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Working Paper

Caring Forward

Advancing women's livelihoods and addressing care needs for a gender-responsive recovery for Ukraine

THE IMPACT OF CRISES ON CARE WORK GLOBALLY

> It is increasingly acknowledged that crises, from those of governance to climate change, conflict and pandemics, disproportionately affect women. Yet one dimension that is often overlooked refers to the way crises exacerbate gender inequalities in care work.

Increased challenges in accessing resources, interruption in the provision of services – such as schools and access to basic needs – economic shocks, loss of livelihoods, limited institutional capacity and mental and physical health needs of family members multiply women's unpaid care responsibilities.

These effects can be connected to and exacerbated by insufficient investment in care systems. This can come in the form of increased time and energy needed to access basic resources, the need to spend more time caring for children and older family members and the loss of access to sufficient financial resources. These expanded responsibilities during crises also intersect with a global disparity in care work, with women spending substantially more time on unpaid care work compared to men. The impacts of these effects are also felt particularly by women who for reasons of socioeconomic status, residence in rural areas, membership in a minority community and related factors are already disproportionately affected.

CRISIS IMPACT ON CARE WORK IN UKRAINE

Prior to the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, gender inequalities in livelihoods and care work were already salient issues in Ukraine. This is particularly given that the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken deepened existing gender inequalities and had particularly negative consequences for women and girls in Ukraine. During the pandemic, women faced a disproportionate increase in unpaid work, particularly providing emotional support for family members and taking care of family members relative to men. Women also faced an increase in working hours for lesser pay among women who worked in the public sector, and women who were business-owners faced particular concern about losing their income during the pandemic. Women were also at a higher risk of gender-based violence. At the same time, since the invasion, these inequalities have been greatly exacerbated. This, in turn, contributed to women's unequal access to sustainable and equitable livelihoods and has placed women and girls at unique risk of resource insecurity, gender-based violence, exploitation and poverty.

Throughout Eastern Europe and Central Asia, despite women's historically high engagement in the labour force, women bear a disproportionate responsibility for unpaid work that negatively effects their opportunities for empowerment. While men in the region on average work more hours in paid employment, women work

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"double" and "triple" shifts, with the combination of paid and unpaid work. Despite efforts by the Government of Ukraine to remedy this discrepancy, inequalities in care work and livelihoods have only been exacerbated by the ongoing war in Ukraine, as many women have become both the primary caregiver and income-earner in their households. At the same time, the Russian invasion has had devastating consequences on education, childcare and other forms of care services in Ukraine and increased capacity pressures on equivalent facilities in neighbouring refugee-hosting countries.

As efforts look towards recovery, it is crucial that the unique needs of women and girls in post-conflict settings are prioritized, particularly concerning the intersection of the care and livelihood challenges that women and girls will face in the recovery process. As stated in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also essential to building a more peaceful and prosperous world. However, the ongoing invasion has jeopardized progress made towards gender equality in Ukraine, with the unequal consequences of the invasion putting women and girls at a unique risk. Reducing the extent of unpaid care work for women and providing sufficient social support to enable further engagement in the labour market is a key means of economic empowerment for women. This brief provides an overview of the key challenges, best practices and recommendations that should be considered in the recovery process as they relate to the livelihood and care needs of women and girls.

THE ISSUE: INEQUALITIES IN CARE WORK PRIOR TO, AND EXACERBATED BY, THE FULL-SCALE INVASION

In Ukraine, as in many countries throughout Europe and Central Asia, unpaid care for children, elderly people and people with disabilities is viewed as a responsibility primarily for women and girls. The salience of this norm results in fewer women participating in the labour market, participating in vulnerable informal employment, and pursuing lesser-paid work or altered working hours, which in turn contribute to gender wage and pension gaps. As a result, inequity in unpaid care work is a significant barrier to economic justice, paid and decent work and household and community decision-making opportunities for women.

Prior to the Russian invasion, 52 per cent of women in Ukraine were employed compared to 62 per cent of men. There was an approximately 23 per cent gender pay gap,and women comprised 72 per cent of those receiving social protection. The COVID-19 pandemic also contributed to the exacerbation of gender inequalities in the immediate lead-up to the Russian invasion. On top of existing vertical and horizontal employment segregation in Ukraine, women and young people were predominantly employed in sectors that faced business closure during the pandemic, as well as public sectors such as nursing where there were wage payment delays. Among businesses that had to lay off employees, 59.8 per cent of business-owners reported having to lay off women.

