



## **Pandemic sees men participating more in unpaid care, but the world is still 92 years away from achieving equality in unpaid care work between men and women finds *State of the World's Fathers* report**

*Global report produced by gender equality organization Promundo, co-coordinator with Sonke Gender Justice of MenCare: A Global Fatherhood Campaign, suggests taking structural action now is the key to closing the care gap*

*“We cannot go back to the failed man-made policies that have resulted in the fragility we see around us – in healthcare systems, in social protection, in access to justice, and in the wellbeing of our planet.”*

—United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on March 15, 2021, during the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women

**Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2021** – The world is 92 years away from achieving equality in unpaid care work between men and women, finds the *State of the World's Fathers* 2021 report.<sup>1</sup> This new analysis of global data notes that no country in the world has achieved equality in unpaid care between men and women, and no country in the world has a policy or target date to achieve it. Men's full participation in care work is part of a necessary and urgent revolution to center care in economies, societies, and lives and to advance gender equality. This year's *State of the World's Fathers* report puts forward seven recommended actions to achieve a more caring, equitable, environmentally sustainable, liveable, and economically just world post-COVID-19; the recommendations are inspired by the vital work of feminists, women's rights organizations, and social justice organizations around the world.

Societies and economies depend on care, whether at home, in childcare or elder care, or in broader social structures and economies. However, care work has long been invisible, unpaid, or underpaid, and underfunded, and it is disproportionately performed by women. Globally, women do three to ten times more *unpaid* care and domestic work than men and also make up 70 percent of the paid, global care workforce.

COVID-19 has thrown these care inequalities into stark relief. Women have continued to do the lion's share of care work around the world during the pandemic which has increased in total. There has also been a well-noted surge in domestic violence perpetrated by men against women during lockdown measures; and women have also faced disproportionate job loss, all told, adding new and undue strains on mental health, economic security, and physical wellbeing.

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<sup>1</sup> The *increase* in men's time per day spent on unpaid care from 1998 to 2012 was 13 minutes, whilst the global *decrease* in women's time per day spent on unpaid care from 1998 to 2012 was 10 minutes. Original calculation based on Charmes, J. (2019, December 19). *The unpaid care work and the labour market: An analysis of time use data based on the latest world compilation of time-use surveys*. International Labour Organization. [http://www.ilo.org/gender/Informationresources/Publications/WCMS\\_732791/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/gender/Informationresources/Publications/WCMS_732791/lang--en/index.htm)



But the report does note some good news: Men are participating more in unpaid care during the pandemic. Surveys<sup>2</sup> with women and men in 47 countries affirm that as a result of COVID-19 lockdowns, men have been carrying out more hands-on care work during the COVID-19 pandemic than any time in recent history, offering an opportunity to engage men in making that shift permanent – and sharing the care equally.

*“Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.”*

—Arundhati Roy, 2020

Many men, even prior to the pandemic, have said they want to do more when it comes to raising their children. The “Helping Dads Care” data featured in the *State of the World’s Fathers 2019* report found that on average, across seven middle- and higher-income countries, 85 percent of men said they would “do whatever it takes to be very involved” in the early stages of caring for a newborn or adopted child but it seems that three major barriers hinder action: (1) the lack of adequate, paid paternity leave, and low take-up of leave when it is available; (2) restrictive gender norms that position care as women’s responsibility, alongside the perception of women as more competent caregivers than men; and (3) a lack of economic security and government support for all parents and caregivers. While COVID-19 lockdowns have obligated many men to spend more time at home, men’s presence in the home is not universally positive for households. While men’s violence against women was already high before the pandemic, data from 142 studies in 44 countries point to an alarming increase in men’s violence against women during COVID-19.<sup>3</sup> Women with disabilities have been particularly at risk. Many countries, from France to Zimbabwe, Singapore to Cyprus, Argentina to Australia, reported that calls to domestic violence helplines doubled or tripled, while, at the same time services for survivors were being cut back. In addition, there is evidence that the pandemic has led to an increase in online sexual harassment and abuse. Research before the pandemic found that men’s unemployment and economic stress can be a driver of men’s use of violence, both of which have been widespread during COVID-19 lockdowns.

This latest *State of the World’s Fathers* report offers a deep and forensic analysis of current data on fatherhood and men’s caregiving around the world through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic and argues that to achieve men’s greater participation in caregiving, necessarily involves both holding individual men accountable for their actions and, more crucially, transforming the structural factors that drive and influence the value of care in society and who undertakes that work. The report defines seven actions to realize these aims, which include changes in laws and policies, with adequate resourcing and clear implementation plans; changes in institutions, such as schools, workplaces, and health facilities, and the ways that they work; changes in culture, narratives, and gendered norms around care work; and changes in our public and private lives and livelihoods.

