

GLOBAL GOALS AND UNPAID CARE

“..[N]ow is the time for bold and innovative thinking, thoughtful analysis and collective commitment, so that in the near future, no woman – no-one - will retire in poverty because they chose to care.”¹

Unpaid care work underpins economic and social life in all societies. In all countries, women and girls do the bulk of this work. Women, on average, spend twice as much time on household work as men and four times as much time on childcare.² Women also work longer hours than men overall when both paid and unpaid work is counted.³ In East Asia and the Pacific, women report doing five times more unpaid care and domestic work than men in the Republic of Korea and four times more in Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic.⁴

Too often unpaid care and domestic work is under-valued and goes unrecognised in policy, legislation and measures of economic development. Caring work is largely invisible in economic calculation despite its economic significance: the monetary value of unpaid care has been estimated at between 10 and 50 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In Australia, unpaid care was valued at \$21.4 billion in 2009-10; equivalent to 50.6 per cent of GDP.⁵ Indeed, economies often rely on women's unpaid care work to meet shortfalls caused by cuts in community services, health services and state-funded care services for children, the elderly or people with disabilities.

The time, intensity and low status associated with unpaid care and domestic work impacts on women's and girl's opportunities to take on paid work and education, to participate in public and political life and to accumulate retirement income and savings. In this way, unpaid care work restricts women's agency, autonomy and enjoyment of human rights.⁶ The situation is particularly difficult for poor and marginalised women who often have limited access to basic amenities, infrastructure, public services, social protection policies and time-saving domestic technologies. A community survey by one of IWDA's partners, Voice for Change, in Jiwaka Province in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, revealed that the slave-like burden of unpaid care and domestic work is having a severe impact on women and girls and was viewed by female respondents as one of the most serious forms of violence against women and girls in Jiwaka Province.⁷

In recent years, the issue of unpaid care has finally made its way onto the international agenda. For example, in 2013, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights produced a report on poverty and unpaid care.⁸ This growing recognition of the importance of unpaid care is reflected in 'recognising and valuing unpaid care and domestic work' being included as target (Target 5.4) under Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

For this target to have real impact, we must move beyond a situation where societies and economies collectively reap the benefit of unpaid care while the costs are born disproportionately by individual women. Unpaid care must be re-framed as an essential enabler and a collective and social responsibility.⁹

Target on unpaid care and domestic work

Target 5.4, one of nine targets under Goal 5, aims to 'recognise 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.'

The wording of the target is not perfect. The clause 'as nationally appropriate' is disappointing given that the goals are intended to be universal. It is also regrettable that the target does not specify the need to 'reduce' and 'redistribute' unpaid care work or specify a timeframe. However, recognising the importance of providing public services, infrastructure and social protection policies is welcome, and including a target on unpaid care itself is a significant step towards acknowledging the contribution of unpaid care.

The proposed indicator under the target, 5.4.1, relates to the percentage of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age group and location. This will enable comparison between women's and men's

unpaid care workload and can be measured by well-designed regular time-use surveys (see section on data collection below). Indicators under Goal 7, to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, which measure access to energy and domestic technologies, will also be relevant to measuring progress against the unpaid care target. And Goal 4 contains a target relating to the access of all girls and boys to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education (Target 4.2).

Relevance of unpaid care across the Sustainable Development Goals

Unpaid care work is relevant to many of the other targets across the goals. For example, on **education**, measures to increase school completion rates will be less successful if they fail to take into account girl's caring responsibilities.¹⁰ A survey in 16 countries found that 10 per cent of girls aged 5-14 perform household chores for 28 hours or more weekly (approximately twice the hours spent by boys), impacting on their school attendance.¹¹ Unpaid care work also affects women's access to further education and training.

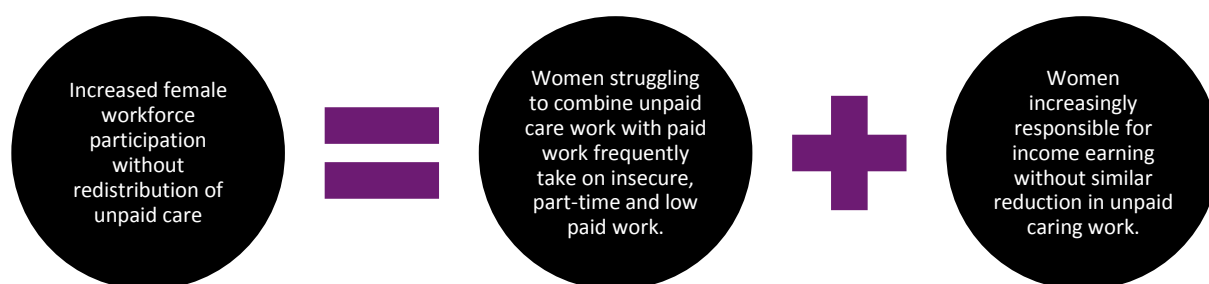
Unpaid care also affects progress on women's political participation. The time and energy associated with caring and household responsibilities, together with the subordinate status associated with caring work, limits women's and girls' opportunities to participate in **decision-making** at all levels.

