Care of dependents has often been seen as the primary responsibility of women and girls which has major impacts on their ability to earn a remunerative income. In the informal economy, with lack of access to social protection, poor service delivery and weak infrastructure, the poverty risks for women and girls are immense. Conversely, increasing the availability of care facilities can significantly increase the amount of time women can spend on productive activities, engage in social dialogue, access training and other measures which can increase their income opportunities. Care facilities can therefore contribute in reducing informality by economically empowering women and enabling them to access the formal economy. While care of dependents has often been seen as a private responsibility and a low priority for public policies, innovative schemes have been developed around the world. Multiple partnerships, including subsidies from public sources are essential for the long term viability and sustainability of these programmes.
KEY CHALLENGES

- Unpaid work burdens and its impact on informality
- Gender dimensions of care responsibilities
- Informal care strategies
- Bringing children to work

Unpaid care burdens and its impact on informality. Conflicting family and work responsibilities are one of the serious obstacles to decent and productive work for a large share of women and men in both developing and developed countries. Care for dependants, in particular for children, is often the most pressing concern for millions of poor households and an issue with important consequences for gender equality objectives and in economic and social terms.

The reasons behind this vulnerability are complex and multifaceted. Informal economy workers generally do not benefit from social security benefits and other social assistance benefits, which can act as safety nets and support poor families facing the additional costs of care for dependents. Furthermore, poor people often live in situations where care of others is particularly time consuming, because access to basic infrastructures and services (such as access to water, public transportation, health care and education facilities) is limited and labour saving devices (such as cooking and cleaning utensils) are rarely available. Time availability for paid work becomes scarce, particularly for women, who therefore often have no other option than to accept informal, home-based, flexible, low paid and low status jobs with serious decent work deficits.

Given the scale of the informal economy in developing countries an increase in the availability, affordability and quality of care services - especially for children but also for other dependants such as elderly, sick or disabled family members - is likely to provide important returns in terms of gender equality, on the one side, and contribute to opening opportunities to the formal economy, on the other. The importance of social care services for workers with family responsibilities is clearly recognized in ILO Convention No. 156 (1981) and Recommendation No. 165 on Workers with Family Responsibilities, which call upon all Member States to take measures “to develop or promote community services, public or private, such as child-care and family services and facilities (Article 5). The support for work-family balance, generally missing in the informal economy, heavily impacts women’s labour force participation rates and can contribute to breaking the poverty transmission cycle to the next generation of women and men.

The economic and social benefits of investing in family friendly policies and in expanding access to care services to informal workers should not be underestimated. The box to the right provides some examples of these benefits.
In spite of the potential returns mentioned above, affordable, state supplied care services are largely unavailable in most developing countries. Where they exist, they often do not take into account the specific needs of certain categories of informal workers, for example in terms of proximity to workplaces or coverage of long or unusual working hours. According to estimates, almost half of all countries have no formal programs for children under 3. Poor women with young children, particularly in female headed households, pay the highest consequences of the lack of support to their family responsibilities.

- **Gender dimensions of care responsibilities.** While care of dependent family members is in fact a concern for both men and women, women bear most of the heavy burden of unpaid care work and consequently see their ability to earn a livelihood more seriously limited than men. With little exceptions, empirical evidence from around the world shows that the increasing female labour force participation has not been accompanied by a substantial change of men’s traditional roles towards household and care-giving responsibilities. Together with policies aimed at expanding women’s equal access to decent work and to care services, advocacy campaigns and other policies that promote a more equal participation of men to family related tasks are likely to have positive impacts both in economic and social terms.

In virtually all countries women tend to work longer hours than men and to perform a disproportionate share of household and family care activities. This trend is further exacerbated by demographic and social changes, including the increase of female headed households, rupture of extended family networks due to urbanisation and migration, growing care needs due to the increasingly aging population and to the spread of HIV and AIDS in many developing countries. Family responsibilities often keep women from engaging into regular paid work and prevent girls from attending school. Unpaid work including the care of others is therefore often an important factor pushing women into flexible, informal, precarious, unprotected and poorly remunerated employment (see also brief on Gender Equality). The correlation between the presence of young children and the female labour participation is today largely acknowledged both in developed and developing countries, while it does not negatively affect men’s labour force participation. Absence of childcare options has been for example cited as the main obstacle to take formal jobs by 40 per cent of mothers working informally in the slums of Guatemala City. As discussed above, when they do not prevent women from getting into paid work, family responsibilities still normally determine, and de facto limit, the type, location and working arrangements of women employment. Surveys on the use of time show that they often also stretch women’s working hours at the expense of other activities such as leisure and rest. They also often confine women to less productive, less dynamic, female dominated activities, often also related to the care of others, such as domestic work.

