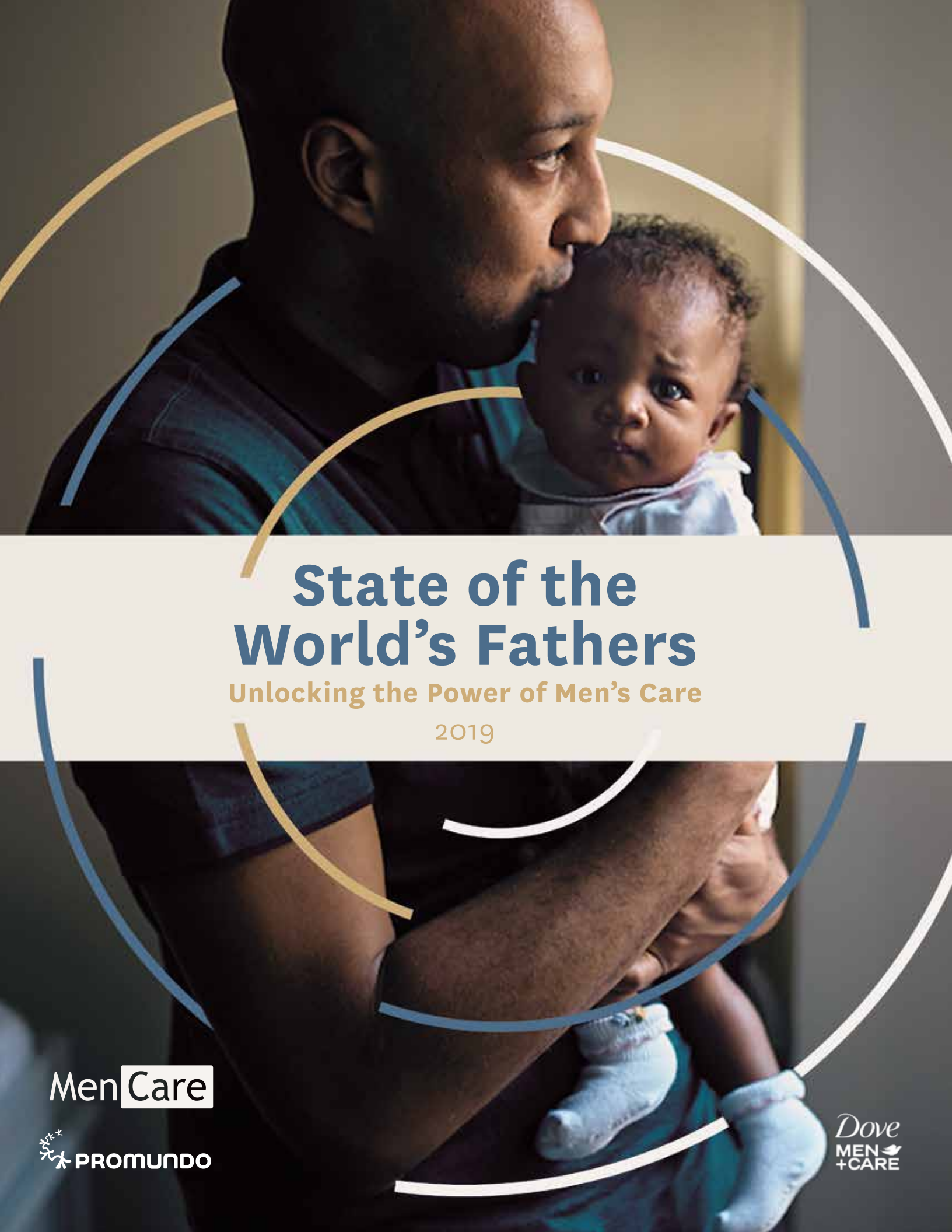


A close-up photograph of a man with a beard and short hair, wearing a dark blue shirt, holding a baby. The man is looking down at the baby with a gentle expression. The baby is looking towards the camera. The image is framed by several overlapping circular lines in shades of blue and yellow.

# State of the World's Fathers

Unlocking the Power of Men's Care

2019

MenCare

 PROMUNDO

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+ CARE

**ABOUT MENCARE:** MenCare is a global campaign led by Promundo and Sonke Gender Justice 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 STATE OF THE WORLD'S FATHERS:** Produced by Promundo, *State of the World's Fathers* 2019 is the third *State of the World's Fathers* report, following previous editions published in 2015 and 2017. It joins a growing set of related country- and region-focused reports on equality in unpaid care work around the world. All editions are available at: [www.stateoftheworldsfathers.org](http://www.stateoftheworldsfathers.org).

**SUGGESTED CITATION:** van der Gaag, N., Heilman, B., Gupta, T., Nembhard, C., and Barker, G. (2019). *State of the World's Fathers: Unlocking the Power of Men's Care*. Washington, DC: Promundo-US.

# State of the World's Fathers

## Unlocking the Power of Men's Care

2019

Produced by:



In partnership with:



## Foreword

From the moment my daughter Malala was born, I wanted her to experience the world. I wanted her to have her own identity. I wanted to be the kind of father who would encourage her to learn — and let her fly toward her dreams.

It was an uncommon choice in rural Pakistan at that time. Men fathered sons this way, not daughters. That was the case in my childhood home.

As a son in a family with five sisters, I saw two types of parenthood. One for boys and one for girls. I knew my parents gave my brother and me special treatment. I had milk in my tea when my sisters could not. I had more clothes than they did. I went to school and they stayed home. All because I was a boy.

As I grew older, I started questioning the patriarchal society around me. Why were my sisters not allowed to go to school? Why did my parents have big dreams for me and not them? Why are women known only by the names of their male relatives? Why does my gender make my life more important?

The answers did not make sense. My privilege became clear and so did my purpose — I would become an educator and make sure that girls were welcomed and encouraged to learn in my school. I would fight for equality and help redefine masculinity in my community.

At home, my wife and I treat our three children as equals and we try to demonstrate a more balanced partnership. Our children see me cook, clean the house, and pick them up from school — tasks too often seen as women's work. I was a feminist before I even knew the word. We are not perfect, but I hope one day our children will take the best of what we've taught them and work to make it even better.

Today there are more men promoting equal rights and opportunities for women. But we still have so far to go. The *State of the World's Fathers* 2019 report shows how fathers can teach their children, both boys and girls, to value equality and to make it their own. To support their wives and partners. And the report demonstrates how fathers themselves benefit from more equitable relationships.

Promundo's thorough and insightful research also calls for changes in laws and policies, and in social and gender norms. If more laws supported working families, they would help promote a fairer distribution of labour at home. If more people understood social norms, we would be better equipped to change them.

I encourage my children to aim high — and every day they make me proud. I learn from them. And now my daughter isn't just experiencing the world, she's changing it. In one generation we transformed our family from a patriarchal one to an egalitarian one. My hope is that all fathers reading this report will question their privilege, care about equality, and contribute to our shared future.

