UNPAID CARE WORK IN TIMES OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS

UN Expert Group Meeting
“Families in development: Assessing progress, challenges and emerging issues. Focus on modalities for IYF + 30 and parenting education”

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<th>Multidimensional Crisis</th>
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<td><strong>Health</strong>: nearly 7 million cases, over 400,000 deaths globally - largest gender gaps among those aged 60-74</td>
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<td><strong>Economy</strong>: 305 million jobs globally to be lost, including in informal sector with women 90% in South Asia and SSA</td>
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<td><strong>Education</strong>: schools closed in over 190 countries, affecting 1.6 billion students, with impacts on gender digital divide</td>
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<td><strong>Food</strong>: 265 million facing acute food insecurity – women and girls play a key role in the food system</td>
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<td><strong>Poverty</strong>: over 160 million people to fall in extreme poverty by 2030</td>
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Gendered impacts of COVID-19

Economic sectors with large share of female employment

- Food/accommodation suffer from full closures – 144 million workers with over half women

Women healthcare workers on frontline of COVID-19 response

- 96 million or 70.4% of total workforce in health/social work sectors are women
Share of women among all workers in health and social work, 2020

Source: ILO
Unpaid care work

Economic value of unpaid care work accounts for 40% of GDP.

Women dedicate on average 3.2 times more hours to unpaid care work than men.

Grandmothers spend over 5 hours on a daily basis.

No country achieved equal share of unpaid care work.

Progress in reducing the unpaid care gap has been slow.

Men are more involved in unpaid work than ever (mainly in household activities e.g. shopping, house repairs).
Global trend in time spent in unpaid care work in 25 countries, 1998-2012

Over 15-year timespan:

• women’s unpaid care work decreased by 10 minutes

• men’s unpaid care work increased by 13 minutes

• women spend more time on unpaid care work than men.

Charmes (2019)
Intersectionality:

In USA, women in Hispanic and Asian couples spend more time on unpaid care work.

Hess et al. (2020)
COVID-19 impacts on unpaid care work:

- **Negative**

  - **Re-traditionalization of care**

  - In USA, UK and Germany during the lockdown, women spend significantly more time caring for children (Adams-Prassl et al. 2020).


  - Working mothers spend less time on paid work but more on household work. Even when working mothers earn more, they do more childcare than working fathers (Andrew et al. 2020).
COVID-19 impacts on unpaid care work:

- **More egalitarian care arrangements**
  - In USA, share of families with equal sharing of unpaid work increased – due to fathers spending more time on domestic work (Carlson et al. 2020).
  - In Spain, men increased their participation in household tasks e.g. grocery shopping (González and Farré 2020).
  - In UK, gender childcare gap narrowed from 30.5 to 27.2% – due to men’s availability to participate in childcare (Sevilla & Smith 2020).
  - Fathers doubled their time on childcare when they lost their job in UK (Andrew et al. 2020).
  - In Germany, fathers with higher earnings working from home provide more care support (Möhring et al. 2020).
Key factors in redistribution of unpaid care work

i. employment status of parents: whether or not mother and father are in paid work

ii. parents’ working conditions: whether parents have flexible work arrangements and whether father can work from home

iii. type of job performed by mother: whether it is essential services

- Fathers who work from home or lost their job have more availability for unpaid care work.
- Mothers continue to do more unpaid care and domestic work regardless of employment and working conditions.
(i) Parental leave: supporting working parents’ care work during school/childcare closure

- **Norway** – childcare leave doubled to 20 care days; **USA** – 12 weeks of paid family leave; **Ireland** – flexible work for public sector employees

(ii) Care services: care support for essential service workers

- **Austria, France, Netherlands** – childcare facilities for essential workers; **Australia** – childcare fee relief for families; **Iran** – new nursing homes

(iii) Financial support: income support to parents

- **Italy** – €600 to cover babysitting; **Cuba** – childcare benefit at 100% of basic salary; **Japan** – subsidies to firms with paid-leave systems

(iv) Utility support: free/subsidized household utility bills

- **Colombia** – water services free of charge for low-income families; **India** – free cooking gas to women in rural areas.
Unprecedented impacts on unpaid care work

1. Increased unpaid care work reinforces existing gender inequality.

2. Grandmothers provide less care, relying on family or social workers.

3. Impact on women’s workforce, labour productivity, economy.

4. Potential positive shift to more egalitarian share of unpaid care work.
Policy recommendations

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<th>Labour market policies</th>
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<td>• enhance support to working parents through paid leave</td>
<td>• support (re-)integration of unpaid carers into the labour force</td>
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<td>• universal provision of quality care services</td>
<td>• offer flexible work arrangements with option of home-based work</td>
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<td>• expand family/child benefits</td>
<td>• improve workplace hours to allow more time for self-care</td>
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<td>• increase investments in social and physical infrastructure</td>
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Supported by macroeconomic environment with adequate fiscal and monetary policies to fund care and labour market policies
Thank you!

For questions and comments:

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