

# WHOSE TIME TO CARE?

## UNPAID CARE AND DOMESTIC WORK DURING COVID-19



## Introduction

### THE PROBLEM

Globally, as more people are at home than ever, due to pandemic-related measures and lockdowns, the need for household chores and care has multiplied. But who is shouldering these increased burdens, and by how much have they increased? To answer this question, UN Women has been gathering new and eye-opening data.

Prior to COVID-19, data on how much time women and men spent on unpaid care and domestic work was scarce. What we knew was that, on an average pre-COVID-19 day, **women already spent about three times as many hours on unpaid domestic work and care work as men.**

But the pandemic has complicated everything – increasing demands for care and domestic work and impeding traditional in-person data-gathering. To ensure a gender-responsive and evidence-based recovery, UN Women has been leading efforts to collect, analyse and disseminate timely data on the gendered impacts of COVID-19, and government responses.

Available data from 38 countries overwhelmingly confirm that both women and men have increased their unpaid workloads, but women are still doing the lion's share. Women are also taking on a greater intensity of care-related tasks than men. Meanwhile, parents are getting more help from daughters than sons. Worryingly, more women than men are leaving the workforce, perhaps as a result of these increased workloads. The economic fallout, including loss of jobs and livelihoods, is expected to push millions of additional people into extreme poverty – and women and

girls stand to be the hardest-hit. By the end of this year, a shocking **13 percent of the world's women and girls – 469 million people – will be living in extreme poverty.**

### WHAT SOLUTIONS ARE BEING INTRODUCED?

To monitor pandemic-related solutions, UN Women has co-developed a global **COVID-19 Gender Policy Response Tracker** with UNDP. It reveals that few governments have addressed the increased demands of unpaid care and domestic work in their COVID-19 responses – with a mere **8 per cent of all existing social and labour market measures** focused on this domain.

That said, a number of targeted solutions have been adopted in response to the care crisis. Argentina has increased monthly child allowance payments; Australia and Costa Rica have ensured that childcare services remain open during lockdown; Austria, Cyprus and Italy have granted additional family leave to affected working parents, and Canada, Spain and Republic of Korea have introduced cash benefits for parents who are affected by school and day care closures. Costa Rica, Germany and Italy have introduced measures such as paid reductions in working time and work-sharing arrangements while expanding access to paid parental and sick leave, including for self-employed workers.

### UN WOMEN'S DATA RESPONSE

Teaming up with national and international partners, UN Women has rolled out **Rapid Gender Assessment surveys**

(RGAs) in nearly 50 countries, using a variety of phone and online methods. Reports from the [Asia-Pacific](#), [Europe and Central Asia](#), and [Arab States](#) regions are now available.

The [Women Count](#) programme at UN Women has been monitoring how these results are being used to improve the design of COVID-19 programmes and interventions, and is documenting 'use cases' that integrate RGA results within gender-responsive planning, programming,

or advocacy work amid COVID-19. At least seven countries have used the findings of the RGAs in their COVID-19 response plans. For details, see the statistical note at the end of this brief.

Timely gender data is helping countries prioritize the rights of women and girls. But these initiatives must be urgently scaled up and coupled with policy measures to ensure we can build back better from the pandemic.

## UN WOMEN'S RAPID GENDER ASSESSMENTS: LEADING GENDER-RESPONSIVE DATA COLLECTION ON COVID-19

### Timely response to gender data gaps



### What's next?



### Data in action



FINDINGS SUMMARIZED IN  
**3 regional reports**  
ON GENDERED IMPACTS OF COVID-19