**Ziauddin Yousafzai, Co-founder of Malala Fund**



**Ziauddin Yousafzai**  
Co-founder of Malala Fund

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### Editorial Advisory Board

Thank you to the following organizations that supported the report's writing, revision, and launch as members of the Editorial Advisory Board:

- MenEngage Alliance (MenCare Steering Committee member)
- Oxfam (MenCare Steering Committee member)
- Plan International Canada
- Plan International Sweden (MenCare Steering Committee member)
- Plan International
- Rutgers
- Save the Children Sweden (MenCare Steering Committee member)
- Sonke Gender Justice (MenCare Steering Committee member)
- Unilever

### Production, Coordination, and Dissemination:

Thank you as well to Alexa Hassink, Annaick Miller, and Lona Manik of Promundo-US for coordinating this report's production and communications; to Jill Merriman for its editing; and to Blossom | blossoming.it for its graphic design and layout.

### Additional Acknowledgments:

The authors also thank Molly Kennedy, Eric Ostern, and Sana Suh from Unilever, Dove Men+Care. Thank you as well to Sharon MacLeod.

Thank you to all Plan International staff in Bangladesh, Canada, Ghana, Haiti, and Nigeria who were involved in new data collection and analysis for this report, including Stella Abah, Rebecca Asare-Djan, Sarah Carr, Erica Fotheringham, Irfath Ara Iva, Elie Juin, Abdulazeez Jumare, Mariama Kadiri, Jennifer King, Linda Liutkus, Michelle MacInnes-Rae, Germanie Molin, Obianuju Osude, Noah Parimah, Theodora Quaye, Dr. Mary Rashid, Robitsher Simon, Daniel Sinika, Ross Tanner, and Farid Uddin.

Photos in this report were provided by Plan International Canada; Unilever, Dove Men+Care; Oxfam's We-Care Initiative; and UNICEF.

The authors dedicate the report to Anvay, Dani, Gemma, and Kellan, new arrivals to families in the authorship team and among Promundo staff during the preparation of this report. May they be the generation to build a more gender-equal world.

*Funding for this report was generously provided by Unilever, Dove Men+Care, the Oak Foundation, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Plan International Canada and the Government of Canada, the Overseas Development Institute (ALIGN project), and the Government of Iceland. The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of any of its affiliated organizations, Editorial Advisory Board members, funders, contributors, or expert reviewers.*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                                                           |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY                                                                                         | 8   |
| I. INTRODUCTION                                                                                           | 13  |
| Why a Report on Fathers?                                                                                  | 13  |
| Putting Care into Action                                                                                  | 17  |
| II. FIVE KEYS TO UNLOCKING THE MULTIPLYING POWER OF MEN’S CAREGIVING                                      | 24  |
| KEY 1: IMPROVE LAWS AND POLICIES                                                                          | 28  |
| <i>Legal Provisions at a Glance</i>                                                                       | 40  |
| KEY 2: TRANSFORM SOCIAL AND GENDER NORMS                                                                  | 43  |
| <i>Which Comes First, the Law or the Social Norm? Visualizing the Interplay between Laws and Norms</i>    | 58  |
| KEY 3: GUARANTEE THE ECONOMIC AND PHYSICAL SECURITY OF FAMILIES                                           | 62  |
| <i>Father of the Man: Shifting Norms about Fatherhood in the Middle East</i>                              | 69  |
| KEY 4: HELP COUPLES AND CO-PARENTS THRIVE TOGETHER                                                        | 72  |
| <i>Child’s Eye View: Adolescent Perspectives on Fatherhood from Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, and Nigeria</i> | 86  |
| KEY 5: PUT INDIVIDUAL FATHERS’ CARE INTO ACTION                                                           | 89  |
| III. CONCLUSION: A CALL TO ACTION                                                                         | 97  |
| REFERENCES                                                                                                | 101 |

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**This report has a big ambition: we are calling for nothing less than full equality between women and men, in the workplace and in the home.** The third *State of the World's Fathers* is rooted firmly in a feminist analysis of care, and the belief that unpaid care work must be valued as much as paid work, and shared equally between men and women.

**Globally, women spend significantly more time than men – sometimes up to ten times as much – on unpaid care and domestic work.** If this is calculated on the basis of an hourly minimum wage, it could make up 9 to 11 percent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 2018, 606 million women of working age around the world said that they were unable to take on paid work because of unpaid care responsibilities. In countries where women do twice as much unpaid care work as men, their average earnings are less than two-thirds of men's. This disparity lies at the heart of gender inequality; it keeps women, families, communities, countries, and the world poor.

**This report focuses specifically, however, on men, and on men who are fathers and caregivers, because this is still an area where huge shifts are needed.** While many men are becoming more engaged as fathers and hands-on caregiving partners, in 23 middle- and high-income countries, the unpaid care gap between men and women has decreased by only seven minutes a day across a 15 year time span. Fewer than half of the world's countries (48 percent) offer paid paternity leave on the birth of a child, and often this is less than three weeks – or sometimes only a few days. Even when paternity leave exists, too few fathers take leave after the birth or adoption of a child.

**Worldwide, there remains a widespread expectation that caring is women's work, and men's role as breadwinners should largely exempt them from any household chores or work that includes providing care.** Drawing on data from 23 countries across the world, significant proportions of both men and women agree that “changing diapers, giving baths to children, and feeding children should be the mother's/woman's responsibility.”

**Change in terms of who does the daily care work in our homes is needed, and urgently, if we want a significant shift in power relations between women and men and to bring about gender equality.** The latest report from the World Economic Forum shows that it will take 202 years to close the economic gender gap between men and women. This is far too long.

**But in the past few years, the world has begun to wake up to the importance of unpaid care work. While this report focuses on fathers, it would not exist without the decades of women’s advocacy and the work of feminists who demanded action in this space.** The inclusion of United Nations Sustainable Development Target 5.4 on unpaid work, the call to make visible the “unequal distribution of remunerated and unremunerated work between women and men” in the 1995 Beijing Declaration (and even further back), and the Wages for Housework campaign in 1972 were just some of the milestones along this road.

**Greater involvement by men in daily care work brings benefits for everyone.** Having involved fathers is good for gender equality. It is good for women’s health. It leads to better relationships within couples and can be linked with a reduction in rates of men’s violence against women. It is good for children, too. There is ample evidence from all over the world that engaged fatherhood has a positive impact on boys and girls – and the relationships they will have as adults. Girls are more empowered, and boys are more likely to believe in gender equality and to share the unpaid work if they saw their fathers do the same.

**And shared caregiving is good for men.** Research shows that men themselves benefit from greater engagement in caregiving, including improved physical, mental, and sexual health and reduced risk-taking. Fathers who are involved in the home and with their children say it’s one of their most important sources of well-being and happiness. Not surprising then that the Helping Dads Care Research Project featured in this report, produced in conjunction with Unilever, Dove Men+Care, finds that on average, 85 percent of fathers in seven countries say they would be willing to do *anything* to be very involved in the early weeks and months of caring for their newly born or adopted child.

