

## ECE input to the SG Report “Women in Development” (A/RES/74/235)

UNECE is committed to the goal of the international community to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and thus improve women’s situation, fight discrimination and assist member countries in implementing the 2030 Agenda. In line with UNECE’s mandate to focus on the economic domain, our focus is to strengthen the role of women in economic development through further active involvement in labour markets and decision making in political and social life.

UNECE’s work on gender related issues is based on strong intergovernmental mandates provided by the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly to follow up the Platform for Action (2000), and several resolutions of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system.

How is UNECE contributing to strengthening the role of women in development?

- I. Promoting the advancement of women in all economic sectors through mainstreaming gender across UNECE areas of work

In line with its mandate to mainstream gender perspectives in all sub-programmes of work, UNECE has developed a [Policy for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women](#) which is revised every five years (current version 2021-2025). It is complemented by a biennial [Gender Action Plan](#) (GAP) with concrete commitments at cross-sectional and divisional levels. The GAP for 2021-2022 has been developed as part of the United Nations System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP).

Key activities in this specific area include:

- (a) organising and facilitating capacity building on gender mainstreaming of UNECE staff (such as trainings on gender bias, workshops for gender mainstreaming in policies and projects)
  - (b) promoting gender perspectives in specific activities of UNECE, including at meetings of UNECE Sectoral Committees (i.e. gender-responsive standards, gender sensitive policies for innovation, gender-responsive environmental policy; gender statistics)
- II. Monitoring and supporting the advancement of gender equality and women’s empowerment in the UNECE region through
    - (a) **periodical reviews of progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action** by UNECE member States and other stakeholders, including intergovernmental meetings every five years (last Regional Beijing+25 review meeting took place on 29-30 October 2019 in Geneva).
    - (b) supporting gender mainstreaming in SDGs in the framework of the **Regional Forums on Sustainable Development (RFSD)**. In 2022, UNECE in cooperation with the UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia and the Issue-Based Coalition on Gender Equality organized a session specifically dedicated to SDG 5. This peer learning roundtable discussed how governments can promote gender equality and women’s empowerment as part of the COVID-19 recovery process, considering gender-differentiated impacts of the pandemic.

- (c) Monitoring and reporting on gender-responsive economic policies in Central Asia through the work of the **SPECA Thematic Working Group on Gender and SDGs**. At the annual meeting of this Working Group on Gender on 2 November 2021 representatives of parliaments, gender machineries and the line ministries from the SPECA countries shared initiatives undertaken in response to the COVID-19 and its economic and social consequences on women in the region.

III. Promoting knowledge generation in UNECE member States on economic empowerment of women through providing policy analysis and research, disseminating results and best practices

Since 2020, UNECE has jointly undertaken policy analysis and research with UN regional commissions and in collaboration with the UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia: **UN DA project tranche 13 ‘Strengthening social protection for the pandemic response’**, with a focus on integrating gender and care dimensions in the economic and social policies in response to Covid-19.

Studies have been undertaken and completed in the following major areas:

- a. [A regional overview of policy initiatives and measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic](https://unece.org/gender/publications/covid-19-response-policies-and-care-economy-mapping-policies-ece-region) took stock of the instruments applied in UNECE member States as a response to the pandemic. The mapping of the initiatives in the region - <https://unece.org/gender/publications/covid-19-response-policies-and-care-economy-mapping-policies-ece-region> was complemented by an policy brief analysing the impact of these initiatives on women’s situation <https://unece.org/gender/publications/policy-brief-gender-no-1-womens-economic-empowerment-and-care-economy-ece>
- b. The regional studies were enriched by country specific analysis of [women’s economic empowerment and the care economy](#), highlighting key gender inequalities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic and its consequences. Two thematic regional studies – on [empowering women through reducing unpaid care work](#) and on [public investments](#) – identify the opportunities and challenges to gender equality in the economic realm.
- c. National assessments on childcare and women’s empowerment in [Kyrgyzstan](#), [Serbia](#) and the [Republic of Moldova](#). Both the regional and country studies highlight the interdependency of unpaid care work, paid work and paid care work and provide recommendations for policies and measures to address this issue as a necessity for women’s economic empowerment.