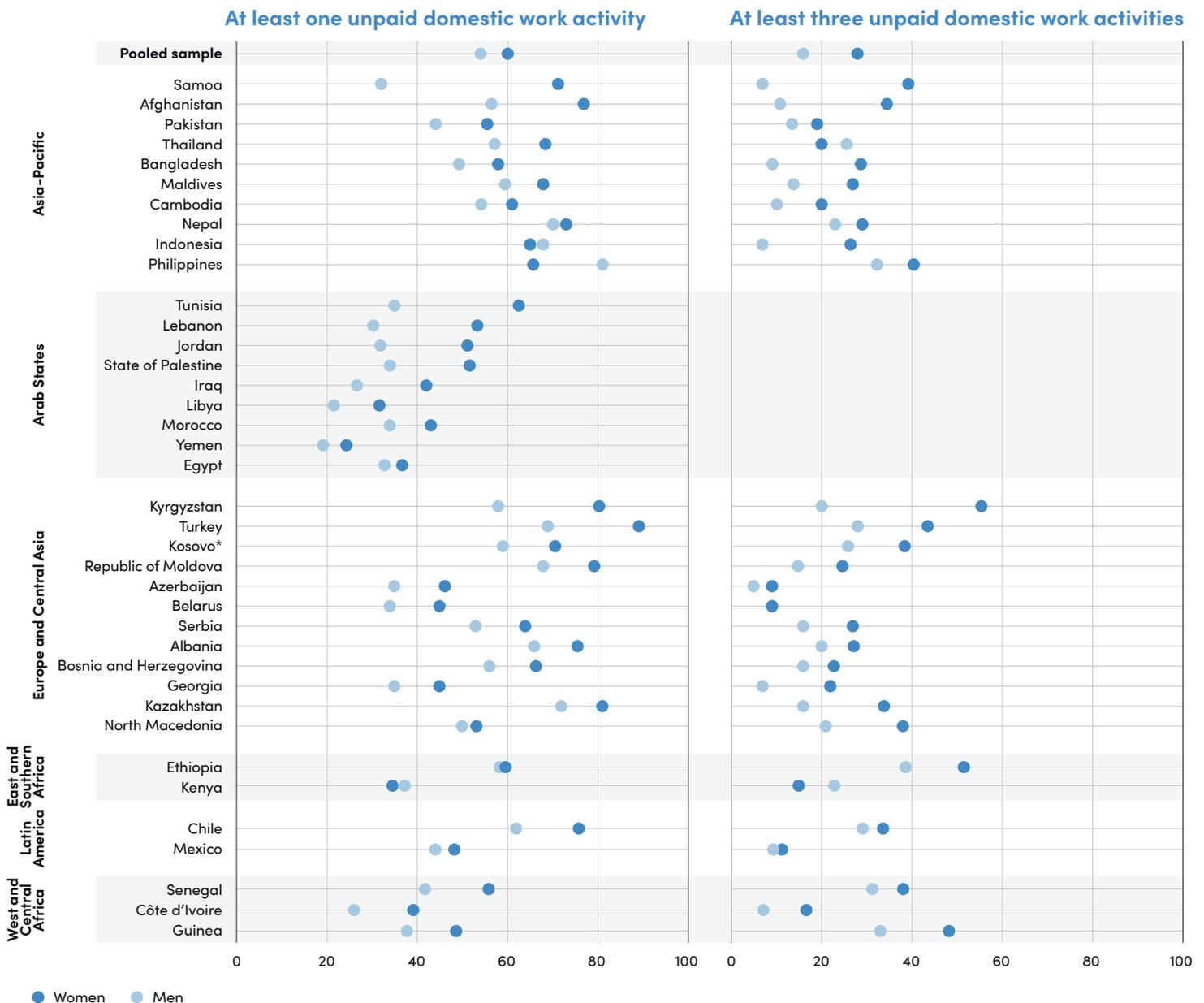
# Who's doing more unpaid domestic work?

Amid COVID-19, household chores and other domestic work have new purpose and value, and are being increasingly recognized as a form of essential work. Chores like cooking, shopping for groceries and cleaning, particularly to prevent infection, are all taking longer than ever. Although both women and men are bearing the increased burden, 60 per cent of women and 54 per cent

of men reported that they have increased the amount of time they spend on unpaid domestic work since the pandemic began. The intensity of unpaid domestic work (defined as performing at least three domestic related activities) has also increased. Since the spread of COVID-19, 28 per cent of women and 16 per cent of men say the intensity of their domestic work has increased.

**FIGURE 1**

**Proportion of people who reported an increase in time spent on unpaid domestic work since COVID-19, by sex, country and number of activities (percentage)**



\* All references to Kosovo are made in the context of UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

Source: UN Women Rapid Gender Assessments on the Impacts of COVID-19, April–November 2020.

Notes: 1. Preliminary estimates based on data from 38 countries as of November 2020. 2. Estimates for countries in Arab States refer only to currently married population. Data on reported increase in time spent on at least three unpaid domestic work activities was not collected. 3. See statistical note on preliminary estimates at the end of this brief.