## **A New Plan: The MenCare Commitment** **50 minutes, 50 percent**

If governments want to care about care, they must have national goals of achieving equality in care work, measure who does the care, and measure progress toward equality in care work. Employers, civil society, and men themselves have a major role to play as well. Along with new data and analysis, this report calls for **a bold commitment to unlock the power of care.**

To reach 50 percent of the unpaid care work, time use data analysis finds that men would need to increase their time spent by a minimum of 50 minutes a day. This report urges governments, employers, and members of civil society around the world to take action to promote gender equality by supporting men to do their fair share of the unpaid care work by 2030. **Learn more about the MenCare Commitment at: [www.men-care.org/mencarecommitment](http://www.men-care.org/mencarecommitment)**

**We call on policy-makers and politicians, health workers and teachers, employers and media influencers, advocates and activists, to step up and end the inequality in unpaid care work.** We call on men and boys – whether biological, non-resident, step or adoptive fathers, adolescent fathers, fathers of all sexual orientations and gender identities, grandfathers, brothers, uncles, or other male relatives – to be more than “helpers.” To take on an equal share of unpaid care and domestic work as an urgent matter of gender justice and women’s rights.

**Changes are needed across five key areas, as highlighted in this report: in laws and policies, in social and gender norms, with families, couples, and individual men themselves.** The full recommendations can be found in each chapter.

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## 1. Improve laws and policies

Governments must implement changes to include fathers in a wide range of sectors and policies – from health to education, childcare to social protection – to support the goal of equality in caregiving and broader gender justice. Equal, fully paid, non-transferable parental leave for all parents is central to setting the foundation for fathers’ involvement with their children from an early age. Governments must collect data on time use in unpaid care work and how it is divided between women and men and girls and boys, and use it to inform policy-making and budgeting decisions.

---

## 2. Transform social and gender norms

Even when supportive laws and policies exist, traditional ideas that women are the default caregivers persist. For this to change, governments must provide training to change attitudes of service providers such as teachers, child care workers and health care providers. Educational programs must ensure that boys and girls are taught to value care from an early age. Employers must create a workplace environment that fully supports the caregiving duties of women and men. Advertisers, media producers, and NGOs should implement media campaigns to inspire men, their families, and their communities to support men’s caregiving.

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## 3. Guarantee economic and physical security for vulnerable families

Programs and policies for marginalized families, including refugees and internally displaced persons, must have an awareness of the pressures that

economic and political insecurity put on the household, and how this affects women and men differently. They must take into account the possible changes in gender roles that result from conflict, and their differentiated impact on women and men. And they must find ways to promote men's involvement in care work.

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#### **4. Help couples and co-parents thrive**

Fathers' relationships with their intimate partners and co-parents are often where the balance or imbalance of care work has the most immediate effects. Father-specific parent training must be implemented and mandated nationally to build men's skills, confidence, and competence, and to promote shared decision-making and good communication.

---

#### **5. Put individual fathers' care into action**

Fathers need to step up – and in practice, this means individual men doing more each day. There must be a deliberate, collective effort to nudge men to do 50 percent of the care work. It's vital to challenge the notion that men are “helping” rather than sharing the care equally. This means encouraging and supporting fathers to participate in groups with their babies and children, to build their confidence and skills, and to commit to sharing the unpaid care and domestic work equally with their partners.

We are not just calling on fathers to make small gestures towards equality. We are after full equality, full stop. Men are shaped by society *and* they have an individual responsibility for achieving equality. We must change the world around men and women to believe that care matters, that it must be equal, and that it is as important as anything else we do.

Change is possible. Gender equality is possible. But it takes all of us to make the shift so that men take on 50 percent of the unpaid care and domestic work and women have the opportunity to participate equally in the workforce. Only then can we build a more equal world. It's time to step up. It's time to unlock – and multiply – the power of men's care.



# I. INTRODUCTION

## *Why a Report on Fathers?*

**This report has a big ambition: helping to achieve equality in unpaid care work – and, by extension, equality between women and men, girls and boys – at home, at work, and in broader society.** This third *State of the World's Fathers* report is rooted firmly in a feminist analysis of care and the belief that unpaid care work must be valued equally with paid work and shared equally between men and women.<sup>1</sup> It focuses specifically on men, and on men who are fathers or caregivers, because this is a part of gender equality and children's rights where massive shifts are needed. Fatherhood marks a critical transition in a man's life, when he can either embrace a loving, caring, nurturing role – more fully embodying gender equality in practice – or demonstrate restrictive notions of what it means to be a man – for example, as a financial provider and protector, but no more.<sup>2</sup>

When discussing fathers, families, and equality in care work, this report is not talking only about fathers in heterosexual relationships. Rather, it refers more generally to caregivers who identify as male in all their diversity – biological fathers, stepfathers, divorced or separated fathers, fathers in same-sex relationships, transgender fathers, men actively caring for children through foster or kinship care, and all other caregiving arrangements that create well-being for all.\* Furthermore, no two couples are the same. Relationships, in all their shapes and sizes, are diverse.

**The fact remains that even though a small number of men around the world are doing more of the daily care work, globally, women spend significantly more time than men – sometimes up to ten times as much – on unpaid care, volunteer, and domestic work.**<sup>3</sup> Unpaid care work includes general household tasks such as laundry and cleaning, as well as direct care for household members, including children, older adults, people with disabilities, people with special needs, and others. Without this work, households and societies would not function.

This huge inequality in terms of who does the daily care work also limits women's choices in the workplace, education, and public life. It is a key factor in driving gender inequality, including the gender pay gap, the glass ceiling, the kinds of

\* While acknowledging this diversity, the language in this report largely reflects the still rigidly binary assignment of gendered roles and responsibilities that continues to inform most societies' expectation of care activities.

jobs that women do, and the part-time or relatively badly paid and protected jobs that are often available to them. It also infringes on women's rights and drives poverty – as Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, former United Nations special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, argued, “*Heavy and unequal care responsibilities are a major barrier to gender equality and to women's equal enjoyment of human rights, and, in many cases, condemn women to poverty.*”<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, this inequality begins in childhood. Girls spend 40 percent more time on unpaid work than boys of the same age, which means they have less time for school, homework, play and leisure, and other things that they should be able to do as children.<sup>5</sup>

**The International Labour Organization (ILO) recognizes that over a 15 year time span, across the 23 middle- and upper-income countries with comparable data, the unpaid care gap between men and women has decreased by only seven minutes per day.**<sup>6</sup> As Shauna Olney, ILO chief of gender, equality, and diversity, remarked, “*The glacial rate of these changes calls into question the effectiveness of past and current policies in addressing the extent and division of unpaid care work over the past two decades.*”<sup>7</sup>

Analysis of the same time use data finds that if men took on at least 50 minutes more unpaid care work per day (and women did 50 minutes less), it would tip the scale toward equality. Women's time spent in unpaid care work clocked in at 4 hours and 8 minutes per day at the end of the 15 year period (ending in 2012), and men's at 2 hours and 27 minutes; this still leaves a gap of 1 hour and 42 minutes between the unpaid work men and women were taking on every day. If men were to meet half way and take on half of that gap, if they were to take on 50 more minutes a day caring for children and households, it would support a leap toward achieving gender equality in unpaid care in middle- and upper-income countries, and would have a meaningful impact in lower-income countries, where the gender gap in unpaid care is often much larger.

