

Forum: UNWOMEN

Issue: Promoting Women's economic and social standing-unpaid care and domestic work.

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Introduction

Domestic work performed by family members for the upkeep and welfare of the family without payment is referred to as unpaid care. Volunteer community service is another type of unpaid care work. Unpaid care and domestic labour are disproportionately weighed on women over the globe, contributing to one of the largest gender gaps between men and women. This work typically branches to two types of work, direct care, and domestic work. Direct care refers to the direct care of people, such as kids, babies, people with disabilities or able-bodied adults. On the other hand, domestic work highlights the jobs of cooking and food preparation, cleaning, washing clothes, water, and fuel collection.

Gender imbalances in unpaid work is a part of the United Nations sustainable development goals. According to the Gender development network in 2014. One of the main struggles of this issue is that even though it is essential to maintain the well-being of people in society, they remain invisible, and are not considered work. Although domestic work is physically and mentally rigorous, in the same way as a regular paid job, it is not considered by the System of National Accounts, i.e. in national gross domestic product (GDP) which is essentially the set of measures used by countries all over the world to measure economic activity. There is no economic value attached to such work, regardless of its importance in society. Generally, in most nations it is considered within someone's private family sphere, therefore it is normally a responsibility for girls and women, although that might not always be the case.

Moreover, this issue truly highlights the division of society, as it very often affects certain groups of people more than others. Though it is a global issue, it is evident that women are the ones mostly affected by the issue. However, this varies due to the frequent polarisation in any society around the globe. Experts have stated that, like many global issues and gender issues, this issue happens to be more prevalent in less developed areas. According to UNWOMEN, *"when basic amenities and public services are lacking, unpaid care and domestic work are more difficult to perform in the context of poverty, disability, and*

*HIV/AIDS. Hence, unpaid care and domestic work issue intersects with rural-urban and/ or rich-poor inequalities, social status, ethnic, etc.*¹ Additionally, this issue remains to be ignored publicly regarding social policies made for the workforce and environment, since it is considered as “housework” diminishing its emotional and physical demands. It does not get affected by any type of work policies, causing a problematic issue that allows for any type of treatment without boundaries, creating a certain “grey area” within this type of work. Unpaid domestic labour and caregiving are misunderstood, which makes them invisible and undervalues their importance as the cornerstone of economic activity. As a result, public policy may ignore the issue. Promoting change requires a thorough grasp of the nature of unpaid caregiving and domestic work.

¹*Unpaid Care and Domestic Work: Issues and Suggestions for Vietnam.* 2016.

Definition of Key Terms

Gender inequality

"Gender inequality is discrimination on the basis of sex or gender, causing one sex or gender to be routinely privileged or prioritized over another. Gender equality is a fundamental human right, and that right is violated by gender-based discrimination".²

Labour force

The labour force counts by any person involved in the active population that forms part of a country's economy, regardless of the type of job, whether both employed or self-employed.

Domestic work

Refers to the practice of cooking; cleaning; food, fuel, water collection and other energy provision; informal unpaid work; family labour in agriculture; etc.

Direct care of persons

"Includes caring for children, elderly and sick people. It also includes washing, cooking, shopping, cleaning and helping other families with their chores".³

GDP

"The total value of goods produced and services provided in a country during one year".⁴

System of national accounts

The system of national accounts is a universally recognized standard set of guidelines on how to gather indicators of economic activity in conformity with accepted accounting procedures based on economic principles. The suggestions are presented in terms of a collection of ideas, explanations, categories, and accounting principles that

² (Save the Children)

³ Definition from OECD

⁴ [Definition by Oxford Dictionary](#)

make up the generally accepted benchmark for calculating things like gross domestic product (GDP), the most often cited metric of economic performance. Economic data can be gathered and presented in a way that is intended for economic analysis, decision-making, and policymaking thanks to the accounting framework of the SNA. According to the United Nations, it is a coherent and consistent and integrated set of macroeconomic accounts.