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<sup>2</sup> UN Women. (2020, November 25). *Whose time to care? Unpaid care and domestic work during COVID-19*. Women Count Data Hub. <https://data.unwomen.org/publications/whose-time-care-unpaid-care-and-domestic-work-during-covid-19>

<sup>3</sup> O’Donnell, M. (2020, November 24). *Preventing a “return to normal”: Addressing violence against women during COVID-19*. Center for Global Development. <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/preventing-return-normal-addressing-violence-against-women-during-covid-19>



*“It is perhaps a function of patriarchy and privilege that decision-makers with the position and power to address and remove these barriers – the majority of whom are men – do not generally see or understand the vital importance of care to our societies and our economies,” notes Gary Barker, report author and President & CEO of Promundo-US. “The encouraging news is that the impacts of COVID-19 have forced a historical reckoning with how the world prioritizes and supports care. A reckoning that we cannot afford to ignore.”*

ENDS

#WorldsFathers

[www.StateoftheWorldsFathers.org](http://www.StateoftheWorldsFathers.org)

Access the full report: <http://stateoftheworldsfathers.org/report/state-of-the-worlds-fathers-2021/>

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#### Notes to editors:

#### About the *State of the World's Fathers* Seven Actions for a More Caring World

1. **Action 1:** Put in place national care policies and campaigns that recognize, reduce, and redistribute care work equally between men and women.
2. **Action 2:** Provide equal, job-protected, fully paid parental leave for all parents as a national policy.
3. **Action 3:** Design and expand social protection programs to redistribute care equally between women and men, while keeping a focus on the needs and rights of women and girls.
4. **Action 4:** Transform health sector institutions to promote fathers' involvement from the prenatal period through birth and childhood and men's involvement as caregivers.
5. **Action 5:** Promote an ethic of male care in schools, media, and other key institutions in which social norms are created and reinforced.



6. **Action 6:** Change workplace conditions, culture, and policies to support workers' caregiving – and mandate those changes in national legislation.
7. **Action 7:** Hold male political leaders accountable for their support of care policies, while advocating for women's equality in political leadership.

### **Equal caregiving – what makes it possible?**

Researchers Francine M. Deutsch and Ruth A. Gaunt worked with partner investigators across 25 countries, from the Global South and North, for their 2020 book *Creating Equality at Home: How 25 Couples Around the World Share Housework and Childcare*. They listened to the stories behind 25 equitable couples – from more egalitarian countries to less egalitarian ones – and identified the common, and divergent, factors that enabled the couples to achieve equality in the home. What they found is that structural factors matter – equal caregiving is easier in countries that offer the policies to support it and easier for couples with middle-class incomes – but individual couple dynamics, life circumstances, and the life satisfaction derived from living equally all the time, are also vital pieces in achieving and sustaining equality at home.

### **What has COVID-19 meant for unpaid care work?**

Women and men who are structurally marginalized due to racism, xenophobia, classism, and ableism have been the most likely to lose their jobs, again often at higher rates for women, or had to continue working in situations that put them at heightened risk for COVID-19. In the United States, during the pandemic, Black and Latina women have dropped out of the labour force at higher rates than White women, especially those with children. The closure of national borders and lockdown measures has also affected the economic activities of migrants working in the paid care sector. In Norway, women who came from Central and Eastern Europe have seen their unemployment increase more than any other group – by more than 10 percent. A study in the United Kingdom found that mothers with disabilities were more than three times as likely to have lost work than able-bodied mothers. For those living in informal settlements in many countries, staying at home and social distancing have not been possible. Families live in overcrowded housing, and if people have not had work, they and their families have not been able to eat.

For the lowest-income women and girls, unpaid care work has been part of a cycle of poverty and vulnerability both before and during COVID-19. A Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) study of informal-sector workers in 12 cities representing the Global North and South found that those who had greater increases in unpaid care work during the first COVID-19 lockdown were less likely to return to paid work, requiring them to deplete savings or other assets; they were also the women and households least likely to have access to social protection. In the United States, a study by Oxfam and Promundo found that 79 percent of women of Asian descent said their daily care work increased under COVID-19, compared to 74 percent of Hispanic/Latina women, 71 percent of African American women, and 57 percent of White women. Research by UN Women and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) predicts that 47 million additional women and girls will be pushed into poverty by COVID-19.

### **Unpaid care and mental health**

The increase in unpaid care work, combined with job losses and economic stress, has meant added strain on mental health, particularly among women. A five-country (United States, United Kingdom, Philippines, Kenya, and Canada) study carried out by Oxfam in partnership with Promundo-US found that almost half (43 percent)



of women surveyed said they were feeling more anxious, depressed, overworked, isolated, or physically ill because of their increased unpaid care and domestic workload during the pandemic. Many men in the same study also reported mental stress, particularly related to job loss and income. Men's mental health may also suffer due to masculine norms, which may discourage men from reaching out to family, friends, or community if they are suffering. Those who are living in isolation because they have disabilities or pre-existing health conditions may also have found it harder to access services and social networks. Gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer men are also more likely to live on their own.

