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MenCare

State of the World's Fathers 2023

Centering Care in
a World in Crisis



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FOREWORD

Sima Bahous

UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women



There is no activity that defines us more as human beings than the care we afford those who need it, whether in our families, communities, societies or nations. That we value that care so little remains a profound failing in the way we understand the world we live in and manage our affairs.

Part of that devaluing of care is very much gendered. It is, as this report argues, reflective of patriarchal norms. It is part of misguided beliefs whereby those things that women more often do are valued and remunerated either less or not at all compared with than those that men more often do.

Differences in time spent on unpaid care work drive women's lower workforce participation, and their diminished participation in public and political life. Conversely, valuing and supporting care work has the potential to unlock huge gender equality dividends for all.

The burden of care is shared extremely unequally. As a result, the world's women in effect undertake countless hours of unpaid work, work that is as demanding, crucial and critical for all of us as any other. This report offers a conservative estimate of the value of that work at some 11 trillion US dollars per year. It may well be much more. But we do not even need to rely on such calculations. We need only imagine for one moment a global strike of the world's carers.

The calls for a fairer, better distribution of the burden of care are longstanding, and there has been progress. Such progress is founded on policy change and an accompanying cultural shift.

Men and boys are central to both. For example, in the HeForShe Alliance we have consistently called on men to recognize the harmful effects of gender inequality on everyone, men, women,

girls and boys alike. We have asked that they be agents for change and reject negative ideas of masculinity. There can be no more harmful an idea that a man has no place in care work.

This is why UN Women is proud of its partnership with Equimundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice, Sonke Gender Justice, and the MenCare Global Fatherhood Campaign. We share both vision and goals and we will work together until those goals are achieved.

The data show how far we have to go but also positive signs that in many households more men are doing a greater share of unpaid care work. The report is encouraging when it shows how men increasingly see the importance of care, value it, and affirm their willingness to advocate for it.

At UN Women and HeForShe, we remain committed to supporting governments and partnering with civil society to make care policies and care equality a centrepiece of gender equality agendas. The MenCare 50/50 Commitments announced in 2019 are a practical set of actions that policymakers, employers, and individual men can take to move the needle on care equality.

Along with the global women's movement, we need men to move. Men must vote, call and march for high quality universal childcare, for workplace policies that support all caregivers, for social protection policies that support all caregivers, whether engaged in formal or informal work, and for equitable, universal, and paid parental leave. The pathways to care equality and to gender equality require all of those. And their rewards will be shared by us all also.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Imagine a world that puts care at the heart of political priorities and daily lives. A world where all have access to healthcare and education, where men and boys share care equally with women and girls, parental leave for all parents is the norm, and where every household has affordable quality childcare and support in caring for aging family members.

Centering care, and care systems, means affirming that men, women and people of all genders have caring responsibilities, that care is skilled work, and that it is a central part of our lives. It means that governments are held accountable for putting care before profit and investing in care infrastructure. A world that centers care must also recognize that all forms of care are interlinked, whether for ourselves, each other, our families, our communities, our countries, or our planet.

This vision seems far from the one we live in today. Care, both paid and unpaid, is, and must be, a universal responsibility. Historically it has been carried mostly by women and girls — and as a result it is undervalued and goes unrecognized and unpaid or is underpaid. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), over 16 billion hours of unpaid care work are performed daily—an amount that would account for 9 % of global GDP, or around \$11 trillion per year, if paid at the minimum wage.

Most unpaid care work and domestic work is done by women and girls, though men in some settings, particularly in middle- and upper-income countries, are doing more than in the past. In the Global South, women do 3 to 7 times more while in the Global North, women do 1.2 to 2 times more. Why aren't men doing their share? The obstacles to care equality range from policies that don't support equal caring, to family decisions about paid work; to poverty; to social norms; to some men's privilege. Globally men spend only 19% of their total non-leisure time is spent on unpaid work compared to 55% for women.

This report, *State of the World's Fathers 2023: Centering care in a world in crisis*, highlights research findings on men's and women's caregiving roles and the barriers that impede equal participation in caregiving. The data come from an online

survey answered by nearly 12,000 people in 17 countries. The survey looked not only at who does the caregiving, but how we care, for whom, and what men and women think about care.

Our findings build on previous *State of the World's Fathers* reports to affirm that an intersectional feminist vision of a care economy needs men and boys — to value care work, both paid and unpaid, to do an equal share of unpaid care work in the home, and to advocate alongside women for care equality in workplaces and public institutions.

From Argentina to Ireland, Australia to Portugal, China to Croatia, Rwanda to India, the research shows many women and men, and people of all gender identities, are calling for care to be firmly at the center of all our lives and are demanding policies that center care. The pandemic made us all think more seriously about what care means, and how it is the foundation that underpins all our lives. Men say they are doing care, and they are willing to take action to do more. But many barriers — structural, norm-based, individual, and financial — to this equal sharing remain. While our new research finds hope, we also find — as do other data — that the pace of change is far too slow. Our key findings and recommendations are summarized below.