## WOMEN ARE MORE LIKELY TO INCREASE THE TIME SPENT ON HOUSEHOLD CHORES

### Cooking and serving meals



Women		Men	
32%	Increased	18%	
17%	I don't usually do it	48%	



### Cleaning (e.g. clothes, household)



Women		Men	
45%	Increased	35%	
13%	I don't usually do it	33%	



### Shopping for the family



Women		Men	
25%	Increased	22%	
23%	I don't usually do it	29%	



### Decoration, repairs and household management



Women		Men	
29%	Increased	24%	
29%	I don't usually do it	33%	



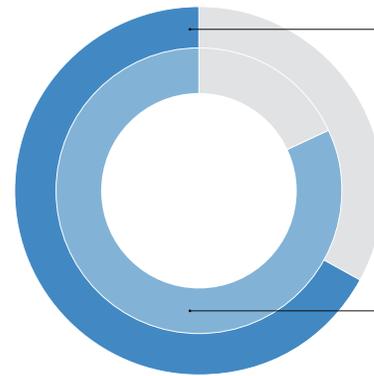
### Pet care



Women		Men	
13%	Increased	14%	
60%	I don't usually do it	61%	



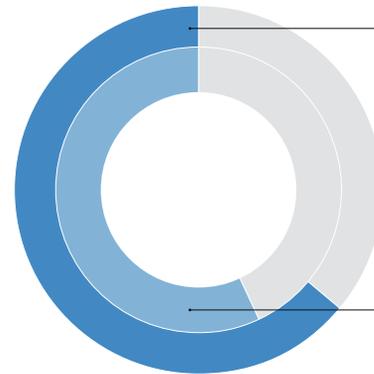
## EVERYBODY IS PITCHING IN AT HOME, BUT WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE BEARING THE HEAVIEST BURDEN



67% of women said their spouse/partner is more involved

82% of men said their spouse/partner is more involved

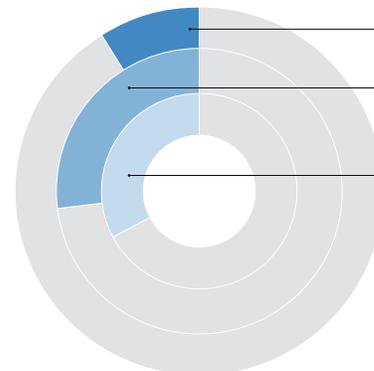
## SOCIAL NORMS ARE STILL AT PLAY DURING COVID-19



64% of parents noted a higher involvement of daughters

57% of parents noted a higher involvement of sons

## DOMESTIC WORKERS FACE OVERWORK OR JOB LOSS



9% hired a domestic worker

27% asked their domestic worker to work longer hours

33% let their domestic worker(s) go

Source: UN Women Rapid Gender Assessments on the Impacts of COVID-19, April–November 2020.

Notes: 1. Preliminary estimates based on data from 38 countries as of November 2020. 2. The proportion of population who said their spouse/partner is more involved does not include the Arab States as data was collected only among women. 3. See statistical note on preliminary estimates at the end of this brief.

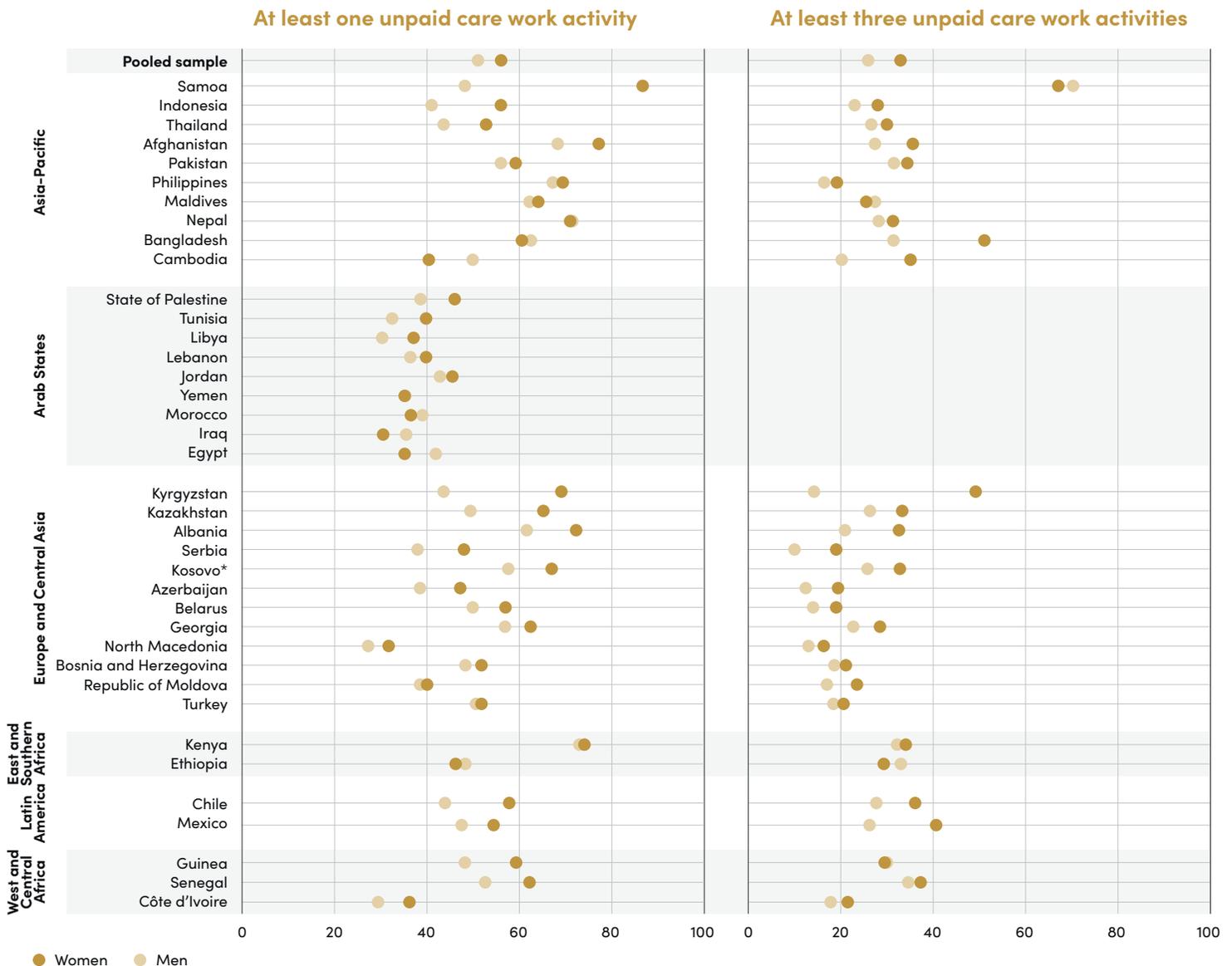
# Who's spending more time caring for loved ones?

