

Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes

OECD Development Centre, December 2014



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Key messages

- **Around the world, women spend two to ten times more time on unpaid care work than men.**
- **This unequal distribution of caring responsibilities is linked to discriminatory social institutions and stereotypes on gender roles.**
- **Gender inequality in unpaid care work is the missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes, such as labour force participation, wages and job quality**
- **Tackling entrenched gender norms and stereotypes is a first step in redistributing responsibilities for care and housework between women and men.**

Unpaid care work is both an important aspect of economic activity and an indispensable factor contributing to the well-being of individuals, their families and societies (Stiglitz et al., 2007). Every day individuals spend time cooking, cleaning and caring for children, the ill and the elderly. Despite this importance for well-being, unpaid care work is commonly left out of policy agendas due to a common misperception that, unlike standard market work measures, it is too difficult to measure and less relevant for policies. Yet, neglecting unpaid care work leads to incorrect inferences about levels and changes in individuals' well-being and the value of time, which in turn limit policy effectiveness across a range of socio-economic areas, notably gender inequalities in employment and other empowerment areas.

Women typically spend disproportionately more time on unpaid care work than men. On account of gendered social norms that view unpaid care work as a female prerogative, women across different regions, socio-economic classes and cultures spend an important part of their day on meeting the expectations of their domestic and reproductive roles. This is in addition to their paid activities, thus creating the "double burden" of work for women. How society and policy makers address issues concerning care has important implications for the achievement of gender equality: they can either expand the capabilities and choices of women and men, or confine women to traditional roles associated with femininity and motherhood (Razavi, 2007). The unequal distribution of unpaid care work between women and men represents an infringement of women's rights (UN, 2013) and also a brake on their economic empowerment.

This policy brief argues that gender inequality in unpaid care work is the missing link that influences gender gaps in labour outcomes. The gender gap in unpaid care work has significant implications for women's ability to actively take part in the labour market and the type/quality of employment opportunities available to them. Time is a limited resource, which is divided between labour and leisure, productive and reproductive activities, paid and unpaid work. Every minute more that a woman spends on unpaid care work represents one minute less that she could be potentially spending on market-related activities or investing in her educational and vocational skills.

Using time use data, this policy brief analyses the impact of gender gaps in time devoted to unpaid care activities on gender gaps in labour outcomes. The first section provides an overview of gender inequalities in caring responsibilities. The second section shows that gender inequalities in unpaid care work are related to gender gaps in labour outcomes, such as labour participation, wages and job quality. The third sections assesses the key role of discriminatory social institutions for understanding gender inequalities in unpaid care work. Finally, the fourth section proposes policy recommendations to lift the constraints on women’s time by both reducing the burden of unpaid care work borne by women as well as redistributing the caring responsibilities between women and men, and between the family and the State.

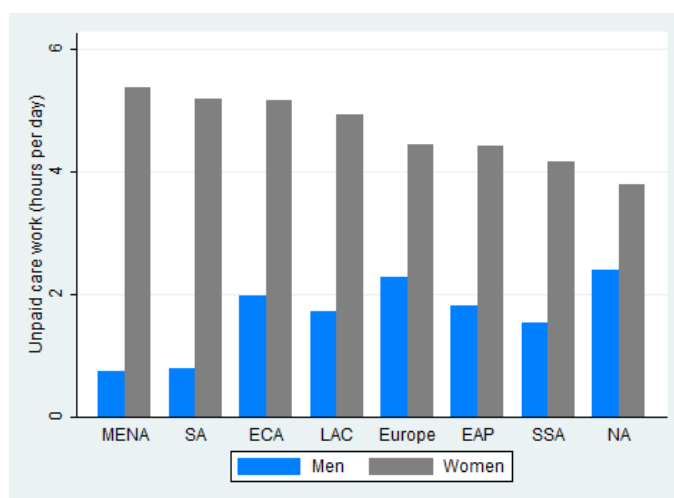
1. Gender inequalities in unpaid care work

Gender patterns in time devoted to unpaid care work cut across geographic regions, household income and societies. Time use data offers an important snapshot of how gender roles shape the division of labour within a household and also put the spotlight on differences between both sexes.

