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Economic Cooperation

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# Unpaid Care and Domestic Work: Counting the Costs

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## KEY MESSAGES

- Women in the APEC region shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, averaging around 4 hours and 20 minutes daily, almost three times the time spent by men, in line with the global average.
- The magnitude and impact of unpaid work differ for women and men. Studies show that socioeconomic conditions such as household income, education level, marital status and having children play a role in such differences.
- Based on estimates by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the value of unpaid care and domestic work accounts for as much as 9 percent of global GDP (USD 11 trillion). Of that, women's unpaid work comes in at around 6.6 percent of GDP, and men's at 2.4 percent of GDP. In APEC, there is a marked 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.
- Along with assessing the monetary value of unpaid work, it is equally important to count the costs in terms of the wider and longer impact on women and girls. Doing unpaid care and domestic work could have lifelong negative consequences. By perpetuating gender inequality and economic disempowerment, unpaid care and domestic work affect women's health, their education and employment opportunities while also increasing their vulnerability to violence.
- Achieving gender parity in unpaid work requires a holistic approach to policy interventions and supportive measures, from the economy level to the broader international community. To recognise–reduce–redistribute unpaid care and domestic work requires an invest–initiate–involve approach.
- *Investing* in infrastructure, social services and data collection is imperative. Time-use surveys and sex-disaggregated data could help determine the monetary value of unpaid work, and inform policy.
- *Initiating* awareness campaigns on gender equality could change mindsets and counter gender stereotyping, and encourage boys and men to share in domestic and caregiving responsibilities.
- *Involving* governments, the private sector, media, the international community and other stakeholders is key to ensuring that non-discriminatory policies and practices are in place in order to address unpaid work, and mitigate its negative impacts, especially on women and girls.

**Advancing Free Trade for Asia-Pacific Prosperity**

APEC Member Economies: Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Canada; Chile; China; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Korea; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Papua New Guinea; Peru; Philippines; Russia; Singapore; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; United States of America; and Viet Nam.

## Introduction

Unpaid care and domestic work run the gamut of unpaid services that women and men carry out on a daily basis, including caring for children, the elderly and sick members of the family as well as doing household chores such as grocery shopping, laundry, cooking, cleaning, construction and repairs, and fetching water and firewood. Voluntary work within the community also forms part of unpaid work.<sup>1</sup> In simple terms, unpaid work – home or non-market activities – encompasses all forms of work not compensated by wage.<sup>2</sup>

Globally, women shoulder a disproportionate burden of unpaid work, affecting their participation in economic and social activities. In particular, doing unpaid work significantly reduces women's time to pursue education and employment, generating a vicious cycle of limited opportunities and access, with negative consequences for themselves and their households.

This Policy Brief seeks to provide a better understanding of the state of unpaid care and domestic work, focusing on its costs to women in particular, and the economy in general. A number of policy suggestions and other recommendations to

reduce the gender gap in this area are also discussed.

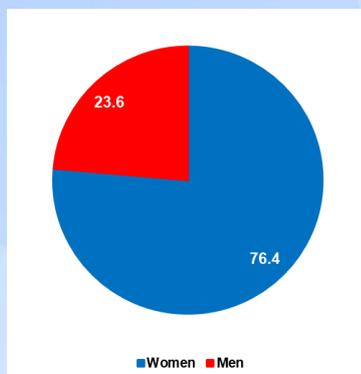
## Unpaid Work in the APEC Region

The time spent on unpaid care work varies across gender and geography. A common theme, however, is that women spend more time doing unpaid care and domestic work than men.<sup>3</sup> Data gathered from five economies in the Asia-Pacific reveal that 187 million hours are spent on unpaid activities daily, 60 percent of which are by women.<sup>4</sup>

Across the world, women devote an average of 4 hours and 32 minutes per day on unpaid care and domestic work, 3.2 times more than men at 1 hour and 24 minutes per day.<sup>5</sup> This translates to women doing more than three-fourths of the total amount of unpaid work, which is a significant gender imbalance (Figure 1).

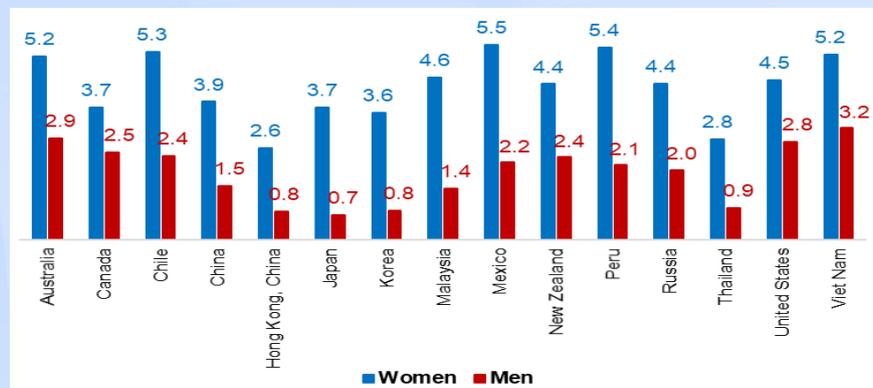
In line with the global trend, women in the APEC region also shoulder a disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work. Available data from 15 member economies reveal that women allot at least 2.6 hours and as much as 5.5 hours daily doing unpaid work, almost three times the time spent by men (Figure 2).