Health crises such as HIV/AIDS create additional unpaid care burdens for women as well as health risks. Women and girls provide between 70 and 90 per cent of the care to people living with HIV/AIDS in countries heavily affected by the disease.¹² The nature of unpaid care work can also affect women's physical and mental health due to its arduous and often stressful nature.¹³ In addition, women may not be able to access health services due to the lack of time or money associated with heavy unpaid care burdens.¹⁴

Unpaid care work also impacts on women's **economic opportunities** and represents a major barrier to women's equal participation in the workforce. Women trying to balance unpaid care with income generation often find themselves in paid work which is insecure, part-time and low-paid. The often informal and precarious nature of this work frequently means that women do not have access to social protection such as pensions, paid parental leave or employment insurance. Women in formal employment also face disadvantage as their accumulation of pension entitlements or superannuation is interrupted by periods of full-time care giving. In Australia, women retire, on average, with around half as much in their superannuation as men.¹⁵ In the Solomon Islands almost three times more men than women contribute to pension schemes.¹⁶

Significantly, women's increased involvement in income generation and the labour market has not necessarily lead to a redistribution of caring work within the household. In fact, new economic opportunities have for many women resulted in a greater feminisation of responsibility for both productive and reproductive roles.¹⁷ Men are not taking on greater responsibility for domestic work and unpaid care at the same rate at which women are increasing their workforce participation.¹⁸

The impact of unpaid care on women's economic empowerment



This finding that women's increased income earning is not leading to a reduction in unpaid care work is supported by [research](#) conducted in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea by the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia program at ANU (SSGM) and IWDA with support from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program. Findings in Solomon Island communities suggest that while men were generally supportive of women's participation in savings clubs, this did not appear to lead to any redistribution of labour within the household. Indeed, women noted an increase in their workload associated with taking on roles within the savings clubs and working to earn more income to meet savings club and community obligations.¹⁹

Environmental degradation and water scarcity can both increase women's unpaid care burden through longer journeys to collect water and fuel and greater difficulty in feeding themselves and their families.²⁰ Additionally, responsibility for environmental sustainability is often placed in the hands of women, further increasing their unpaid work.

Plan for Action: Recognising, redistributing and reducing unpaid care

IWDA calls on the Australian Government to prioritise Target 5.4 on unpaid care and domestic work as key to equitable, sustainable development, focusing on the following actions:

- (a) Use **existing international commitments** and language on unpaid care and domestic work in developing Australia's policy approach.
- (b) Focus on steps that **recognise, reduce and redistribute** unpaid care.²¹
- (c) Improve **data collection** about unpaid care work.
- (d) Assess all actions to implement the global goals for their **impact on unpaid care** including taxation and expenditure, social protection and employment policies.

(a) Use existing international commitments on unpaid care and domestic work

Australia's approach to the unpaid care and domestic work target within Goal 5 should be informed by existing international commitments and language on unpaid care and domestic work, including CEDAW (See Articles 5, 2 (f), 11(2) and 16) and the Beijing Platform for Action (see Strategic Objectives A4, F6 and H3) as well as various human rights treaties including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which all include binding obligations on States to address the issue of unpaid care.²² These international commitments mean that States have an existing duty to act when the distribution of unpaid care perpetuates gender inequality or interferes with full and equal enjoyment of human rights.

(b) Focus on steps that recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care

A right-based approach to the unpaid care and domestic work target requires a focus on recognising, reducing and redistributing unpaid care work.

Recognise and value unpaid care: This must involve recognition of the disproportionate role of women and girls in the provision of unpaid care and the social and economic value of unpaid care. Measuring unpaid care as a form of work is essential to assessing its value, economically and socially. In contexts where the gendered division of labour is very strong, men and women can spend their days in different physical spaces, making women's care work even less visible. Changing understandings about what constitutes work and the intersections between unpaid care work and other social and economic activities is vital to addressing gender inequality. Care givers must be valued, supported and treated as rights-holders.

