

## Chapter 15

### Gender inequality in unpaid work

#### Key findings

- Women continue to spend far more hours than men on unpaid childcare and housework, and in most OECD countries, women spend more *total* time on paid and unpaid work than men do.
- Women's hours in unremunerated work restrict the time they can spend in paid work, a pattern seen both within households and at the cross-national level.
- Norms, attitudes and behaviours around childcare and housework change slowly over time, and children tend to mimic – in later years – their own parents' paid and unpaid work behaviours. Recognising that the unequal distribution of unpaid work is a key barrier to gender equality overall, many OECD governments are promoting fathers' parental leave-taking and care for young children, as well as a range of public awareness campaigns challenging gender stereotypes and norms.

## Women still do most unpaid work

Time is a finite resource. Long hours at home spent cooking, cleaning and caring for family limits the amount of time individuals can spend in paid work. Women have a disproportionate share of responsibility for caregiving, which can prevent them from entering full-time jobs, remaining in the labour market, and advancing their careers, earnings and pension entitlements. This unpaid work commitment can also discourage women from having children.

Women's responsibility for unpaid work also raises employers' relative cost of hiring women, which means employers may discriminate against hiring women of childbearing age due to the risk that they will leave the job to care for children. This perception stems not only from norms and social expectations around childrearing, but also from legal institutions and policies that treat men and women differently, such as maternity and paternity leave schemes in most (including OECD) countries. At the same time, stereotypes and expectations that men will heavily engage in the labour market – rather than provide family care – take away valuable time that fathers may want to spend with their family.

In OECD countries with available data, and indeed throughout the world, women do far more unpaid work than men. On average, women do the greatest share of unremunerated housework and childcare in Korea, Japan, Mexico, Portugal, Turkey and Italy, where women undertake more than three-quarters of all unpaid work. Women in Turkey and Mexico spend the most time per day on unpaid work, in absolute values, at over six hours per day on average, compared with under two hours for men (*OECD Gender Data Portal*). The gaps are typically even larger in developing countries (OECD, 2014a), where inadequate access to time-saving infrastructure (e.g., water piped into the home) and technology (e.g., washing machines) increases the total time required for unpaid work. In India and Pakistan, for example, women spend around ten times as many hours on unpaid work as men (OECD, 2014a).

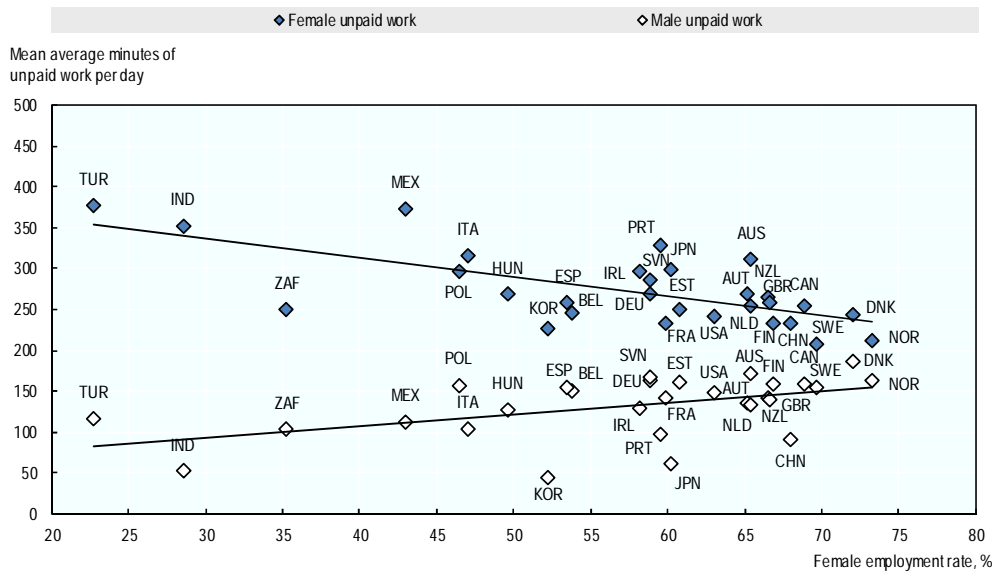
In most OECD countries, women's disproportionate hours spent on unpaid work result in women spending more hours *in total* on combined paid and unpaid work (*OECD Gender Data Portal*). In all but six OECD countries (Denmark, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden), women spend more time than men on combined hours of paid and unpaid work. The gender gap in unpaid work hours corresponds closely with the gender gap in paid work hours: in countries in which there are small differences in unpaid work, there also tend to be small gender differences in hours spent in the labour market.