**Figure 1. Time spent on unpaid work (% of total)**



Source: J. Charmes, "The Unpaid Care Work and the Labour Market: An Analysis of Time Use Data Based on the Latest World Compilation of Time-Use Surveys" (Geneva: ILO, 2019).

**Figure 2. Unpaid care and domestic work in APEC (in hours, various years)**



Source: OECD Statistics (for Australia; Canada; China; Japan; Korea; Mexico; New Zealand; United States); World Bank, World Development Indicators (for Chile; Hong Kong, China; Malaysia; Thailand); UN Women (for Peru and Russia); ActionAid Unpaid Care Work Time Diary Surveys (for Viet Nam).

<sup>1</sup> J. Woodroffe and K. Donald, "Unpaid Care: A Priority for the post-2015 Development Goals and Beyond" (Briefings 6, London: UK Gender and Development Network, July 2014); S. Razavi, "Redistributing Unpaid Care and Sustaining Quality Care Services: A Prerequisite for Gender Equality" (Policy Brief 5, New York: UN Women, 2016); UN Women, "Unpaid Care and Domestic Work: Issues and Suggestions for Viet Nam" (Hanoi: UN Women, Viet Nam Office, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> C. Alonso et al., "Reducing and Redistributing Unpaid Work: Stronger Policies to Support Gender Equality" (Working Paper 19/225, Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund (IMF), 2019).

<sup>3</sup> G. Ferrant, L.M. Pesando and K. Nowacka, "Unpaid Care Work: The Missing Link in the Analysis of Gender Gaps in the Labour Market" (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), December 2014).

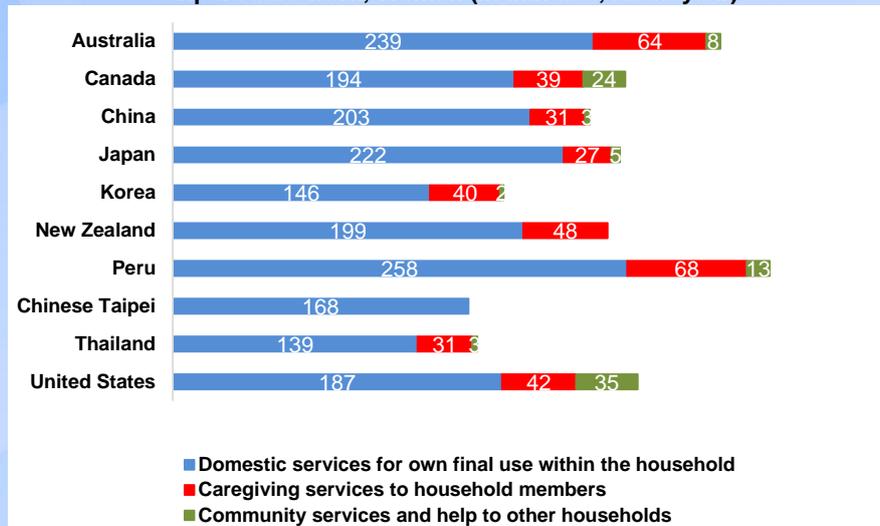
<sup>4</sup> Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR), "Workers with Family Responsibilities, 1981 (No. 156): General Observation" (Geneva: International Labour Organization (ILO), 2020).

<sup>5</sup> J. Charmes, "The Unpaid Care Work and the Labour Market: An Analysis of Time Use Data Based on the Latest World Compilation of Time-Use Surveys" (Geneva: ILO, 2019).

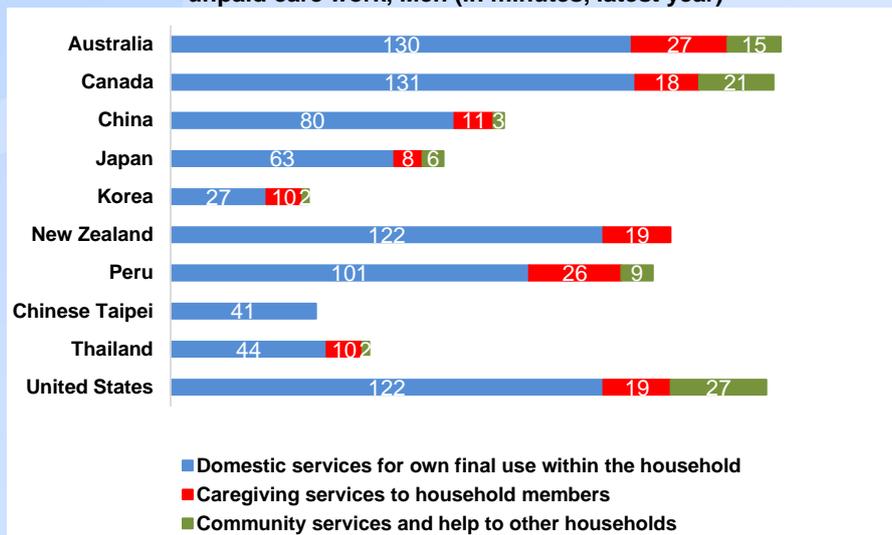
Using time-use surveys from 67 economies for the age group 15 years and above, the ILO estimates that, on average, almost 82 percent of unpaid care and domestic work consists of household work. This is also true for the APEC region: available data for 10 member economies show that household services make up the bulk of unpaid work for both women and men, although as with global trends, women shoulder the greater share overall (Figures 3 and 4).