In absence of external support, families address care-giving needs by leaving their dependants unattended, resorting to the paid or unpaid help of others, or taking them at the workplace. All these coping strategies come with important downsides for individuals and societies as discussed below.

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Informal Care Strategies. Lack of affordable care solutions for dependent family members not only pushes women into informal work but often has important consequences for the perpetuation of poverty across generations. When reliable, low-cost, out of home child-care services are not available or not affordable, poor families often use “substitute mothers”, frequently older daughters or elderly women. In other cases they rely on the paid services of other women, employed through informal arrangements, and often with even more precarious working conditions. These ‘substitution dynamics’ are often embedded in age, ethnicity, nationality or class issues, with the domestic employee often suffering from multiple layers of discrimination. (see also brief on Domestic Workers). This gendered phenomenon, part of the broader “care economy” concept, has clear intergenerational economic and social consequences, as it transfers the costs of care from one woman to another who de facto sees her opportunities for education and/or employment prospects jeopardised in the longer term. Additionally there are consequences for girls’ education since family responsibilities have a significant impact on girls’ school attainment rates in developing countries.

Informal caring arrangements may also prove inadequate both for the person who receives and the person who provides for care, as they can be unreliable, unsuitable and unsafe. For example, care is often delegated to elderly women (such as grandmothers) or very young girls, who might be psychologically and physically unfit to carry this burden and respond adequately to the different needs of children, disabled or sick family members. In certain cases, caring needs arising from the absence of mothers due for example to labour migration, contribute to changing roles and responsibilities among women and men within the households. Men are therefore challenged by tasks which for them are unusual, unfamiliar and often socially unacceptable. They are often not prepared to take up child caring roles and when they are ready to do so, they frequently have to face the social pressure of disapproving peers, employers and traditional societies. Studies conducted in several Latin American countries for example, show that men tend to see themselves as breadwinners rather than caregivers and that they believe this role of ‘providers’ exempts them from most domestic or care work. Even when family friendly options exist, such as paternity or parental leave opportunities, empirical evidence shows men are often openly or indirectly discouraged by employers and peers to use these benefits. This division of roles and responsibilities within and outside the household is often also endorsed by women, who in many cases show a certain resistance to men’s involvement in domestic and care work. Policies aimed at supporting men’s greater involvement in care giving activities as well as advocacy campaigns for social and cultural change are also important complementary instruments to guarantee a better work and family balance for women and men.

5 In a study of care providers for AIDS-affected people in South Africa, two male carers spoke of how men in the community saw them as ‘deviants’, doing unmanly duties, and sometimes teased them as a result. Case reported in Emily Esplen: “GENDER and CARE Overview Report BRIDGE, February 2009
Bringing children to work can be an entry point for child labour

Bringing children to work. Many working mothers have no other option other than taking their children to their workplace. In India it is estimated that 7 or 8 million children accompany their parents (mostly mothers) to building sites. In Indonesia, 40 per cent of working women care for their children while working. This practice has important negative consequences in a number of areas. First and foremost it contributes to informality, including homework and casual work, as it largely limits mothers’ options and takes away time from paid work. Having children at work reduces the time and investments women can put into important activities such as training, market development, registration and expansion. Given the poor working conditions most informal workers are engaged in, this practice also involves the possible exposure of children to hazardous, unhealthy or unsafe environments, and it increases the risk of child labour.

Providing for affordable care services is often seen as a costly and low priority exercise for the meagre public budgets of many developing countries. Some policymakers consider it to fall under the private responsibility of women and their extended family networks. Yet it is has been shown that the introduction of progressive and innovative measures to support care responsibilities can not only provide long term returns in terms of gender equality and economic development and growth, but it also often requires limited financial and human resources.