## Childcare and housework obligations restrict women's paid work prospects

A disproportionate responsibility for unpaid work limits women's abilities to enter and progress in the labour market. When women – and especially mothers – enter the workforce, their responsibility for childcare and housework often impedes career progression and can relegate them to low-skill, temporary and part-time work. Across countries, at the aggregate level, women participate more in the labour market when their male partners take on more housework (Hook, 2006; OECD, 2017a). Women in countries with high female employment rates also spend fewer minutes on unpaid work than women in countries with lower female employment rates (Figure 15.1). Norway, Denmark and Sweden are OECD leaders in promoting the equal sharing of unpaid work. While women in these countries still do more childcare and chores than men, the difference between female and male time spent in unpaid work is less than one hour each day.

**Figure 15.1. Better gender balance in unpaid work correlates with greater equality in labour markets**

Mean average minutes per day in unpaid work, by gender and female employment rates, 15-64 year-olds



*Note:* Data on unpaid work are for 15+ year-olds for Australia, 15-74 year-olds for Hungary, and 25-64 year-olds for Sweden. Reference years vary across countries: Australia: 2006; Austria: 2008-09; Belgium: 2005; Canada: 2010; China: 2008 for unpaid work and 2010 for the female employment rate; Denmark: 2001; Estonia: 2009-10; Finland: 2009-10; France: 2009; Germany: 2001-02; Hungary: 1999-2000; India: 1999 for unpaid work and 2010 for the female employment rate; Italy: 2008-09; Ireland: 2005; Japan: 2011; Korea: 2009; Mexico: 2009; the Netherlands: 2005-06; New Zealand: 2009-10; Norway: 2010; Poland: 2003-04; Portugal: 1999; Slovenia: 2000-01; South Africa: 2010; Spain: 2009-10; Sweden: 2010; Turkey: 2006; the United Kingdom: 2005; and the United States: 2014.

*Source:* OECD Gender Data Portal, <http://www.oecd.org/gender/data/>, and OECD Employment Database, <http://www.oecd.org/employment/emp/onlineoecdemploymentdatabase.htm>.

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This cross-national pattern holds at the household level, as well. In OECD countries, male-breadwinner couples tend to adhere to a more traditional division of paid and unpaid labour: when a male partner works full-time, the female partner predominantly takes on housework and childcare. In dual-earner couples, in contrast, male partners take on a larger share of housework than sole male breadwinners.

Yet even when both partners work full-time, the division of household labour is rarely a 50-50 split. The female share of unpaid labour in dual full-time earner households varies across countries, for example, from 62% of all unpaid labour on average in Germany, to 88% on average in Korea (OECD, 2017a). Women generally do less unpaid housework and childcare as their share of household earnings goes up, but the relationship is not linear. There is some evidence from Australia and the United States that high-earning women do more housework in order to conform to gender norms at home, if not in the workplace – an example of so-called “doing gender” behaviour (Bittman, 2003; Bertrand et al., 2015).

