



THE CARE ECONOMY IN EGYPT:

THE ROAD TOWARDS RECOGNIZING, REDUCING AND REDISTRIBUTING UNPAID CARE WORK

In a nutshell:

- Women in Egypt perform the vast majority of unpaid care work, and marriage is a key determinant of increased time use. Married women spend seven times as much time on domestic work as married men; while unmarried women spend six times as much as unmarried men.
- Egyptian women spend almost the same amount of time on unpaid care work whether or not they are employed, which reflects the double burden many face.
- There is a mismatch between care needs and existing services, which limits the ability to redistribute unpaid care responsibilities.
- Private sector employment has grown faster in paid care sectors (education, health and social work) than in the rest of the economy. Although paid care jobs in the private sector became more feminized than the public, informality has risen and job quality has declined.
- Expanding decent jobs in the care economy in the private sector can be a major driver of private sector employment growth and women's engagement in paid work.
- There is a need to expand high-quality early childhood care and education services, ensuring affordability and decent working conditions.
- Family-oriented labour market regulations for care leave and flexible work are needed. Provisions that only apply to women can be costly to employers and might discourage them from recruiting women.
- Social norm change and tackling traditional attitudes is essential to the success of public policies and interventions to redistribute unpaid care work.

Key questions:

- How does time spent on unpaid care work differ between women and men in Egypt?
- How has women's employment in care jobs evolved in the public versus private sector?
- To what extent do care policies match the magnitude of Egypt's care needs?

Egypt has made substantial progress in closing the gender gap in education. However, the gender gap in labour force participation remains large, with Egypt ranking 143rd out of 153 countries in 2017. Only 21 per cent of working-age women in Egypt were in the labour force in 2018, in contrast with 76 per cent of working-age men (Krafft and others, 2019). Gender inequality in the distribution of unpaid domestic work plays an important role in this gender gap in labour force participation in Egypt.

Given prevailing norms about the gender division of labour and support for the male-breadwinner/female-caregiver model, unpaid domestic care responsibilities fall primarily on women, hindering their ability to participate in the paid economy. This trade-off is also fueled by the lack of decent jobs and the mismatch between care needs and the availability/adequacy of paid care services, which limits the ability of women (and of households) to shift some of their unpaid care responsibilities to the market.

Advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment therefore requires an understanding of the drivers of unpaid and paid care work in Egypt. Failing to recognize, redistribute or subsidise unpaid care work will affect women's participation in paid employment, leading to a loss of human capital and skills and exacting a toll on the growth of the economy.

This policy brief suggests evidence-based policies to address the main challenges to reallocating unpaid care work to the paid care economy in Egypt. These are based on the key findings of the study *Progress of Women in the Arab States 2020: the role of the care economy in promoting gender equality*, which analyses the extent to which the paid care sector and care policies match the magnitude of Egypt's care needs. This analysis is based on multiple

rounds of two nationally representative surveys – the Egypt Labour Market Panel Survey (ELMPS) and the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