Women tend to multi-task. A study by Chopra et al. using both qualitative and quantitative data covering four economies and spanning three years from 2016 to 2019 finds that women are multi-tasking for at least 14 hours a day, doing unpaid work such as childcare while also earning income.<sup>6</sup> In addition, women may engage in one or more forms of work in parallel or consecutively, i.e., they may be employed, be volunteering, doing unpaid trainee work and/or engaging in own-use production work, in any combination.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 3. Time spent on main categories of unpaid care work, Women (in minutes, latest year)**



**Figure 4. Time spent on main categories of unpaid care work, Men (in minutes, latest year)**



For Figures 3 and 4:  
ILO, "Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work" (Geneva: ILO, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> D. Chopra, S. Nazneen and M. Krishnan, "Women's Economic Engagement and Childcare: Moving from Survival to a Triple Boon" (Policy Brief, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies (IDS), October 2019).

<sup>7</sup> International Conference of Labour Statisticians, "Resolution I: Resolution concerning Statistics of Work, Employment and Labour Underutilization" (Geneva: ILO, 11 October 2013); Charnes, "The Unpaid Care Work."

### Scratching beyond the Surface

There have been several studies conducted by international organisations on unpaid care and domestic work. Digging beyond the fact that women shoulder the bulk of unpaid care and domestic work reveals that the magnitude and impact of the burden differ, depending on socioeconomic conditions (Figure 5).

Women living in emerging economies spend 4 hours and 36 minutes on unpaid work, 16 minutes more than women in developed economies. Moreover, women doing unpaid work are more prevalent in rural areas than in urban areas.<sup>8</sup> This may be due to a disparity in access to infrastructure, technology and food. For example, in low-income economies where basic public services such as water and electricity are lacking, women spend six times as much as men doing unpaid domestic work such as fetching water or getting firewood.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, women in urban areas tend to have more choices in cleaning, laundering and cooking devices as well as food products that save labour, time and energy.

As their education level goes up, the time that women spend on unpaid work generally goes down.<sup>10</sup> The same negative correlation arises in the relationship of unpaid care work to female labour force participation, wherein reducing women’s unpaid care work corresponds to a 10 percent increase in women’s participation in the labour force.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, economies with higher gender inequality in the share of unpaid work tend to have higher gender gaps in labour force participation. For instance, in economies where women spend almost eight times as much as men on unpaid work, they represent only 35 percent of the active working population.<sup>12</sup>

The time spent by women on gainful employment generally increases with the household income level.<sup>13</sup> This finding is corroborated by a study using time-use data showing that the gender gap in the distribution of care responsibilities substantially shrinks in high-income economies.<sup>14</sup> A subsequent study also shows that, as economies become wealthier, the time that women spend on unpaid home production declines. However, gender parity in unpaid care and domestic work has never been

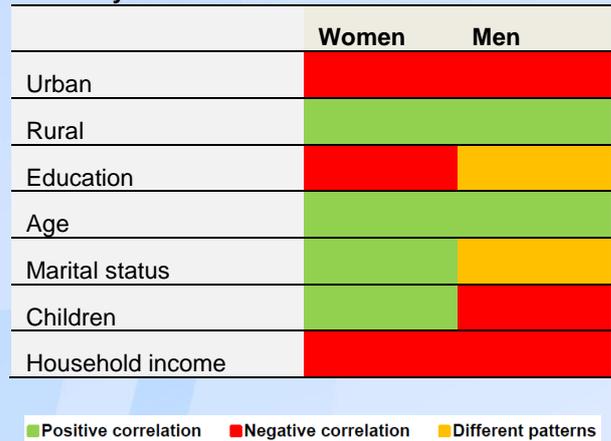
<sup>8</sup> Charmes, “The Unpaid Care Work.”  
<sup>9</sup> Oxfam, “Making Care Count: An Overview of the Women’s Economic Empowerment and Care Initiative” (Oxford: Oxfam, 2020).  
<sup>10</sup> Charmes, “The Unpaid Care Work.”  
<sup>11</sup> Ferrant et al., “Unpaid Care Work”

achieved at any given time and in any economy, rich or not.<sup>15</sup>

Women’s burden of unpaid work generally doubles once they get married, while the results are mixed for men. For some economies, men’s share of unpaid work also increases when they get married, although not as high as women’s share. In other economies, men’s share of unpaid work declines when they get married, which could be attributed to highly patriarchal settings.

Having children in the household also has a contrasting impact on women and men with respect to the time allotted for paid work. Generally, women reduce the time they allocate for paid work when they have young children to take care of, while men’s time for paid work significantly increases when they have children.<sup>16</sup> This suggests the existence of gender stereotyping within households: men have to work to provide for the family while women stay out of the labour force to care for the children.

**Figure 5. Unpaid work trend, by socioeconomic conditions and sex**



Source: Oxfam, “Making Care Count: An Overview of the Women’s Economic Empowerment and Care Initiative” (Oxford: Oxfam, 2020); J. Charmes, “The Unpaid Care Work and the Labour Market: An Analysis of Time Use Data Based on the Latest World Compilation of Time-Use Surveys” (Geneva: ILO, 2019); G. Ferrant, L.M. Pesando and K. Nowacka, “Unpaid Care Work: The Missing Link in the Analysis of Gender Gaps in the Labour Market” (Paris: OECD, December 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Ferrant et al., “Unpaid Care Work”  
<sup>13</sup> Charmes, “The Unpaid Care Work.”  
<sup>14</sup> Ferrant et al., “Unpaid Care Work”  
<sup>15</sup> Alonso et al., “Reducing and Redistributing Unpaid Work.”  
<sup>16</sup> Charmes, “The Unpaid Care Work.”