59.8%

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Meanwhile, women-owned micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises struggled overall with lower financial turnover and challenges in covering expenses, such as taxes and utilities. Moreover, there was low engagement of women, particularly those from vulnerable groups, in pandemic emergency response bodies and an incomplete consideration of gender equality and human rights considerations in policy measures against the spread of COVID-19. In this context, already prior to the invasion women reported a disproportionate increase in household and care responsibilities, particularly women who transitioned to remote work with family members who also remained at home. Women were also already more likely to report struggles to cover basic expenses such as food and rent.

Since the escalation, inequalities in care work and access to livelihoods for women have greatly increased. As indicated by a CARE and UN Women report, it is estimated that prior to February 24th women spent an average of 24.6 hours per week on unpaid work, including care work, compared to men's 14.5 hours per week. Since then, it is estimated that this number has greatly increased for women in and outside of Ukraine, due to the closure or lack of access to care facilities, security risks, loss of paid employment and engagement in volunteer efforts, among other factors. Specifically, the most recent Ukraine Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA) estimates that in 2023 women spent 55 hours per week in unpaid work, including care work, compared to men's 39 hours.

Before the Invasion

24.6

hours per week in unpaid work

After the Invasion

55

hours per week in unpaid work

The RDNA also estimates that the potential cost implications from women spending more time on unpaid childcare are approximately USD 72.5 billion.21 Particularly relevant to the lack of access to care facilities is the destruction of educational institutions. Between February 2022 and October 2023, the Ukrainian Government reported that 3,428 educational facilities had been damaged and 365 destroyed. At the same time,

it is estimated that roughly 4.8 million jobs have been lost, some 30 per cent of pre-war employment. However, the full potential costs resulting from increased loads of unpaid care work for women are likely underestimated as definitions of unpaid care work often exclude care work for older people and people with disabilities and there is a lack of official data on the cost of care work. For women who have become refugees increased childcare responsibilities paired with insufficient access to care facilities has been identified as a barrier to employment. This is compounded by the difficulties associated with accessing care for those with special needs and the enrolment of children in remote Ukrainian education. Moreover, women from minority communities such as the Roma face additional barriers in terms of care responsibilities and access to livelihoods.

Women in Ukraine have experienced a greater loss in access to livelihoods since a large portion of women work in lower-paying sectors that have been heavily affected by the war, forced displacement internally or abroad, security risks that prevent physically accessing work and the need to care for family members who can no longer access care facilities. Moreover, because many male family members are engaged in defence activities or are for other reasons not earning an income, there is also increased pressure on women to provide for their families. This has in turn pushed women to increasingly pursue work in the informal sector, with its associated protection and exploitation risks. As a result, women have been disproportionately affected by the compounded impacts of the Russian full-scale invasion.

WHY IT MATTERS: THE IMPORTANCE OF ADDRESSING GENDER-BASED LIVELIHOODS AND CARE INEQUALITIES IN THE RECOVERY PROCESS

As indicated above, the escalation in Ukraine has differently impacted the opportunities of women and men to access sustainable livelihoods and care work. If not properly addressed, the disproportionate impacts of the escalation on women's access to livelihoods and care responsibilities can have negative long-term consequences on progress towards gender equality in Ukraine. If not sufficiently addressed, the imbalance in care responsibilities, with its associated livelihood implications, can hinder women's access to productive resources, economic justice, political and community leadership, while also negatively impacting women's mental health and increasing women's exposure to exploitation and protection risks resulting from informal work.

Moreover, addressing gender disparities in care work is also relevant for the ongoing process of Ukraine's accession to the European Union (EU). In 2021, a European care strategy was announced, which aimed to increase participation and early childhood education and access to long-term care while coupling this with additional measures to increase women's labour force participation. This strategy is connected to The European Pillar of Social Rights, which indicated that in all States, there must be equal opportunities and treatment for women and men including in relation to labour market participation, employment conditions and career advancement. This growing attention in the EU to care work is based on the recognition that care imbalances have not only social, but economic consequences, and that addressing care work inequalities is also crucial for sustained economic growth.