Time-use surveys have not been conducted systematically over time in most OECD countries, though some countries, like Mexico, have shown a more serious commitment to this measurement tool (OECD, 2017b). This important data gap – which disproportionately discounts women’s labour – complicates efforts to understand time trends in the gendered division of unpaid work. Nevertheless, research on countries that do collect time-series time-use data suggests that gender equality in housework has increased over time since the

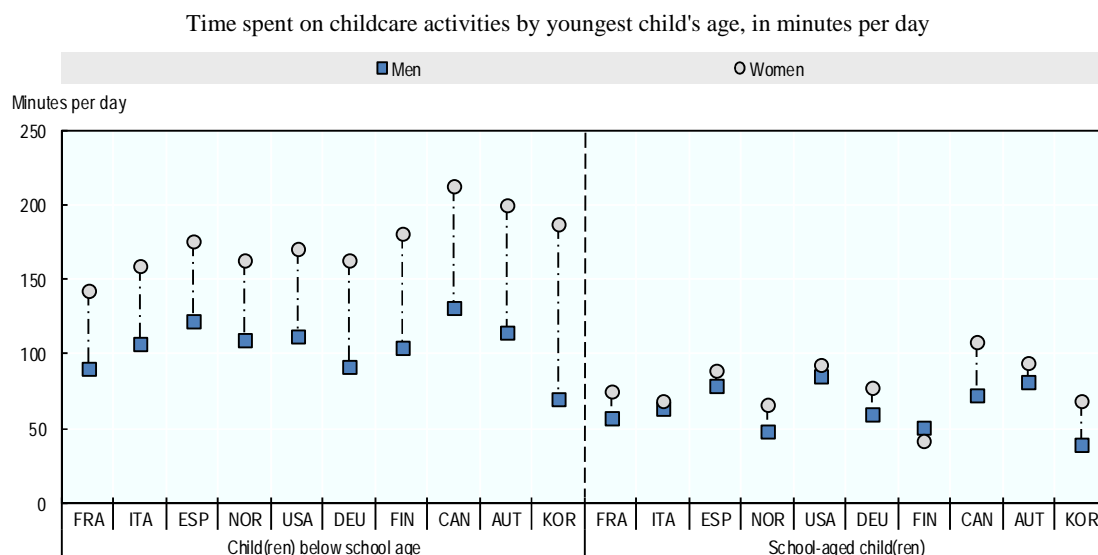
1960s, on average, around the world, but that there has been a slowing of the gender convergence from the late 1980s in those countries where men's and women's housework was already more equal (Altintas and Sullivan, 2016).

### Who does what? Determinants of the distribution of unpaid work

Many factors influence within-household responsibilities for unpaid work. High-income and highly-educated couples share unpaid work more equally, relative to lower-income and less-educated couples. Couples without children tend to have a more egalitarian approach to unpaid housework and care work across countries as well, relative to similarly-aged couples with children. Across OECD countries, women's unpaid work burden typically increases when children enter a family (OECD, 2017a).

In couple families in OECD countries, fathers spend less time with children than mothers do, but the gap diminishes as children grow older (Figure 15.2). These gaps exist not only in active childcare hours, but also simply hours spent in the presence of children (OECD, 2017a). As a proportion of total time spent on childcare, fathers spend more of their total childcare time reading, playing, talking with and teaching children (i.e., interactive care, often referred to as “quality time”) than mothers do. Mothers, in turn, devote a relatively larger share of their total childcare to physical care and supervision. Because mothers spend more time overall on childcare, mothers also spend more total quality time with young children than fathers, on average (OECD, 2017a).

**Figure 15.2. Mothers spend more time on childcare than fathers, but gaps narrow as children age**



*Note:* Countries are sorted from left to right in ascending order according to gender difference (women minus men) in time spent on childcare activities among men and women with child(ren) below school age. Data for partnered men and women (those who live in the same household as a spouse or cohabitating partner, married or not) in couples with a female partner aged 25–45, only. Pensioners and students excluded. Data restricted to “carers”, i.e. mothers and fathers who are engaged in at least one childcare activity during a time-use diary day.

*Source:* OECD (2017), *Dare to Share: Germany's Experience Promoting Equal Partnership in Families*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264259157-en>.

