated manner, is a powerful tool for talent retention and for the inclusion of vulnerable groups in the labor market¹¹⁰.

Ecuador stands out as the precursor of the 40-hour work week in South America, having established this limit long before the current trend of reforms in the region. In 2026, the country no longer discusses the reduction of total time, but rather the modernization of how these hours are distributed. Ecuadorian legislation now allows for greater flexibility, enabling the 40 hours to be completed in four days of ten hours (the 4x3 model), provided there is an agreement between employer and employee. This approach focuses on "time sovereignty," allowing the worker to have longer rest periods without this implying a reduction in salary or loss of acquired rights¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁷ International Labor Organization, "Working Time And Work-Life Balance Around The World", 2022.

¹⁰⁸ International Labor Organization, "Working Time And Work-Life Balance Around The World", 2022.

¹⁰⁹ International Labor Organization, "Working Time And Work-Life Balance Around The World", 2022.

¹¹⁰ International Labor Organization, "Working Time And Work-Life Balance Around The World", 2022.

¹¹¹ International Labor Organization, "Working Time And Work-Life Balance Around The World", 2022.

Chile adopted one of the most structured reduction strategies in Latin America with the implementation of the "40-Hour Law." The Chilean model is characterized by graduality, aiming to protect the economy and allow small businesses to adapt without shocks. In April 2026, the country reached the 42-hour weekly milestone, following the schedule that will culminate in the definitive 40 hours in 2028. In addition to the numerical reduction, the Chilean reform is innovative by introducing time bands for parents and caregivers, allowing them to start or end the workday at different times to reconcile work with school routines or the care of dependents¹¹².

Mexico, historically known for having one of the most extensive workloads in the OECD, is experiencing a moment of profound transformation with the constitutional reform promulgated in March 2026. The new law changes the maximum limit from 48 to 40 hours per week, guaranteeing the worker at least two days of rest for every five worked. Unlike the Chilean model, Mexico established a preparation period in 2026 so that the effective reduction begins to be applied progressively starting in January 2027. This change is seen as a milestone for Mexican public health, aiming to combat high rates of labor stress and increase productivity through a more rested workforce¹¹³.

In Brazil, the current scenario is marked by a historic mobilization in the National Congress to overcome the 44-hour work week and extinguish the 6x1 scale; this refers to Bill 67/2025. The project aims to establish the 5x2 scale as a general rule, in which workers labor for 5 days and rest for 2 days, maintaining the requirement that rest coincides with a Sunday every three weeks. However, the Bill authorizes the adoption of the 4x3 scale with shifts of up to 10 hours. As in Mexico and Ecuador, the proposal provides for the reduction of the working day gradually, with a 42-hour work week starting in 2027, and 40 hours starting in 2028, prohibiting salary reduction as a result of the reduction in working hours¹¹⁴.

The project, which has already advanced in important committees and is scheduled for a plenary vote in May 2026, proposes a gradual implementation over six years to allow the economy and the productive sector to adapt without salary reduction. The debate is driven by studies indicating the potential to generate up to 4.5 million new jobs and by strong popular support, with surveys pointing out that about 71% of Brazilians favor the reduction of working days in favor of mental health and quality of life¹¹⁵.

¹¹² International Labor Organization, "Working Time And Work-Life Balance Around The World", 2022.

¹¹³ Igor Gomes, "The Reduction of the Work Week to 40 Hours Put Mexico in an Unprecedented Position: Among the 3 Countries in Latin America with the Shortest Work Week", Terra, March 9, 2026, <https://www.terra.com.br/byte/a-reducao-da-semana-de-trabalho-para-40-horas-colocou-o-mexico-em-um-a-posicao-inedita-entre-os-3-paises-da-america-latina-com-a-semana-de-trabalho-mais-curta,78416efdfab0fd14d492240620604565n45ke39s.html>.

¹¹⁴ CBIC Agency, "5x2 Shift: Alternative Project to Reducing Working Hours Enters the Agenda of the Labor Commission", CBIC – Brazilian Chamber of the Construction Industry, March 23, 2026, <https://cbic.org.br/escala-5x2-projeto-alternativo-a-reducao-da-jornada-entra-na-pauta-da-comissao-de-trabalho/>.