Consequently, gender must be mainstreamed into livelihoods and care recovery programmes to contribute towards ensuring equal self-reliance and productive abilities among women and men. More specifically, mainstreaming gender in these recovery programmes contributes to upholding human rights standards concerning sufficient livelihoods, provides independence connected to equal access to and control of productive resources, creates safer communities by providing safer alternatives for income-generation, and reduces barriers to accessing livelihoods assistance. In doing so, livelihoods and care recovery programmes can serve as a catalyst for change in social norms and structural inequalities pertaining to the role of women as caregivers, thereby advancing women's rights and serving as an early opportunity to begin shifting gender norms surrounding livelihoods and care in Ukraine.

WHERE WE STAND: ARE THERE FINANCIAL RESOURCES FOR A GENDER-RESPONSIVE RECOVERY IN UKRAINE?

The recent Ukraine Recovery Conference in June 2023 expanded on commitments made at the 2022 gathering in Lugano and included the mobilization of substantive resources across sectors. Specific attention was allocated to mobilizing the private sector as a leader in Ukraine's

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recovery, with partners agreeing to provide an additional USD 60 billion to meet the country's recovery needs. Moreover, actors such as the United Kingdom and United States of America announced more than USD 1 billion in additional commitments to address issues such as modernizing critical infrastructure and meeting immediate needs.

Commitments were also made by businesses to support recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine, with priority placed on enhancing the potential of Ukraine in sectors such as energy, technology, infrastructure and finance. Although specific financial commitments to the care economy were not made in 2023, the Ukrainian Ministry of Social Policy used the conference to present several planned interventions aimed at supporting families, related to poverty reduction, resilience centres, family support centres, housing and economic independence, among other issues.

Following the Conference, key initiatives were also established, including the Platform for Gender Mainstreaming and Inclusive Recovery and the inclusion of women's rights organizations in recovery discussions via the Civil Society Organization Consultative Panel.

The 2024 Ukraine Recovery Conference in Berlin marked another key moment for the advancement of gender mainstreaming in recovery efforts with the creation of the Alliance for Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Recovery. While not explicitly focused on care work, the key commitments of the Alliance – which includes governments, international organizations, civil society organizations (CSOs) and businesses – are to:

Integrate a gender perspective into funding and resources for recovery, by increasing the share of funding to gender equality and women's empowerment-oriented recovery projects or programmes in Ukraine.

Ensure women's full and effective participation and representation, by supporting women's and women's rights organizations' participation in decision-making on recovery and reconstruction at all levels.

Prioritize women's rights and needs, by delivering financial and technical assistance that meet the needs of women and girls and advances their rights.

The establishment of the Alliance and commitment of approximately EUR 46 million to achieve the above aims marks a significant step towards addressing gender equality and women's empowerment in the Ukraine recovery. However, it is important that care work initiatives be included in the work of the Alliance. Specifically, to ensure that the care and livelihoods needs of women and girls are sufficiently integrated into recovery efforts, it is critical not only that sufficient funding is allocated to care and livelihoods programming, but also that initiatives aimed at enhancing Ukraine's private sector are gender inclusive by actively engaging and responding to the needs of women and girls through all stages of programming initiatives.

MOVING FORWARD: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY IN CARE WORK IN RECOVERY EFFORTS

This brief has affirmed the existing understanding that women and girls in Ukraine have been disproportionally affected by the multidimensional impacts of the Russian full-scale invasion. Specifically, this brief has offered a glimpse into the way that the escalation has decreased the access of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugee women to sustainable and decent livelihoods and increased unpaid care responsibilities, while at the same time increasing the pressure many women face to provide financially for their families. As efforts begin to look towards recovery, it is crucial that the needs of women and girls in relation to access to livelihoods and gender equality in care work are prioritized. To ensure that these needs are considered, the following recommendations related to the care economy of Ukraine are presented.

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On care work

Invest in the speedy reopening and construction of care facilities for children, elderly people and people with disabilities, to enable women to more easily access paid employment.

Develop long-term projects on social infrastructure development, which aim to create favourable conditions for balancing work and family responsibilities, to provide support to working women with children and other groups of workers that have family responsibilities (e. g. those who care for elderly family members or persons with disabilities).

Adopt gender-responsive and family-friendly action from governments and businesses, including where possible paid parental leave, flexible working policies and the introduction of or increase in child/family benefits.

Provide child support via **cash assistance transfers** to small and medium-sized enterprise owners. **Call for the need to prioritize more resources for economic recovery,** with a focus on economic vulnerabilities, livelihood support, care infrastructure, cash transfers and other forms of social protection. Public investment in strengthening the institutional quality of care services is particularly critical for ensuring high-quality service-delivery and good governance of service-delivery. Also relevant and related is the need to invest in the digital infrastructure for care services.