The COVID-19 global crisis has exposed the fact that the world's economies and our daily lives are made possible by the unpaid care work of women and girls, which is often invisible and under-appreciated. With children out of school, intensified care needs of elderly and ill family members, and overwhelmed health services, the demands for care work have skyrocketed. Unpaid care is a key dimension of pandemic responses – enabling both well-being, education and income-generation, particularly given homeschooling, elder vulnerability and work-from-home arrangements.

Since the pandemic began, 56 per cent of women and 51 per cent of men have increased the time they spend on unpaid care work. Interestingly, men were slightly more likely than women (21 versus 20 per cent) to have increased the time they spend assisting elderly, sick or disabled adults. But despite men's increased contributions, women are still carrying the heaviest load: 33 per cent of women versus 26 per cent of men increased their time spent on at least three activities related to unpaid care work.

**FIGURE 2**

**Proportion of people who reported an increase in time spent on unpaid care work since COVID-19, by sex, country and number of activities (percentage)**



\* All references to Kosovo are made in the context of UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

Source: UN Women Rapid Gender Assessments on the Impacts of COVID-19, April–November 2020.

Notes: 1. Preliminary estimates based on data from 38 countries as of November 2020. 2. Estimates for countries in Arab States refer only to currently married population. Data on reported increase in time spent on at least three unpaid care work activities was not collected. 3. See statistical note on preliminary estimates at the end of this brief.

# EVERYONE IS HELPING OUT AT HOME, BUT WOMEN STILL DO MUCH MORE

## Caring for children, including feeding, cleaning, physical care



Women		Men
36%	Increased	30%
36%	I don't usually do it	48%



## Teaching

Women		Men
32%	Increased	29%
40%	I don't usually do it	44%



## Playing with, talking to and reading to children



Women		Men
34%	Increased	28%
36%	I don't usually do it	42%



## Affective/emotional support for adult family members



Women		Men
34%	Increased	31%
27%	I don't usually do it	35%



## Assisting older/sick/disabled adults with medical care, feeding, cleaning, physical care



Women		Men
20%	Increased	21%
52%	I don't usually do it	54%



Source: UN Women Rapid Gender Assessments on the Impacts of COVID-19, April–November 2020.

Notes: 1. Preliminary estimates based on data from 38 countries as of November 2020. 2. See statistical note on preliminary estimates at the end of this brief.

