



Women and the Future of Work – Taking care of the caregivers

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Introduction

Over the last 20 years, important achievements have been made with regards to gender equality in the world of work. At least 50% of the world's women are in paid wage and salary employment – an increase of 10% since the 1990s. In 2014, women held 24% of the world's senior management positions, compared to 19% ten years ago.

What these achievements do not tell us is who is providing the caregiving that is helping these women make inroads into the labour market. Possibly these women are working double shifts, one at the workplace and another at home. There is also evidence of a redistribution of tasks between men and women in households. However, chances are that there are other women helping out. Women of all ages are the principal providers of care for children, the elderly, the disabled, and for whole families and communities, at home and in private and public institutions. In the context of ageing societies, public health care deficits and cut-backs in public services, there is growing demand for care work in private households and an increased pressure on women's time as care givers. To a large extent, it is also thanks to the labour of, predominantly female, domestic workers that other women have succeeded in occupying the paid labour market in increasingly larger proportions and in breaking the glass ceiling. When women engage in paid work outside the home, they either have to reduce their rest and leisure time, enlist the help of partners or other family members or – if the family or woman could afford it – pay someone else to do the unpaid care work that they would normally do.

Women, work and the future of care – an ILO priority.

The world's population has now surpassed 7.2 billion, of which 1 billion are over the age of 60. The fertility rate in developing countries is still robust. The ILO's work on changing demographics can offer guidance as to the size and scope of the problem. By 2050, the world's population will surpass 9 billion and the number of people aged over 60 years and over will have tripled (see [ILC 102nd Session, 2013, Report IV](#)). Most of these people will require a

As the ILO implements its strategy on domestic work, collaborating with national constituents and other stakeholders around the world, the Office has identified many policy questions of concern to constituents. In response, the Office has combined efforts to answer these frequently asked questions, drawing from country level experience, empirical research, and knowledge-sharing. The «work in progress» series will showcase the Office's research work in progress on these policy areas.

wide range of care services, not only health and medical care, but also everyday personal and household care. While traditionally in many countries until today, family members are expected to provide this care, many elderly live on their own and depend on public or private care services. At the same time, women's labour market participation continues to increase and is promoted by the development and gender equality agenda.

The double-burden of women points to the persisting difficulties for women to balance employment and income generation with taking care of family and household responsibilities. Issues related to the provision of care cut across all aspects of ILO work, and have been identified in the first wave of reflections and consultations as central to the ILO Director General's centenary initiative "Women at Work." Overcoming gender stereotypes and discrimination and valuing the work women do – paid and unpaid – are inextricably linked to care work. It has become clear that if issues related to care, in all its manifestations, are not properly identified and addressed, there will not be any significant progress in the achievement of gender equality in the world of work.

Understanding care work

Care work is broadly defined as looking after the physical, psychological, emotional and developmental needs of one or more other people. It spans both public and private spheres and is to be found in a variety of settings and across formal and informal economies. Care work involves a wide range of actors. Children and older persons are often both unpaid caregivers themselves, as well as recipients of care (conditional on their dependency).

The care economy has enormous potential for employment generation in the coming years, and it will be necessary to strengthen it to continue to improve gender equality for all women, including domestic workers. Home-health and personal care workers are among the fastest growing occupations. According to the US Bureau of Labour Statistics (2012), this sector is expected to grow by 70% over the next ten years in the United States of America. Similar trends can be witnessed across the world, according to the [ILO's World Employment and Social Outlook 2015](#).

An important area for ILO work will be strengthening the care economy through promoting decent jobs in this sector. Actuarial studies will be needed to project the number of people needing care and therefore allowing for better planning of the number of jobs to be created. As such, ILOs work on the care economy will link to the Open Working Group for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) number 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; number 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; and number 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. But it is not only the direct jobs created in the care economy that will lead to employment. Finding solutions to care work is essential if women are truly to have equal opportunities in the world of work. The more the burden of care is shared between women and men, and with government, workers and employers in shaping policies in areas such as maternity, paternity, childcare and elder care needs, the more female labour force participation can be expected. A concerted look is necessary to study all the dimensions of the care economy so that potential trends can be considered and guidance given on the way ahead.

Gender equality and decent work for domestic workers – ILO achievements.

There are over 53 million domestic workers across the world and 83% of them are women. The caregiving role of domestic workers enables other women to enter the labour force, allowing them to reconcile work and family responsibilities. Thus domestic workers' contributions to economic growth is substantial as dual-income families become more common. Nevertheless, domestic work is situated at the low end of the care economy, due to generally low-wages, few benefits and little protections. In part this results from exclusion of domestic workers from labour and employment rights in many countries, which effectively legitimizes discrimination of a female-dominated class of workers. This unequal situation reflects and perpetuates a deep-seated social perception that the unpaid care work that women do for their families, has little value to economies and societies.

Consequently, assuring decent work for domestic workers establishes the principle that domestic workers, like any other workers, are entitled to a minimum set of protections under labour law. This redresses not only the historic undervaluation of domestic work in particular, but of women's work in general. The mere fact of regulating domestic work is an acknowledgement of the crucial social and economic contribution of care work. In turn, ensuring decent working conditions for domestic workers will contribute to reducing gender inequalities in the world of work while improving the quality of care received by households.

This principle is at the heart of the ILO Global Strategy to make decent work a reality for domestic workers. The strategy was launched after the adoption of the ILO Domestic Workers Convention No. 189 in 2011. The ILO aims at strengthening national institutions as well as domestic workers' and employers' organizations. Moreover, the ILO supports the ratification and implementation of Convention 189, raises awareness of domestic workers' rights and builds a knowledge base on domestic work. So far, the ILO has assisted 36 countries covering over 30 million domestic workers.

Situating domestic work in care work

Domestic work is defined as work for and in a household or households. Historically and across a diverse range of countries, women domestic workers from disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups have tended to provide care services to meet the needs of the more powerful social groups, while their own needs for care have been neglected or downplayed. The majority of domestic workers provide personal and household care; they may cook, clean, take care of children, the elderly and the disabled, and attend to domestic animals in private homes.