The day-to-day lives of women around the world share one important characteristic: unpaid care work is seen as a female responsibility. Across all regions of the world, women spend on average between three and six hours on unpaid care activities, while men spend between half an hour and two hours (Figure 1). Hence gender inequalities in unpaid care work are observed all around the world, even if there are regional variations (Figure 2). Overall, women spend more time on unpaid care activities than men representing on average two to ten times that of men’s.

Women are more involved in terms of participation and time devoted to unpaid care work. In Ethiopia, for example, the proportion of women collecting water and firewood (71% and 54%, respectively) is twice that of men (29% and 28%, respectively). In addition, the average duration of these activities are higher for women (more than seven hours for both) than for men (less than six hours and six and an half hours, respectively) (Suárez Robles, 2010).

Figure 1: Time spent on unpaid care work varies by gender and region



Note: This chart presents the average hours per day spent on unpaid care work by women and men by regions of the world: Middle East and North Africa (MENA), South Asia (SA), Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ECA), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), East Asia and Pacific (EAP), Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and North America (NA).

Source: OECD (2014), Gender, Institutions and Development Database .

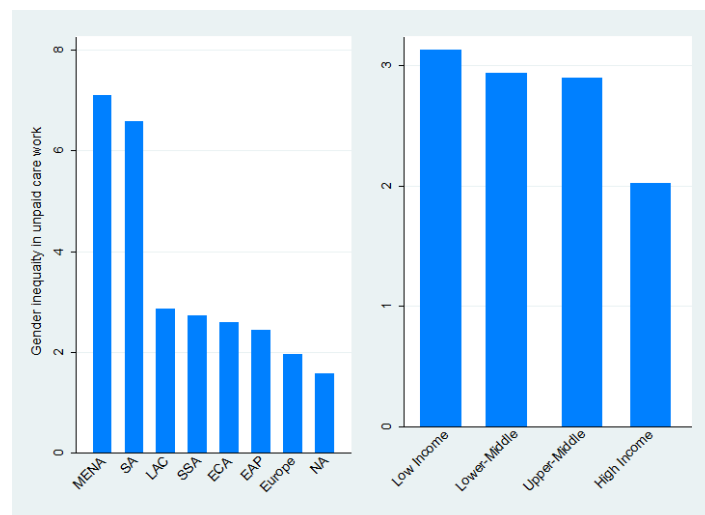
Box 1: Definition of unpaid care work

Unpaid care work refers to all unpaid services provided within a household for its members, including care of persons, housework and voluntary community work (Elson, 2000). These activities are considered *work*, because theoretically one could pay a third person to perform them.

- *Unpaid* = the individual performing this activity is not remunerated
- *Care* = the activity provides what is necessary for the health, well-being, maintenance, and protection of someone or something
- *Work* = the activity involves mental or physical effort and is costly in terms of time resources

Moreover, the allocation of time to various unpaid care activities varies across gender. In India, for example, men devote 36 minutes to unpaid care responsibilities, out of which 36% goes into housework, with the remaining time spent on shopping, care for household members, and travel related to household activities. Out of the six hours women devote to unpaid care activities, the portion of time specifically spent on housework reaches 85%.

Figure 2: Gender inequality in unpaid care work varies by region and income



Note: These charts present the female-to-male ratio of time devoted to unpaid care activities by region and income group. Income groups are divided according to GNI per capita: low income, USD 1 035 or less; lower middle income, USD 1 036 – USD 4 085; upper middle income, USD 4 086 – USD 12 615; and high income, USD 12 616 or more.

Source: World Bank (2014), *World Development Indicators* and OECD (2014), *Gender, Institutions and Development Database*.

Gender inequality in unpaid care work is also related to the wealth of a country. Time use data reveals a negative correlation between income and levels of gender inequalities in unpaid care work: the distribution of responsibilities is the most equal in high income countries (Figure 2). This is largely due to the fact that men in higher income countries are more engaged in care activities.