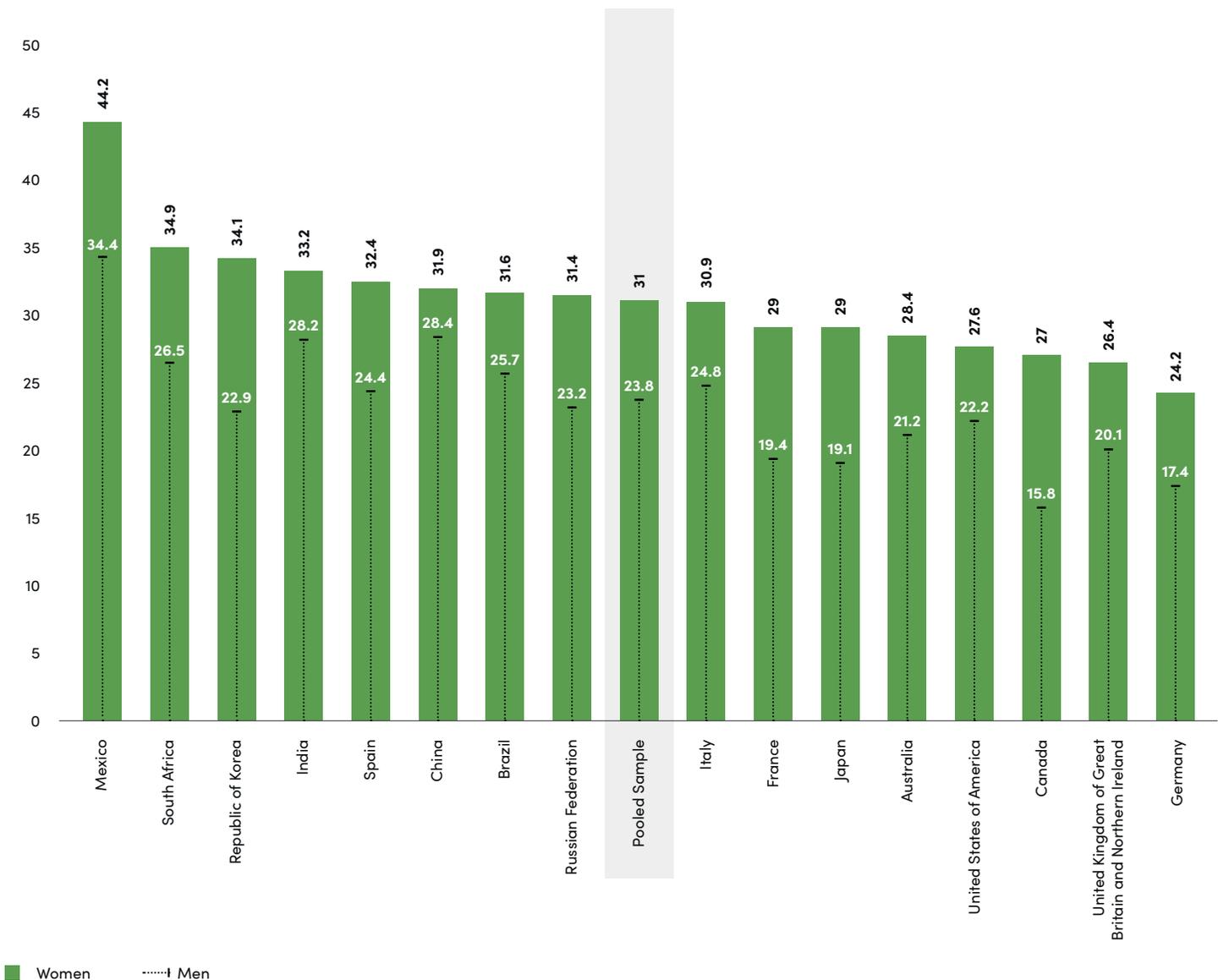
# Women do more in each country, but how long are their days?

Both women and men report increased time spent on unpaid care, but it is important to know who is spending more additional time overall. [Research by Ipsos for UN Women](#) in 16 countries reveals that before COVID-19, the average time spent on childcare by women was approximately 26 hours per week; but since the pandemic began, they spend approximately 31 hours. Men, on the other hand, reported spending approximately 20

hours per week on childcare before the crisis, which has since increased to 24 hours. On average, women have thus added an extra 5.2 hours on average per week for childcare, compared to 3.5 extra hours for men, with the gender gap varying widely across countries. This means that, in most countries, women are spending 30+ hours per week solely on childcare – almost equivalent to the average time spent at a full-time job per week.

**FIGURE 3**

**Average hours spent per week on childcare during COVID-19, by sex**



Source: Ipsos poll fielded 22-25 October 2020.

