



EMPOWERING WOMEN

Who Cares?

The Nexus of Age, Gender, Decent Work and Care

Delegates Dining Room, United Nations Headquarters
Tuesday 14 March 2017 (1 – 3 pm)

Concept Note

Background

The sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61) will take place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 13 to 24 March 2017. The session will address two themes: a Priority Theme on “Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work” and a Review Theme on “Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls (agreed conclusions of the fifty-eighth session)”, both of which are broadly supportive of Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.”

Among other SDG targets addressing economic inclusion and decent work, target 4 of Sustainable Development Goal 5 highlights unpaid care and domestic work, committing Governments to: “Recognize 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.” Given that most unpaid -- as well as paid -- care and domestic work¹ around the world is undertaken by women, it is clear that such work has a pivotal role in their economic empowerment or disempowerment. Where care and domestic work is unpaid, it often goes unrecognized and diverts women’s time and labour from paid employment and its associated benefits. Where such work is paid, it tends to be valued less than many other types of work and provides low wages and few if any benefits. These types of work comprise what is termed the care economy.

Yet the linkages between care and empowerment are not solely economic; care has a significant social dimension. Care-related debates and policies must address the rights, autonomy and well-being of both formal and informal caregivers as well as care receivers.² Particularly with regard to the latter, Sustainable Development Goal 3 aims to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.”

Definitions of care vary, but the term may generally be described as looking after the physical, psychological, emotional and developmental needs of another person or persons.³ Care services may include, or be accompanied by, aspects of domestic work such as cooking, laundering and cleaning (domestic work, however, also encompasses personal care such as care of older persons, children and persons with disabilities⁴). Long-term care, which typically applies to the context of older

¹ Generally referring to work that is performed in a household.

² United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, *Policy Innovations for Transformative Change: Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (Geneva, 2016).

³ International Labour Organization, *ABC of Women Workers’ Rights and Gender Equality* (Geneva, 2007). Available from http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms_087314.pdf.

⁴ International Labour Organization, *Formalizing Domestic Work* (Geneva, 2016).



persons who have a chronic illness or disability, refers to a wide range of services and situations, from in-home assistance with basic activities of daily life such as bathing, dressing and eating meals and/or health care-related services, to attendance at day care centres and care in an institutional setting.⁵ The majority of older persons across countries are cared for at home by informal caregivers, usually female family members or friends. Typically perceived to be part of the normal responsibilities of women and thus taken for granted, care work is thereby intertwined with gender stereotypes and inequalities.

Most older persons, who are disproportionately women, and especially those aged 80 and above, will eventually require care services from family members or paid caregivers. At the same time, older persons, especially older women, are frequent care providers to their spouses, grandchildren and other family members. Many women in middle age experience a double care burden, with care responsibilities spread in some fashion among ageing parents, children and grandchildren.⁶ Older persons and women of all ages are thus at the crux of issues related to care. The dual challenges of both providing quality and affordable care to all older persons who require it, as well as ensuring a range of adequate support such as training and a decent level of remuneration (for formal care) to care providers, are assuming greater importance and urgency as population ageing emerges as a defining global trend.

Between 2015 and 2050 worldwide, the number of persons aged 60 and over is expected to more than double,⁷ while that of persons aged 80 or over to more than triple. In 2015, women comprised 54 per cent of those aged 60 or over – a proportion that increases with age. Given that, by 2050, there will be approximately the same number of older persons as children under the age of 15,⁸ care work will increasingly be geared to older persons. Even today, however, the world is experiencing a shortage of nearly 14 million formal long-term care workers.⁹

The nexus of age, gender, decent work and care

The value of care work is overlooked in part because unpaid care services are not considered to be economic activity in labour force surveys and are not included in GDP (gross domestic product) calculations.¹⁰ Some countries, however, have undertaken efforts to assign monetary value to unpaid work based on time use surveys. Among these countries, it is estimated that unpaid care work represents 20-60 per cent of GDP.¹¹ In addition to the value of unpaid hours worked, care services also contribute to economies in other ways. For instance, care of older persons helps them in many cases to remain active, be it through support to family members or engagement in paid or unpaid work themselves. It further helps older person to achieve or remain in optimum health, thereby also limiting potential health expenses. As noted, there are additionally opportunity costs attached to unpaid work in the form of foregone paid work or investments in human capital such as

⁵ United Nations, "The growing need for long-term care: assumptions and realities," August 2016. Available from http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing/documents/un-ageing_briefing-paper_Long-term-care.pdf.

⁶ Enid Schatz and Janet Seeley, "Gender, ageing & carework in East and Southern Africa: A review", *Global Public Health*, vol. 10, No. 10 (2015), pp. 1185-1200. Available from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4888771/>; AARP, "The sandwich generation: you are not alone", 28 June 2012. Available from <http://www.aarp.org/home-family/caregiving/info-06-2012/sandwich-generation-fl1845.html>.

⁷ United Nations, *World Population Ageing 2015* (ST/ESA/SER.A/390).

⁸ United Nations, *World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision, Key Findings and Advance Tables*. Working Paper, No. ESA/P/WP.241.

⁹ Xenia Scheil-Adlung, "Long-term care (LTC) protection for older persons: A review of coverage deficits in 46 countries", ESS Working Paper, No. 50 (Geneva, International Labour Organization, 2015).

¹⁰ Shahra Razavi, "Redistributing unpaid care and sustaining quality care services: a prerequisite for gender equality", Policy Brief, No. 5 (New York, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2016).

