

Policy Agenda

Generation Equality Fora (GEF)

Economic Justice & Rights Action Coalition

MenEngage Alliance Joint Recommendations for Action Coalition Leaders

Rationale

Feminist economists and social policy scholars have produced rigorous evidence for decades confirming that, across the world, **burdensome aspects of care work fall disproportionately on women and girls.** This comes as no surprise. However, the scale of that inequality is staggering.

Throughout the world, women and girls continue to spend two to 10 times more time than men and boys on unpaid care work, including domestic work, water and firewood collection, and caring for children and those who are ill or old^[1]. Even in countries like Sweden and The Netherlands, known for being relatively gender-equal, women still do 20% to 60% more unpaid care work than men^[2]. Women make up 40% of the global formal workforce yet, on average, earn 24% less than men^[3]. This unequal division of care work acts as one of the primary barriers to women's economic empowerment (and empowerment in general) and relates to several key women's rights violations worldwide.

The forces threatening progress on women's human rights and gender and economic justice more broadly are, in many ways, being intensified by COVID-19 and reactions to it. **At the level of the household, the pandemic has exposed and exacerbated patriarchal dynamics, with a documented surge in cases of men's violence against women and children, and an increase in the burden of care work borne by women and girls.**^[4] Research makes clear the extent to which responsibilities for household work, nursing the sick, and caring for children and the elderly have only further intensified for women and girls during COVID-19.^[5]

As we understand patriarchal structures and white supremacy to be central to the current functioning of neoliberal capitalism - evident in the mountain of unpaid care work on which corporate profits rest - the market cannot be an effective mechanism through which to correct gender, racial, or ethnic inequality. Instead, active policy interventions that seek to restructure the current, unequal state of the economy and society are fundamental to a feminist approach.

As this discussion of economic contexts makes clear, the "current, unequal state of the economy and society" is not only destroying the planet and exploiting and killing women, girls and transgender and gender non-conforming people; the lives of cisgendered, heterosexual men and boys too are threatened in many ways by neoliberal capitalism, especially those marginalized by forces of economic and racial oppression. Male-focused gender transformative work can help men and boys to see their own interests in the systems change agenda being advanced by feminists across the world. Part of this agenda identifies the need to build the power of organized labor, and gender work with men in labor unions may be useful in this regard.

Achieving gender equality will mean that men and boys take on their equal share of the world's paid and unpaid care work. This will require that boys and men, from early childhood, are socialized in ways that seek to transform the gendered division of care work specifically, and the gendered division of labor

in general. In order to advance women's economic empowerment and gender justice, it is essential to examine and challenge the stereotypical notions of masculinities that are currently inhibiting men's and boys' care work, and to work with men and boys to take up their share of caring and domestic work.

Increasingly, more women and girls are entering the labor market worldwide than ever before, compelling the increased need for men and boys need to uptake their fair share of not just paid and unpaid care work, but of the household workload as well. **Women continue the work "double shift"** to varying degrees in every context globally, and this necessitates a fundamental shift in the cultural norms and stereotypes around men's roles and responsibilities as equitable partners in the private domain.

Research has shown that positive male parental involvement leads to improved maternal and child health, as well as stronger and more equitable partner relations, and increases the likelihood that sons will grow up to be more gender-equitable and involved fathers, and that daughters will be empowered^[1]. In addition, male engagement in caring has benefits for men themselves, and research shows that men who are more active in caring roles are healthier, happier and less violent^[2].

To achieve the necessary transformative impact, work with individual men and boys must be **accompanied by efforts to challenge both the personal and structural barriers to the equitable division and fair share of caring**. These include factors that inhibit women and girls from developing paid careers at the same pace and quality as men can – the infamous 'sticky floors' and 'glass ceilings' – which often result in women doing more unpaid care.

Insufficient public services, infrastructure and social protection policies are leading causes of the unequal division of paid and unpaid labor. Progressive policies, such as (paid) parental leave, can help even out this division, and when these include paternity leave, they encourage men's caring, help transform deeply rooted societal attitudes to caring and promote greater equality in the household, workplace and society as a whole^[3].

Existing workplace cultures, driven by the global capitalist economy, lead to a system that values growth and production more than caring for people and the environment. There is an urgent need to sensitize and mobilize men and boys as critical citizens and advocates, alongside women and girls and people of diverse gender identities, in order to transform the systems and institutions around them and support policy change, including on unpaid care.

The work of developing policy advocacy and programming to promote and support boys' and men's greater involvement in the care economy and fostering care-giving norms must continue. And more fundamentally, a vision of sustainable and equitable life-making, collective care and social solidarity beyond the patriarchal masculine-feminine binary is needed. **The related demands of climate justice, economic justice and gender justice require solidarity with feminist visions of economic transformation for intersectional gender justice, is to envision relations of care for each other and for the planet that transcend the masculine-feminine binary separating production from social reproduction**.

As a recent paper by Oxfam reports, many **"ecofeminist and indigenous ethicists have argued that care is a determinant aspect of the interdependency between communities, society and the environment"** and that not only an ethics but also a politics of care must be centred/foregrounded "when the aim is to support communities to exercise their power and care for themselves and the planet."^[6] But, as the report continues, "[c]aring for the planet, however, is too often framed as a 'feminine' attitude and rejected by machista (male chauvinist), patriarchal value systems that devalue and erase the work of women,

translating into an eco-gender gap.”^[7] It is this binary distinction between masculinized ‘work’ and feminized ‘care’ that must be overcome.

