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Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

Women's economic empowerment in all stages of life

Ensuring women's equal rights in the economic sphere: addressing unpaid care work

Richard Teuten OBE, UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office
Deputy Director – Economic Co-operation and Growth Department

Session 111 – Women's Economic Empowerment in all stages of life

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Impact of the unequal distribution of unpaid care on the life cycle of women and girls

Adolescent girls who did 28 hours or more per week in domestic & care work spent 25% less time at school than those involved in less than ten hours per week. ILO survey 8.1% of girls worked for 14-20 hours within the house, compared with 4.7% of boys

Women up to child-bearing age struggle to juggle paid work-and unpaid work. They do 2-3 times more hours on unpaid domestic work & care work as men reducing time for paid work. 20% of Eurasian women aged between 15 and 25 are not in education, employment or training compared to only 2% of men.

Mature women find re entry to the job market difficult often returning to lower skilled, lower paid jobs. They also begin to take on elderly care responsibilities. Between 7% and 21% of informal carers reduce their working hours and between 3% and 18% withdraw from the labour market. Report from the European Commission quoted in ETUC (2015)

Lower female employment participation rates: gap narrowing in OSCE but only slowly (65.6% compared to 77.9% in 2020). If rate of progress of last decade continues it would take until 2111 to close.

Retirement: Fewer employment opportunities and lower wages result in **lower pensions in retirement**

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How has COVID impacted women's unpaid care and work

UN data from 38 countries confirm both women and men have increased their unpaid workloads. But nearly everywhere more women reported an increase than men. The extent varies with little difference in the Balkans but a marked difference in Central Asia.

The 2021 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap projects labour force participation gaps are wider than since the outbreak of the pandemic.

COVID has impacted most on lower paid service sectors, manufacturing and agrobusiness. Worldwide women's jobs are 19% more at risk than men's jobs because of the gendered distribution of employment across these sectors.

Globally nearly 62% of women-led Enterprises were strongly affected by the crisis, compared to 52% of firms led by men. Women-owned firms have been 1.4 times more likely to close (permanently or temporarily) than majority men-owned firms, likely in part driven by women's disproportionate caregiving responsibilities



The wider impact on profitability, output and stability

Empowering potential women workers is great for business:

- more women on boards increases firm profitability;
- more gender diverse workforces are more productive and more resilient;
- employer supported child care brings improvements in employee retention, productivity, job satisfaction, and loyalty, and has a positive impact on recruitment . IFC estimate potential returns on investment in quality service provision for young children can be as much as US\$9 for every US\$1 invested



The wider impact on profitability, output and stability

Empowering potential women workers is great for the economy and for stability

McKinsey argued in 2015 that, if all countries matched the progress towards gender parity of the fastest-improving country in their region they could add 12 trillion—or 11 percent—to the global 2025 GDP

Increasing female employment rates across the OECD (to match those of Sweden) could boost OECD Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by US\$6 trillion, while closing the gender pay gap could boost OECD GDP by US\$2 trillion

Addressing the career break penalty for female professionals in the UK could increase their annual earnings by £1.1 billion. This generates additional economic output of £1.7 billion annually

Inclusion of women in the economy, including accepting and recognising women's unpaid contribution to the economy can alter the distribution of political and economic power in favour of stability.



UK domestic action on unpaid care and WEE

The UK Government is helping people combine work and family responsibilities, by valuing, recognising, and supporting unpaid carers to provide care in a way that supports their own health and wellbeing, employment and life chances. Measures comprise:

- Shared Parental Leave and Pay Scheme
- Benefits and allowances for unpaid carers
- Supporting carers to make more informed decisions about work and informal care
- The UK is in the Top Ten in the World out of 190 countries on how well its domestic law and regulations help advance women's economic opportunities
- The UK's "Investing in Women Code" champions Women's Entrepreneurship in Finance: 66 signatories commit to reporting sex-disaggregated data, and taking action to better meet the needs of women's entrepreneurs
- The UK is committed to a gender responsive approach to its future trade policy including provisions in new UK bilateral Free Trade Agreements that advance WEE



UK G7 and international action to address unpaid care

Under the UK's G7 presidency

.... G7 Leaders recognised that the unequal division of unpaid care responsibilities in the home and low pay for paid care work limit women's empowerment, social and economic participation and leadership.

G7 DFIs and finance institutions [committed to investing \\$15 billion over the next two years](#) to help women in emerging markets to access jobs, build resilient businesses and respond to the devastating economic impacts of COVID-19, including through flexible working.

G7 Employment Task Force agreed : *One of the highest priorities for our ongoing cooperation will be ensuring our labour markets continue to evolve to respond to these changes and deliver decent jobs and equal opportunities for everyone.*

UK bilateral support

FCDO works with partner governments, multilaterals and the private sector to:

- encourage flexible workplace and business practices through private sector partnerships and gender lens investing
- Strengthen the focus on gender in social protection systems
- improve global evidence on how to expand opportunities for women's labour force participation,
- advocate for sex disaggregated data on time use.



What could the OSCE do?



Participating States could use the OSCE to

- Use the meeting later this year in Stockholm to build more specificity into the decisions taken at Vilnius 2011 on promoting the sharing of domestic work, and parental and caregiver responsibilities
- Share lessons and best practice on policies, laws, investments and partnerships which address pre-existing inequalities in care and build the enabling environment needed for women to remain in work and maximise their economic contribution and security

New OSCE commitments could include how governments, policy makers, business and civil society can:

- Develop services and systems that work for carers and reconcile work and family life
- Address social norms to encourage a more equal distribution of care responsibilities between women and men
- Make education and skills for women more relevant to future labour market needs