

# OECD POLICY DIALOGUE ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

## RECOGNISING, REDUCING AND REDISTRIBUTING UNPAID CARE AND DOMESTIC WORK

### CONCEPT NOTE

#### I. BACKGROUND

1. The case for countries to invest in women's economic empowerment has never been stronger. A growing body of evidence is demonstrating that economies are more resilient, productive and inclusive when they reduce gender inequalities and actively support women's equal participation in all spheres of life<sup>1</sup>. Further impetus for action is provided by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which confirms that women's economic empowerment is essential for sustainable development.
2. In current discussions around women's economic empowerment, there is growing recognition of the constraints imposed by the unequal share of unpaid care and domestic work.<sup>2</sup> Following the three Rs approach<sup>3</sup>, recognising, reducing and redistributing their unpaid care and domestic workload is essential to enable women to take advantage of opportunities for livelihoods development, access decent work, network, develop their skills through education and vocational training, and improve their quality of life, including attending to their health needs as well as enjoying leisure time. While some advances have been realised – such as removing legal barriers to women's employment or increasing access to micro-credit - women still continue to experience fewer economic rights, wages and employment opportunities than men, and are confronted with traditional gendered norms on their roles and responsibilities within the household.<sup>4</sup> The significance of unpaid care work for achieving gender equality and women's economic empowerment was recognised explicitly in the SDG Target 5.4.

#### **Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**

**Target 5.4:** Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

<sup>1</sup> Ferrant G and Kolev A (2016) Issues Paper: The economic cost of gender-based discrimination in social institutions, Paris: OECD; OECD (2012) Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now, Paris: OECD; McKinsey (2015) The Power of Parity: How advancing women's equality can add \$12 trillion to global growth, McKinsey Global Institute.

<sup>2</sup> UN HLP (2016) Leave No One Behind, A call to action for gender equality and women's economic empowerment, Report of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, New York: UNHLP.

<sup>3</sup> The framework of the three Rs interconnected dimensions of policy towards unpaid care work was conceptualised by Professor Diane Elson, Essex University.

<sup>4</sup> UN Women (2016) Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016, Transforming economies, realising rights, New York: UN Women.

## II. RATIONALE FOR OECD'S ENGAGEMENT

- Women's unequal share of unpaid care and domestic work is an important barrier to their economic empowerment and well-being. This reflects not only the time-intensive nature of some tasks performed around the home, such as caring for other household members, but also the uneven distribution of caring activities between household members, which reflect social norms and practices and intra-household decision-making. Moreover, the productivity of a woman's time is influenced by her age, health, nutritional status, vulnerability to gender-based violence and family life cycle (including household composition, sex of household head).

### Definition of unpaid care and domestic work

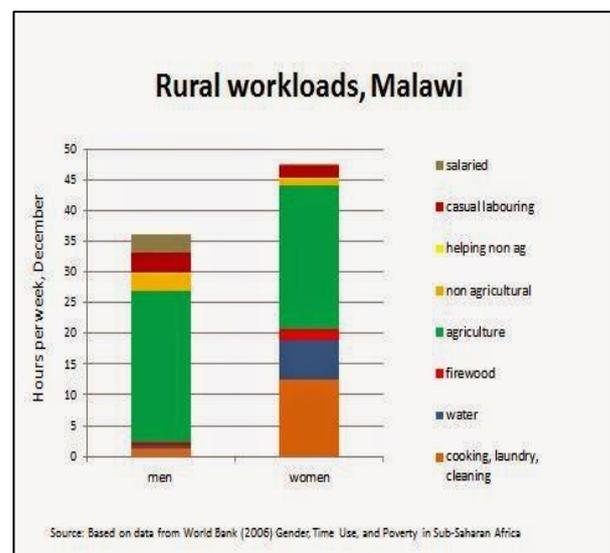
Unpaid care work refers to non-remunerated activities performed within the household for its maintenance and well-being such as childcare and housework. These activities are considered work, because theoretically one could pay a third person to perform them.