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Changes in the unpaid work behaviour of women, rather than men, have been most important in gradually narrowing the gender gap over time. Higher-earning women, in

particular, are increasingly outsourcing household chores, employing others (typically women) to undertake chores and care work, and buying time-saving electronic devices, which have reduced their unpaid work burden relative to lower-earning women. While fathers have increased the hours spent on childcare in some countries, men’s time spent on housework has not changed much (OECD, 2017a). Fathers’ uptake of parental leave has been found to be important in improving fathers’ commitment to childcare as children age (Adema, et al., 2015), and OECD governments are increasingly recognising that paid leave for fathers when children are very young is an important tool for gender equality (Chapter 16).

### **Box 15.1. The value of unpaid work**

Unpaid work is valuable, both in monetary and non-monetary terms. It represents money saved over what a household would have to pay for the same service in the private market. Unpaid work at home increases the overall consumption of goods and services, represents implicit income and is crucial for enabling the labour force participation of beneficiary household members (Becker, 1965, is seminal on this topic). In rural communities, agricultural production carried out within the household for family consumption has especially important value (Stiglitz et al., 2007). Consumption and production can also be more broadly defined to include the production and rearing of children, as well as maintaining a clean home (Browning et al., 2014).

Despite being a key factor driving the well-being of individuals, their families and societies, unpaid care work is excluded from traditional measures of national wealth, such as GDP (Ferrant et al., 2014; Miranda, 2011). The invisibility of unpaid care activities in Systems of National Accounts leads to underestimates of countries’ wealth production: between one-third and half of all valuable economic activity is not accounted for in 26 OECD countries, India, China and South Africa (OECD, 2011). In Mexico, for example, the economic value of unremunerated domestic and care work was estimated to be 4.2 billion pesos in 2014 – equal to 24.2% of Mexico’s GDP (OECD, 2017b).

Household satellite accounts (accounts that measure and value unpaid household labour, household production and household output) would enable a better estimation of women’s economic and social contribution. Women’s paid work contributes to 37% of global GDP, but this result only accounts for women’s participation in the market economy: unpaid work undertaken by women amounts to as much as USD 10 trillion of output per year, equivalent to 13% of global GDP (Woetzel et al., 2015). These estimates are particularly relevant in developing countries, where women perform even more unpaid care work. In Ecuador, for example, unpaid care production is estimated to equal 15% of the GDP, with 12% performed by women compared to 3% by men (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos del Ecuador, 2014).

Better time-use statistics are needed to develop and standardise household satellite accounts across countries, as time-use data are necessary for measuring “inputs” (i.e., value of time spent on unpaid care) rather than “outputs” (i.e., “goods produced”) as measurement tools (Varjonen et al., 1999). Colombia became the first country to formally acknowledge the economic contribution of unpaid care work with its passage of a law (La ley 1413 de 2010) mandating time-use surveys to account for the care economy and women’s invisible contribution to national accounts.

## **Policies can help to distribute the burden of paid and unpaid work more equally**

OECD countries recognise that gender equality requires changes on the part of men as well as women, and inequality in unremunerated work is increasingly acknowledged as a key component of broader discriminatory social institutions and norms (OECD Development Centre, 2014b). In response to the OECD Gender Equality Questionnaire, 14 countries identified the unequal sharing of household tasks as an urgent gender equality issue in their country, and the most common answer to the question, “How can governments improve men’s unpaid responsibilities at home?” was “Change men’s and boy’s attitudes towards care activities”. Correspondingly, governments have attempted to

influence gender norms around caregiving through typical family policy measures such as extensions of paternity leave for fathers, father-specific reservations of (typically shareable) parental leave and the extension of flexible work arrangements to fathers (Chapters 16 and 18), but also around education choices and school practices (Chapters 7 and 9). Focusing on men's and women's behaviours after childbirth is particularly important, as couples tend to be more egalitarian before having children but then assume more "traditional" gender roles after they become parents.

About two-thirds of OECD countries now offer paid paternity leave, a short but typically well-paid period that fathers can use within the first few months after a baby's arrival. An increasing number of countries have reserved leave periods for fathers (or a father-specific "bonus") within national parental leave schemes, which are typically a shareable period of child-rearing leave available to parents after the maternity and paternity leave periods end. It can take some time for changes in policy to influence behaviour, but evidence from several OECD countries reveals that providing fathers with their own exclusive leave entitlements can boost male take-up, especially when leave is well-paid (Chapter 16).