On the basis of the results undertaken in these studies UNECE delivered technical assistance on integrating gender and care dimensions in economic policies, national plans and strategies to Kyrgyzstan and the Republic of Moldova (December 2021).

IV. Summaries of key thematic reports:

## **Public investment in the care economy in the UNECE region: Opportunities and challenges for gender equality in the COVID-19 recovery**

COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of investment in the care economy for successful response, recovery and “building back better” from the pandemic. The report<sup>1</sup> provides evidence on UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) member states’ efforts to secure and expand care-focused investment during the pandemic response and the implementation of recovery plans. It documents main policy measures with impacts on financing the care economy. Five main areas are distinguished: Fiscal and tax policy with direct impacts on the care economy, second, economic stimulus action in specific sectors and enterprises, including the care sector and care enterprises. Third, employment protection measures, including subsidies, especially in the care sector; fourth, measures aiming to protect the income of care workers. Fifth is direct support of paid care work, incl. pay, measures to improve working conditions, or emergency recruitment and retainment measures. The report provides recommendations on how best to strengthen investment in the care economy in the response and recovery packages, differentiating between short term and medium to long-term strategies.

### **Empowering women through reducing unpaid work: a regional analysis of Europe and Central Asia**

This report is part of a series of knowledge products developed to strengthen economic and social policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic with a gender lens. It presents a thematic regional analysis of unpaid work of women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) and the resulting empowerment women gain when their responsibility for such work is reduced. The report concludes with policy recommendations that prioritize the importance of unpaid work as a barrier to women’s economic empowerment. Removing this barrier require specific interventions in three key areas: the labour market, the social care infrastructure and gender-specific social norms. While significant progress is required across all these fronts, the most effective policy intervention to empower women through reducing unpaid work is the provision of institutionalized, high-quality, affordable childcare, especially for young children. Progress towards gender equality through the redistribution of unpaid work would allow women to benefit from new employment and family responsibility arrangements. Achieving these long-overdue changes will unlock the potential of women’s economic empowerment.

- V. Key policy recommendations for fostering policies and measures to empower women in the region through reducing the unpaid work (based on the regional and country studies described above):

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<sup>1</sup> This report is part of a series of knowledge products developed to strengthen economic and social policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic with a gender lens. The UNECE - UN Women series: *Rethinking Care Economy and Empowering Women for Building back Better* forms part of a collaboration by wider UN Development Account tranche 13 project: Strengthening Social Protection for Pandemic Response. The project aims at strengthening national capacities to design and implement social policies for rapid recovery from COVID-19 and for increased resilience to future exogenous shocks. The UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia collaborated to implement the project for the UNECE region.

Unpaid work impacts on women's empowerment regardless of their level of education, income or the level of country development. Although in recent decades, some countries have made advances in line with to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work (the '3Rs' framework) and women's paid employment participation has increased, the largest share continues to fall on women (particularly vulnerable women from lower socioeconomic groups, rural areas and women from ethnic minority groups) (Elson, 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the importance of unpaid work to social and economic life into sharp relief. It has also brought greater recognition of who undertakes most of this work. This momentum must now be harnessed to prioritize unpaid work and care on the long-term political agenda (EIGE, 2020) and to push to revalue such work as crucial rather than burdensome work that must be fairly rewarded and equally shared between women and men.