¹¹⁵ CBIC Agency, "5x2 Shift: Alternative Project to Reducing Working Hours Enters the Agenda of the Labor Commission", CBIC – Brazilian Chamber of the Construction Industry, 2026.

The recent flexibilization of the daily working day in Argentina, with the possibility of extension to up to 12 hours in certain sectors and regimes, reveals a significant contradiction in the contemporary context of debates on the reduction of working time. Although such measures are frequently justified under the argument of increasing productivity, economic competitiveness, and adaptation to market dynamics, their effects on the quality of life and health of workers tend to be deeply problematic. Prolonged shifts are associated with increased stress, chronic fatigue, occupational diseases, and mental disorders, in addition to compromising the balance between professional and personal life. From a critical perspective, this flexibilization may represent a social setback, especially in peripheral economies marked by power asymmetries between capital and labor, in which the extension of the working day does not necessarily translate into better salaries or dignified conditions, but rather into the intensification of labor exploitation. In this sense, the adoption of extended shifts directly tensions the normative and theoretical advances that defend the reduction of working time as an instrument for promoting health, human dignity, and the redistribution of social time, calling into question the commitment to development models oriented toward the well-being of workers.

Chile, Mexico, and Ecuador are pioneers in Latin America regarding the reduction of working hours, aiming for the well-being and health of workers. It is a measure aimed at combating professional exhaustion, allowing individuals to enjoy dignified rest, making the labor market more flexible. The changes directly impact the quality of life of millions of people, allowing for a balance between personal and professional life, reducing stress levels, and enabling people to live with dignity, with time for their families, leisure, and health. From an economic point of view, changes must occur gradually so that there are no significant impacts on the economic stability of the nations that adopt the reduction of working hours, although recent ILO studies demonstrate that the reduction of the working day was positive for the labor market, since it led to an increase in productivity and the retention of qualified and talented professional labor, decreasing turnover in the labor market, caused mainly by the exhaustion and stress of professionals¹¹⁶.

The implementation of the reduction of working hours in Latin America faces concrete challenges that go beyond the normative level and reveal structural tensions between capital, labor, and economic development. The resistance of the business sector constitutes one of the main obstacles, often based on the argument of rising operational costs, the need for productive restructuring, and the risk of loss of competitiveness, especially in economies inserted peripherally in the global market¹¹⁷. This scenario becomes even more sensitive in the case of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, which, due to their lower financial and technological capacity, tend to face greater difficulties in adaptation, potentially resorting to the intensification of work, informality, or the reduction of formal positions as adjustment strategies¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁶ International Labour Organization, “Working Time and Work-Life Balance Around the World”, 2022.

¹¹⁷ International Labour Organization (ILO), Working Time and Work-Life Balance Around the World (Geneva: ILO, 2022).

¹¹⁸ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Financing SMEs and Entrepreneurs 2023: An OECD Scoreboard (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023).

Furthermore, the reduction of hours can generate indirect salary effects, such as the compression of variable income, the flexibilization of benefits, or the expansion of control and productivity mechanisms, which requires careful analysis to avoid that the decrease in working time results, paradoxically, in the precarization of labor conditions¹¹⁹. The economic viability of the measure also varies significantly among the analyzed countries, depending on factors such as productivity level, degree of informality, sectoral structure of the economy, and institutional capacity for regulation and supervision¹²⁰. In this context, the effectiveness of the reduction of hours depends not only on its legal provision but on the construction of integrated public policies, economic incentives, and collective bargaining mechanisms that guarantee its implementation in a balanced way, without disproportionately transferring the transition costs to workers or to the most vulnerable segments of the productive sector¹²¹.

The comparative analysis of Latin American countries evidences, in empirical terms, the tensions already pointed out by the theoretical framework presented in section 1.1. The experiences of reducing working hours, as in the cases of Chile, Mexico, and Ecuador, dialogue directly with Alberto Acosta's critique of productivism, signaling a reorientation of work toward the promotion of well-being and quality of life, in line with the perspective of *Buen Vivir*¹²².