Note: The sample size for the poll is 14,509 individuals aged 16 to 74 from 16 countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, United Kingdom. The age group for Canada and USA was 18 to 74 years. Childcare responsibilities were proxied by specific tasks and activities such as physical care of children, overseeing them and teaching and remote learning. The hours per week spent in childcare prior to the pandemic and during COVID-19 was collected using a seven-point scale: 0 hours per day; 1-2 hours per day; 3-4 hours per day; 5-6 hours per day; 7-8 hours per day; 9 hours or more per day and not applicable. The data presented in the figure are only for women and men who reported spending any time in childcare – a sub-sample of 8,000 individuals.

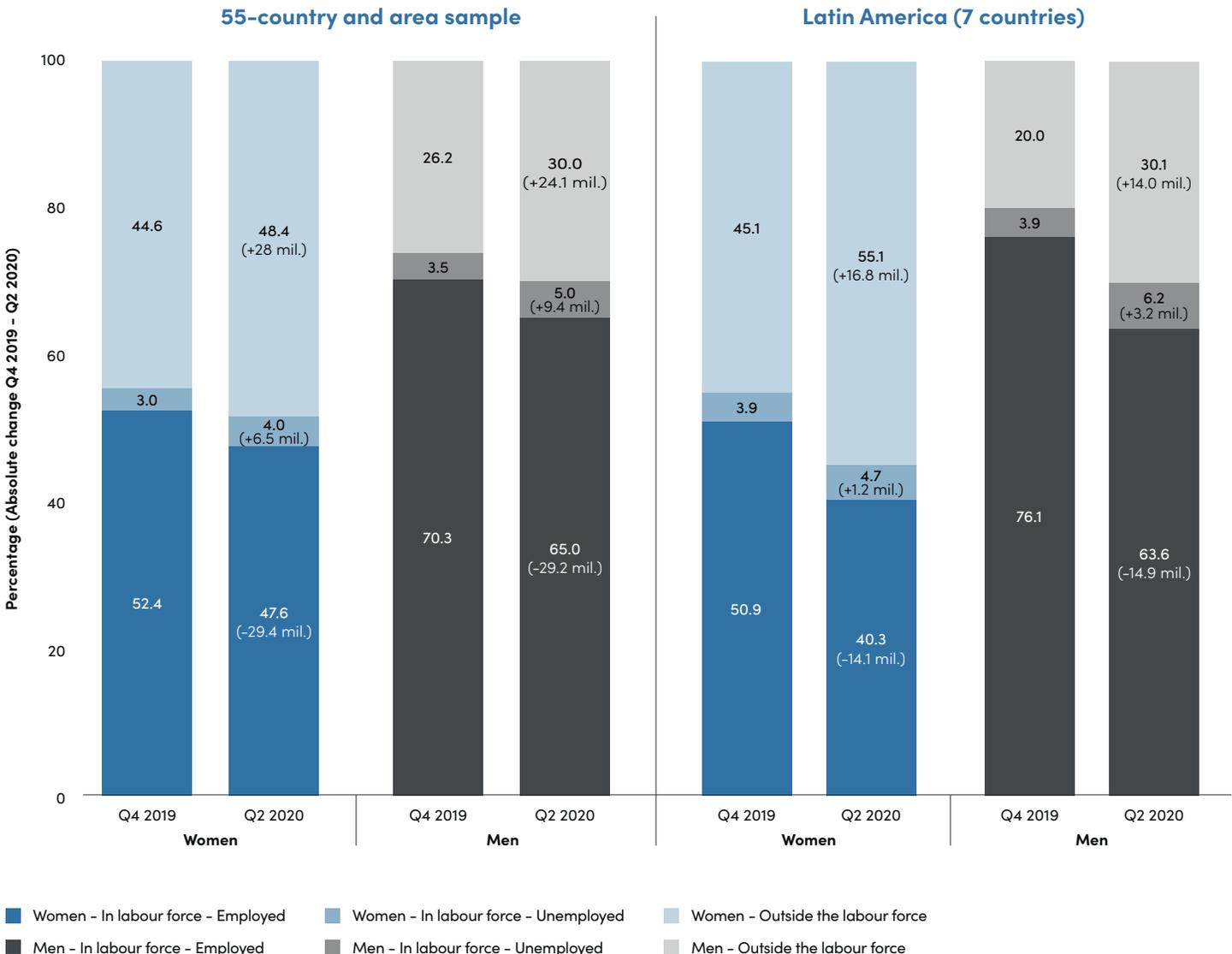
# Who's giving up paid work?