Elson, D (2000), "Progress of the World's Women 2000", UNIFEM Biennial Report, New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women.

- Women around the world spend more time on unpaid and domestic care work, irrespective of their country's level of development, income or socio-cultural factors.<sup>5</sup> In low- and middle-income countries, time-intensive tasks are dominated by fetching water and fuel, food preparation, care of children, the elderly, disabled and the sick, and cleaning (see Box 1 for data about Malawi). The labour burden of daily living is most pronounced in vulnerable communities, where the demands of household work<sup>6</sup> are often exacerbated by low-technology, labour intensive farming systems.<sup>7</sup>

### Box 1: Women's and men's use of time in Malawi

*In Malawi*, data from a World Bank study\* found that women typically spent 13 hours a week on cooking, laundry and cleaning, six hours collecting water and another two hours collecting firewood whereas these domestic tasks barely featured in men's workload, accounting for just over 2 hours per week. Moreover, women often multi-task and the time they spend caring for other family members will be interwoven with other activities. Both sexes spent around 23-24 hours per week working in agriculture and men another spent nine hours in non-agricultural activities including labouring and salaried work. Even in the quietest month of the year, women worked 39 hours per week and men only 27 hours. The data confirm that women are overburdened by many labour-intensive and repetitive tasks, which earn them no money, and have little seasonal variation. Moreover, this pattern is repeated among girls and boys.

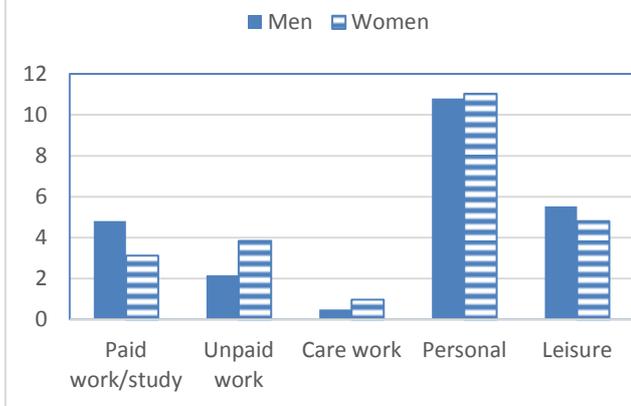


<sup>5</sup> Ferrant G, Pesando L M and Nowacka K (2014) Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes, Paris: OECD Development Centre.

<sup>6</sup> Cooke J and Bishop-Sambrook C (2016) Reducing rural women's domestic workload through labour-saving technologies and practices toolkit, Rome: IFAD.

<sup>7</sup> Grassi F, Landberg J and Huyer S (2015) Running Out of Time, The reduction of women's work burden in agricultural production, Rome: FAO.

Figure 1: Time allocated in main activities (hours per day) by sex in OECD countries



5. Higher levels of economic development have not erased these gender inequalities, pointing to the role of social norms in underpinning women’s unpaid care work burden. In OECD economies, despite access to many labour-saving infrastructure and technologies - such as piped water, energy supplies and washing machines, women still spend, on average, twice as much time as men on unpaid care and domestic work (Figure 1).<sup>8</sup> This shows the importance of also addressing social norms, which influence the allocation of tasks between household members.

6. With women’s economic empowerment recognised as a universal challenge, OECD’s commitment to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment goes beyond its member countries. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development commits to ensure women’s equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy. Adequate financing from all sources is thus required for the full and accelerated implementation of commitments to empower women economically and shape economies that work for women<sup>9</sup>. As the main providers of official development assistance, women’s economic empowerment is a policy priority for the majority of OECD DAC countries.
7. Operationalising OECD’s commitment to partner countries raises questions on how public policies and development cooperation support can promote women’s economic empowerment in developing country contexts. Moving from the “why” to the “how” is emerging as the new question confronting both governments and the development community.