#### 5.1. Recognizing and Representing Unpaid Work at the Macroeconomic Policy and Decision-making Level

- It is pivotal to recognize unpaid (and paid) care work at the national policy level and in decision-making. The importance of this has been reinforced during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has underscored the centrality of paid care, unpaid care and domestic work to social and economic life and the gendering of such work.
- To facilitate this, governments need to continue to improve data collection on unpaid work in order to help inform and shape policy and decision-making. Undertaking ongoing monitoring and evaluation to better understand the social and economic impacts of women's unpaid care work and to support women's empowerment. Evaluations should be country- and context-specific in order to recognize the multiple circumstances behind women's unpaid work and to facilitate comparability across countries.
- Governments should support gender analysis and assessment that consider the impacts of infrastructure, social protection and public service investments on women and girls' unpaid work and whether they lead to unpaid work responsibilities being transferred to other women in the household, particularly older women and girls.
- As part of this, governments need to engage with grass root partnerships, networks and civil society groups (UN, 2016). Involving a variety of actors in programme design and implementation is key to understanding the local context and designing fit-for-purpose policy and programme solutions.

#### 5.2 Women's Labour Market Access and Opportunities: Strengthening Employment Rights and Workplace Policies

- Formalize paid parental leave for both women and men. Ensure that paternity leave is non-transferable and introduce incentives to encourage men's take-up.
- Employers should encourage men to take on a greater share of unpaid care work and should support employees with caregiving responsibilities (Ferrant and Thim, 2019; da Silva, 2019).
- Compensation for paternity and parental leave is key to stimulating uptake among fathers, with some commentators arguing that compensation at 100 per cent income level is the most conducive incentive to take-up this leave (EIGE, 2020).
- Organizations should adopt flexible work schedules and different types of working arrangements (e.g. part-time, reduced hours, flexible schedules, shorter working weeks)

to encourage more equal distribution of unpaid work at the family level and to help women and men find a better work-life balance.

- Organizations should monitor and evaluate take-up to ensure women and men are both accessing these working options and that workers are not penalized for doing so. For example, despite greater access to flexible working arrangements, men's uptake of those entitlements is generally hindered by gender norms that attribute efforts to reconcile home and work life to women (Teasdale, 2020). Research shows that men often use flexible working arrangements to increase their engagement in paid work, while women resort to flexible working arrangements to support their family responsibilities. Organizations and workplaces should maintain ongoing monitoring and evaluation and communication efforts in order to promote positive gender outcomes and to support women and men's use of such policies and arrangements (EIGE, 2020a).

### 5.3. Challenging Social and Cultural Norms: Increase Awareness Raising and Advocacy for Greater Recognition and Redistribution of Unpaid Care Work

Although deep-seated social and cultural norms around gender roles are slow to change, they are not intractable (Sweeney, 2020: 49). Progress towards gender equality through the redistribution of unpaid work, resources and power from men to women, would allow men to benefit from new employment and family responsibility arrangements (Fagan, 2010). Essential to this is re-valuing and destigmatizing unpaid work, which will help disrupt the gender, racialized and class underpinnings of household and care work.

- Use outreach campaigns to facilitate changes to gender norms and social attitudes, to promote men's involvement in unpaid work and to address gender segregation in the home and the workplace. Cultural expectations about fathers' involvement in childcare have been changing in many countries, including in the EECA region. However, housework offers fewer emotional rewards than childcare, with many men still not regarding housework as falling within the remit of their father/partner responsibilities (Fagan, 2010). Campaigns and approaches should include essential elements that aim to transform negative masculinities at different levels: societal, community, family and individual levels. Campaigns should also reflect the need for men to take up their share of both care and household activities. It is essential to continue to prioritize and address violence against women and girls through legislation, policies, community training and education in schools.
- It is essential to raise and strengthen employers' awareness of their responsibilities to help challenge gendered cultural norms and expectations around ideal workers and ideal carers.
- Within communities, strategies to challenge cultural norms should include creating spaces for men and boys to discuss gender stereotypes. Strategies should also encourage men's engagement in childcare and all household and unpaid work. Media campaigns (using local or national leaders, celebrities or artists) could be used to destigmatize and disrupting gendered notions of women's and men's work, norms and roles. In Kenya, for example, the non-governmental organization Femnet has found working with men and local champions for gender equality at the community level to be an effective way to transform negative social norms. Childcare providers and teachers have a role to play in

this and can help challenge gender stereotypes. More men working in childcare will also support this.