8 Managing Diversity in the workplace: training package on work and family. ACT/EMP and TRAVAIL, ILO Geneva 2009
9 Cassirer, N. and Addati, L. op.cit. 2007
10 Ibid.
Family of farmers, Vietnam.
8.4 Childcare: An Essential Support for Better Incomes

Strategies to support families to meet their basic care needs, and therefore allow women to have more and better access to decent and productive employment, usually focus on the following broad policy objectives: making family responsibilities more compatible with work and making workplaces more compatible with family responsibilities. To reach these broad objectives a wide range of complementary initiatives can be implemented by different actors to:

- improve and increase the availability, affordability and quality of services for the care of dependant family members;
- reduce families vulnerability to the economic and social costs associated with the care of dependents;
- promote and support cultural and attitudinal changes toward traditional roles and responsibilities of women and men within and outside the household, by creating a conducive environment for a more equitable share of care activities among sexes.

Flexible schooling arrangements. Informal workers and entrepreneurs often cannot afford or are sometimes not aware of existing care services and structures. The few care facilities that exist often do not respond to their specific needs, (for example, they may be too costly, far away or do not cover the long working day of informal workers) or/and they do not provide quality services. They may be understaffed or have staff with poor working conditions who are undertrained or not qualified to care for young children, sick, disabled or elderly dependents.

The re-organisation of existing school hours to meet the needs of specific categories of workers is for example a rather simple - yet effective and often affordable - measure to ease parents’ full and productive participation to paid employment. Several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have started programmes to lengthen the school day. In Chile, for example, as of 2006, there were some 7,000 schools with extended hours. Another programme in Costa Rica, “Segunda Casa”, has started with some success. However both examples are facing...
sustainability challenges. In both cases, support from existing infrastructure offered an enormous advantage. Flexible arrangements regarding for example parents-teachers consultation can also enable informal workers to keep more regular contact with schools minimising the impact on the time spent on productive activities and increasing parents' ability to participate in the care services. Similarly, co-location of pre-school care services within existing schools can have the positive effect of enabling older siblings to take younger children to the care facilities without absenting themselves from school. In Kenya, primary schools include a unit for pre-school education, known as Baby Classes, for children from the age of 3. This arrangement has been possible through a multi partnership approach: parents' associations, religious and welfare organizations, private firms and individuals cooperate with local authorities for the creation, financing and management of these units. These partners have also played a key role in training pre-school teachers.

- **Targeting specific informal economy groups.** Mobile populations within the informal economy including migrant and seasonal agricultural workers have specific constraints. In Mexico, the Programa de Educación Preescolar y Primaria para Niños y Niñas de Familias Jornaleras Agrícolas Migrantes, PRONIM, was initiated in 1997 to guarantee children access to education and school attainment despite their mobility and their families' difficult living conditions. The program targets boys and girls from the age of 3 to 14. It encourages intercultural and gender-sensitive education for children of indigenous, mestizo, migrant and settled, agricultural day-workers parents. Public schools are expected to receive these travelling students and ensure that their studies are not interrupted.

- **Multiple partnerships.** The ILO has compiled information on some innovative initiatives developed by governments, employers and workers to make childcare available to vulnerable groups of workers in the informal economy. Most of these initiatives provide – in addition to education – meals and health services, therefore contribute substantially to reducing the economic and social insecurity of the family. Participation and consultation of parents in designing childcare services is highlighted as indispensable to their success. Services directed to vulnerable groups have to consider the often very limited contributory capacity of their beneficiaries. None of the cases analysed by the ILO study fully rely on parental contribution. Medium and long term economic sustainability is often a challenge, in spite of the growing demand for such services. While external donor support is often invaluable (though rarely sustainable) to subsidize these services, multi-partnership seem to provide for viable solutions to sustainability concerns. The Chilean child care centres for seasonal agricultural workers (CAHMT) is a good example of such partnerships scheme, where national government offers finance, oversight and standards, local government contributes building space, national professional foundations and associations provide nutritional, educational, and health services and materials, and other actors contribute supplementary funds and resources.