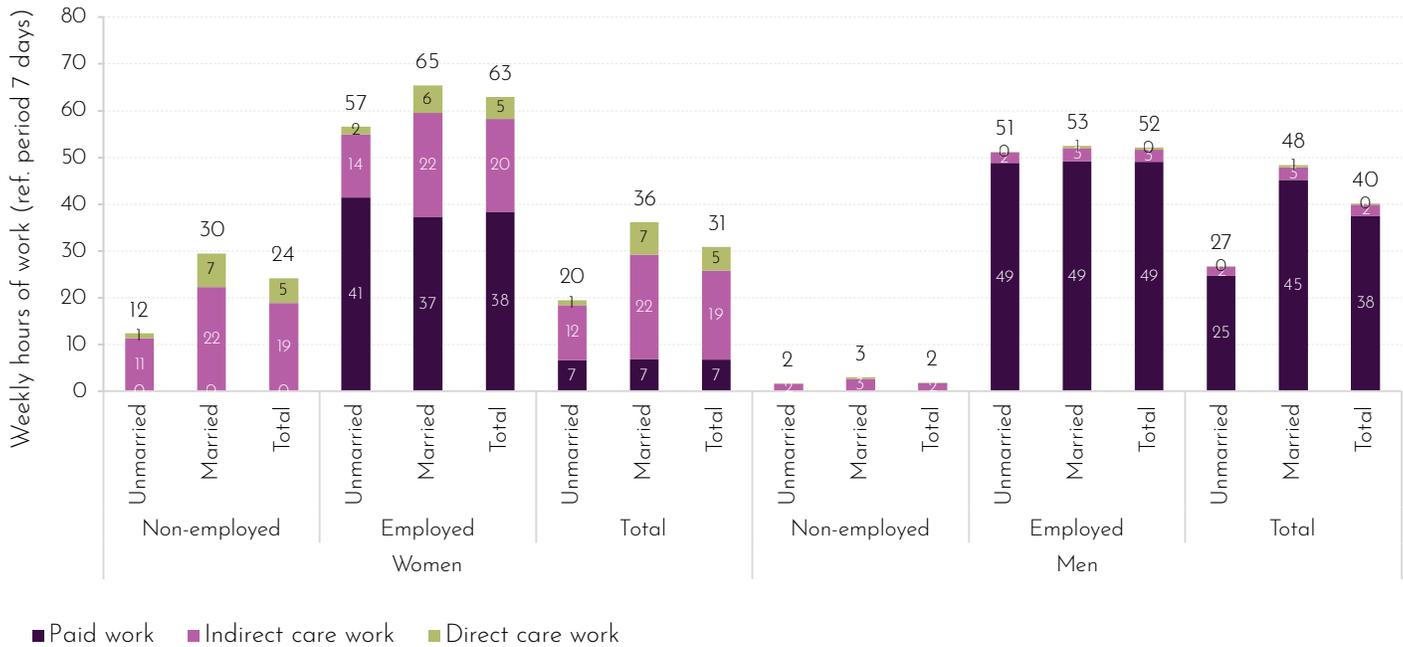
Recognizing unpaid care work

Women in Egypt perform the vast majority of unpaid care work, which consumes an important proportion of their time – time that could be allocated to paid work, education, leisure, self-care activities or other pursuits. Women's participation in unpaid care work is almost universal, with 88 per cent of working-age women involved in such work in 2018 versus only 29 per cent of men.

Marriage is the key determinant of how much time women spend on unpaid care activities, with married women spending twice as much time as unmarried women (Figure 1). Another critical finding is that married women spend almost the same amount of time on unpaid care work whether or not they are employed (Figure 1). Employed married women perform the highest number of hours per week of total work (paid and unpaid), far exceeding the number of hours of their male peers. This double burden is thus an important barrier to women's participation in the labour force, which will continue unless measures are taken to reduce and redistribute women's unpaid care responsibilities.

Women's time spent on unpaid care work also depends on family structure. The largest effect on married women's time spent on unpaid care work results from having a child aged 0–3 or 3–5 in the household (Figure 2). The effect varies by women's educational levels, with women with higher education tending to spend more hours on unpaid care work for children aged 0–3.

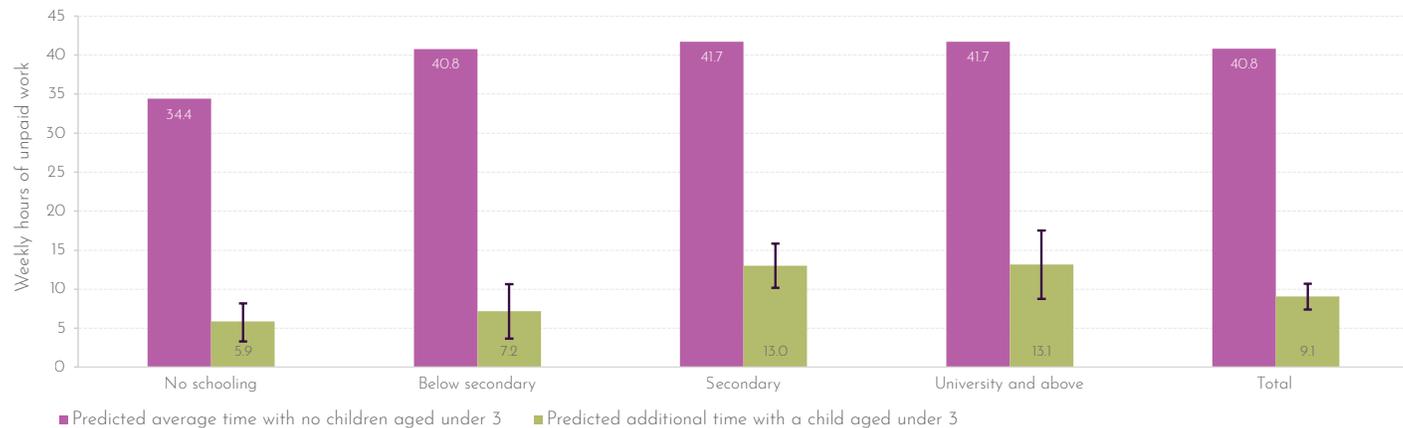
FIGURE 1. WEEKLY HOURS OF PAID WORK AND UNPAID CARE WORK (DIRECT AND INDIRECT) BY SEX, EMPLOYMENT AND MARITAL STATUS, AGES 15-64



Source: Authors' calculation based on ELMPS 2012.