**NEW DATA** According to the 2019 Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development Social Institutions and Gender Index (OECD SIGI), women's daily contributions to unpaid care, domestic, and volunteer work are greater than men's in all included countries. Presented as ratios where a higher value indicates a greater imbalance between women and men, unpaid work imbalance ratios range from 1.26 to 10.00. While these data obscure differences among women within each country – based on age, location, wealth level, and other important differences – the overall trend is undeniable: although many wealthier countries have come close, no country in the world has achieved gender equality in unpaid care work.

Girls spend

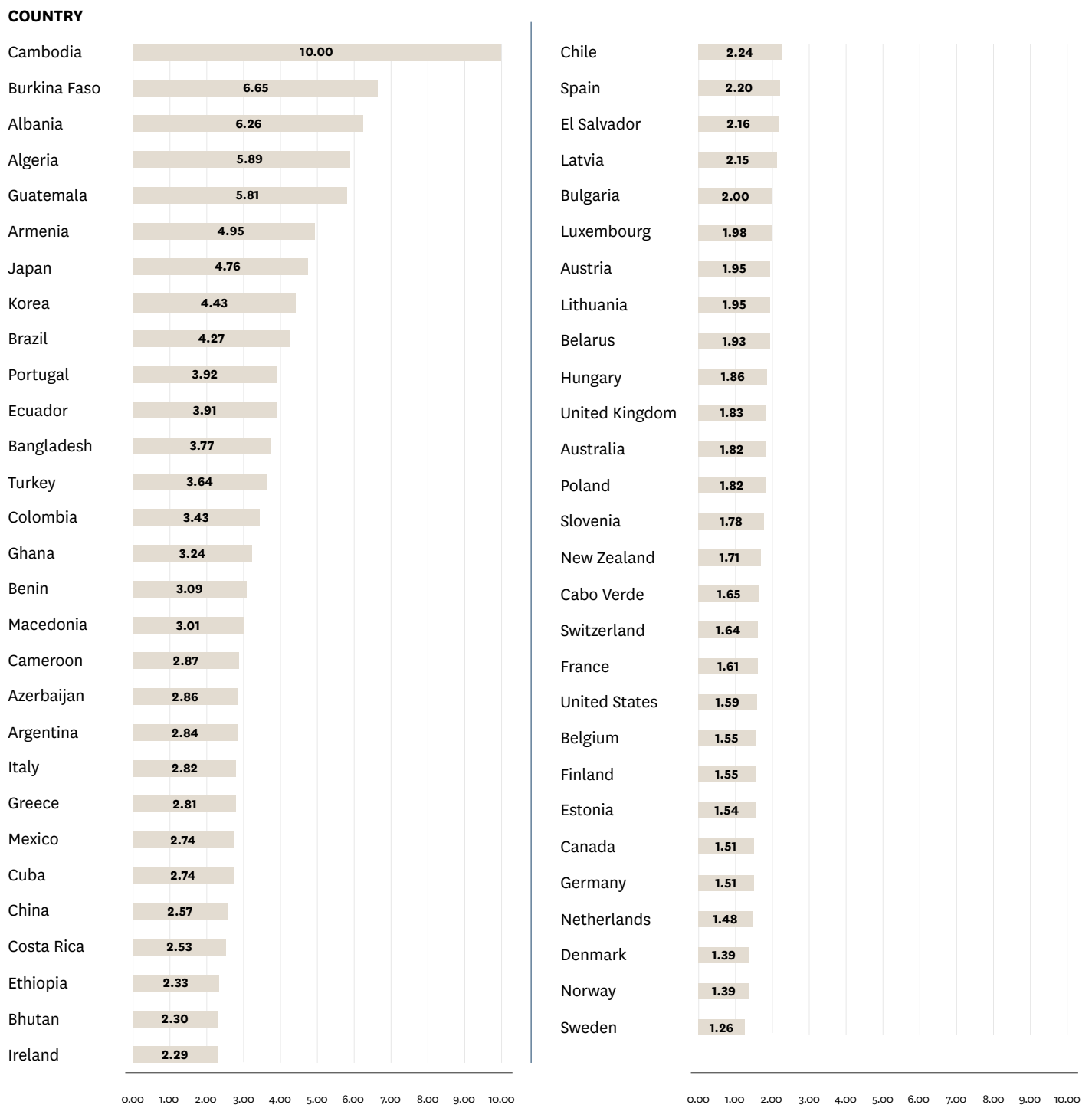
40%

more time on unpaid work than boys of the same age, which means they have less time for school, homework, play, and leisure.

**What about when paid and unpaid work are combined?** Adding up the time women and men spend in paid work and unpaid care work, women on average still work more every day compared to men, as a new analysis published by the ILO shows (see Figure 2).

**FIGURE 1.**

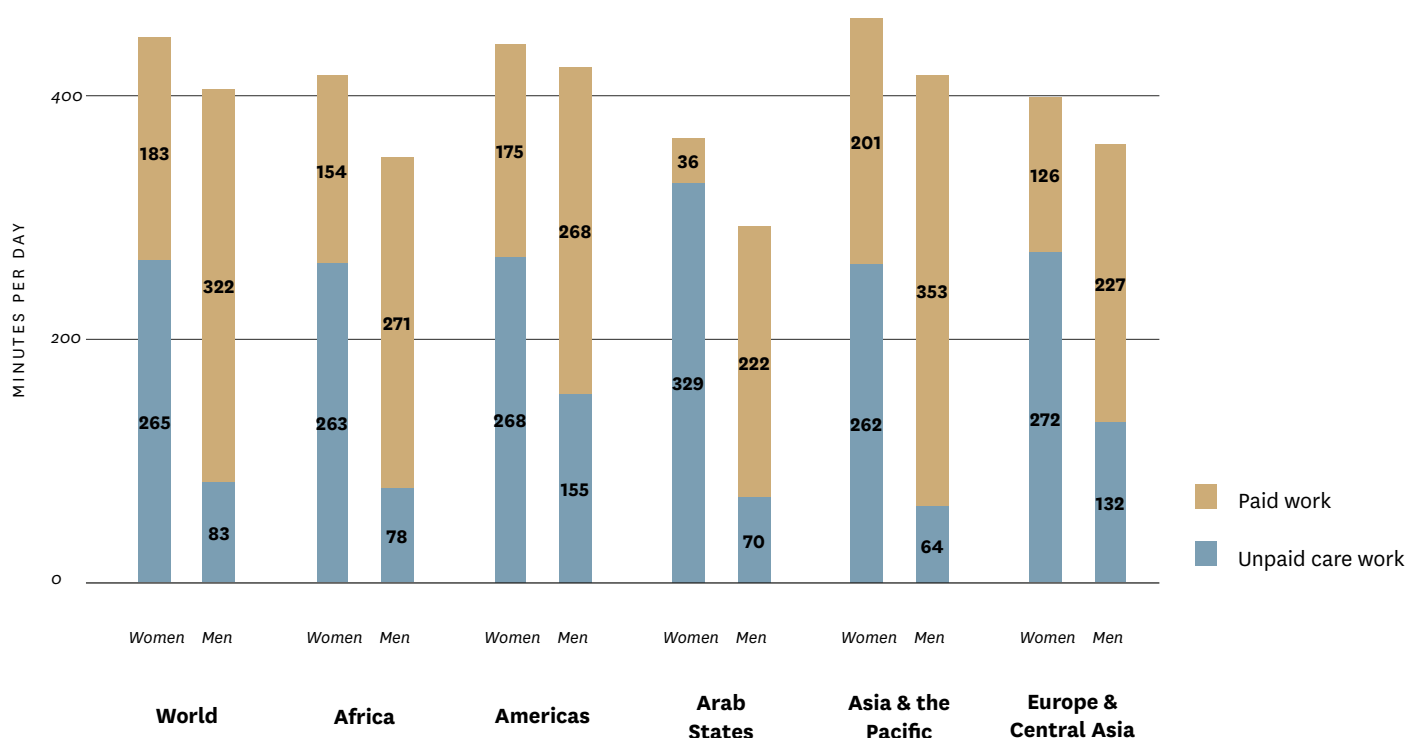
**Female-to-male ratio of average time spent on unpaid domestic, care, and volunteer work in a 24-hour period**