In this sense, parenting work with men is inherently political, not just in terms of shifting the domestic division of care work, but also in relation to highlighting the linked responsibilities of families and the State in the provision of care.

The need to address the structural dimensions of care economies is imperative. This formulation can help to broaden perspectives on and understanding of men’s differing relationships to and responsibilities within care economies, beyond the “fatherhood” frame and its emphasis on men’s familial responsibilities toward children. Such a formulation enables a consideration of the unpaid and underpaid feminized care workforce, transnational care supply chains, the long-term needs of care-dependent older persons and the basic infrastructures of water, sanitation, food security, transport and accessible, affordable and quality early childhood education and care that support the provision of unpaid care and domestic work.

If gender transformative work with men and boys is to embrace this broad formulation and address the patriarchal dimensions of the issues outlined above, then it must take care not to be complicit with a public policy discourse on the care economy that centers attention on the family and men’s “irresponsible” masculinity. For, it is this discourse of men’s “irresponsible” masculinity on which the “family values” ideology of neoliberalism has, in part, relied. The restructuring required by the transition to a post-carbon economy also requires new visions of the labour and social relations of care, for both current and future generations.

Tactics

- Promoting public services and social protection policies that support families and enable the redistribution of care work within households.
- Redistributing care-work from poorer households to the state by financing, providing and regulating care services.
- Promoting more progressive parental leave policies that are well-paid, non-transferable, and adequate in length.
- Increasing government uptake of programs and campaigns that seek to transform social norms around caregiving, including through institutionalizing such initiatives within education and health care systems.
- Promoting family friendly policies in the private sector, including parental leave, child care and flexible working arrangements.
- Work through the health system to change social norms around caregiving, for example by involving men more in pre- and post-natal care, and using these visits as an entry point into fatherhood and parenting programs etc.
- Increasing the government uptake of programs and campaigns that seek to transform social norms and stereotypes around caring, including through institutionalizing such initiatives within education, healthcare, and social protection systems.
- At the state level, implement progressive laws supportive of men’s caregiving, including paid, non-transferable parental leave, that is adequate in length and includes childcare provisions.
- Introduce caring as a key competency in education systems and promote diverse job skills for all, as well as transform the stereotypical gendered division of labor.

- Work with the media to promote non-stereotypical, caring, non-violent depictions of men and boys.
- Promoting public services and social protection policies that support families, including acknowledging diversities, and enable the redistribution of care work within households.
- Redistributing care work from poorer households to the state by financing, providing and regulating care and social protection services.
- Promoting family-friendly, *taking into cognizance of diverse family structures*, policies in the private sector, including parental leave, childcare and flexible working arrangements.

^[1] Ferrant, G., Pesando, L.M. and Nowacka, K. (2014) Unpaid care work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes, issue paper, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Development Centre.

^[2] Levtov, R., Gaag, N., Greene, M., Kaufman, M. and Barker, G. (2015) State of the world's fathers: A MenCare advocacy publication, Washington, DC: Promundo, Rutgers, Save the Children, Sonke Gender Justice and MenEngage Alliance.

^[3] Banks, M. (2006) Moral economy and cultural work, *Sociology*, 40(3): 455–72.

^[4] Donald, K. and Moussié, R. (2016) Redistributing unpaid care work: Why tax matters for women's rights, Brighton: Institute for Development Studies (IDS).

^[2] World Bank (2015) Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, female % of 24 hour day, World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.TIM.UWRK.FE?view=map>

^[3] Levtov, R., Gaag, N., Greene, M., Kaufman, M. and Barker, G. (2015) State of the world's fathers: A MenCare advocacy publication, Washington, DC: Promundo, Rutgers, Save the Children, Sonke Gender Justice and MenEngage Alliance.

^[4] UN Women. 2020. "COVID-19 and Ending Violence against Women and Girls." New York, NY: UN Women.

^[5] Bolis, Mara, Anam Parvez, Emma Holten, Leah Mugehera, Nabil Abdo and Maria Jose Moreno. 2020. "Care in the Time of Coronavirus: Why Care Work Needs to Be at the Centre of a Post-Covid-19 Feminist Future." Oxfam Briefing Paper. Oxford, UK: Oxfam International.

^[6] Piaget, Kim, Clare Coffey, Sebastián Molano and Maria José Moreno Ruiz. 2020. "Feminist Futures: Caring for People, Caring for Justice and Rights." Oxfam Discussion Paper. Oxford, UK: Oxfam International. p10

^[7] Ibid. p10

^[8] UN Human Rights Council Resolution 35/10, Accelerating efforts to eliminate violence against women: engaging men and boys in preventing and responding to violence against all women and girls, June 2017

^[9] Ferrant, G., Pesando, L.M. and Nowacka, K. (2014) Unpaid care work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes, issue paper, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Development Centre.

^[10] Levtov, R., Gaag, N., Greene, M., Kaufman, M. and Barker, G. (2015) State of the world's fathers: A MenCare advocacy publication, Washington, DC: Promundo, Rutgers, Save the Children, Sonke Gender Justice and MenEngage Alliance.

^[11] Banks, M. (2006) Moral economy and cultural work, *Sociology*, 40(3): 455–72.