Note: Indirect care work consists of tasks that do not involve face-to-face interaction, but that are needed to sustain direct care, including cleaning, cooking, shopping for household items and maintenance work within the home. Direct care work involves personal, relational activities of taking care of another person, such as nursing a baby, reading to a child or helping an elderly person to dress or take a bath.

FIGURE 2. PREDICTED ADDITIONAL WEEKLY HOURS OF CARE WORK WITH A CHILD UNDER AGE 3 IN THE HOUSEHOLD, BY EDUCATION, MARRIED WOMEN AGE 15-64



Source: Authors' predictions based on OLS regression using ELMPS 2006.

Note: The grey bars indicate 95 per cent confidence intervals on the estimates of additional time.

This tendency may be due to the fact that more educated mothers may be more aware of the importance of spending time with their children. It is also possible that more educated women report the number of hours spent on such activities more precisely.

Growth of the paid care economy

Just as women perform most of the unpaid care work, they are also more likely to perform paid care work. Women were almost four times more likely than men to be employed in paid care sectors (health, education, social work or domestic work) compared to other sectors of the economy. Most paid care jobs are concentrated in the public sector. Yet, the share of the private sector in paid care employment has grown considerably – from 13 per cent of all care-sector jobs in 2009–11 to 25 per cent in 2015–17. Over this period, employment in the private paid care sector grew faster than in other parts of the private sector.

Within both care sectors and care occupations, the private sector is more feminized than the public (Figure 3). Not only is the proportion of women in care occupations higher than average in the private sector, it is also higher than that in the public sector. Over time, the proportion of women employed in the private sector has also grown faster in care versus non-care sectors. The private sector is therefore more likely than the public sector to hire women as paid employees in care jobs. Given women's weak participation in Egypt's private sector in general, the care economy can be an important source of expanding job opportunities for women.