Germany offers an interesting example of an effort to consolidate the equal sharing of parenting responsibilities. In 2015, Germany introduced the Parental Allowance Plus (*ElterngeldPlus*) and Partnership Bonus (*Partnerschaftsbonus*) measures, which provide financial incentives for both parents to work part-time (between 25-30 hours per week) and share caregiving when children are very young. The stated goal of the programme is to give parents more time for family, support a partnership of family and vocation, promote shared parenting and ensure the livelihood of mothers (OECD, 2017a).

Of course, public policy can only go so far in promoting gender equality at home if inegalitarian attitudes, sexism and misogyny persist in society. Survey data show that public opinion towards the roles of men and women have changed slowly over time in OECD and emerging economies (OECD, 2016 and 2017b). Although fathers taking parental leave and engaging in more part-time work are steps in the right direction, they are likely to only slowly produce long-term, aggregate-level changes in unpaid work behaviours. Indeed, the effects of early gender socialisation (UNICEF, 2007) at school and at home are strong and long-lasting, and one of the strongest predictors of an individual's gendered behaviours and expectations is their parents. Across countries, adult children tend to mimic (both in attitudes and behaviours) their parents' division of paid and unpaid labour (Cunningham, 2001; McGinn et al., 2015).

In addition to implementing fathers' leave programmes, many governments have committed to trying to change gender stereotypes through public awareness-raising campaigns. Since 2013 at least seven OECD countries, including Australia, Austria, the Czech Republic, Korea, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden, have carried out national public awareness campaigns tackling gender stereotyping and norms, using a mixture of traditional and online media channels. Among these, Australia's joint public-private campaign was novel: the "Equilibrium Man Challenge" was an online micro-documentary series attempting to raise awareness of work-life balance by following a group of men who are pursuing flexible work arrangements, often to care for family members. Australia reports that the documentaries reached nearly 30 000 views, and were successful in generating awareness of flexible work and promoting uptake of flexible work arrangements in the partner organisations. Portugal and Slovenia's national campaigns specifically targeted the equal sharing of household activities and a better reconciliation of work-life responsibilities. In Sweden, several projects have been initiated exploring the ways by which gender norms can restrict boys and men with regard to opportunities in schools,

men's relationships with their children, health, social vulnerability and risk behaviour, and men's use of violence and their exposure to violence.

Information campaigns are a soft measure for changing opinions and behaviours, and evidence suggests that mass media interventions and other brief stimuli are not usually effective in durably reducing prejudice (Paluck, 2016; Broockman and Kalla, 2016). Randomised control trials have not been used to evaluate campaigns aimed at reducing gender stereotypes, but scholars have found evidence of information interventions reducing prejudice against transgender individuals in the United States (Broockman and Kalla, 2016) and reducing opposition to migrants in Japan (Facchini et al., 2016). During the design phase of information campaigns, governments should strategise about how to accurately evaluate effects on gender stereotypes to ensure the most effective use of public resources.

### **Key policy messages**

- Governments should expand the use of social policy tools to incentivise fathers' caregiving. Well-paid paternity leave and father-specific parental leave have been found to encourage fathers' leave take-up and can help to establish equitable caregiving.
- Changing stereotypes and norms around caregiving and housework is crucial but challenging. Governments should apply a range of tools, including awareness campaigns, to reduce bias against male caregiving and promote gender-equitable sharing of unpaid work.
- Governments must commit to improving data gaps in unremunerated work. This could include carrying out more frequent time-use surveys, better collecting data on fathers' leave-taking, and conducting public opinion surveys before and after public awareness campaigns and publicly disseminating the results.



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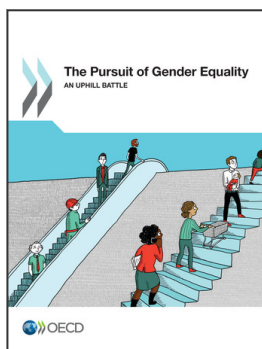
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