Background Information

Historical context

Throughout history, women, and men have had gender roles that have slowly been degenerating but still exist. The specific role for women of domestic work has been around ever since humans existed, and the primary job for women has been taking care of household tasks. Gender stereotypes have changed over time, yet not sufficiently. Compared to men, women have historically had fewer legal rights and career prospects due to the perception that they should be confined to the home. It was less than a hundred years ago that women started to obtain more equal rights in the eyes of the law, an example being the acquisition of the right to vote in the 20th century. Until today, there is still a significant lack of protective policies, regulations, and laws that benefit women in order to further close the breach between men and women in the work field, but also in society in general. As the years pass, people become more aware of women's potential, and gender stereotypes are slowly reinterpreted, but the progress remains to be slow, and women still are at disadvantage in many aspects of our society. One of them being the unbalanced carry of unpaid care and domestic work.

Disproportionate distribution of unpaid care and domestic work

Currently, it is a commonly known fact that unpaid care and domestic work relies heavily on one gender. All throughout the world, women carry the burden of a very gendered practice. According to a study done by ActionAid, women take on three times more of the domestic work men do. And according to several studies, women perform over 75% of unpaid care and domestic work, in fact women dedicate, on average, four hours and 25 minutes daily, more than three times men's average of one hour and 23 minutes. Both in the 2012 World Development Report and United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) and in the 2015 Human Development Report, there were similar findings that highlighted that, around the world, women perform unpaid care and domestic work approximately 2.5 times as often as men do, with notable gender differences in the

amount of time spent cooking, cleaning, and taking care of family members. According to UNICEF, girls are disproportionately burdened with household work starting at a young age. In comparison to boys their age, girls aged 5 to 14 spend 160 million more hours every day on household chores, or 550 million hours, globally (UNICEF, 2016). Girls aged 5 to 9 spend approximately four hours a week on home duties, and girls aged 10 to 14 spend nine hours a week, according to a study done by UN women in a discussion paper.

In many countries, the disproportion of work between men and women enhances the true gender inequality between genders regarding this issue. Accordingly, women actually spend more time working than men. But there is an inordinate distribution of paid and unpaid work between men and women, as shown in figure 1.



Figure 1. Unpaid and paid work distribution between men and women. Source: UN Women 2017

Economic potential

Economically, unpaid care and domestic work have a significantly big opportunity cost regarding the missed potential of women in the workplace. The ILO⁵ actually estimates the value of unpaid care and domestic work to be 9 percent of the global GDP (11 trillion USD). Within such, they clarify women's contribution to be 6.6 percent of GDP, compared to only 2.4 of male contribution globally (2022). Additionally, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, have emphasised the disparity in the value of unpaid work across economies, from as low as 5.5 percent of GDP to as high as 41.3 percent of GDP. Moreover, in IMF's "The Economic Cost of Devaluing 'women's work'. Unpaid care and domestic work incites low productivity and is forgone for economic growth. A more balanced distribution of unpaid work would not only benefit women, allowing them to expend their potential to

⁵ The International Labour Organization is a United Nations agency whose mandate is to advance social and economic justice by setting international labour standards. Founded in October 1919 under the League of Nations, it is the first and oldest specialised agency of the UN.

benefit society, but it would also lead to stronger economies. One of the strongest points they make is based on the correlation between development and unpaid work. "Unpaid work declines as economic development increases". In Norway, the gap is smaller, with women doing 3.7 hours of unpaid work, while men contribute 3. On the other extreme, in Egypt, women do 5.4 hours per day of unpaid work and men only 35 minutes. In the US, women do 3.8 hours of unpaid work and men do 2.4 hours. Not only is unpaid work targeting a certain gender, therefore unfair, but it's clearly impractical.