The widening gap between care needs and care services

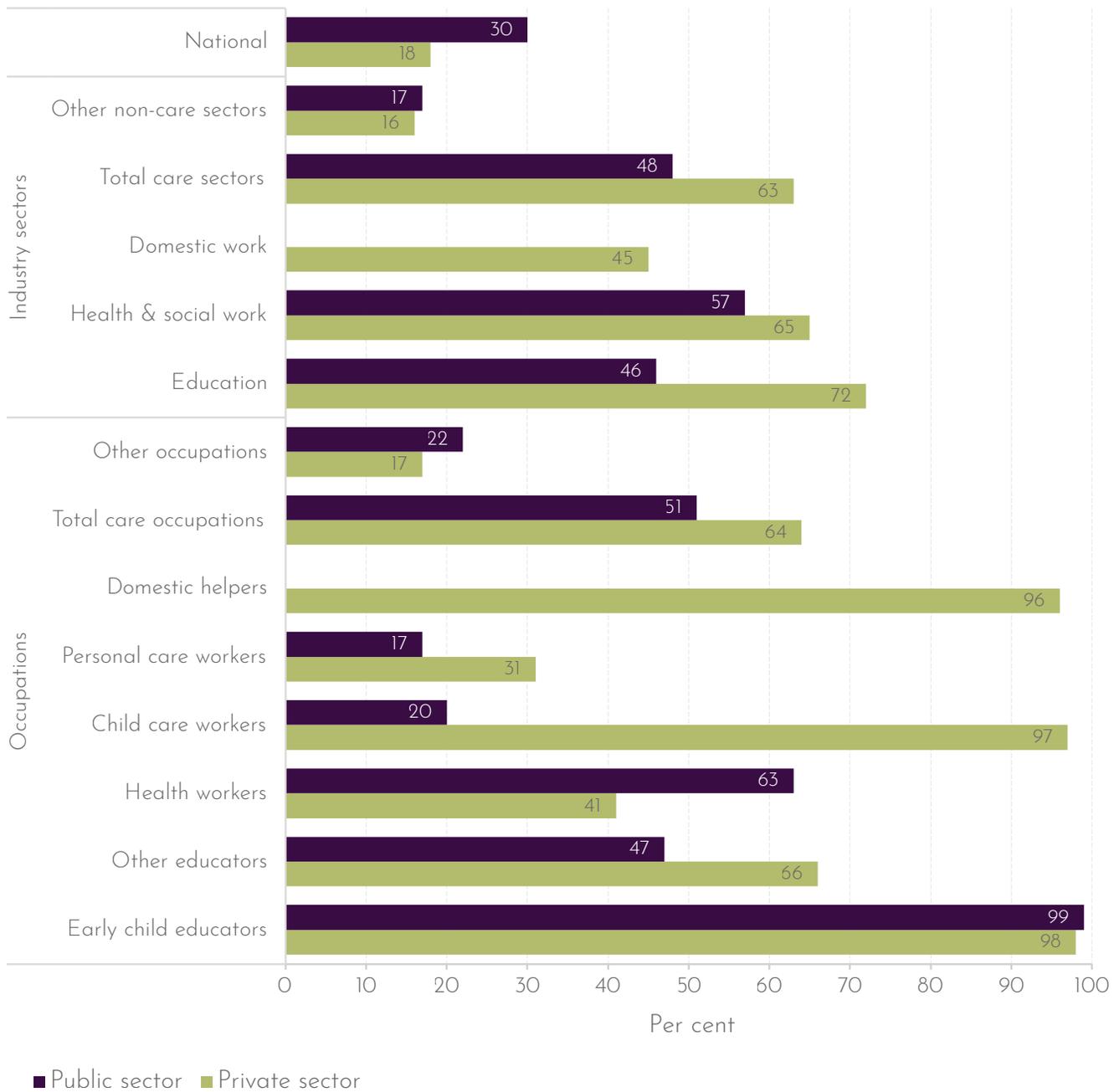
The number of childcare institutions in Egypt is limited and has grown much slower than the number of children. From 2006 to 2017, the number of children aged 0–3 grew at an annual rate of 3.6 per cent, to reach over 11 million children. By comparison, the number of childcare facilities in the private sector only increased by 1.2 per cent per year. This has contributed to the low enrolment rate (8 per cent) for children in this age group, with important implications for women's time use. As noted, the highest impact on the hours women spend on unpaid care work stems from having a child under age 3 or a child aged 3–5 in the household. Thus, it is important to expand access to affordable and high-quality childcare options for women, through public policy and private sector engagement.

Building policy paths based on key findings

Expand quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) services

The challenges that women currently face in arranging for childcare, especially if children are under 6 years old, will eventually push more employed women to leave their jobs, and discourage non-employed ones from seeking employment. In addition to its importance in children's development and in potentially improving future educational outcomes, expanding quality ECCE is necessary to redistribute the amount of unpaid care work undertaken by women, which is most intensive when they have young children.

FIGURE 3. PROPORTION OF WOMEN, BY INDUSTRY SECTORS AND CARE OCCUPATIONS COMPARED TO OTHER SECTORS/OCCUPATIONS AND BY INSTITUTIONAL SECTOR



Source: Authors' calculations based on LFS 2015-2017.

Expanding quality ECCE services would give women choices for childcare, thus enabling them to join the labour market, while providing nurturing care for young children.

A strong regulatory framework, in terms of quality, monitoring and governance, can play an important role in reducing unpaid care work and creating an enabling environment for the private sector to invest in high-quality ECCE services. Such a framework is much needed to create decent job opportunities for women in the ECCE sector, with equitable wages and decent working conditions. Accordingly, the Government of Egypt should build on the ongoing reforms introduced by the Ministry of Social Solidarity to review regulations and licensing procedures for nurseries, while adopting and maintaining a rigorous monitoring and accreditation system to check their quality standards.

Another key policy action is to create programmes that incentivize private sector investment in care institutions and encourage businesses to establish nurseries at workplaces through tax deductions or preferential pricing of utilities. This could also help the private sector provide better quality jobs, by alleviating hiring costs. Moreover, any expansion in the number of childcare institutions should be accompanied with means to facilitate access for children from poor families. This is crucial to reduce gender and social inequalities and break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Subsidizing quality childcare for the poor is an important area for public interventions to support the outreach of ECCE services to different vulnerable groups.