More women than men are shifting from a mix of paid and unpaid care work to full-time childcare, foregoing paid work. [In an analysis of labour market data by UN Women and the International Labour Organization](#), emerging evidence from 55 high- and middle-income countries reveals that, between the fourth quarter of 2019 and the second quarter of 2020, the unemployment rate among those aged 25+ increased from 5.5 to 7.7 per cent among women and from 4.7 to 7.1 per cent among men. Nevertheless, greater numbers of women- who are already

less likely to be in the workforce - have left the labour market altogether (28 million women aged 25+, compared to 24.1 million men aged 25+). At the end of Q2 2020, based on this sample of 55 countries, there were 1.7 times as many women as men outside the labour force (321 million women, compared to 182 million men). The difference is highest in Latin America, a region hard hit by the economic fallout of COVID-19, with 83 million women outside the labour force (up from 66 million before COVID-19) compared to 40 million (up from 26 before COVID-19) for men.

**FIGURE 4**

**Percentage distribution of the working-age population by labour force status and sex, ages 25+, Q4 2019 and Q2 2020**



Source: UN Women calculations based on the ILOSTAT database.

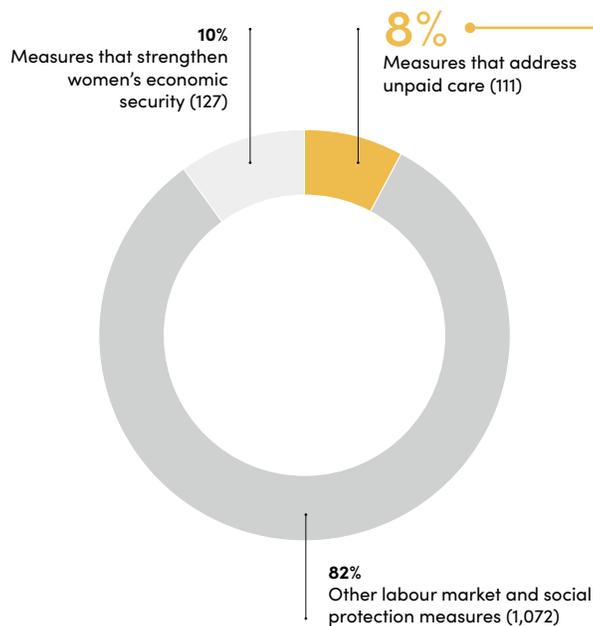
Note: This chart shows the share among the total population aged 25 and over who is employed, unemployed and out of the labour force, by sex. The corresponding unemployment rate which is computed as the share of the labour force population that is unemployed is not shown but provided in the text above.

## How is the response measuring up?

Many women face a double burden – trying to keep their jobs and sources of income while dealing with rising unpaid care and domestic work demands. And without decided action, there is a real danger that the pandemic **will erase the important but fragile progress that women have made over the past decades.**

Women’s unpaid care and domestic work is often invisible but has value. **In fact, 16.4 billion hours are spent on unpaid care work every day** – the equivalent of 2 billion people working 8 hours per day without pay. The actual value of this work amounts to 9 per cent of global GDP – equivalent to USD 11 trillion.

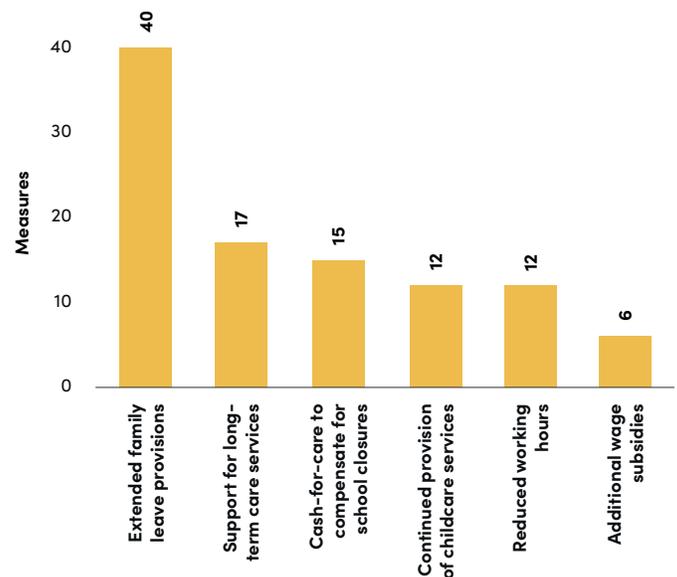
### UNPAID CARE IS A FRACTION OF SOCIAL PROTECTION AND LABOUR MARKET MEASURES



Source: UNDP-UN Women Global COVID-19 Gender Response Tracker.