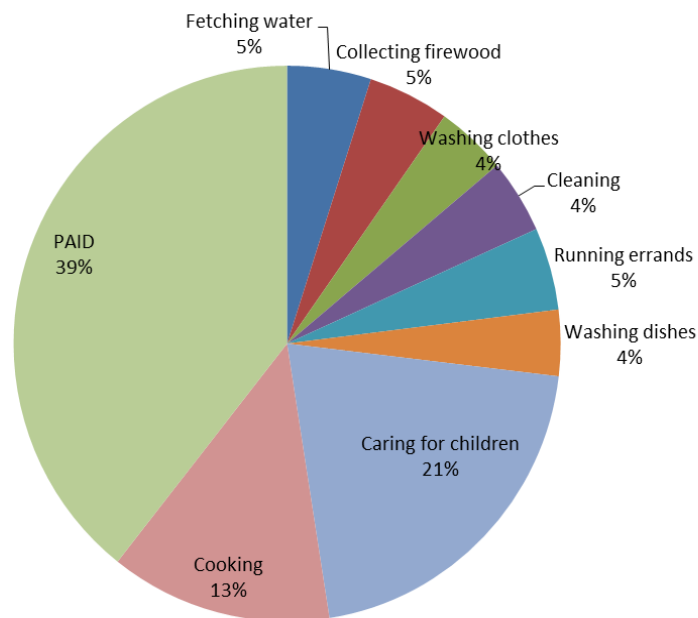
Box 2: Total working time of women in Ghana

What does a typical day of a Ghanaian woman look like? Irrespective of her employment status) her marital status, age or income group, a typical Ghanaian woman works on average 13 hours per day. However, while 40% of her day's work is paid, the majority of her work is unpaid (Figure 3).

Cooking and caring for children make up for the majority of Ghanaian women's daily unpaid tasks: 13% and 21% of their total working time or 20% and 35% of their unpaid working time, respectively. Other unpaid activities, such as fetching water, collecting firewood, washing clothes, and washing dishes require approximately the same amount of time and represent a total of three hours per day.

In Ghana, men also participate in unpaid activities. However, women are performing between two-thirds and three-quarters of the household chores and childcare spending almost double the amount of time on the care of children, for example, compared to men.

Figure 3: Amount of time spent on paid and unpaid activities by Ghanaian women



Note: Ghanaian women's time allocation as percentage of a full working day.

Source: Ghana Living Standards Survey 2005-06.

2. Unequal caring responsibilities explain gender gaps in labour outcomes

The persistent gender gaps in labour force participation over the past few decades highlights the limitations of standard labour supply arguments, which neglect the role of social norms on women's ability to enter and remain in the labour market. A standard assumption is that increases in levels of female education and employability and decreasing fertility rates would automatically lead to increased levels of female labour force participation. Time spent on unpaid care activities is also part of the labour supply equation.

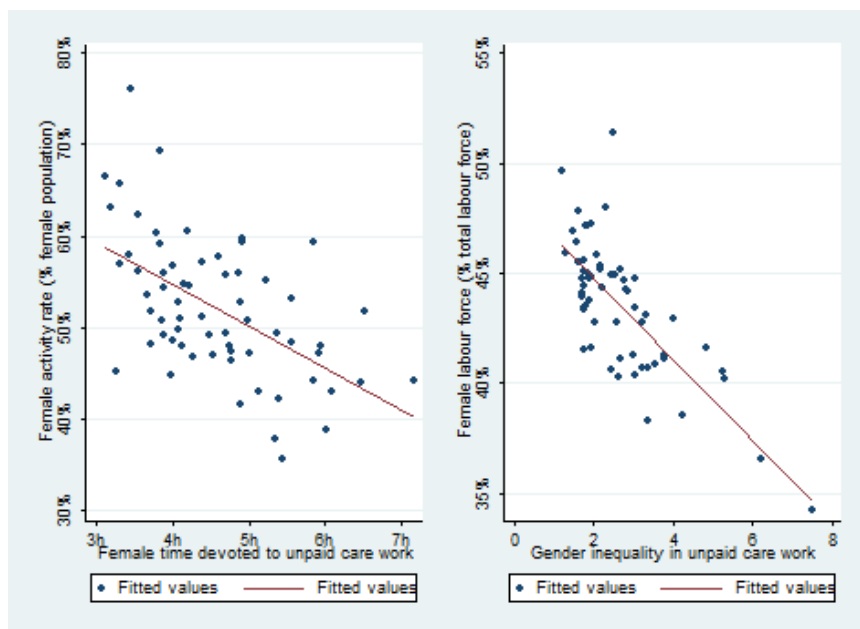
Outsourcing unpaid care activities, such as cooking, cleaning or fetching water is not an affordable or realistic option for most women: their household’s daily wellbeing depends on them to carry out these activities. The unequal distribution of caring responsibilities between women and men within the household thus also translates into unequal opportunities in terms of time to participate equally in paid activities.