WHO CARES AND HOW THEY CARE

Care matters for everyone. 63 percent of respondents care for a partner, 60 percent care for children, and 36 percent care for an elderly family member. 24 percent have care responsibilities for both children and older people, and one in five look after someone with a disability.

Despite these multiple care responsibilities, women and men overwhelmingly speak of care in positive terms and affirm that it brings them happiness and well-being. Men and women who said that they were satisfied with how involved they were in raising their children were 1.5 times as likely to agree that “I am the person I always wanted to be” and to feel a sense of gratitude.

But not all families speak of caregiving in positive terms.

Women and men with the highest economic hardship are the most likely to speak of care work as more exhausting than enjoyable.

Although fathers feel equally responsible for care work, mothers overall are still doing the most caregiving.

Mothers are carrying out more house cleaning, physical child care, emotional child care, cooking, and caring for their partner. Yet in many study countries, fathers say they carry out many hours of different kinds of unpaid care tasks in the home. And 70% to 90% of men across 15 countries agreed that “I feel as responsible for care work as my partner” – though we did not ask women if they agreed with this. The only exception is India.

Men who take greater emotional care of themselves -- meaning they are aware of when they need help or emotional support and actually seeking that support -- are more likely to report that they care for others.

Men who say they take care of their emotional selves are 2 to 8 times more likely to care for a family member. And those who care for others may experience greater well-being: respondents who said that they were satisfied with how involved they were in raising their children were 1.5 times more likely to agree that ‘I am the person I always wanted to be’ and to feel a sense of gratitude.

Men’s caregiving varies across and within countries. Even in countries where on average men are not doing their share of care work, there are some men who are doing an equal share and who center care as much as female partners. And even in countries where something closer to equality has been achieved, there are households with large disparities between men’s unpaid care work and women’s, continuing to act as a major barrier to women’s full participation in public life and a barrier to gender equality more broadly.

The majority of mothers – and fathers – said their care levels increased during the COVID pandemic. The proportion of mothers who said the amount of caring they did increased in the lockdown phase was higher on average than that of fathers.

GENDER NORMS - IT MATTERS HOW MUCH MEN (AND WOMEN) BELIEVE CARE IS MEN’S WORK.

The majority of women and men agree that care work is the responsibility of women and men and a majority of women and men believe women can be mothers and leaders. 61% of men and 65% of women overall disagree with this statement: ‘Women who participate in leadership positions cannot also be good wives and mothers. And only 32% of men and 27% of women agree with the inequitable norm that ‘Changing diapers, giving kids a bath and feeding kids are a mother’s responsibility’.

The vast majority of parents believe sons as well as daughters should be taught to do care work, a positive sign of change. A majority of men and women – more than 80% in most countries – disagreed with the statement that ‘boys should not be taught how to do household chores and care work during childhood’.

WOMEN AND MEN CAN’T DO IT ALONE: THE URGENT NEED FOR ADVOCACY AND POLICY CHANGE

While most parents (63%) say they have some kind of support, just under one in five parents (17%) say they have no support. When asked why they don’t have all the care support they need, cost and lack of affordable care scored highest for both mothers and fathers.

More than half of both mothers and fathers said that political activism for care leave policies was important to them. *This ranged from 57% for fathers and 66% for mothers in India, to 92% for fathers and 94% of mothers in Rwanda. Without policy change to support equality in care, individual change will not be enough.*

A significant proportion of both women and men in all countries say they have taken some form of action to improve care policies. The highest percentage (74%) of both women and men had talked to friends and family about the issue, followed by 39% of women and 36% of men who said they had signed or shared a petition online, and 27% of women and 33% of men who had attended an in-person event to support the cause. Finally, 20% of women

and 25% of men said they had approached or talked to local leaders. This suggests the untapped promise of engaging men alongside women in demanding the care policies all households need.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENTAL LEAVE: REMUNERATION IS KEY TO LEAVE UPTAKE

Parents perceive the benefits of taking paid care leave. 87% of mothers and 85% of fathers think that taking paid care leaveⁱ will benefit their partners and their children.

Among those who were employed and offered leave but did not take all the leave available, the lack of sufficient replacement pay was the most common reason, mentioned by 49% of men and women. This is consistent with other research that finds that remuneration is key to leave uptake, particularly for fathers.ⁱⁱ This is because men still often earn more than women, and unless leave is fully paid, the family cannot afford to lose the man's income. And yet, the World Policy Analysis Center found that only 24% of countries with shared parental leave guarantee at least 80% of wages.¹

Other important barriers to taking leave include experiences in the workplace. These included fear of losing their job (40%), unsupportive managers (36%), or fear of being judged poorly by friends or colleagues for taking leave (18%).