Source: Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development. (2019). *The OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index*.

**FIGURE 2.**

**Combined amounts of paid and unpaid work among women and men by region**



Source: Addati, L., Cattaneo, U., Esquivel, V., & Valarino, I. (2018). *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*. International Labour Organization.

The latest report from the World Economic Forum shows that at the current rate of progress, it will take 202 years to close the global economic gap between men and women.<sup>8</sup> Addressing the inequalities of unpaid care work is a prerequisite to narrow this enormous divide.

*“At home I have to sweep, wash the dishes and wash my brother’s clothes. He was brought to the world as a trophy that is cleaned and taken care of and it makes me feel bad, how is it possible that I have to do everything and also have to wash his clothes? He can learn too.” — Girl, Colombia<sup>9</sup>*

The slow pace of change toward a more equitable sharing of unpaid care, along with the enormous unrealized benefits of greater gender equality, motivates this report. There is more attention being paid to this issue, and a growing minority of fathers are living more caring, more equal lifestyles. However, far too few men are fully embodying equality at home, at work, and across society. To achieve the kinds of changes that lead to gender equality, men must step up and the world around them must change so that care work is shared 50/50 between men and women.

## Putting Care into Action

**The capacity to care and show empathy is one of the fundamental reasons humans have survived as a species and continue to thrive<sup>10</sup>** – which is why caregiving is as much a societal responsibility as an individual one, as many feminist analyses of care point out.<sup>11</sup> Care can be physical or emotional, and it extends beyond families, children, and dependent adults to include friends and neighbors. Furthermore, the need for all forms of interpersonal care is only going to increase in the coming years, as the world's population will include both more children and more older adults. In 2015, 2.1 billion people were in need of care, including 1.9 billion children under 15 and 200 million older adults. By 2030, estimates suggest this number is likely to increase to 2.3 billion – meaning an additional 200 million children and older adults needing care.<sup>12</sup>

**The international community has increasingly recognized the importance of unpaid care and domestic work.** In 2016, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal on gender equality (SDG 5) specifically highlighted the importance of unpaid care and domestic work and the need for adequate public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies, as well as shared responsibility within the household. The United Nations High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment also recognized unpaid care as a key barrier. Caring and equitable fatherhood is also a key concern from a child-rights perspective, underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Care can be physical or emotional, and it extends beyond families, children, and dependent adults to include friends and neighbors.

**At the same time, unpaid care – whether for children, partners, friends, older adults, or for the planet as a whole – is undervalued, socially and financially.** Care work, and women's position in society, are simultaneously given second-class status. The scale of this undervaluing of care work is massive. Globally, at least 16.4 billion hours a day are spent on unpaid care work – the equivalent of two billion people working eight hours a day for no pay. If this is calculated on the basis of an hourly minimum wage, according to separate analyses by the ILO and McKinsey & Company, it would add up to at least 9 percent of the global gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>13</sup> It is imperative to dismantle this patriarchal undervaluing while also transforming who actually does the daily hands-on work.

**These two facts are interlinked: no country in the world has achieved equality in unpaid care work between men and women, and no country in the world has achieved pay equality between women and men.** As men's wages are higher, heterosexual families typically end up with women taking on more of the

unpaid care work, often on top of paid work. This means their wages stay lower, employers make assumptions about who is doing the care work at home, and the cycle continues. Even in countries like Denmark, which has one of the highest female employment rates (even for mothers with young children) according to recent OECD data, women earn 15 percent less on average than men.<sup>14</sup> In an interview to mark International Women's Day in 2019, International Monetary Fund Managing Director and Chairwoman Christine Lagarde made a strong economic case for women's equal role in the workforce, citing evidence that gender empowerment means *"a reduction in inequality, an improvement in the strength of the economy and a more diversified, export-focused country."*<sup>15</sup> Quite simply, there can be no gender equality unless women are able to choose to participate in the workplace on an equal basis with men. In sum, equality in who carries out the daily work in homes is necessary for economic development, poverty reduction, and gender equality in all realms of life.

### The Four Rs – Valuing Women's Unpaid Care and Domestic Work Contributions and Achieving Equality

This report is rooted in the analysis and the call, originally put forward by feminist economist Diane Elson, to recognize, reduce, and redistribute women's and girls' unpaid care and domestic work contributions. The original "3 Rs framework"<sup>16</sup> calls for:

- **Recognition:** Increased attention to the vital importance of the role of care in society. Efforts seeking to increase this recognition may gather new data on the patterns and consequences of care work in society and present this data in compelling ways to decision-makers and government authorities
- **Reduction:** Programs, policies, and societies to lessen the toll of arduous and difficult unpaid care and domestic work on women and girls and to invest in water, energy, infrastructure, transportation, and other areas

so that domestic work in particular becomes less difficult and time-consuming.

- **Redistribution:** The state, and men and boys, taking up a greater, more equitable share of the responsibilities, tasks, and work in this domain.<sup>17</sup>

More recently, after discussions with international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and academics working on this issue, the United Nations High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment proposed a fourth "R":

- **Representation:** This calls for carers' increased visibility within the policy environment, including supporting collectives, unions, and groups of organized carers in relevant negotiations and advocacy processes.<sup>18</sup>

**Aligned with the four Rs, *State of the World's Fathers 2019* proposes five interconnected keys to unlock the power of men's care work.** Men as individuals need to step up and do more, and this report presents a strong case for the many benefits that can empower and encourage men to live gender-equal ideals. All fathers should take greater responsibility and accountability in their own families, workplaces, and spheres of influence. However, the factors that drive men's care extend beyond individual mothers or fathers. They exist at the structural level, where policies, laws, and norms shape parents' and children's opportunities. They extend into social and gender norms dictating what is and isn't appropriate or sanctioned based on a person's gender. They reach into family life, whatever shape that family takes, and include factors of economic and physical security and well-being. Also, of course, they manifest in men's relationships with their intimate partners and co-parents. The report will address each of these five domains, with key recommendations across all.