**Figure 6. International recognition of unpaid work as a gender inequality problem**



### Recognising Unpaid Work as a Gender Inequality Problem

The journey to addressing the unequal share of unpaid work that women carry begins with the recognition that it exists and that it harms women's potential and productivity. Major conventions and resolutions have been adopted by governments and multilateral organisations through the years to recognise and place a monetary value on the unpaid care and domestic work carried out by women and men on a daily basis, wherever they are and whatever conditions they face (Figure 6).

#### **1981 ILO Convention No. 156**

The international community formally acknowledged the importance and impact of unpaid work when the General Conference of the ILO adopted Convention No. 156 (C156) or the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention on 3 June 1981.

This Convention recognises that men and women carry responsibilities to their dependent children or other members of their immediate family that could limit their participation in economic activity. The implementation of enabling policies is thus necessary, to ensure that those with family responsibilities who are employed or seeking employment are not discriminated against, and, to the extent possible, to prevent or avoid conflict between their work and family responsibilities.<sup>17</sup>

However, four decades after the adoption of C156 as an international convention, many economies

<sup>17</sup> In 2020, the CEACR conducted an assessment of C156. This was deemed necessary in light of the changes between 1981, when C156 was first adopted, and 2020, with issues of gender equality, decent work and work-life balance becoming more urgent amid technological, societal, demographic and organisational transformations affecting how people live and

have yet to ratify it. Ratification is important because it could pave the way for the creation and implementation of specific policies, and administrative or practical measures at the economy level, to protect against discrimination of workers with family responsibilities. In the APEC region, only six economies have ratified C156 so far, representing less than a third of its membership.<sup>18</sup>

#### **2013 Report of the UN Special Rapporteur**

The United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur's report to the 68th session of the General Assembly in 2013 examined the impact of unpaid care work on women's poverty and human rights. The report further clarified that it is the obligation of governments to recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work through policies guided by human rights, across areas covering labour legislation, social protection, public services, care services and infrastructure.

To uphold women's rights and reduce their vulnerability to poverty, the Special Rapporteur highlighted three areas where governments can make a significant difference. The first is to recognise and quantify women's unpaid care work through utilising time-use surveys, and considering these in policymaking. Second is through investing and/or increasing resources allocated for gender-sensitive public services and infrastructure, especially in disadvantaged areas. Third is by adopting a 'care lens' in social and economic policymaking, with a view to improving the distribution of care work between men and women.

make a living. See: CEACR, "Workers with Family Responsibilities, 1981 (No. 156): General Observation."

<sup>18</sup> APEC members and date of ratification of C156: Australia (30 March 1990); Chile (14 October 1994); Japan (9 June 1995); Korea (29 March 2001); Peru (16 June 1986); and Russia (13 February 1998).

### **2015 Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**

The 66th session of the UN General Assembly in 2011 highlighted the crucial role of gender equality in development progress. A prerequisite to realising women's potential is enabling and widening access to social, economic and political opportunities. In 2015, all members of the UN adopted the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), which includes Goal 5 on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

In particular, Goal 5 advances the active, full and equal participation of women in social and economic activities as well as their representation in leadership roles by eliminating discriminatory and harmful practices that violate the rights of women and girls, limit their potential and restrict their access to opportunities.

It should be emphasised that Target 5.4 under Goal 5 focuses on recognising and valuing unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services and infrastructure, the implementation of social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family, as appropriate.

### **The Importance of Valuing Unpaid Work**

International conventions and resolutions have highlighted the need to generate data on unpaid work to have a more accurate picture of the magnitude of the gender imbalance and its impact on women. Time-use data on unpaid activities by men and women will assist governments in designing policy initiatives to significantly reduce the gender gap on unpaid work.

### **1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**

At the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995, over 40,000 representatives from governments, international organisations, civil society and the private sector adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, centred on advancing women's empowerment.

A key component of the Beijing women's agenda is the directive issued to statistical organisations, both at the domestic and international levels, to devise

<sup>19</sup> International Conference of Labour Statisticians, "Resolution I: Resolution concerning Statistics of Work, Employment and Labour Underutilization" (Geneva: ILO, 11 October 2013); Charnes, "The Unpaid Care Work."

<sup>20</sup> J. Stiglitz, A. Sen and J.P. Fitoussi, "Report by the Commission on Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress" (Paris: OECD-High-Level Expert Group on the

methods that will help quantify women's unpaid work, especially since it exacerbates women's vulnerability to poverty.

### **2013 ILO Resolution I**

The 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians adopted Resolution I in October 2013 to set standards for work statistics to better measure the participation of all individuals in all forms of work and in all sectors of the economy.

These forms of work were identified: (a) own-use production work, engaged in the production of goods and services for own final use; (b) employment work, performed for others in exchange for pay or profit; (c) unpaid trainee work, performed for others without pay to acquire workplace experience or skills; (d) volunteer work, performed for others without pay; and (e) other work activities. The latter includes unpaid community service and unpaid work by prisoners, when ordered by a court or similar authority, and unpaid military or alternative civilian service.

The ILO was also of the view that factoring in women's multi-tasking in statistical standards will give important insights on the allocation of work within households, including the interaction between labour force participation and different types of work activities.<sup>19</sup>

Despite these guidelines issued by international organisations, there is a dearth of data on unpaid work in some APEC economies. Moreover, where available, data on unpaid work are not updated on a yearly basis for most APEC economies.