Labour force participation

Regardless of modern globalisation, and the growing involvement of women in the workforce, one of the main gender issues the world faces today is the gender gap regarding participation in labour between men and women. A study done in Viet Nam for example, provided data if 85 percent of respondents agreed that domestic work was an obstacle in a women's career path. Additionally, 93 percent of women recorded that family responsibility is a constant constraint for women leaders. Politically, women lack representation in positions of power. Meaning that, for women, domestic "responsibilities" become a barrier in obtaining a position of power in politics as well as in other job fields.

Persuasive gender stereotypes regarding their role in a family or a house have deprived women from reaching their full potential in most cases. And also lead to occupational segregation within the workplace. Unpaid care and domestic work falling heavily on the shoulders of women is counterproductive for international development, but also for the global economy.

The UN has stated that if women played an identical role in labour markets to that of men, as much as US\$28 trillion, or 26 per cent, could be added to the global annual Gross Domestic Product by 2025, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Working-Age Population in the Workforce. Source: UN Website

Impact on earnings

Globally, women on average are paid 24 per cent less than men. According to ActionAid UK, "Worldwide, women are paid only two-thirds of what men earn for the same work. In 2020, women make only \$0.81 for every dollar men make". Over the last decade, gender pay gaps have increased, but not sufficiently. Income inequality highlights gender inequality and the effect of gender stereotypes, and most importantly the effect of maldistribution of unpaid care and domestic work. The gender pay gap (in hourly wages for paid employment) is higher in nations where women spend disproportionately more time providing unpaid care and doing household chores than males, according to the OECD. For instance, women only make 65% of what men do for the same job in nations where they spend twice as much time as men caring for others. When women spend five times as much time on unpaid care and household duties, this number falls to 40% (for full-time employees).

Health

Carrying the onus of unpaid care and domestic work due to gender roles, have forced women carrying such to withdraw their attention from accessing health services and Instead of attending school, girls are frequently sent to fetch water and fuel or to care for family members such as younger siblings or elderly relatives. Mothers commonly pursue jobs in the unorganised sector where they can bring their newborns with them.

These working conditions are frequently dangerous and could harm the kids' health and general development. With the spread of HIV/AIDS, the burden of care work on women and girls has significantly increased; in some countries, up to 90% of all home-care for sick people is provided by women and girls.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

United Nations

The United Nations is a global organisation that was established in 1945 with the goal of preserving peace and addressing global challenges through its initiatives and gatherings. They have a number of objectives to benefit society, but they consistently raise awareness of difficulties facing women worldwide and offer assistance when it is most needed. For example, UN Women, a division of the UN, continues to aid in very specific problems women face today, in order to help the UN reach the sustainable development goals.

ActionAid

Action Aid is an organisation that has managed to work with women, girls and boys to raise awareness about unpaid care and domestic work, and the importance to fairly distribute work in households. Apart from their project POWER (Promoting Opportunities for Women's Empowerment and Rights), in which they work with local partners in Bangladesh, Ghana, and Rwanda to "mobilise and organise rural women to raise awareness of and claim their rights as farmers and caregivers", they also work in countries, like Rwanda, in which they set Early Childhood Development Centres, in an attempt to reduce the amount of time women spend in unpaid care and domestic work.

Germany

Germany is one of the most involved countries in the fight to increase women in the workplace and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work. One of the things they have accomplished is the improvement of paid maternity leave. The introduction of 12 months of paid leave in Germany, led to a significant increase in women's workforce participation one year after a child's birth. Furthermore, the last chancellor of the country, Angela Merkel, advocated for the partnership with Chefsache; a movement that brings together their government, society, science, and technology in their efforts to promote the

representation of women in top management positions. Germany was recorded in 2021 to have a percentage of 41.24% of female participation in the labour force.

Argentina

According to Un Women, Argentina is an example of universal maternity protection. The maternity protection system in Argentina includes maternity protection in the workplace, contributory and non-contributory family allowances, as well as pensions for women with 7 or more children, done as transfers through cash or card. In a report of Un Women, they provide a table of the maternity protection system in Argentina, as seen below.