Orient tax policy around the establishment of a sustainable balance between the prioritization of growth and social inclusion. Tax policy is particularly central for care-focused investment, and it is therefore important that investments in care and care work be considered in terms of their role in contributing to and sustaining human development capabilities.

Scale-up financing and investments for gender-responsive social protection and ensure sufficient costing and budgeting in response to the crisis in the context of a dramatic deterioration of public finances due to the invasion. Diverse stakeholder constituencies, including donors, multilateral organizations and the private sector, could contribute to facilitating this shift.

Encourage a redistribution of work to engage men in care responsibilities, for example through campaigns to encourage the uptake of parental leave by fathers, as is permitted under Ukrainian law. Part of efforts to ensure that paternity leave is taken by male caregivers should ensure that a **high or full portion of pre-leave income is covered.** Moreover, it is important to introduce measures against incorporating leave and flexible working arrangements into employer decisions related to employees.

Support unconditional cash transfer systems for caregivers with insufficient resources particularly due to business closures during the invasion. This should also be complemented with social protection programmes that include those with care responsibilities for children, people with disabilities, older people and other vulnerable individuals.

Invest in **data collection on the costs of care work for IDPs, refugees and returnees, ensuring that data are intersectional with regards to gender, age, disability and other factors** that impact experiences in care work, including in future multi-sectoral needs assessments. This data collection must also be based on a **revised definition of care work** that goes beyond household chores and childcare to include care for older people and people with disabilities.

Enhance investment in and the capacity of care systems in Ukraine, also empowering women to lead their own childcare initiatives where appropriate. The full-scale invasion and COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted critical care workforce shortages, low pay and poor working conditions of the care sector, and the unstable employment situation of care workers all of which makes investment in care services a critical piece of post-invasion care systems. Meanwhile, the invasion and initiatives by Ukrainian refugees in neighbouring countries have also shown that self-arranged childcare initiatives enable women to alleviate some of the stress of increased care.

On access to work

During the full-scale invasion, women have increasingly become engaged in traditionally male-dominated activities, such as mining, construction and farming. It is important that recovery efforts **facilitate the sustained engagement of women in such activities and remove discriminatory laws preventing women from operating in certain sectors of the economy.**

Provide women with **opportunities for vocational training,** including in various professions that are possible via remote work, as many are seeking to reintegrate into the job market. The trainings offered should **engage the private sector and be triangulated with market needs to avoid oversaturation of training in** specific sectors.

As efforts transition from meeting humanitarian to recovery needs, **jobs in distribution centres should be created for women who are heading households, including single women with family members to care for, from minorities, and other vulnerable groups.** This would provide both a source of livelihoods but also ensure that programming in these centres is gender-sensitive and considerate to flexible and part-time work.

Adapt legal frameworks to enable women to pursue employment while balancing care responsibilities, such as part-time work, parental leave and flexible working arrangements.

On digitization, care work and entrepreneurship

Sufficient investment should be made to address the digital gender gap and mainstream gender throughout public digital services, given that in 2020, more men (58 per cent) were using public digital services compared to women (49 per cent).

The Government of Ukraine, primarily through its Ministry of Digital Transformation, has made ambitious strides towards expanding the digital and ICT infrastructure of Ukraine, and is also actively engaged in international processes and platforms aimed at advancing progress on gender equality, including 2021 commitments under the Equality Action Coalition on Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality. To achieve these goals, **long-term investment should be made to ensure that women and girls are specifically targeted for ICT and other digital employment trainings to facilitate equal access to decent work.**

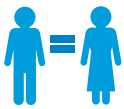
Flexible working arrangements for working men and women with care responsibilities should be encouraged- particularly relevant for women to access to remote work.

Efforts should be made to **counter gender stereotypes concerning the engagement of women in the digital sphere** through active information campaigns.

Gender should be mainstreamed and incorporated into targeting for digital literacy and digital skills trainings, given that digital technologies and platforms offer valuable employment and marketing opportunities for women and girls that enable them to more easily balance work and care responsibilities and provide for themselves, particularly in situations of limited mobility.

The Government of Ukraine should continue the implementation of its ambitious **e-governance agenda** launched prior to the full-scale invasion, particularly the new e-services to enable job-seekers and employers to create online accounts to facilitate job-seekers' interactions with both the Ukrainian State Employment Services (SES) and employers, and web-based platforms for career guidance and development. These services should also be made to tailor to the unique needs of women and girls.