### **Counting the Costs**

Unpaid domestic work is important, to assess both the total amount of household services produced and how family chores are distributed between men and women.<sup>20</sup>

Using the opportunity cost method to quantify the value of unpaid work, where it is assumed that time spent on unpaid work is at the expense of earning a market wage, the ILO estimates that unpaid care and domestic work amounts to an aggregate 9 percent of global GDP, equivalent to USD 11 trillion in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms.<sup>21</sup> Using this approach, the value of women's unpaid work is

Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> PPP compares the currencies of various economies using a 'basket of goods' approach that allows comparison of economic productivity and standards of living among economies.

estimated to represent 6.6 percent of GDP or USD 8 trillion while men's contribution equals 2.4 percent of GDP or USD 3 trillion.<sup>22</sup>

However, there are marked differences in the value of unpaid work across economies. This is illustrated by data covering 8 of the 21 APEC member economies: total unpaid work is as high as 41.3 percent of GDP in Australia while it is lower in Thailand at 5.5 percent of GDP (Figure 7).

Some APEC economies have also conducted their own studies on the value of unpaid care and domestic work. For example, Viet Nam has estimated that the contribution of unpaid work was more than 20 percent of GDP in 2015.<sup>23</sup> A report on care work in Australia appraised the monetary value of unpaid care and domestic work to be AUD 650.1 billion, equivalent to 50.6 percent of GDP.<sup>24</sup>

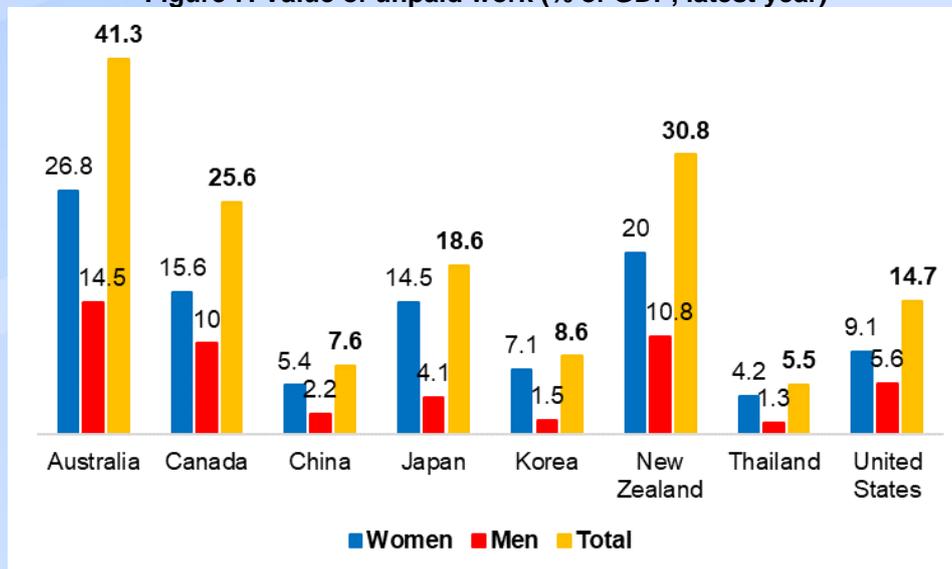
In Japan, a study showed that the value of unpaid work was between 17.9 and 34.7 percent of GDP in 2006.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, earlier work in the Philippines found that women's unpaid work was valued at 33.3 percent of GDP during the period 1990–1997, compared to 4 percent of GDP for men's unpaid work.<sup>26</sup> By the same token, Canada assessed the

value of its total unpaid work to range from CAD 210.8 billion to CAD 318.8 billion or between 31 and 46 percent of GDP in 1992.<sup>27</sup>

Along with assessing the monetary value of unpaid work, it is equally important to count the costs in terms of the wider and longer impact on women and girls, considering that doing unpaid care and domestic work as a young girl right up to adulthood perpetuates gender inequality and economic disempowerment.

For example, doing unpaid work negatively affects girls' education. There is anecdotal evidence of girls withdrawing from school to help with domestic work or care for younger siblings or sick family members while boys continue their studies. Furthermore, a 2013 ILO study finds, through a survey of 65 economies that girls are more involved in household chores compared to boys, and that schooling appears to be a privilege only for boys.<sup>28</sup> This validates an earlier ILO survey in 2012 showing that 9.9 percent of girls aged 5–17 years old carry out domestic work compared to 3.8 percent of boys, with an adverse impact on their school attendance.<sup>29</sup> UNICEF estimates that girls 5–14 years old spend 40 percent more time than boys

**Figure 7. Value of unpaid work (% of GDP, latest year)**



Source: ILO, "Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work" (Geneva: ILO, 2018).

<sup>22</sup> ILO, "Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work" (Geneva: ILO, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> ActionAid (2016), cited in UN Women, "Unpaid Care and Domestic Work: Issues and Suggestions for Viet Nam."

<sup>24</sup> S. Hoenig and A. Page, "Counting on Care Work in Australia: Final Report" (Australia-Economic Security4Women, 2012)

<sup>25</sup> S. Kuwahara, "Monetary Valuation of Unpaid Work in Japan" (Economic and Social Research Institute, Cabinet of Japan, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> J. Torres, "Linkages between Paid and Unpaid Work in Human Resources Policy: The Philippine Context" (Philippines: Department of Labor and Employment, 1999).