Gender inequality in unpaid care work is the missing link in the analysis of related to gender gaps in labour outcomes in three areas: gender gaps in labour force participation rates, quality of employment, and wages.

Unpaid care work and female labour force participation

Firstly, the amount of time devoted to unpaid care work is negatively correlated with female labour force participation (Figure 4). In countries where women spend an average of five hours on unpaid care activities, 50% of women in the working age-population are active, i.e. employed or looking for a job. However, in countries where women spend three hours on unpaid care work, 60% of women are active in the labour force. A decrease in women’s unpaid care work is related to a ten percentage point increase in women’s labour force participation rate (for a given level of GDP per capita, fertility rate, female unemployment rate, female education, urbanisation rate and maternity leave).

Figure 4: Higher inequalities in unpaid care work, higher inequalities in labour force participation



Note: The left graph presents the predicted value of female activity rates as a percentage of total women in the working-age population by time devoted to unpaid care work by women, controlling for GDP per capita, fertility rate, female unemployment rate, female years of schooling, urbanisation rate, maternity leave and regional dummies. The right-hand graph presents the estimated female share of the labour force by the female-to-male ratio of time devoted to unpaid care activities, controlling for GDP per capita, fertility rate, urbanisation rate, maternity leave and gender inequality in unemployment and education.

Source: World Bank (2014), *World Development Indicators* and OECD (2014), *Gender, Institutions and Development Database*.

Secondly, gender inequalities in unpaid care work are also linked to gender gaps in labour force participation. The higher the inequality in distribution of care responsibilities between women and men, the higher the gender gaps in labour force participation. In countries where women spend almost eight times the amount of time on unpaid care activities than men, they represent only 35% of the active working population. However, when the difference drops to less than two times the amount, women's labour force participation increases to 50% of the active population (for a given level of GDP per capita, fertility rate, urbanisation rate, maternity leave and gender inequality in unemployment and education). Hence, when gender inequality in time devoted to unpaid care work increases, the female employment situation relative to the male one worsens.

The unequal distribution of caring responsibilities also provides an important clue to understanding why reduced gender gaps in education have not led to reduced gender gaps in employment in certain countries. Women in countries with high responsibility for unpaid care work are more likely to have lower levels of economic activity. So despite decreasing the gender gap in education, these countries have not been able to maximise the returns from this investment and have persistent gender gaps in employment outcomes. However, countries with family-friendly policies that promote better work-family life balance for both parents see a higher female economic activity rate.

Unpaid care work and quality of employment

Caring responsibilities are also related to the quality of female employment with the unequal amount of time spent by women on unpaid care work increasing the probability that they will be engaged in part-time or in vulnerable employment. Countries having a high share of unpaid care work performed by women compared to men have a higher share of women in part-time and vulnerable jobs. Unpaid care activities constitute a time and energy-consuming occupation that limits women's access to the labour market, relegating them to low-income and insecure employment.

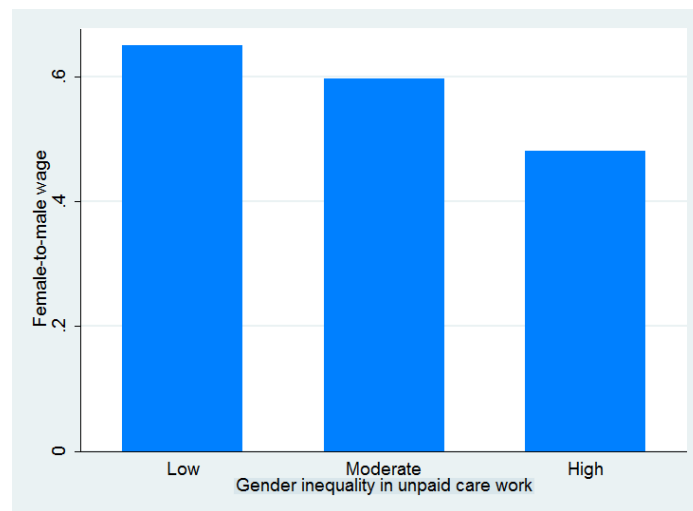
The struggle for women to reconcile care responsibilities with paid employment can lead to "occupational downgrading", where women choose employment below their skills level and accept poorer conditions (Hegewisch and Gornick, 2011). In addition, part-time employment and the informal sector are another alternative for women although this has negative long-term implications in terms of reduced superannuation contributions and retirement incomes (when available).