Develop a national strategy for elder care

Public and private provision of elder care in

Egypt requires further development. Moreover, information and data about this sector is scarce and often contradictory. Yet, it is one of the most important areas of improvement because the elder population will continue to grow considerably in Egypt in coming decades. Without policies to develop adequate elder care services, this expected increase will lead to higher unpaid care responsibilities. The workload will fall primarily on both married and unmarried women, whose additional unpaid care time rises significantly with the presence of an elderly member in the household. More efforts are needed to develop and strengthen policies to support the growing elderly population. First, it is important to address the falling rates of workers covered by social insurance to ensure a decent level of pension coverage in old age. The New Social Insurance and Pension Act (Law No. 148 for 2019), introduced in 2019, is a first reform to curb the rising proportion of socially uncovered workers. Second, there is a strong need to expand high-quality residential and non-residential care services for the elderly. This could be achieved by encouraging the private sector to invest in these services through improving the business climate, simplifying tax procedures, and providing access to adequate funding. Another area of action is to encourage and promote professional nursing, so as to increase the availability of quality home-based care services.

Implement family-friendly labour market regulations for care leave and flexible work

Women's care responsibilities shape their decisions regarding paid employment. As a result, family-friendly policies aimed at redistributing unpaid care work should include employment regulations that promote flexible and part-time work arrangements to improve work-life balance, particularly for

married women. However, employment regulations that only apply to women can be costly to employers and tend to discourage employers from recruiting women. For example, the current labour law stipulates that employers establish a nursery once they hire 100 female workers or more. This may be one of the reasons that the share of employer-initiated nurseries does not exceed 2 per cent of total nurseries, as this policy has probably disincentivized many employers from hiring more than 99 female workers. A reform such as that recently implemented in Jordan, which based the requirements for opening a nursery on the total number of young children of all employees, rather than just female employees, could help to reduce this disincentive.

Care leaves, including paternity or parental leave, constitute an important pillar for any comprehensive approach to care policy. Maternity leaves – which are currently financed partly by the social insurance scheme and partly by the employer – may also discourage employers from hiring women. Accordingly, there is room to restructure the financing scheme of maternity leave to move from a system that puts the main liability on employers and reduces incentives for hiring women, to a maternity insurance system. Care leaves and related provisions should be offered to all employees, regardless of gender, to avoid further reinforcing the prevailing norm that care work is ‘women’s work’ (For more details on Jordan’s maternity leave funding mechanism please see pp. 57, 146–148, and 110 of the Progress of Women in the Arab States 2020: The role of the care economy in promoting gender equality).

Changing attitudes

Involving men in unpaid care work is essential for its redistribution. This will require intensive communication and advocacy campaigns to

address the stereotypes, barriers and attitudes towards gender roles in Egypt and to promote behavioural change. More research on gender norms is required to understand the drivers of these attitudes. Public campaigns and nationwide programs on positive behavioural change to redistribute unpaid care responsibilities are also essential.

Conduct regular, national time-use surveys

Promoting gender and economic equity should start with recognizing the amount and value of unpaid domestic work. Accordingly, this analysis points to the importance of data in recognizing unpaid care work in Egypt. The significance of data is magnified during times of crisis, like the COVID-19 pandemic, to examine its impact on the care economy and, specifically, on women’s unpaid care roles. Therefore, it is critical to conduct regular, national time-use surveys.¹ These surveys will enable the measurement and analysis of unpaid work, in relation to GDP growth, inequality and time poverty, and how it is evolving by gender, socioeconomic status and other characteristics. Data on unpaid care work is a prerequisite for placing a value on it, which can contribute to policies to adequately reward care work and improve Egypt’s socioeconomic policies. An additional data gap identified by this study is updated information on coverage of childcare facilities, fee structures, types of nurseries and enrolment patterns, as well as elder-care services.

A time-use survey was conducted by CAPMAS in 2015 on a sample of 3,480 households, including 6,895 individuals. The survey was conducted in six governorates, which limited its national representativeness.

Concluding remarks

The results of this study, as well as continuous monitoring of the care economy, should nurture policy-level and social norm changes that recognize and redistribute unpaid care work, and reward paid care work to enable women to participate fully in the Egyptian economy. Addressing gender imbalances in unpaid care work and investing in the paid care sector, through promoting more and decent work for care workers and guaranteeing care workers' representation, would boost women's economic empowerment and reduce gender disparity in the Egyptian labour market, thus contributing significantly to Egypt's inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Further reading

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About the research

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