On the other hand, the maintenance of extensive hours or the flexibilization that allows for their expansion—as observed in Argentina—confirms the persistence of the logic of overexploitation described by Ruy Mauro Marini¹²³ and deepened by Anibal Quijano¹²⁴ within the scope of the coloniality of power, evidencing that the unequal distribution of working time continues to be a structural mechanism for the reproduction of inequalities in the region. Furthermore, the negative impacts of prolonged hours on the physical and mental health of workers corroborate the analyses of Ricardo Antunes¹²⁵ and David Harvey¹²⁶ regarding the intensification of work in contemporary capitalism, while the evidence of productivity and well-being gains associated with the reduction of hours reinforces Enrique Leff's critique of instrumental economic rationality. In this sense, the comparative data not only illustrate different regulatory models but reveal concrete disputes between development paradigms: on one hand, the maintenance of productivist structures centered on accumulation; on the other, initiatives that point toward the redistribution of social time as a condition for human dignity, sustainability, and emancipation, as defended by the critical sociology of Latin American work.

¹¹⁹ Antunes, *The Privilege of Servitude*, 112.

¹²⁰ International Labour Organization (ILO), *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2023* (Geneva: ILO, 2023).

¹²¹ Kooiman, *Governance as Governance* (2003).

¹²² Acosta, *Good Living*, 50.

¹²³ Marini, *Dialectics of Dependency*, 31.

¹²⁴ Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Social Classification", 90.

¹²⁵ Antunes, *The Privilege of Servitude*, 112.

¹²⁶ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1992).

Conclusions

The present research demonstrated that the discussion on the reduction of working hours in Latin America goes beyond the limits of a simple normative reform, configuring itself as a structural debate on development models, social justice, and quality of life. From the dialogue between the critical theoretical framework and the comparative analysis of Latin American countries, it was possible to highlight that contradictory movements coexist in the region: on one hand, progressive initiatives to reduce hours—as in the cases of Chile, Mexico, and Ecuador—aligned with the promotion of well-being, health, and productivity; on the other, the permanence—and, in certain contexts, the deepening—of flexibilization practices that extend working time, as observed in Argentina, reinforcing historical dynamics of overexploitation.

The analyzed data confirm that extensive working hours negatively impact the physical and mental health of workers, contributing to the increase in occupational diseases, stress, and imbalance between professional and personal life. In contrast, the reduction of hours, when implemented in a structured and gradual manner, tends to produce positive effects, such as increased productivity per hour worked, reduction of absenteeism, and improvement in quality of life. Such evidence corroborates the theoretical perspectives that criticize the centrality of productivism and defend the redistribution of social time as a fundamental element for human dignity.

However, the research also evidenced that the implementation of this agenda faces significant challenges. The resistance of the business sector, especially in peripheral economies, reveals legitimate concerns with costs and competitiveness, but also expresses the permanence of an economic rationality centered on the maximization of working time. Furthermore, micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises show greater vulnerability to changes, demanding specific public policies that enable their adaptation without compromising jobs or working conditions. Added to this is the possibility of indirect effects on remuneration and labor intensification, which reinforces the need for effective regulatory mechanisms and collective bargaining.

Given this scenario, the formulation of public policies aimed at Latin American countries that still maintain 48-hour work weeks requires a systemic, gradual, and institutionally coordinated approach. Firstly, the adoption of gradual reduction strategies is recommended, inspired by models such as the Chilean and Mexican ones, in order to allow for the progressive adaptation of productive sectors. Secondly, the creation of differentiated policies for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises is fundamental, including tax incentives, credit lines, and support for innovation, so as to mitigate the economic impacts of the transition. Thirdly, it is essential to strengthen collective bargaining mechanisms and state supervision, ensuring that the reduction of hours is not accompanied by salary losses or work intensification. Finally, integrated policies for employment formalization and productivity increase must accompany this process, ensuring that the redistribution of working time effectively translates into improved living conditions.

It is concluded that the reduction of working hours, beyond an economic measure, must be understood as a civilizing strategy aimed at promoting health, sustainability, and the democratization of social relations. Its effectiveness, however, depends on an articulation between the State, the market, and civil society, capable of balancing economic and social interests, respecting national specificities. Thus, the advancement of this agenda in Latin America requires not only legal reforms but a broader reorientation of development paradigms, so as to place life, well-being, and human dignity at the center of public policies and labor relations.

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