Unpaid care work and gender wage gaps

Gender inequalities in unpaid care work are also linked to gender wage gaps. A cross-country analysis indicates that in countries where women spend a large amount of time on unpaid care and there is a large gender gap in time spent, the gender gap in hourly wages is also higher (for a given level of GDP per capita, fertility rate, female unemployment rate, female education, urbanisation rate, and maternity leave) (Figure 5). In countries where women spend twice as much time as men in caring activities, they earn only 65% of what their male counterpart earns for the same job. This drops to 40% when women are spending five times the amount of time on unpaid care work (for full-time employees).

In conclusion, in countries where women shoulder most of the responsibility for unpaid care work, they are less likely to be engaged in paid employment, and those who are active in the labour market are more likely to be limited to part-time or informal employment, and earn less than their male peers. The gender inequalities in unpaid care work thus translate into higher gender gaps in labour outcomes.

Figure 5: Higher inequalities in unpaid care work, higher inequalities in wages.



Note: This chart presents the positive relationship between the estimated gender hourly wage gap and the female-to-male ratio of time devoted to unpaid care activities, controlling for GDP per capita, fertility rate, urbanisation rate, maternity leave and gender inequality in labour force participation, unemployment and education. Low inequality: female-to-male ratio ≤ 2 ; 2 < moderate ≤ 5 ; and high ≥ 5 .

Source: World Economic forum, World Bank (2014), World Development Indicators and OECD (2014), Gender, Institutions and Development Database.

3. The role of social norms in explaining gender inequalities in caring responsibilities

Discriminatory social norms can also explain gender inequalities in unpaid care work. Some of these gender disparities in time use can be explained by socio-demographic and economic factors, such as levels of education and wealth. However, half to two-thirds of the difference remains unexplained and is considered as discrimination (Berniell and Sánchez-Páramo, 2011). Even among the wealthier and more educated household's inequalities in caring responsibilities persist: women contribute more than 60% of the time devoted to housework and care, irrespective of their employment status, income or education levels (Rizavi and Sofer, 2010).

Women and men's opportunities and behaviours are determined as much by social institutions, including traditional gender roles and beliefs, as by the conditions of the communities and countries in which they live. Social institutions, such as formal and informal laws, social norms and practices, shape or restrict the decisions, choices and behaviours of groups, communities and individuals (Jütting et al., 2008). By defining which behaviours are deemed acceptable or unacceptable in a society, social institutions influence gender roles: in most societies, working for pay is considered a masculine task, while unpaid care work is seen as women's domain.



Box 3: What is the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)?

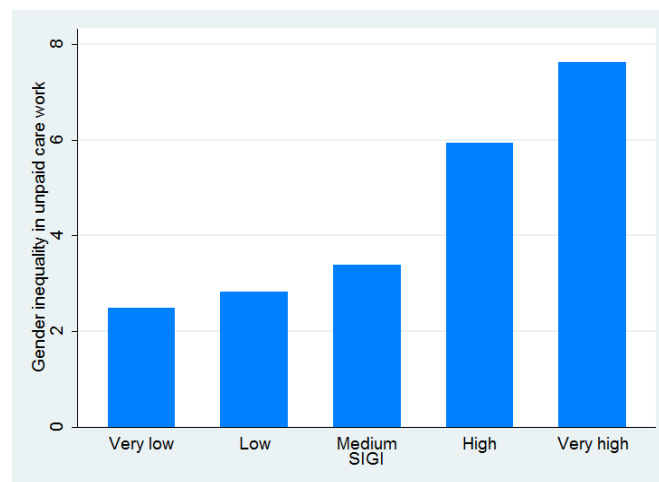
The SIGI measures discriminatory social institutions using 14 indicators grouped into five sub-indices:

- *Discriminatory Family Code* captures restrictions on women’s decision making power within the family;
- *Restricted Physical Integrity* refers to restrictions on women’s control over their bodies;
- *Son Bias* measures intra-household biases towards sons and the devaluation of daughters;
- *Restricted Resources and Entitlements* includes restrictions on access to, control of and entitlement over resources;
- *Restricted Civil Liberties* captures restrictions on women’s access to public and political space.

The SIGI provides data for over 160 countries. The scale of the SIGI is from 0, representing low discrimination, to 1, which represents a high level of discriminatory social institutions.

The level of gender discrimination in social institutions as measured by the SIGI is related to the way responsibilities for housework and care are shared between women and men. In countries where social institutions discriminate highly against women, women’s role in society is restricted to reproductive and domestic functions, with women performing more unpaid care work than men. In other words, higher SIGI scores are associated with higher gender gaps in time devoted to unpaid care work (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Higher gender inequality in social institutions, more unequal allocation of unpaid care responsibilities



Note: This chart presents the female-to-male ratio of time devoted to unpaid care activities by SIGI terciles: Low SIGI, $SIGI < 0.16$; Moderate SIGI, $0.16 < SIGI < 0.30$; High SIGI, $0.30 < SIGI < 0.60$.

Source: OECD Development Centre.

Conversely, when discrimination against women in social institutions is lower, the distribution of caring responsibilities between genders is more equal. Reducing the level of discrimination in social institutions encourages gender roles to evolve allowing for more opportunities for the share of unpaid care work to be redistributed between the genders. Women are less associated with reproductive and domestic roles. Similarly, social norms open up new opportunities for men assuming domestic and care responsibilities.

4. Policy recommendations

Unpaid care work is the missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes. Lifting the constraints on women's time implies reducing the burden borne by women. Care should not be considered only as a burden and this central activity for well-being should be redistributed between men and women, as well as between the family and the State: States' failures to provide, regulate and fund domestic and care formal services increase the burden for communities, families and especially women. Finally, recognition of the economic contribution of unpaid care work requires measuring it using time-budget surveys and embedding time-use modules within household surveys. In this regard, some recommendations and good practices are listed below.

Reduction

Investment in time-saving technology and infrastructure

- ✓ **Electrification and improved access to water** ease the constraints on women's time. In Pakistan water sources closer to home were associated with decreased time devoted to housework and increased female employment (Ilahi and Grimard, 2000); When rural electrification was introduced in South Africa, the time women spent on housework decreased, leading to a 9% increase in the female labour participation (Dinkelman, 2011).

Increasing public and care services

- ✓ **Better access to public services, child care and care for the elderly** allows for better work-life balance. In India the *NGO Mobile Crèches* provide child care services for women employed on public works programmes on construction sites. This support is essential for working mother.
- ✓ **Longer school days or expand pre-school hours** are alternatives for public day-care. The Kenyan government, expanded its preschool education to four-to-five-years-olds children, increasing female labour participation (Cassirer and Addati, 2007).

Redistribution

Family-friendly working policies

- ✓ **Maternity leave public subsidies of 14 weeks** (ILO standard) improve women's likelihood of taking leave instead of leaving the labour force entirely. Morocco's increased maternity leave (from 12 to 14 weeks) was associated with an increased share of working mothers.
- ✓ **Equal amounts of maternity and paternity leave** increase women's employment by increasing employer incentives to hire woman. In Sweden, for example, a minimum share of available parental leave is reserved to fathers on a 'use it or lose it' basis, encouraging an equal sharing of caring responsibilities.
- ✓ **Family-friendly working conditions** enable parents to balance their working hours and caring responsibilities. A flexible work schedule or teleworking allows women and men to choose working hours that better accommodate their caring responsibilities



Tackling discriminatory social institutions

- ✓ **Tackling entrenched social norms and gender stereotypes** can ‘de-feminise’ care-giving and shape gender norms that prevent men from assuming equal caring responsibilities. In Zimbabwe for example, the “Africare’s Male Empowerment Project” seeks to change behavioural trends and challenge existing gender norms by increasing male involvement in home-based care services given to rural people living with AIDS.