Reduce the unpaid care burden: Investment in labour-saving technology and infrastructure is key to reducing the drudgery and time burden of unpaid care, especially for women living in poverty. Investment in affordable time-saving domestic technologies such as fuel-efficient stoves can significantly reduce women's time burdens.²³ Investing in key infrastructure such as energy, water and sanitation facilities is also crucial,

particularly for poor women and girls in rural areas, reducing the time burden associated with collecting fuel and firewood. In sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that women and girls spend 40 billion hours a year collecting water.²⁴

Tackle social norms about responsibility for the provision of care: Changing the social norms about who should be responsible for unpaid care is essential to achieving a more equal sharing of responsibilities. Gender stereotypes which define caregiving as female and maternal shape how women and men are expected to allocate their time between paid and unpaid care and domestic work. Those who carry out the bulk of unpaid care work are then inevitably penalised in an economic system which is based on expectations of uninterrupted and full-time employment.²⁵ Addressing these social norms is key to a more equal sharing of care work, within households and across society.²⁶ This will require a more equal sharing of care between women and men; across the key social institutions of family, state and market; and more support to poorer families and households to reduce the amount and intensity of their unpaid care burden and increase the space for subsistence or income generating work. Governments have a core responsibility for enabling high quality accessible care for all.

Priorities for action to recognise, reduce and redistribute care include:²⁷

- Improving parental and flexible leave policies and legislation.
- Ensuring high quality, affordable care is available for all children, the elderly, people with disabilities and those who are sick including early child development and child care services.
- Investing in gender-sensitive infrastructure, technology and public services in disadvantaged areas.
- Innovating to increase men's active participation in caring and domestic responsibilities such as through education which promotes the value of care.²⁸
- Supporting women's own recognition of the value of their work and tackling the barriers which prevent carers from having a greater voice in decision making.²⁹

(c) Improving data collection

More and better data is crucial to recognising the economic and social contribution of unpaid care. This requires regular surveys of time use. Time-use surveys have been conducted by approximately 70 countries, including many developing countries.³⁰ However, further investment is needed to improve the quality and disaggregation (by sex, age, disability, location) of data and ensure surveys are conducted regularly in every country. This includes Australia, where the Australian Bureau of Statistics cancelled the 2013 [Work, Life and Family Survey: Work, Care and Family Balance](#) (WoLFS), which includes the *Time Use Survey*, in order to achieve budget savings. The next time-use survey is now scheduled to take place in 2019, 13 years after the last one in 2006.³¹ The [Individual Deprivation Measure](#), developed by an international research collaboration including IWDA, includes a module to measure time-use and offers a cost effective way to improve time use data while also collecting other core economic and social information, which can assist in understanding the implications of time use.³²

For real progress to be made against the unpaid care target, perception indicators which measure changes in social norms related to gender equality (such as care giving being seen as typically a female role) are also important.

(d) Using a care-lens

As steps are taken to implement the global goals, actions should be assessed for their impact (positive or negative) on care work. Failure to understand the significance and extent of unpaid care can lead to poor policy decisions which misunderstand the economic contributions of women and men as well as the impact of time poverty.³³ For example, initiatives to increase women's participation in decision making must take into account the time constraints and practical difficulties associated with caring responsibilities. Economic initiatives to increase women's participation in the workforce must address women's unpaid care obligations, for example by ensuring opportunities which are secure, flexible and well-paid are combined with accessible and affordable care arrangements for those who need it. Governments must also avoid policies that reinforce negative stereotypes about caring as women's work.

The inclusion of a target on unpaid care and domestic work in the Global Goals is a significant step forward in recognising the importance of unpaid care and its implications for poverty, gender inequality and human rights. As a developed country that supports gender equality, Australia can improve outcomes here and demonstrate the importance of unpaid care by making it a priority for advancing the sustainable development agenda.

Care work is not an optional or marginal activity. It underpins economic and social development and the capabilities of the next generation of citizens and workers. Public policy must reflect this if it is to support robust, equitable, sustainable development.

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<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/news/speeches/recognising-and-valuing-unpaid-care>

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⁴ UN Women (2015), *East Asia and the Pacific Fact Sheet. Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights*, available at:

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¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ ANZ (2015) *ANZ Women's Report: Barriers to Achieving Financial Gender Equity*, July 2015, available at:

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