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11 On the decision to close most of the schools under the programme, see the article http://www.nacion.com/ln_e/2009/marzo/02/pais1891090.html
12 For more details see the Resources section to access ILO-UNDP, Work and Family: Towards new forms of reconciliation with social co-responsibility op.cit.
13 For more details see the Resources section to access ACT/EMP and TRAVAL, op.cit. 2009
14 For more details see Resources section to access: ILO-UNDP, op cit, Chile 2009
15 For more details see Cassirer and Addati, op. cit. 2007
In Peru, the Wawa Wasi (children’s homes) program, launched in 1993 with the support of external donors (UNICEF, IDB, EU and WFP), has been institutionalized by the government and has created around 20,000 low cost, home-based or community based child-care centers for children under 3 years living in extreme poverty. Apart from allowing low income families to access quality care services, the major advantage of this scheme is the creation of employment for local women. In Colombia, community initiatives originally organised by women to take care of neighbours’ children, have been institutionalised by the government in the form of child care programmes, run by the family welfare institute (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familial, ICBF).

Community partnerships and community outreach in partnership with formal enterprises, trade unions and NGOs have also produced some innovative strategies for supporting care of dependents. For example the San Salvador Mayor’s office child-care initiative for market and street vendors has been put in place. A network of childcare facilities in close proximity to the markets has been established, geographical proximity being an important aspect of the scheme’s success. The municipality pays staff salaries and daily operating costs are covered, in part, by fees paid by parents.

Mobile pre-school services. An interesting innovation from India has seen the development of mobile pre-school services and the promotion of co-operatives for social and child care, including family cooperatives, which are able to respond to the needs of working parents in the informal economy. The voluntary organisation Mobile Crèches operates childcare centres for workers on construction sites and slums of Delhi, Gurgaon, Noida, Ghaziabad, Faridabad. Day-care is integrated with supplementary nutrition, healthcare, and age appropriate learning programme, followed by School Admission and Support. Mobile Crèches open day-care centres in agreement with the employer at construction sites. The builder then provides accommodation, electricity and water and the crèche only lasts as long as construction on the site. Financing comes from construction contractors, local grants, foreign donors and private fund raising.

The Hogares Comunitarios Program (HCP), established in Guatemala City in 1991, aimed at alleviating poverty by providing working parents with low-cost, quality childcare within their communities. Each daycare center was established by a group of families who chose a local woman to provide childcare in her home for up to 10 of their children. The government provided food for the children in addition to subsidizing the caregiver’s services. The evaluation of the program highlighted that beneficiaries’ mothers were more likely to have salaried - and possibly more stable - employment than mothers who use other childcare arrangements, which often resulted in higher wages. Also benefiting from the program were the caregivers themselves, who tended to be older, less educated mothers with possibly fewer opportunities to work outside the home. Moreover, the evaluation pointed out at the significant positive impact of the program on the diets of participating children.

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16 For more details see Resources section to access: ACT/EMP and TRAVAIL, op. cit.
17 For more details see Resources section to access ILO-UNDP, Work and Family: Towards new forms of reconciliation with social co-responsibility. Op. cit
18 For more details see Resources section to access: ACT/EMP and TRAVAIL, op. cit.
19 For more details see the Mobile Creches organization http://www.mobilecreches.org
20 For more details see the Resources section to access: IFPRI, City profile, op. cit. 2001
Childcare initiatives that include meals and health services contribute substantially to reducing a family’s economic and social insecurity.

Complementary services. Innovative approaches to family-work balance often include a combination of different yet complementary elements and services. The government-led National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme in India includes the provision of on-site crèches among other worksite facilities, such as medical aid, drinking water and shade. This has been seen as an essential pre-requisite to enable more women to participate in the programme, and an important innovation since many employment guarantee schemes tend to favour the participation of men for a variety of reasons.

From Rhetoric to Reality: Promoting Women’s Participation and Gender Responsive Budgeting

This is a Joint UN programme carried out in Nicaragua with support from the Spanish MDG fund: Gender Equality Window.

As part of its broad strategic objective of promoting gender equality in the country, the project includes the provision of child care to informal workers, such as seasonal agricultural workers involved in coffee harvest. These initiatives adopt a multi partnership approach, through the support of local and national governments, employers and workers organisations.