<sup>27</sup> Statistics Canada, "Value of Household Work in Canada," 1994.

<sup>28</sup> International Conference of Labour Statisticians, "Resolution I."

<sup>29</sup> ILO, "Child Domestic Work: Global Estimates" (Geneva: ILO, 2012).

doing unpaid household chores, lending support to the findings by the ILO.<sup>30</sup> The impact is lifelong inequality, extending to adulthood when access to jobs and other economic opportunities is severely limited by lack of education.

There are also physical and mental health consequences of doing heavy domestic chores or emotionally stressful caregiving work for sick and disabled family members. Moreover, since the disproportionate distribution of unpaid care and domestic work significantly reduces women's economic and financial capacity, it gives rise to gendered power imbalances that, in turn, increase women's vulnerability to domestic violence.

COVID-19 measures, such as lockdowns at the onset of the pandemic and whenever there is a surge in infections, have increased women's share of unpaid work within the household. Working from home combined with online learning for children have made it more challenging for women to maintain their productivity and some have had to opt out of the labour force.

Moreover, women are likely to be employed in sectors that require face-to-face interaction, such as tourism and travel, which collapsed amid movement restrictions and border closures. McKinsey estimates that women's jobs are almost twice as vulnerable as men's jobs to the pandemic.<sup>31</sup> In fact, women, who accounted for 38.9 percent of global employment in 2019, made up 47.6 percent of employment losses in 2020.<sup>32</sup>

### Taking Action: Policy Recommendations

Several studies on unpaid work have brought forward various recommendations to make visible unpaid work and its negative impact. These recommendations generally revolve around the recognise–reduce–redistribute framework.<sup>33</sup>

Specifically, the Three R strategy focuses on: (1) recognising and valuing unpaid work using time-use surveys to put a monetary equivalent on the time that women spend doing unpaid activities; (2) reducing the time allocated to unpaid work through

<sup>30</sup> See: UNICEF, "Girls Spend 160 Million More Hours than Boys Doing Household Chores Everyday," Press Release, 7 October 2016, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/girls-spend-160-million-more-hours-boys-doing-household-chores-everyday>

<sup>31</sup> D. Mahajan et al., "Don't Let the Pandemic Set Back Gender Equality," McKinsey, 18 September 2020.

<sup>32</sup> ILO, "COVID-19 and the World of Work," ILO Monitor, 27 October 2021.

<sup>33</sup> D. Elson, "The Three R's of Unpaid Work: Recognition, Reduction and Redistribution" (*United Nations Development Programme Expert Group Meeting on Unpaid Work, Economic Development and Human Well-Being*, New York, 2008); D. Elson, "Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute Unpaid Care Work:

good practices as well as investment in public infrastructure and social services; and (3) redistributing unpaid work, particularly encouraging men to share in family responsibilities.

Achieving gender parity in unpaid work, therefore, requires a holistic approach in policy interventions and supportive measures, from the individual economy level to the broader international community (Figure 10).

### **Recognising and valuing unpaid work using time-use surveys**

On the macroeconomic front, governments need to work with professionals, especially statisticians, census takers and researchers, the community and other stakeholders to recognise and value unpaid work. This requires allocating resources to conduct time-use surveys to determine time spent on the various categories of unpaid work prevailing in households (e.g., housework, caregiving and voluntary services) and, at the same time, calculate their monetary equivalent.

These time-use surveys should be designed to provide sex-disaggregated data, which could be used to inform policy. However, one of the main problems in generating sex-disaggregated statistics is the funding gap. According to Seck, only 13 percent of economies worldwide had a budget specifically dedicated to gender statistics.<sup>34</sup>

### **Reducing women's unpaid work through good practices and investments in infrastructure and social services**

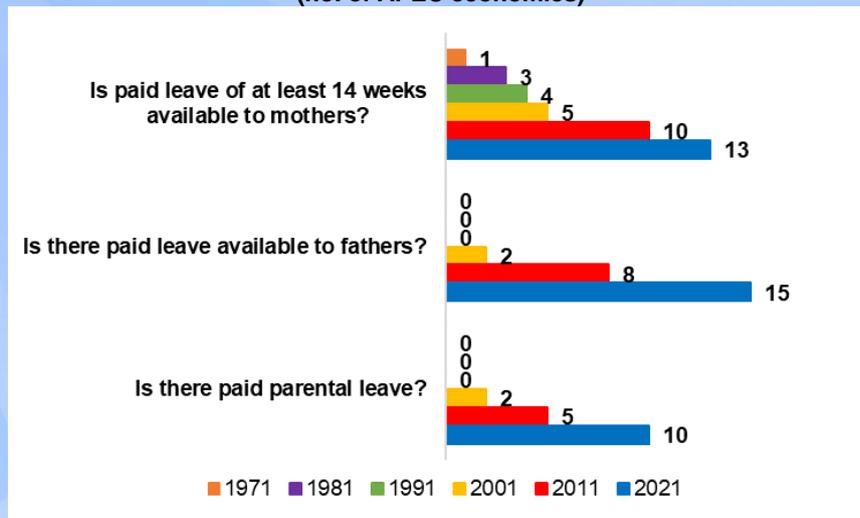
Labour market policies need to recognise that some workers have family responsibilities, and they need support to enable them to attend to these obligations while doing paid work. Article 4 of the ILO Maternity Protection Convention No. 183 (C183), which was adopted in 2000 and came into force in February 2002, specifically provides that all employed women be entitled to 14 weeks of maternity leave, including six weeks of compulsory leave after childbirth.<sup>35</sup>

How to Close the Gender Gap" (*New Labour Forum*, New York, 2017).