Adopting a care lens across all areas of public policy

- ✓ **Design suitable fiscal policies** to avoid second earners in married couples, typically women, being taxed more heavily than single individuals, discouraging female labour force participation. For instance, in Japan female labour force participation of women would increase by almost 13% if there were high tax incentives to share market work (which ultimately reflects unpaid care work) between spouses.

Box 4: A Global Conversation on “Addressing unpaid care in the post-2015 agenda”

From 22-24 October 2014, Wikigender organised an online discussion on the issue of unpaid care work in the context of the post-2015 agenda. Four influential experts, Alison Aggarwal (Australian Human Rights Commission), Deepta Chopra (Institute for Development Studies [IDS]), Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed (IDS) and Valeria Esquivel (UN Research Institute for Social Development [UNRISD]) guided the discussion, which gathered 84 contributions. The following topics emerged as important issues surrounding the unpaid care work agenda:

- **Unpaid care is a universal issue:** it affects women across the globe, regardless of their levels of education and income or the level of development of their countries. While some countries have made strides to recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work, the largest share of the burden continues to fall on women.
- **Measuring unpaid care work:** tools and research to measure unpaid care are critical to help implement public policies that improve the lives of women. However, measurements should be context-specific to recognise the multiple circumstances behind women's unpaid care work. Also, data comparability across countries is essential.
- **Recognising unpaid care work at the national policy level:** States have a role to encourage a more equal distribution of unpaid care work at the family level. Flexible work schedules and shared parental leave are two possibilities for companies to encourage more equal distribution of unpaid care work at the family level and help women find a better work/life balance. Participants stressed the need to break established perceptions and initiative a shift in the organisational structure.
- **Strategies to address unpaid care work at the community level** are needed to promote effective change in attitudes towards unpaid care work. Audio visual strategies, the role of the media and programmes engaging men and boys were all mentioned as possible ways leading to change.



Box 5: Using Time Use Surveys (TUS) to recognise the invisible contribution of unpaid care work

Making unpaid care work visible and a priority on the policy agenda can be carried out through a *Household Satellite Account*. This measures and values the unpaid outputs produced by households through unpaid care work in the System of National Accounts (SNA).

Why measure Household Satellite Accounts?

- Household production refers to the unpaid goods and services produced by the household members for their own consumption and is the most significant part of production that is excluded from the production boundary of the SNA.
- A Household Satellite Account highlights how the economy is affected by changing patterns of unpaid care work.

What are the consequences of excluding household production from national accounts?

- It leads to misestimating households' material well-being and societies' wealth. If included, unpaid care work would constitute 40% of Swiss GDP (Schiess and Schön-Bühlmann, 2004) and would be equivalent to 63% of Indian GDP (Budlender, 2008).
- It distorts international comparisons of well-being based on GDP per capita because the underestimation of material well-being would be proportionally higher in those countries where the share of housewives and home-made consumption is higher. For instance, by including Household Satellite Accounts the GDP per capita of Italy reaches from 56% to 79% of the USA's GDP, and 98% to 120% of that of Spain (Alesina and Ichino 2009).

How can TUS be used to compute a Household Satellite Account?

- Measuring unpaid care work and comparing caring responsibilities is not straightforward. Some unpaid care activities provide satisfaction that differs among individuals, like cooking and gardening, while others have physical intensity that varies across places, such as water collection.
- Time use data is an innovative and convenient tool to easily capture the amount of caring responsibilities and the time resources involved in unpaid care work.

How can the time devoted to unpaid care work be valued?

- Input valuation gives a monetary value to the time devoted to unpaid care work using as cost of time either the market wage of the person who performed unpaid work (opportunity cost) or the market wage of a domestic worker if the family hired an external person (replacement cost).
- Output valuation gives a market-equivalent value to the public good produced (having a clean house, a well-educated child, etc.).

For more details, refer to <http://oecd.org/dev/poverty/Time%20use%20final%202014.pdf>

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