#### 5.4. Social Care Infrastructure – Investment and Prioritisation of Childcare and Social care.

- A structural re-evaluation of domestic and care work to both society and the economy is urgently required (EIGE, 2020a; WBG, 2020). Pivotal to this is the formal recognition of skills gained through paid and unpaid care work. This can support unpaid and informal carers and their transition to the formal labour market (EIGE Report 2020a).
- Ensure accessible and affordable public care services, including both childcare and social care provision. This will help create job opportunities and will reduce women's unpaid work responsibilities, which will enable their labour force participation (De Henau and Himmelweit, 2020).
- Ensure wider investment to address labour-intensive aspects of unpaid work that thwart women's empowerment and that impacts on their time. For example, invest in sustainable agriculture and rural development to reduce rural-urban inequalities, rural poverty and food insecurity and reverse or halt the ongoing depopulation of rural areas (UN, 2012). Investing in time-saving technology and infrastructure, including electrification and improved access to water, will ease the constraints on women's time in rural areas.

#### 5.5. Legal and Institutional Infrastructure: Improving Social Protection Systems

- The design and implementation of social protection programmes needs to acknowledge these constraints and specific attention should be paid to expanding the economic and social rights of unpaid workers. This would help ameliorate economic inequality between women and men and support women's empowerment. Pension entitlements could also be made more universal as opposed to being based on working life and earned salaries. In turn, this would help raise the value of unpaid work. Paid leave for care should be introduced as should entitlement to leave for caring and compensation for those who undertake such leave (Sweeney, 2020).
- Governments and organizations should strengthen social protection schemes/programmes and ensure social protection floors. Social assistance (e.g. income transfers for those living below the poverty line) and social insurance (e.g. pensions, unemployment, medical insurance) schemes and programmes should be sufficient to ensure a decent standard of living and access to basic public and social services (e.g. education, health, water/sanitation, energy, protection against food insecurity). A social protection floor should emphasize the need to guarantee services and transfers across the life cycle, including for children, the economically active with insufficient income and older persons, while paying particular attention to vulnerable groups.
- Social protection programmes should be developed to support unpaid caregivers and avoid penalizing women as caregivers. Solutions should incorporate country context.
- Unconditional cash transfers should avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes and unintentionally creating additional care-related burdens for women.
- Expand contributory credits linked to pensions and cash for care programmes to all caregivers (female and male) should account and compensate for time spent providing unpaid care (and therefore time spent out of the labour force).

## VI. Capacity-building for women's entrepreneurship development

UNECE attaches great importance to training women in entrepreneurial skills, including in new technologies, to increase women's opportunities in the formal economy. This contributes importantly to building women's capacity to gain economic independence through entrepreneurship and successfully set up, manage and grow their own businesses.

UNECE has collaborated with the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre and Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation since 2006 in providing biannual training workshops for professional women from Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia. These workshops cover support systems for women entrepreneurs and information and communication technologies (ICTs). Since the first jointly organised workshop in 2006 on Microcredit and other Support Systems for Women Entrepreneurs, over 900 women professionals from government institutions and SME support agencies, NGOs dealing with small business support and development, women's business associations and academia have received training on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and Support Systems for Women Entrepreneurs. These training workshops provide an excellent opportunity for women entrepreneurs from Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia to meet, exchange information and experience and build their networks. In 2021, two workshops on "Economic Empowerment of Women during and after COVID-19" and on "Use of ICTs for the Promotion and Implementation of Gender Equality in Small Business Development" were organized followed by another one in 2022 on "Empowering women for sustainable development".

In addition to the activities mentioned above, ECE efforts to assist member States in closing the implementation gap in gender equality and empowerment of women include:

- Increasing national capacity in producing and using sex-disaggregated statistics and gender indicators.
- Promote women's economic empowerment, particularly through the promotion of gender-responsive policies in innovation, environmental policy, energy and SMEs.
- Promote gender equality across the life-course, particularly in old age in the Regional Implementation Strategy of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.