<sup>34</sup> P.A. Seck, "Keynote Address on the Importance of Sex-Disaggregated Data for Women's Economic Empowerment, Collection Methods and Opportunities for Use" (*Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment through Data Workshop*, Valparaiso, Chile, 7–8 May 2019), <https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/inlinelinks/APEC%20workshop%20keynote.docx>

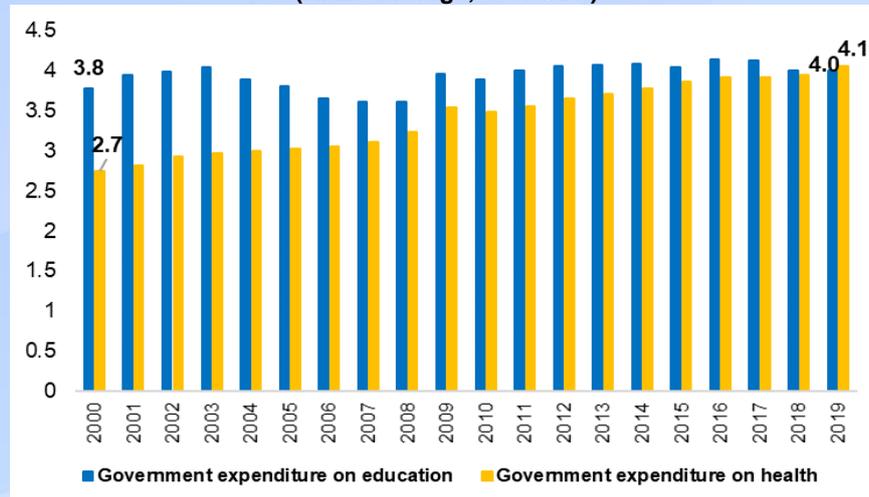
<sup>35</sup> See: ILO, "C183 – Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)," 30 May 2000, [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:55:0::NO::P55\\_TYPE,P55\\_LANG,P55\\_DOCUMENT,P55\\_NODE:RE V,en,C183/Document](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:55:0::NO::P55_TYPE,P55_LANG,P55_DOCUMENT,P55_NODE:RE V,en,C183/Document)

**Figure 8. Laws on maternity, paternity and parental leave (no. of APEC economies)**



Source: World Bank, “Women, Business and the Law” data, February 2022.

**Figure 9. Government expenditure on health and education (APEC average, % of GDP)**



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators; economy sources; APEC Policy Support Unit (PSU) staff calculations.

In the APEC region, only Peru has ratified C183. Nonetheless, 13 APEC member economies provide at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave, an increase from 10 members a decade ago.<sup>36</sup> This is important because it allows women a period of post-partum recovery and bonding with their newborn, uninterrupted by work responsibilities.

It is also desirable for maternity leave to be complemented with paternity and/or parental leave to redistribute child-rearing and household responsibilities. These additional leave benefits, particularly shared parental leave, help women to balance career and family responsibilities, motivating them to stay in the labour force, thereby also reducing incidences of retreating from the

workforce to do unpaid work arising from increased family responsibilities.