Maternity protection in the workplace	Contributory programmes monthly income replacement equivalent to 100 per cent of the worker's salary.	Employees covered by the Law on work-related risks and Unemployment protection
Family allowances	Prenatal: Between ARS199 and 2,084 (US\$13-141) per month per birth: ARS1,125 (US\$76) per adoption: ARS6,748 (US\$456) per child: between ARS199 and 2,084 (US\$13-141) per month. School allowance: between ARS808 and 1,615 (US\$55- 109) per year	Same as above, plus beneficiaries of the pension system and non-contributory pension, up to a maximum monthly family income of ARS60,000 (US\$4,054), which is established by law.
Universal child allowance	Non-contributory programmes ARS966 (US\$65) per month per child, with conditions on health and education.	Beneficiaries of Monotax, unemployed persons, workers in the informal economy with income below minimum wage, and domestic wor
Pregnancy allowance	ARS966 (US\$65) per month from the 12th week of pregnancy through childbirth or interruption of pregnancy	
Pensions for mothers with seven or more children	Lifetime monthly amount equivalent to the minimum old-age pension of ARS4958.90 (US\$335) (ANSES, March 2016)	Mothers with seven or more children (own or adopted children)

Source: Decree 1141/2015 on Family Allowances granted from March 2016, cited in ILO (2016).

Timeline of Events

- 1850** Industrial revolution: During the industrial revolution, women's role in society shifted dramatically. It was the beginning of women's role in the workplace. It was when women finally began to obtain jobs outside the home and alongside men. However, During this period of time, their wages were nowhere near close as those of a man's. They tended to obtain around one third to one half of a man's average salary, for the same work.
- July 1914-
November
1918** During World War I, it was truly the first period of time in which women's participation in the workforce truly grew exponentially. Due to the fact that men were commonly drafted to fight in the army, the jobs they would normally carry out, were starting to be taken by women. In the absence of men, women proved to be of equal capability as that of men to carry out more rigorous jobs, they wouldn't be doing otherwise. Women filled millions of places in jobs in agriculture, manufacturing, and even in the field as nurses, ambulance drivers, translators and in some cases in the battlefield. This was one of the biggest catalysts for change in societal attitudes and behavioural tendencies. As women proved to be as capable as men were, women's rates in the workplace increased from 23.6% of the working age population in 1914 to between 37.7% and 46.7% in 1918.
- 1963** The Equal Pay Act of 1963 amending the Fair Labour Standards Act, protects against wage discrimination based on sex. Due to this, it was made in the United States officially illegal to have unequal wages between men and women for the same work. Although there is still a big wage gap between gender today, it has reduced ever since the passing of this act, although there are some loopholes in the act, making it ineffective in fully addressing equal pay issues.
- March 22,
1972** Equal rights amendment: The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was passed by the United States Congress and sent to states for ratification. The amendment states: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." The ERA aims to protect women under the law as equal to men.
- 1978** Pregnancy Discrimination Act: In accordance with the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, which amended Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000e et seq., discrimination based on pregnancy, delivery, or conditions connected to those conditions is illegal. The US

Congress passed the law in 1978, and it has been in effect ever since. In all areas of employment, including hiring, firing, promotion, compensation, and other employment perks, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (PDA) forbids discrimination on the basis of pregnancy. Policies that restrict or forbid women from working just because they are expecting or of childbearing age are forbidden under this law. It also prohibits measures that unfairly affect women because they are expecting or have the potential to become pregnant.

Relevant UN Treaties and Resolutions

[A/RES/64/140-\(Implemented in 2010\)](#)

Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas/Resolution adopted by the general assembly, 2010 64th session. IN summary, this resolution aimed for the recognition and reiteration of the roles women in rural society hold. They mean to attach greater importance to the improvement of the situation for rural women, including indigenous women, by the means of 7 operative clauses highlighting the issue at hand, and with the purpose of drafting development strategies that address the inequalities women, in this case rural women face, rooted from the social phenomena of gender inequality.