**Unpaid care matters. The fact that women and girls all over the world carry out the vast majority of this work lies at the heart of gender inequality.** It keeps women, families, communities, countries, and the world poor. To achieve gender equality, inequalities between women and men must be addressed in unpaid and paid work. These continue to represent the major social and economic injustices that hold women back from equal participation in the workplace and in society. Nothing short of a full-on, multi-key push, and a bold vision for change, will end this inequality. It is deep and it is structural – and one of the things it needs to make it happen is the power of men's caregiving. If societies want to care about care, they must have national goals of achieving equality in care work, measure who does the care, and measure progress toward equality in care work. Along with new data and analysis, this report calls for **a bold and urgent commitment to unlock the power of care.**

To reach 50 percent of the unpaid care work, time use data analysis finds that men would need to increase their time spent by a minimum of 50 minutes a day. This report urges governments, employers, and members of civil society around the world to take action to promote gender equality by supporting men to do their fair share of the unpaid care work by 2030. Learn more about the MenCare Commitment at: [www.men-care.org/mencarecommitment](http://www.men-care.org/mencarecommitment).

**We call on policy-makers and politicians, health workers and teachers, employers and media influencers, advocates and activists, to step up and end the inequality in unpaid care work.** We call on men and boys – whether biological, non-resident, step or adoptive fathers, adolescent fathers, fathers of all sexual orientations and gender identities, grandfathers, brothers, uncles, or other male relatives – to be more than “helpers.” To take on an equal share of unpaid care and domestic work as an urgent matter of gender justice and women's rights.

**It “takes a village,” or a whole society, to unlock the power of men’s care. We must work on all five keys in this report, simultaneously and urgently, for as long as it takes.** Men are shaped by the world around them, *and* they have an individual responsibility for achieving equality. We are not merely calling on fathers to make small gestures toward this equality, and this is not about celebrating a few things that men should already be doing. We are after full equality, full stop. We must also change the world around individuals to believe that care matters, that it must be equal, and that it is as important as anything else we do.

# About the Data in this Report

*State of the World's Fathers 2019* includes new data analyses from four sources, detailed below. Wherever a never-before-seen analysis appears in the report, it is labeled as **NEW DATA.**

## 1. The Helping Dads Care Research Project (2017–2019)

In partnership with Unilever Dove Men+Care, Promundo conducted the Helping Dads Care Research Project, which provides new cross-sectional survey data involving men and women (aged 25 to 45) on what factors encourage men's use of parental leave in seven countries. *State of the World's Fathers 2019* is the first and only multi-country publication featuring these new data to date.

**TABLE 1:**

**Sample sizes across countries from The Helping Dads Care Research Project**

|               | FATHERS<br>(n) | MOTHERS<br>(n) | MEN<br>WITHOUT<br>CHILDREN<br>(n) | WOMEN<br>WITHOUT<br>CHILDREN<br>(n) | DID NOT<br>RESPOND<br>ON PARENT<br>STATUS<br>(n) | TOTAL<br>SAMPLE<br>(n) |
|---------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| United States | 371            | 398            | 187                               | 225                                 | 0                                                | 1,181                  |
| Brazil        | 790            | 380            | 346                               | 172                                 | 21                                               | 1,709                  |
| Japan         | 557            | 465            | 454                               | 278                                 | 53                                               | 1,807                  |
| UK            | 828            | 296            | 216                               | 300                                 | 12                                               | 1,652                  |
| Argentina     | 714            | 392            | 305                               | 182                                 | 60                                               | 1,653                  |
| Canada        | 853            | 289            | 185                               | 284                                 | 23                                               | 1,634                  |
| Netherlands   | 723            | 305            | 271                               | 365                                 | 34                                               | 1,698                  |

## 2. Plan International Canada: SHOW Fathers' Study

Plan International Canada conducted a study in its multi-country, Global Affairs Canada-funded program Strengthening Health Outcomes for Women and Children (SHOW) in Bangladesh, Haiti, Nigeria, and Ghana in January and February 2019. The study examined attitudes and perceptions on the distribution of roles and responsibilities between women and men regarding household work and caregiving

activities; behavior changes of male participants in the SHOW Fathers' Clubs; and perceptions and effects of behavior changes. The study collected qualitative data through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with women partners and adolescent children (boys and girls), with Fathers' Club participants, and with male community leaders. In total, 154 consultations were conducted with 482 participants (284 female and 198 male). Complementary case studies were collected with a focus on women and adolescent children and their experience of change related to their partner and father's caregiving and participation in care work.

### **3. International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES)**

The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) is one of the most comprehensive studies ever on men's and women's practices and attitudes as they relate to gender norms, attitudes toward gender-equality policies, household dynamics (including caregiving and men's involvement as fathers), intimate partner violence, health, economic stress, and more. Promundo and the International Center for Research on Women created IMAGES, and IMAGES studies had been carried out in more than 27 countries around the world as of 2019. Studies inspired by IMAGES, including the Partners for Prevention United Nations Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence, have been conducted in at least another 14 countries.<sup>19</sup> Since 2009, household surveys were administered to more than 50,000 men and women (combined) as part of IMAGES. *State of the World's Fathers 2019* presents new multi-country analysis of IMAGES findings from more than two-dozen country studies.

### **4. OECD SIGI Index**

The Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) is a new composite measure of gender equality based on the OECD's Gender, Institutions, and Development Database. It complements and improves existing measures in several ways. While conventional indicators of gender equality capture inequality outcomes, the SIGI focuses on the root causes behind these inequalities. The SIGI introduces 12 innovative indicators on social institutions, which are grouped into five categories: family code, physical integrity, son preference, civil liberties, and ownership rights. Each of the SIGI indicators is coded between 0, meaning no or very low inequality, and 1, indicating very high inequality. For more information, visit [www.genderindex.org](http://www.genderindex.org)



## II. FIVE KEYS TO UNLOCKING THE POWER OF MEN'S CAREGIVING

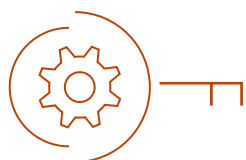
This third edition of *State of the World's Fathers* aims to do nothing less than change the world by calling on societies, legislators, corporations, media, social institutions, families, caregivers – and, ultimately, men and fathers – to unlock the power of care and to ensure that men step up to do 50 percent of the unpaid care work in the home.

It sets out the five keys that are essential to achieving this:



### KEY 1: IMPROVE LAWS AND POLICIES

Sweeping changes are needed in the legal realities and the policy environment that shape women's and men's opportunities and choices, as well as children's lives. This key focuses on parental leave policies in particular, but it also refers to other high-level changes to advance equality in unpaid care work in terms of constitutional protections and provisions, as well as in terms of social protection, affordable, quality public childcare, and the collection of data and statistics.