Social partners working together. Both employers’ and workers’ organisations are also promoting innovative policies to make work and family responsibilities easier to balance. These initiatives are based on the recognition of the importance of family friendly policies to attract women into the labour market and therefore make a more efficient use of the human capital. The International Organisation of Employers deals with the issue as part of diversity management. Making the business case for creating family friendly workplaces, the ILO Bureau for Employers’ Activities and the Condition of Work and Employment Programme (TRAVAIL) recently issued a training package on work-family policies. Similarly, the ILO Bureau for Worker’s Activities (ACTRAV) developed a training manual to support trade unions to include family friendly policies in the collective bargaining negotiations.

Promoting Decent Work for care workers. Importantly, improving the working conditions of care workers is an essential element for creating decent work opportunities in this sector, and will invariably help to enhance the quality of services provided. Recognising the education and training needs of informal workers of all ages in the informal care economy, including domestic work, is an important aspect of improving their working and living conditions. Domestic workers play an indispensable role in delivering care services and, yet are exposed to very poor working and living conditions. The ILO recently adopted international standards to support decent work for domestic workers, while also drawing attention to the enormous economic and social contribution that domestic work provides to development and growth (see brief on Domestic Workers). Similarly, the ILO is researching issues related to the shortage of care and health workers in developing countries.

Policies that aim to reduce the costs and risks of caring for dependents range from conditional or unconditional cash transfer initiatives to investment in basic services and social infrastructure.

Reducing families’ vulnerability to the cost of care, through social protection measures. Informal economy actors not only face difficulties in accessing available and affordable care services, but they are often the most vulnerable to the economic and social risks associated with care of dependents. Additional expenses for children or other dependant family member, including sick (including people affected by HIV and AIDS) or elderly people, often have catastrophic effects on poor households’ security. Poor families have limited capacities to purchase goods (such as processed food, labour saving tools such as cooking and washing utensils, private transportation means, etc) or services (private childcare, health services for the ill or disabled, domestic help) that would reduce the time they have to spend in unpaid household work. As noted earlier, they often have no access to social assistance and contributory social security schemes. Policies that aim at reducing the costs and risks of caring for dependents range from conditional or unconditional cash transfer initiatives to investment in basic services and social infrastructure. The latter include affordable public transportation to and from care giving facilities or water and energy supply to isolated areas. These can considerably reduce the amount of time spent on unpaid care activities and therefore have a positive impact on the amount of time possibly spent on remunerative employment.

Some Latin American countries, such as Chile and Mexico, are for example, experimenting with new forms of social protection through programmes that include early childhood components in the form of subsidies to enable access to childcare facilities for informal workers, among others. Day care centres are also used as important means to deliver nutritional and health related support to vulnerable households. In Chile the comprehensive protection system for early childhood, (Sistema de Protección Integral a la Primera Infancia Chile Crece Contigo), known as “Chile grows up with you”, created in 2006 offers benefits such as a prenatal family subsidy and preferential access to childhood development services, as well as free, quality childcare for all children under the age of two, whose mothers are either working or seeking employment. The program is particularly relevant to informal economy workers as it targets the most vulnerable 40% of the population. In particular the program includes as a target group mothers who are studying, especially teenage mothers, in order to retain them in the school system. Through this program approximately 900 new centres have been built every year, and by the end of 2009, 3,500 free, public child care centres will care for 70,000 infants, up 500% increase over the public sector supply in 2005. Some offer countrywide services.

Opening up income opportunities for women. Any program or project aiming to promote more and better income opportunities for women in the informal economy is likely to impact the household capacities to pay for care (private care -institutional or individual) for dependant family members. These policies cover a wide range of possible initiatives, from anti-discrimination campaigns for trade unions, employers and informal workers so to better equip them identifying and addressing discrimination on the basis of sex or family responsibilities, to the extension of social security to excluded

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8.4 CHILDCARE: AN ESSENTIAL SUPPORT FOR BETTER INCOMES

22 For more details see Resources section to access: UNESCO, “Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2009”

23 For more details see Resources section to access: ILO-UNDP, Work and Family: Towards new forms of reconciliation with social co-responsibility. Op.cit
groups such as domestic workers or home workers. Each of these specific issues have been covered by separate briefs in this Policy Resource, but it is important here to mention that all these policy interventions, when well designed, have the potential to directly or indirectly affect the way families and individuals can reconcile caring and work activities.