[A/HRC/RES/14/12-\(Implemented in 2010\)](#)

While this resolution reviews a wider spectrum regarding gender inequality, some clauses include calling upon member states to acknowledge and battle any sort of violence towards women on the basis of sex. In several clauses, the importance of eradicating gender inequality, in all its forms, is highlighted repeatedly. In clause two, particularly, they promote to member states the opportunity cost of depriving women to reach their full economic potential.

“Calls upon States to place a high priority on strengthening and implementing legal and policy measures that promote the full enjoyment by women and girls of all human rights, particularly those aimed at eliminating discrimination against women, promoting gender equality, empowering women and promoting their autonomy, including with regard to land, property, marriage and divorce, child custody and inheritance, and to promote equal access to literacy, education, skills training and employment opportunities, land, credit, agricultural extension, adequate housing, just and favourable conditions of work, and business and leadership skills training;”

As mentioned before, this clause is substantial in the resolution because of what it calls for; placing high priority on legal and policy measures that further allow women to develop their economic potential in the workplace, and do so with the right tools.

UN Policy brief-Redistributing unpaid care and domestic work

This policy brief by the UN, summarises the problem at hand, and goes on to explain thoroughly the different measures that are urgent in order to reach parity, and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work. According to this policy brief, it is needed to publish such, since attempting to redistribute unpaid care and domestic work is essential to reach their sustainable development goal number 5. Additionally, they claim that It tries to close the gap between the growing consensus regarding the value of care and the not-so-clear policy alternatives for promoting care without reinforcing it as a female-only responsibility.

Possible Solutions

The UN strongly believes that coordinated and systematic efforts are required to promote reaching gender parity, not only in the distribution of domestic work, but also any other gender issue in the world. Specifically for this issue, and for the accomplishment of their sustainable development goals, the UN has tried promoting their four-fold objective, the 4 R's. Recognition, reduction, redistribution, and representation. Firstly, recognition is key. Acknowledging that unpaid care and domestic work is real work, brings value to the job and prevents it from lowering the status of people who carry out such work. It's important to recognize the immense burden women take, and how much they affect the economy by doing so. As well as strongly recognizing unpaid care and domestic work in the job field, in order to implement policies that aid parity when it comes to the gender roles regarding this type of work. According to Action Aid, "People and acting responsibilities ought to be a centre of economic policies". Secondly, reduction.

After the causes and effects of unpaid care and domestic work have been understood, it's crucial to take action in order to find measures to redistribute unpaid care and domestic work across genders. The intention to reduce unpaid care and domestic work, has the intention to allow girls and women to spend their time advocating for a job, and developing their skills and potential. One of the most important correlations with unpaid care and domestic work is having a developed infrastructure. In order to reduce the amount of time women spend in chores, infrastructure in LEDC'S especially, needs to be more developed so that we can facilitate essential services such as obtaining water or wood for fire. Thirdly, redistributing the work between genders and family members is essential to create a real change in our society as well as ensuring the funding by governments or even organisations of gender-responsive services. The goal is to ensure that the responsibility for providing care services and performing unpaid job duties is distributed more fairly among men and women, the public and private sectors, communities, and households. Lastly, representing women and marginalised caregivers

who are somehow attacked by modern gender stereotypes. Ensuring that women all around the world have a voice in the creation of policies, regulations, planning of their surrounding work or daily environment, that benefit them and comply with their needs.

Most importantly, it is of utmost importance to institute regulations and policies to aid women and allow them to comply with any needs they might have. Several studies mention the importance of supporting maternal leave and implementing flexible schedules for women who undergo the birth process. Another possible commodity that has been proven to help women comply with domestic work or care by providing a more comfortable and less demanding schedule. In order to increase the number of women in the workplace, changes need to be made in order to make it possible for women to work in the first place. Delegates are expected to devise a resolution that will aid unpaid care and domestic work around the world.

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