### KEY 2: TRANSFORM SOCIAL AND GENDER NORMS

This key focuses on “changing hearts and minds,” specifically social and gender norms – the ideas about what it means to be a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, a mother or a father, what is skilled and valuable work, and all of the ways in which these social expectations can support or create barriers to equality in unpaid care work.



### KEY 3: BUILD THE ECONOMIC AND PHYSICAL SECURITY OF FAMILIES

This section focuses on the family's economic situation and physical safety. Relatively few families worldwide are able to make decisions about caregiving without economic constraints or physical safety concerns, and this key bring particular focus to how experiences of conflict and displacement influence unpaid care.



#### KEY 4: HELP COUPLES AND CO-PARENTS THRIVE TOGETHER

This refers to men's relationships with their intimate partners and co-parents, which are most often women but include households of all sexual orientations and gender identities. It is essential to understand the diversity of caregiving relationships and to elevate the voices and demands of women, paying attention to what women are calling for in terms of fathers' care work.

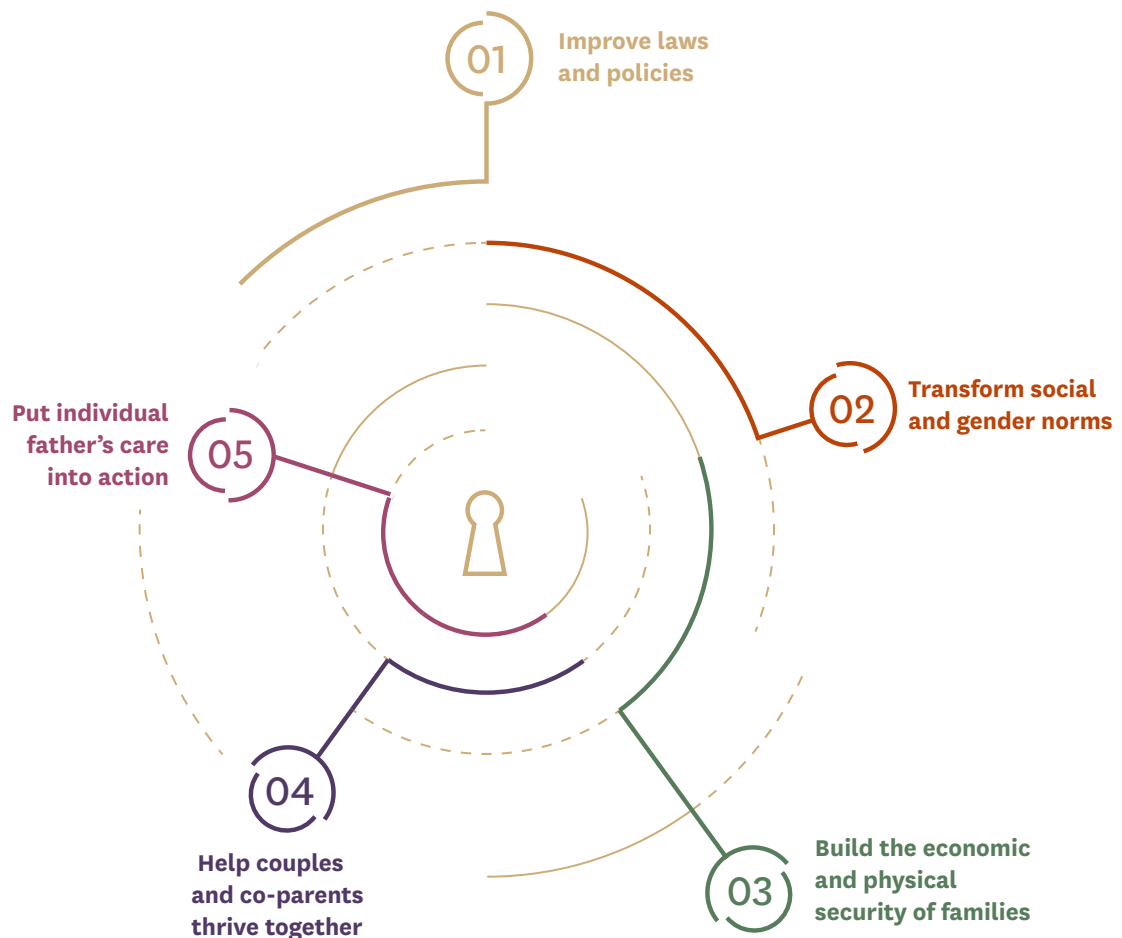


#### KEY 5: PUT INDIVIDUAL FATHERS' CARE INTO ACTION

It is ultimately the individual father who either does or doesn't step up into a more equal caregiving role. This section investigates fathers' caregiving capacities, intergenerational factors in men's care work, and the individual benefits of care work equality.

**FIGURE 3.**

**Five keys to unlock the power of care**



Urgent action is required simultaneously in these five interlocking and indispensable areas: by mobilizing new laws and policies, shifting social and gender norms, promoting family and relationship equality, and empowering individual men and fathers to become equitable caregivers, the world will see radical transformations. In short, the more we care – and the more we care *about* care and caregiving – the more families and societies will thrive. Women, families, boys and girls, and men themselves already care about one another and want the best futures for themselves, their children and other family members, and communities.





## KEY 1:

# Improve Laws and Policies

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*“We commit ourselves to place at the center of public policy the shared responsibility for caregiving.”*

*- Luis Guillermo Solís Rivera, then-President of Costa Rica, in 2015<sup>20</sup>*

In most countries, social and economic policies continue to reflect and reinforce an unjust gendered division of labor and care. As such, changes in a wide range of government sectors and policies are needed to achieve a shift in caregiving practices. Policy investments to support households with their unpaid care responsibilities, and toward a more equal distribution of care, have been shown to improve gender equality and economic development. However, too many countries are not taking advantage, to their detriment.

### ***Exploring the Range of Needed Policy Changes***

**Changes in a wide range of government sectors and policies have the potential to support the goal of equality in caregiving and broader gender justice.** Before zooming in specifically on parental and paternity leave, this section covers a range of important policies.