¹¹ Rania Antonopoulos, "The unpaid care work - paid work connection", Working Paper, No. 86 (Geneva, International Labour Organization, May 2009). In United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2015: Work for Human Development* (New York, 2015).



training. Moreover, productivity suffers when workers in the labour market are overburdened with care responsibilities, particularly in the absence of supportive employer policies. The care economy is also fuelled by paid care work and associated consumption and taxes, as well as remittances in the case of many migrants. Domestic workers are estimated to account for 7.5 per cent of women's wage employment globally.¹²

Care work is often not perceived as work, particularly where it is performed unremunerated. Unpaid care givers at all ages forego paid work, education or training and therefore opportunities for an adequate or better standard of living, as well as civic or political activities and leisure time, to provide care, which is often unrecognized and dismissed as "women's work." Indeed, women across regions shoulder a disproportionately burden of unpaid care work. In developing countries, time use surveys show that 75 per cent of time spent on unpaid care in households was expended by women.¹³ Caregivers who simultaneously engage in paid work may lose paid working hours or work-related opportunities due to care needs at home or in their community.

Similarly, paid care workers—both formal and informal—are also undervalued. Compared to other occupations whose workers have similar skills, education and experience, caregiving tends to be underpaid, sometimes referred to as the care penalty,¹⁴ and also to provide few or no employment benefits and protections and limited training. Care wage penalties are associated with occupational sex segregation (though remain after controlling for such segregation),¹⁵ and are more likely to occur in contexts with high income inequality and low union presence, and with small public sectors and low levels of public spending on care.¹⁶ In particular, just 10 per cent of all domestic workers worldwide, among whom migrant women are overrepresented and at increased risk of exploitation,¹⁷ are protected by general labour legislation to the same degree as are other workers.¹⁸ Informal care workers in many countries are also often left uncovered by existing social protection systems and programmes. Overall, care work is under-professionalized and rarely decent work.

In some cases, care workers have successfully mobilized to secure higher and minimum wages and other legal protections such as paid sick days. Crucially, steps towards achieving decent work for care workers are likely to lead to the provision of better care. Strong regulation of care work tends to allow for care providers to have adequate interaction with care recipients, to reduce the likelihood of care providers becoming demoralized and changing jobs due to poor remuneration and working conditions, and to lead to appropriate training for care providers that is responsive to the needs and preferences of those for whom they care.¹⁹ Well-designed and sustained investment in accessible, affordable and quality care services may in fact generate a "triple dividend," enhancing

¹² International Labour Organization, "More than 52 million domestic workers worldwide", 9 January 2013. Available from http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_200937/lang--en/index.htm.

¹³ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2015: Work for Human Development* (New York, 2015).

¹⁴ Paula England, Michelle Budig and Nancy Folbre, "Wages of virtue: the relative pay of care work", *Social Problems*, vol. 49, No. 4 (November 2002), pp. 455-473. In Shahra Razavi, "Redistributing unpaid care and sustaining quality care services: a prerequisite for gender equality", Policy Brief, No. 5 (New York, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2016).

¹⁵ Michelle J. Budig and Joya Misra, "How care-work employment shapes earnings in cross-national perspective", *International Labour Review*, vol. 149, No. 4 (2010), pp. 441-460.

¹⁶ Shahra Razavi and Silke Staab, "Underpaid and overworked: a cross-national perspective on care workers", *International Labour Review*, vol. 149, No. 4 (2010), pp. 407-422.

¹⁷ International Labour Organization, "Migrant domestic workers", Labour Migration Highlights, No. 3 (Geneva, June 2015).

¹⁸ International Labour Organization, "More than 52 million domestic workers worldwide", 9 January 2013. Available from http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_200937/lang--en/index.htm.

¹⁹ Shahra Razavi and Silke Staab, "Underpaid and overworked: a cross-national perspective on care workers", *International Labour Review*, vol. 149, No. 4 (2010), pp. 407-422.



older persons' well-being and capacities, freeing up family members'—usually women's—time to participate in the paid labour force, and creating more decent jobs in the care economy.²⁰

Care work has other important social dimensions. Recipients of quality care benefit from assistance in following health regimens and improved health status, help in communicating with family and friends and the reduction or avoidance of social isolation, assistance with everyday tasks such as housework or basic shopping, and in many cases, the ability to remain in one's residence—or to age in place. These factors all contribute to overall well-being. However, particularly where care work is informal and unregulated or enforcement of regulations is lacking, care recipients are at risk of poor or inadequate treatment and, in the worst cases, outright abuse. Older persons sometimes experience physical, mental, sexual and financial abuse at the hands of family and other caregivers. The professionalization of care work and adequate legal and policy frameworks can help to prevent and protect care recipients from neglect and abuse.

Objectives

To bring the perspectives of older women to the gender and care work debates and to launch a discussion about strategies to better value and redistribute the burden of care while empowering women of *all* ages in the receipt and delivery of care.

Guiding questions

- What are the main drivers behind the decent work deficits that characterize care work, and how do they interact?
- How can policies and strategies enhance the value of care and promote the professionalization of care work?
- Recognizing the importance of quality, affordable and accessible care, gender equality, and decent work, how can societies respond to the rapid growth in care needs across countries, particularly among older persons?

Composition and format

The briefing will feature speakers from Government, civil society and the private sector to capture the views, experiences and recommendations of key stakeholders.

The session will be a moderator-driven, interactive panel discussion (Davos style). The chair will invite short interventions of 4-5 minutes each from the speakers in a few rounds of interaction before opening the floor for questions and comments.

²⁰ Silke Staab, "Gender equality, child development and job creation: how to reap the 'triple dividend' from early childhood education and care services", Policy Brief, No. 2 (New York, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2015).