How governments respond to such increased workloads will be key to fuelling a more equitable recovery. Yet the **UNDP-UN Women Global COVID-19 Gender Response Tracker** reveals that while many governments have taken unprecedented measures to contain the economic and social fallout of the pandemic, the bulk of responses have been blind to women’s needs. The tracker shows that 206 countries and territories have taken a total of 1,813 measures to address the economic and social fallout of COVID-19. But only 85 have taken measures to strengthen women’s economic security, and only 60 have taken measures to address unpaid care. Only 111 measures directly address unpaid care work – **a mere 8 per cent of all social protection and labour market measures taken in light of the pandemic.**

### MOST COMMON POLICY MEASURES COUNTRIES HAVE TAKEN TO ADDRESS RISING UNPAID CARE DEMANDS



## Showing how much we care: Where do we go from here?

The comparable data gleaned from the RGAs of these 38 countries is eye-opening and confirms what we already suspected – that women are still doing the bulk of unpaid care and domestic work. Less predictable was how many women are abandoning paid work in light of the increased demands. This will have long-lasting impacts on women’s economic empowerment. These trends also threaten to reverse decades of progress towards the ideals of the

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as the Sustainable Development Goals.

So, where do we go from here? Gathering this data has been challenging, but UN Women understands its importance for informing policies and shaping government responses. We have another 45 RGAs currently underway or planned. We will also continue to

support countries to conduct time-use surveys and use them to influence policy. We are supporting the analysis of the time-use survey in Colombia, which is now being used to inform its national care policy, while the results of Uganda's first time-use survey have been integrated in its national development plans. We are continuing to track responses through the UNDP-UN Women Global COVID-19 Gender Response Tracker.

We urgently need action and investments in gender data to ensure that every woman and girl does count. We need more RGAs, time-use surveys and gender-focused research to track trends, quantify increased workloads, measure short- and long-term pandemic impacts, and monitor the effectiveness of responses.

This pandemic has drilled home that the world's economies and our daily lives simply cannot function

without the unpaid care and domestic work that is predominantly borne by women and girls. It is high time that this work be recognized, reduced, redistributed and, ultimately, supported through concrete policy action, including through broad investments in the care economy. Adequately remunerating care workers—the majority of whom are women— would be an important step in priming the pump of economies world-wide. It would mark an important shift towards care economies globally. Governments should also: **adopt policies that support access to childcare services and recognize these as essential; extend paid family and sick leave; introduce flexible working arrangements and “cash-for-care” programmes that compensate parents during school or day-care closures; and tailor economic support packages to affected women.** It's time for governments to show how much they care about women's unpaid care and domestic work.

## Technical note on UN Women Rapid Gender Assessment Surveys

The estimates showcased in this brief, unless otherwise noted, were generated from UN Women RGAs on the impacts of COVID-19 implemented with national or regional partners. The cut-off date for country data used in the brief is 7 November 2020.

The brief covers 38 countries: nine in Arab States, 10 in Asia and the Pacific (A-P), 12 in Europe and Central Asia (ECA), two in Latin America (LA), two in East and Southern Africa (ESA), and three in West and Central Africa (WCA).<sup>2</sup> Results focus on relative changes (and not exact measures) since the COVID-19 crisis. Aggregates presented refer only to surveyed countries and do not represent regional or global averages. The timing of surveys may explain differences across countries due to the intensity of COVID-19 spread and related lockdown measures.

Sampling design differed across countries and regions. The 'target population' covered both women and men aged between 18 and 86. Data collection approaches also varied, ranging from web-based surveys and

computer-assisted telephone interviewing. The median sample size was 1,729 – ranging between a low of 612 (Samoa) and high of 8,198 (Nepal).

A **global reference questionnaire** was developed and adapted to regional or country contexts. For questions related to unpaid care and domestic work, only A-P and Chile questionnaires covered all of the activities identified as unpaid care and domestic work based on the **International Classification of Activities for Time Use Statistics 2016**. Other regions/countries collapsed or excluded some of the activities when the survey was conducted, mainly due to practical/operational considerations.

Population estimates for 2020 come from the **World Population Prospects** for the reference populations, which were used as weights for the aggregates, except for Serbia and Kosovo\*, where publicly available official data from their national statistical offices were used. Education and location were also used, depending on the region or country.

Read the **full version of this technical note**.

1. UN Women conducted the survey in all countries where national governments were supportive and where a partner (public or private) could be identified for survey roll-out.
2. Based on UN Women's regional classifications (<https://www.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are>; Accessed 5 November 2020).

\*All references to Kosovo are made in the context of UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).