### III. OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

8. In recognition of the knowledge, policy and data gaps, the OECD will champion evidence-based analysis to steer inclusive policy guidance on “what works” to achieve SDG 5.4 as an entry point for promoting women’s economic empowerment and well-being in low- and middle-income countries.
9. This work will leverage expertise and learning from developing countries’ experiences and partner organisations. It will build on OECD’s extensive work on gender and development. This includes the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) which examines how gender inequality is shaped by discriminatory social institutions that affect women’s lives, including the unequal

<sup>8</sup> OECD Family Database LMF2.5: Time use for work, care and other day-to-day activities, Paris: OECD.

<sup>9</sup> OECD (2016) Tracking the money for women’s economic empowerment: still a drop in the ocean, Paris: OECD-DAC Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET) and the DAC Working Party on Development Finance Statistics.

share of unpaid care work. It will complement OECD studies on the relationship between unpaid work and impact on women's access to decent work, and the gender gap in wages and pension entitlements.<sup>10</sup> It will include analysis of official development assistance to women's economic empowerment.<sup>11</sup> It will also build on OECD's time-use data series by identifying data and harmonised methodologies that can be used to support developing countries measurement of unpaid care work and help track SDG 5.4.

10. The proposed Policy Dialogue on reducing the burden of unpaid care and domestic work for women will be based on the four areas identified in SDG target 5.4. The target identifies "the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection" as policy enablers for women's economic empowerment. The emphasis on these policy domains highlights the need to incorporate a gender lens in the design, analysis and implementation of social and economic policies that directly or indirectly affect unpaid care and domestic workload. In addition, "promotion of shared responsibility" through redistributing tasks between household members will challenge the traditional gender norms that underpin the unequal distribution of unpaid care work.
11. Gender-responsive interventions in these four domains can generate multiple benefits for women's time use:
  - **Public services** can both alleviate women's time spent on unpaid care activities as well as help generate employment opportunities for them. The public provision of care services for children through crèches or services for the elderly, sick and disabled can redistribute care work that may traditionally fall to women. Access to basic health services can cut down on the amount of time women spend travelling and waiting to receive health care for themselves or their dependents. There is also the possibility for these services to provide employment opportunities for women but only when the necessary education and vocational training is accessible to women and takes into consideration the challenge of balancing this with their existing unpaid care work.
  - **Infrastructure** is often considered to be gender-neutral yet women are disproportionately affected by a lack of water or electricity, by poor local roads and inadequate transport – all of which increase their time spent on domestic tasks. A recent OECD study<sup>12</sup> found that official development assistance targeting gender equality is weakest in the infrastructure sectors, such as energy and transport. This is despite strong evidence that women's access to quality infrastructure is essential for expanding their economic opportunities and reducing the drudgery of unpaid work. By applying a gender lens to the design of public works programmes, they can not only save time but also be a source of decent work for women, for example by limiting the number of hours worked per day to allow time for other activities or by providing child-care facilities at worksites.

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<sup>10</sup> Ferrant G, Pesando L M and Nowacka K (2014) Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes, Paris: OECD Development Centre.

<sup>11</sup> OECD (2016) *Op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> OECD (2016) *Op. cit.*