Promoting cultural and attitudinal changes about the traditional roles and responsibilities of women and men. Measures that aim to change behaviours and attitudes are essential to enable a more equitable division of household tasks. While these strategies are for the medium and longer terms since attitudinal shifts take time, they have the potential to significantly impact on how those in the informal economy organise their private and productive lives. They encompass a wide range of gender equality initiatives, from education and training programme, school curricula design to parental benefits and parental leave among others. Such measures are based on the recognition of the imbalance in tasks and responsibilities among men and women in the private and public spheres and of the consequent impact this has in both economic and social terms. Gender equality initiatives should recognise the caring roles of men as well as of women and offer both viable and targeted solutions to achieve a better balance of work and family. Family friendly policies cannot focus on women only, as this would simply perpetuate the existing gender division of labour. In designing family-friendly policies policy makers should consider the different impact these have on both women and men. Education and awareness raising initiatives through formal and informal education should focus on challenging traditional attitudes, while recognising the implication social change has for both women and men. An example of community education programme aimed at discussing the costs of “traditional masculinity” is the Brazilian-based Program H (“Hombres”). This NGO programme was set up in 1999 in collaboration with young men from low-income communities in Brazil and Mexico. With the support of a specifically designed training manual and awareness raising materials, the programs questions the assumption that men are not care givers and focuses on how young men themselves define care-giving and the place it has, and should have, in their daily lives. The program has been more recently complemented by program M (“Mujeres”), which involves young women into the design of awareness raising materials (including a radio broadcasted soap opera) on a variety of gender equality issues such as parenthood and shared care-giving.24

24 For more details see Resources section for Emily Esplen: “GENDER and CARE Overview Report BRIDGE, February 2009
8.4 CHILDCARE: AN ESSENTIAL SUPPORT FOR BETTER INCOMES

Women with her baby working in a small dressmaking workshop, Bolivia.
This section provides a list of resources which can enable the reader to delve deeper into the issue. Details of the good practices cited above can be accessed here. The section comprises international instruments, International Labour Conference conclusions, relevant publications and training tools. A bibliography of references in the text is further below. There may be some overlap between the two.

ILO instruments and Conference Conclusions

Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981, (No 156)
Employment (Women with Family Responsibilities) Recommendation, 1965, (No 123)
Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951, (No 100)
Equal Remuneration Recommendation, 1951, (No 90)
Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958, (No 111)
Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Recommendation, 1958, (No 111)

ILO 2009 Conclusions concerning Gender Equality at the heart of Decent Work, International Labour Conference 98th session, Geneva

Relevant Publications

Cassirer, N. and Addati, L. 2007 Expanding women’s employment opportunities: informal economy workers and the need for childcare, ILO Geneva


Hein, C. 2005 Reconciling work and family responsibilities: practical ideas from global experience, ILO TRAVAIL, Geneva,

ILO 2010 Achieving MDG4 through Decent Work


ILO Global Job Crisis Observatory,


http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0017/001776/177683e.pdf

Tools

ILO 2009 Training package on Work and Family. Managing Diversity and Equality at the Workplace, ACT/EMP-TRAVAIL.


http://actrav.itcilo.org/english/library/socdiag/v07000.htm

For more information see the ILO Conditions of Work and Employment Department website http://www.ilo.org/travail/lang--en/index.htm

References

Cassirer, N. and Addati, L. 2007 Expanding women’s employment opportunities: Informal economy workers and the need for childcare, ILO Geneva

Esplen, E. 2009 Gender and Care Overview Report BRIDGE, February 2009

Esplen, E. 2009 Gender and Care Overview Report BRIDGE, February 2009

Hein, C. and Cassirer, N. 2010 Workplace solutions for childcare, ILO Geneva

Hein, C., 2005 Reconciling work and family responsibilities: practical ideas from global experience, ILO TRAVAIL, Geneva,


ILO Global Job Crisis Observatory,


http://nrega.nic.in/Nrega_guidelinesEng.pdf


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