### **What has COVID-19 meant for women during childbirth?**

COVID-19 has also increased the vulnerability of women during childbirth and made it more difficult to access maternal and sexual and reproductive health services, including contraception. Between 13 and 51 million women may have been unable to access contraceptives, which could mean up to 15 million unintended pregnancies. One study in 10 countries in Southern and East Africa found that access to sexual and reproductive health and HIV-related services was "severely undermined" during the pandemic.

In a number of countries, from Japan to Brazil to the United Kingdom, hospitals have not been allowing fathers and birth partners to attend antenatal appointments or to be present for the birth of their child due to rules imposed to prevent the spread of infection. This has meant that women have had to give birth alone and without their partner's support, and that progress made in allowing fathers to be present is being undermined, despite the fact that research shows the positive effect on their future relationships with their children.

### **Impact of COVID-19 on education**

Most of the world's schools have been shut at some point since COVID-19 started and approximately 60 percent of children have been in some form of lockdown, with those lacking access to technology in particular unable to learn. This reality has a direct effect on gender inequality in care work for adult women and for girls: Girls reported increased time spent caring for siblings and others compared to boys (52 percent to 42 percent) and were twice as likely to report household chores as an obstacle to learning.

### **Care and the climate**

As care in homes is gendered, so too is care for the planet. Women and girls pay a disproportionate price for human-made climate change. The United Nations estimates that women are 80 percent of those displaced by climate change and that women experience a majority of the impacts of climate change – even as women are less likely to hold leadership roles in spaces where decisions are made about addressing it.

### **Female leaders and COVID-19**

Finally, looking at leadership during the pandemic, the 21 countries with women leaders have generally done better in terms of numbers of deaths, while those with autocratic male leaders have fared worst. Women have been on the front lines of the health and care workforce, as well as of caring at home and volunteering in the community. However, very little of the leadership on COVID-19 has been by women, or even included women. Research in 30 countries by Care International found that women made up 24 percent of national COVID-19 committees. On three-quarters of these committees, women comprised less than a third of the membership. This lack of representation was also found at the local level. UN Women and UNDP found that globally, only



4.4 percent of COVID-19 task forces have gender parity, while 84 percent are male-dominated. Would decisions have been different if there had been more women leaders, particularly progressive women leaders, or if the men in power in more settings had made decisions based on promoting gender equality, social justice, and support for care work? We do not have enough research to know. We do know, though, that we are facing a world with autocratic male leaders and that gender equality is in danger of slipping back.

**About *STATE OF THE WORLD'S FATHERS*:** Produced by Promundo-US, *State of the World's Fathers 2021* is the fourth *State of the World's Fathers* report, following previous editions published in 2015, 2017, and 2019. The report aims to impact power structures, policies, and social norms around care work and to advance gender equality. It joins a growing set of related country- and region-focused on men's caregiving around the world. All editions of *State of the World's Fathers* are available at: [www.stateoftheworldsfathers.org](http://www.stateoftheworldsfathers.org)

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**About MenCare:** MenCare is a global campaign led by Promundo-US and Sonke Gender Justice, in partnership with Oxfam, Plan International, Save the Children Sweden, and the MenEngage Alliance (MenEngage), to promote men's and boys' involvement as equitable, nonviolent caregivers. With activities in more than 50 countries, MenCare partners carry out joint advocacy initiatives, research, and programming to engage men in positive parenting, in equitable caregiving, in violence prevention, and in maternal, newborn, and child health. For more information about the campaign and its partners, visit MenCare at: [men-care.org](http://men-care.org)

**About Promundo:** Promundo is a global leader in promoting gender equality and preventing violence by engaging men and boys in partnership with women and girls. We believe that working with men and boys to transform harmful gender norms and unequal power dynamics is a critical part of the solution to achieve gender equality. Promundo's formative research and rigorous evaluation, evidence-based programs, and targeted advocacy efforts strive to create change at multiple levels. Since 1997, Promundo's initiatives – in collaboration with partners in more than 55 countries - have reached nearly 10 million people through programs and training, campaigns and community engagement; and over 2 billion potential viewers through media, resulting in broader awareness around gender equality and violence prevention, as well as changes in attitudes and behaviors related to intimate partner violence; sexual and reproductive health and rights; and domestic work and caregiving, among others. For more information, visit: [www.promundoglobal.org](http://www.promundoglobal.org)