As the Government of Ukraine seeks to enhance its digital business infrastructure, **long-term programmes should be launched to facilitate women's engagement in digital business initiatives and to empower women to launch and lead their own digital businesses. This includes improving access to int**ernet services for those in rural areas, particularly women.



Additional recommendations to advance gender equality in access to livelihoods and care work

Engage in **unconditional cash-assistance programming** for women-headed households where women are unable to access employment to contribute to the partial alleviation of financial stress that may result from increased care responsibilities. Ensure that post-conflict employment programmes are accessible online, as women may have prolonged increased care responsibilities that make it difficult to attend such programmes in person.

Mainstream gender in post-conflict interventions, including through the consideration of the care responsibilities women will continue to have post-conflict. This includes introducing an annual target for investments in the care sector – at least 15 per cent of funds planned for the economic and social recovery need to support specific gender equality and women's empowerment interventions.

Women's organizations and organizations that were engaging with IDP and refugee women on livelihoods during the full-scale invasion should be **actively engaged in the development and execution of recovery plans related to livelihoods and care to ensure that gender is mainstreamed in these aspects of the response.**

Expand **flexible funding to CSOs and women's groups** to design and implement innovative models for care-related service-delivery with a focus on excluded and marginalized groups.

WHAT UN WOMEN CAN DELIVER: THE GENDER EQUALITY ACCELERATOR

UN Women's Gender Equality Accelerator on Transforming the Care Economy calls for comprehensive policies to recognize, reduce, redistribute, represent and reward paid and unpaid care and domestic work. Its "5Rs" strategy hinges on a strong public sector role through increased investment in care infrastructure. This would create millions of decent jobs for women and facilitate economic participation more broadly, including in high-paying, male-dominated sectors.

The Gender Equality Accelerator seeks to

1. Identify and develop innovative care service models.
2. Invest in capacity-building, technical assistance and advisory services for government, the private sector, women's organizations and entrepreneurs to encourage investment in care service access and trainings for women.
3. Reform discriminatory laws and policies while creating an enabling regulatory framework that values unpaid care work.
4. Advocate for the right to care and create awareness of the economic value of unpaid care and domestic work, while also challenging social norms and encouraging the engagement of men and boys in care work.

How does UN Women contribute to the realization of the 5Rs?

1. Methodologies for estimations of the care deficit, investment cost and economic returns (across care sectors).
2. Policy and programming toolkits on care economy transformation for the public and private sector, including the UN Women and ILO policy toolkit *A guide to public investments in the care economy*.

ADDITIONAL UN WOMEN RESOURCES ON CARE WORK REGULATIONS

A toolkit on paid and unpaid care work: From 3Rs to 5Rs

This toolkit, a product of the 2017 UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, offers an introduction or how-to-guide for those working in care to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Specifically, the toolkit emphasizes how to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work, and how to additionally reward and represent paid care work by promoting decent work for care workers and guaranteeing their representation, social dialogue and collective bargaining.

Gender brief: Livelihoods and access to work of refugees from Ukraine in neighbouring host countries

A product of the Regional Gender Task force for the Ukraine Refugee Response, this brief focuses on the challenges women refugees from Ukraine have faced in accessing sustainable livelihoods since the onset of the full-scale invasion, including the impact of care responsibilities. The brief offers an assessment of the challenges while identifying good practices and recommendations.

A guide to public investments in the care economy

The is a policy support tool prepared by UN Women and the International Labour Organization that aims to provide a methodology for how to identify and eliminate coverage gaps in care service-delivery and evaluate the return on such an investment in the short and long-term.

Interactive tool on unpaid care work

This interactive UN Women tool demonstrates the long-term impact of unpaid care responsibilities from a gender perspective.

Global Alliance for Care: An urgent call to action

The Global Alliance for Care is a global multi-stakeholder initiative launched by the National Institute of Women in Mexico and UN Women connected to the 2021 Generation Equality Forum. The Alliance focuses on assessing and addressing the impacts of the unequal distribution of care work across societies.

Rethinking care economy and empowering women for building back better

This collaboration between UNECE and UN Women is focused on assessing the care economy in the UNECE region and how it can be reconceived to further enhance the empowerment of women and girls, including through the presentation of findings and policy recommendations.

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