- **Social protection** is one policy area that has been associated with reducing women's income poverty. However, as research is beginning to show<sup>13</sup>, social protection programmes have had almost incidental if not minimal positive impacts on reducing women's time poverty. The design of social protection programmes have tended to be gender blind, reinforcing patriarchal family structures and based on gender stereotypes of women as the primary caregiver, thereby increasing rather than reducing their time poverty<sup>14</sup>. For example, the obligations related to receipt of conditional cash transfers or participation in a public works programme impose a burden of time.
  - **Redistributing responsibility within the household for unpaid care and domestic work** addresses social norms and expectations about women's roles, which are some of the underlying causes of gender inequality. The unequal share of unpaid care and domestic work has an adverse impact on women's time and ability to seek empowerment opportunities outside the home; it also restricts their voice and agency within the home. Interventions to support better distribution include parental leave policies and labour-saving technologies. Transforming household roles can also be an opportunity to challenge discriminatory social norms around gender-based violence through increasing women's agency.
12. The Policy Dialogue will offer guidance to policy makers on:
- How can public policies reduce unpaid care and domestic work, tailored to the specific needs of different groups of women\*? (*\*Women in different age cohorts, as heads of households, household composition*)
13. To answer this question, the Policy Dialogue will identify:
- Which unpaid care activities are the most time intensive for women and men in different geographical settings (rural/urban) and cultural contexts (countries)?
  - What are the principal barriers to reducing and redistributing the unpaid and care work burden for women?
  - What are the impacts - positive and negative - of different public policies on women's use of time? And why?
  - How can gender-responsive public policies contribute to transforming social norms on unpaid care work with positive gains for time-poverty reduction (e.g. engaging men as fathers, intra-household decision making)? What is the time scale for change?
  - How can gender-responsive budgeting support government efforts to implement policies tackling unpaid care work?
  - How can the development community work with national governments to integrate a gender lens in their cooperation to support national efforts?
14. In addition, the Policy Dialogue will examine:
- Where are the most urgent data needs on time use (gaps in micro data, limited country coverage, rural/urban)?

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<sup>13</sup> De la O Campos A P (2015) Empowering Rural Women through Social Protection, Rural Transformations, Technical Papers Series #2, Rome: FAO.

<sup>14</sup> UN Women (2015) *Op cit.*

- What lessons can be learned from middle- to high-income countries that could be applied or scaled in low- to middle-income countries?

#### IV. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

15. This Policy Dialogue will be informed by experts from developed and developing countries and specialised agencies. It will be underpinned by four key assumptions:
  - i. **Women spend more time ‘working’ than men when unpaid and paid work are combined.** This universal phenomenon has negative impacts on not only their economic prospects but also their health and well-being.
  - ii. **Reducing women’s unpaid and domestic care burden can positively affect their economic empowerment** by opening more time for them to pursue employment, education/training, networking, and membership and leadership opportunities.
  - iii. **Gender-responsive public policies** can positively impact on women’s time use and, as a consequence, create an enabling policy environment for them to pursue economic empowerment opportunities and other life choices.
  - iv. **Redistributive initiatives are necessary complimentary measures that help to address social norms which affect the distribution of unpaid care and domestic work within a household**, helping to expand women’s opportunities and increase their agency and decision-making power.
16. **Expert Group Consultations** will be organised throughout the implementation of this initiative to refine the focus and methodological approach of the Policy Dialogue including validating the choice of policy domains and shaping the development of outputs, and guide the work.
17. **Members of the Policy Dialogue** will be invited to participate in the co-production of knowledge products. A Dialogue membership will be formed with representatives from the DAC Network on Gender Equality, developing countries, specialised agencies (e.g. development banks, research institutes, UN agencies) and civil society. At least two physical meetings for the Policy Dialogue members will take place (end 2017 and end 2018).

#### V. KEY OUTPUTS

18. The principal output of the Policy Dialogue work will be **practical policy guidance on implementing SDG 5.4**. This will consist of the following elements:
  - **Policy guidance to implement SDG 5.4:** Thematic material focusing on the four policy domains and co-produced with Policy Dialogue members will offer multidimensional perspectives to reducing women’s unpaid care and domestic work. These co-knowledge products will cover the latest evidence and analysis and provide a practical roadmap on policy guidance to implement SDG 5.4 and promote women’s economic empowerment. This will form a key contribution to more informed policy decisions at the national level by

governments, development cooperation partners, the private sector and other key stakeholders in support of women's economic empowerment.

- **Data:** A short document assessing the availability of time use surveys in BRIICS and selected emerging economies will be produced. This will include a review assessing the quality of the statistical information that can be obtained from these surveys, in terms of activity categories used, sample sizes, country coverage and sample representativeness (e.g. rural/urban), etc. On the basis of the results of the review, the Policy Dialogue will lead to the development of a measure of unpaid care work and time poverty for a few selected countries for which time use surveys have been conducted in recent years and fulfil minimum data quality requirements.