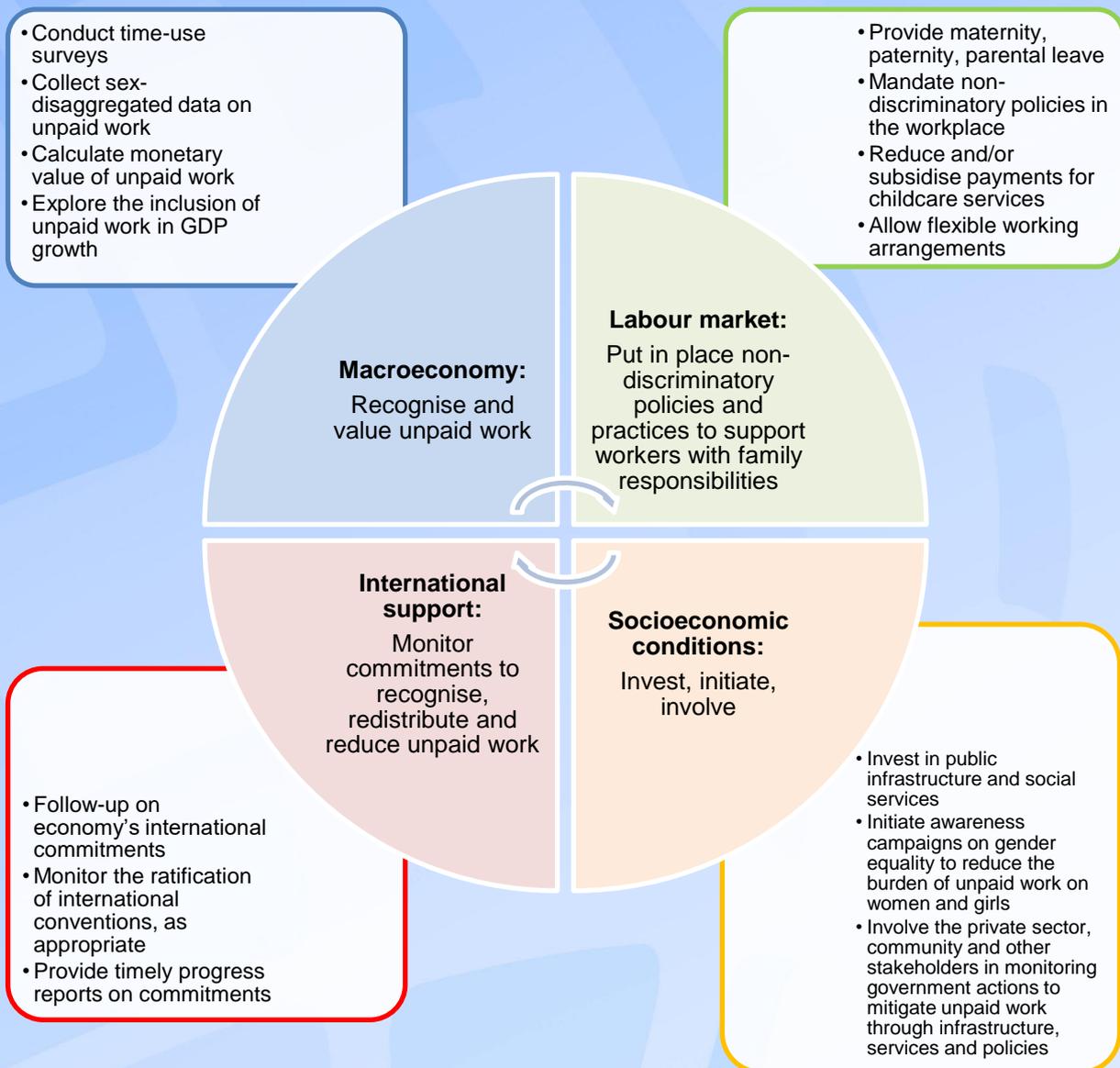
It was only in the 2000s that APEC started to recognise the importance of paternity and parental leave to encourage men to help women take care of the family. As of February 2022, there are 15 APEC economies that provide paternity leave, up from eight a decade ago.<sup>37</sup> In addition, 10 APEC members support employed women and men with shared parental leave, doubling the number from 10 years ago (Figure 8).

To accompany these supportive paid paternity and parental leave, the workplace should also put in place non-discriminatory policies and practices to

<sup>36</sup> World Bank, “Women, Business and the Law” data, 21 February 2022.

<sup>37</sup> World Bank, “Women, Business and the Law” data, 21 February 2022.

**Figure 10. Holistic approach to addressing unpaid work**



inspire women to enter and stay in the labour force. For example, mandating non-discrimination in hiring (whether on the basis of sex, marital status or family characteristics) could pave the way for women to apply for jobs without fear of outright bias or rejection due to their gender or because they are raising or about to raise children. Employers could also look into adopting flexible working arrangements to encourage wider participation in the labour force, particularly by workers with family duties.

Furthermore, since socioeconomic factors influence the amount of unpaid work, it is high time that governments invest in infrastructure and social services. Clean water and electricity need to reach rural/remote areas to reduce the heavy domestic

workload that women disproportionately endure, such as fetching water and firewood.

Governments also need to augment their budgets to ensure wider access to social services such as health and nutrition as well as education and skills programmes. Investing in childcare and long-term care services and facilities, especially for the elderly, could also significantly reduce unpaid care work.

In APEC, average government expenditure on education has improved only incrementally over two decades, from 3.8 percent of GDP in 2000 to 4.0 percent in 2019, while expenditure on health increased from 2.7 percent to 4.1 percent of GDP during the same period (Figure 9). Where feasible,

governments could explore ways to augment the resources allocated for education, health and other social services as these are crucial to human and economic development, a lesson the world re-learned amid the ongoing pandemic.

### ***Redistributing unpaid work by advancing gender equality***

Initiating public awareness campaigns, with the support of the private sector, media organisations and the community as a whole, should also form part of the agenda toward recognising, reducing and redistributing unpaid work.

Informing and reforming perspectives, policies and practices to achieve equality in both paid and unpaid work need to involve everyone. The various stakeholders need to work together with the government to monitor the state of infrastructure and the delivery of social services as well as raise awareness on gender equality. Aside from targeting policymakers, these campaigns should also consciously reach out to men and boys to promote gender equality and change mindsets within households and among policymakers.

Consistent and intensified efforts to counter gender stereotypes could help reduce the unequal share of unpaid work between girls and boys, women and men. Economies could look into integrating gender equality into all levels of education, beginning with the primary level, to counter gender biases emanating from the assignment of gendered functions and skills to boys and girls. In addition, an information campaign targeted at certain groups or sectors (e.g., police authorities, the judiciary, teachers, school-age children, corporate executives and staff) could also be conducted to help eliminate gender stereotyping and other forms of gender-based discrimination.

The international community could also help bring the world's attention to the harmful impacts of unpaid work on women, in their employment, education, health and vulnerability to violence.

Tracking economies' commitments to relevant international conventions, along with encouraging ratifications to ensure the implementation of appropriate domestic policies that serve to reduce

and redistribute unpaid work could go a long way in increasing labour force participation, particularly of women.

Progress reports on the actions taken by economies to honour these commitments could also prompt initiatives that are sustainable, carried out from one government administration to the next.

Finally, the international community could influence economies to help address unpaid work, scaling up initiatives, policies and regulations to generate a positive impact, from households to the workplace, from one economy to an entire region and then, the world.

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