Parents care enough about leave to be willing to take action to have more paid leave time. These steps included 'advocating for the issue at work', and life changes such as moving or relinquishing jobs to have more time for care. Mothers, on average, showed more willingness to take action than fathers, however both groups showed a relatively high level of willingness to take action. In many households around the world, men's higher pay and higher paid workplace participation, job security and adequate wage replacement often takes priority for households over caregiving or leave at reduced wages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Encouraging an ethic of care among men and boys and seeing more men caring in an increasing number of ways, particularly by advocating for the care policies in governments and workplaces, is important for families, and for society as a whole, and is an as yet untapped way forward for helping to break cycles of violence, inequality and the backlash toward women's equality. To achieve full equality in unpaid care work and bring men fully on board as advocates fully invested in care, we must be **CARING**:

Center care systems in policies and public institutions

1. Governments should **establish national care policies** and campaigns that recognize, reduce, and redistribute care work equally between men and women.
2. **Expand social protection programs** to redistribute care equally between women and men who are unemployed or working in the informal economy, while keeping a focus on the needs and rights of women and girls.
3. **Provide state-supported, high-quality childcare** that facilitates the full participation in economic activities for all working parents and caregivers.
4. **Transform health sector institutions** to promote fathers' involvement from the prenatal period through birth and childhood and men's involvement as caregivers.
5. Governments should **hold male political leaders accountable** for their support of care policies, while **advocating for women's equality** in political leadership.

i "Paid care leave" includes maternity, paternity and parental leave, but can also include shared leave or non-parental leave like 'care days' or 'family responsibility leave.'

ii The number of countries that offer paid leave to fathers after a child is born (known as paternity leave) for any period of a day or more has increased significantly, from 25% in 1995 to 63% in 2022, when 186 countries offered any parental leave to care for infants to mothers, and 122 offered any parental leave to care for infants to fathers. However, the length of time for paternity leave is often short: 9 days (1.3 weeks) is the global average, and there are many country variations.

Advocate for a culture of care in all workplaces

6. Establish **equal, paid, non-transferable parental leave** for all parents employed by the company.
7. Create a **family-friendly workplace** by implementing policies such as care days, remote working, flexi-time, childcare or breastfeeding facilities and promote care equality with internal company public relations and marketing channels.
8. **Track indicators on care equality** in company surveys and reports (for example, the ratio of men compared to women who take parental leave and the amount of leave used).

Revolutionize the way boys are taught about care

9. **Start young to promote emotional connection and expression**, to reframe masculinity and boyhood as caring and valuing care. This means engaging parents, teachers, peers, and coaches, and providing hands on opportunities for boys to learn and practice care.
10. Harness the power of digital tools by **creating age-appropriate educational materials**.
11. Manufacturers and producers of toys, games, and clothing, as well as television programs, **should promote gender equality** among children and young people and caring ideas about manhood and boyhood.

Invest in care services, measure equity in access to service coverage across income levels, by gender and age

12. **Invest in care and care systems** so that changes are funded and included in government budgets.
13. **Collect regular data on time use** in unpaid care work and how it is divided between women and men, girls and boys across socioeconomic groups and ages and use it to **measure progress toward equality**, and to inform policymaking and budgeting decisions.

Normalize equal, non-transferable parental leave for caregivers at the national policy level

14. **Establish equal, fully paid, non-transferable parental leave for all parents in national legislation**, in addition to maternity leave for pregnancy and birth-related health needs.
15. Make **more paid parental leave days available for men**, to get to equal, paid, and substantial parental leave for all parents, with 14 weeks for both parents as a minimum and a non-transferable portion for fathers.
16. **National governments must work to ensure the distribution** of paid parental leave by including informally employed workers.
17. **Regional multilateral entities such as the European Union, Organization of American States and the African Union and the multilateral development banks** can work toward regional directives that encourage or mandate parental leave provisions across more countries, especially in the Global South.

Generate mainstream media that portrays men and boys as caring and competent caregivers and normalizes care as universal

18. **Implement communications and media campaigns** to promote men's involvement in care work, prevent gender-based violence, teach the value of care, and promote equitable, nonviolent, caring relationships.
19. Produce, support and amplify campaigns, television shows and other media that **show men and boys doing the care at home and sharing it equally with their partners**.
20. Support active engagement of fathers and male caregivers in care work, by means of **public campaigns that engage communities for change**.

Care is what it is to be human. Care for each other and for our families is how we have survived as a species. It is the only way we will thrive and survive in the midst of the many crises our world is facing. And to center care, we need to build on decades of work by feminists, and ensure that millions of men and boys join the unfinished revolution that is care equality.