**SOCIAL PROTECTION: When designed well, social protection policies are critical in transforming women, men’s, and children’s lives – and supporting men to do more of the care work.** Social protection measures include cash transfers, old age social pensions, disability grants, childcare subsidies, and public programs that provide income and services to the poorest. Very often, however, many of the benefits that relate to unpaid care work (for example, cash transfers) are offered only to mothers, perpetuating the idea that caregiving is inherently a female role.<sup>21</sup> Traditionally, the analysis was that women tend to make more productive investments for the family than men.<sup>22</sup> However, this is changing. For example,

one study in South Africa found men who accessed the Child Support Grant cash transfer used the money no differently than women who accessed the grant, spending it on expenses such as food, school fees, and clothing.<sup>23</sup> Of course, this is not the case with all men, and any changes in cash transfers to low-income families must be done with caution. Programs that give men responsibility – for example, ensuring they take children to school or to health clinics and attend training programs – are able to support a more equitable sharing of household responsibilities without taking power away from the mother.<sup>24</sup> The government of the Philippines has introduced the 4Ps program, which provides cash assistance to poor families and includes a Family Development Session in which discussions cover relationships between husbands and wives, women's rights, and home management. The program now requires fathers as well as mothers to attend these sessions, with a target minimum of 40 percent for fathers' involvement.<sup>25</sup>

A forthcoming review of over 100 large-scale social protection programs concludes that most social protection programs are in fact *gender-reinforcing*, with only three documented examples trying to engage men in doing a greater share of unpaid care work.<sup>26</sup> The report demonstrates that some cash-transfer programs have provided childcare subsidies to working mothers and/or guaranteed on-site childcare services and flexible working hours in public works projects in order to help women accommodate their domestic responsibilities. Even as these examples do redistribute some of women's unpaid care workload to the state and have the potential to promote increased economic empowerment of women, *none* have encouraged greater male involvement in unpaid care work nor sought to challenge the norm that women are the chief caregivers.<sup>27</sup>

**CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTIONS AND PROVISIONS: Equality in unpaid care work can and must be enshrined in the highest levels of international and national legislation.** Kenya's constitution (2010) explicitly states that it is the shared responsibility of both parents to care for their children, as well as that every child has the right to "parental care and protection, which includes equal responsibility of the mother and father to provide for the child, whether they are married to each other or not."<sup>28</sup> The Australian Human Rights Commission designates "carers" as a protected group, and Australia's Sex Discrimination Act and Disability Discrimination Act protect individuals from discrimination based on their caring responsibilities. In New South Wales and Victoria, laws specify that employers have to accommodate reasonable requests from carers for alternative work arrangements.<sup>29</sup> For care and care work to be taken seriously, and to be taken on equally by men, it must be clear in the highest order of law.

**At present, no country in the world has achieved equality between men and women in unpaid care, and no country in the world has a national goal of men doing 50 percent of the care work.** The Sustainable Development Goals, the global blueprint for equality and development signed by the United Nations countries, call only for “greater attention” to unpaid care work and encouraging men and boys to do more. They do not call outright for equality in unpaid care work. It’s time to change that. It’s time for countries and the United Nations, and individual countries, to call for the explicit goal for men and boys carrying out 50 percent of the unpaid care work.

### The European Commission’s Work-Life Balance Directive

On April 4, 2019, the European Parliament voted in favor of the Work-Life Balance Directive to become law in all member states. The directive is aimed at improving family-related leave covering parental leave, paternity leave, carers’ leave, and the right to request flexible working arrangements related to care responsibilities. It sets the minimum standards for members, while leaving it up to member states to decide on their own levels of protection. As of this report’s publication, the directive is now waiting for final consent from the Council of the European Union. The directive’s main points entail:<sup>30</sup>

- A European minimum standard of 10 days of paternity or second parent’s leave around the birth of the child (paid at the sick-leave level). Member states with higher-level pay or more generous parental leave systems are allowed to keep their current national arrangements.
- Four months of parental leave (with a minimum of two months non-transferable and paid, with payment to be determined by national governments).
- Five days per year of carer’s leave per worker (with payment to be decided by national governments).

- An extension to the right for working carers, in addition to all working parents, to request flexible working arrangements.

While this directive is moving in the right direction, there are several important limitations. First, of course, it applies only to European Union countries. Second, the best-performing countries in leave policies in the region, such as Sweden and Finland, already have leave policies in place that are more generous than what is being proposed. Third, civil society associations such as COFACE Families Europe have called for the inclusion of quality childcare services as part of the directive, which are urgently needed in addition to leave post-childbirth. Some legislators also feel that while the directive sets up a minimum level and represents a step toward great gender equality and better care for children, it is a small step that could have been taken further.<sup>31</sup>

Leaving the limitations of this directive aside, however, it is encouraging to see the European Union stepping up its commitment to ensure family-friendly leave policies for all countries in the region.

**CHILDCARE:** The provision of publicly subsidized, affordable, and high-quality childcare is another key driver of women's economic empowerment, as well as a major contribution to the sharing of housework and childcare. Lack of affordable, quality childcare means that women have to choose between paid and unpaid work, especially women from low-income households.<sup>32</sup> A cost-benefit analysis of daycare fees, cash transfers, and expenditures for mothers receiving subsidized childcare in Nairobi, Kenya, found that those who did receive the subsidy were able to increase their annual earnings while working fewer hours overall than those who did not.<sup>33</sup> The program was found to be both economically empowering for women and cost-effective for the government given the returns in child health and development and the increases in mothers' earnings. In Japan, the government has approved a program, to begin in October 2019, that expands state-supported childcare, offering free public preschool education for all children aged three to five and free daycare services for children under two if they come from low-income households.<sup>34</sup> In South Africa, a report by UN Women found that a gross annual investment of 3.2 percent of GDP would not only result in universal coverage for all children aged zero to five but also create 2.3 million new jobs, raise female employment by 10.1 percentage points, and generate new tax and social security revenue of up to US\$3.8 billion. A less ambitious scenario requiring only 1.8 percent of GDP could serve as a stepping stone towards universal coverage.<sup>35</sup>

**DATA AND STATISTICS:** Collecting data on unpaid care work and time use – and using it to inform policy-making and budgeting decisions – is necessary at both national and local levels.<sup>36</sup> The Uganda Bureau of Statistics has incorporated questions on unpaid care into relevant national surveys, including the Demographic Health Survey and National Health Survey, following engagement with Oxfam, the Uganda Women's Network, and others.<sup>37</sup> In the Philippines, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Colombia, and elsewhere, Oxfam's Women's Economic Empowerment and Care (WE-Care) program works with communities to provide their own assessments of care work through a rapid care analysis.<sup>38</sup> Local researchers use a household care survey<sup>39</sup> to collect evidence on the time spent by men, women, and children on paid work, education, and care activities like laundry, cooking, childcare, and water collection, as well as evidence on the infrastructure, services, and social norms that shape who does what in households. This is then used to influence ministries and local governments, which have made commitments to invest more in public services and promote shared care work. In some cases, government officials have promised to include questions on unpaid care in their household surveys, which in turn can be fed back into shaping programs.<sup>40</sup> If societies care about care, they must have national goals of achieving equality in care work, measure who does the care, and measure progress toward equality in care work.

If societies care about care, they must have national goals of achieving equality in care work, measure who does the care, and measure progress toward equality in care work.

## Parental and Paternity Leave

*“Paternity leave is definitely a necessity – I can draw from my own experience. Being present during childbirth allowed me to feel the greatness of mothers. It also helped me cultivate a stronger sense of responsibility.”*

– Qiu Jiacheng, 28-year-old business consultant and new father from Shanghai, China<sup>41</sup>

**Leave for fathers – in conjunction with leave for mothers and when enshrined in national policies – contributes significantly to the recognition and redistribution of unpaid care work.** It also helps transform deeply rooted inequalities between men and women and builds better relationships between fathers and their children. Paid parental leave, as currently constructed, only benefits those in paid employment and does not generally provide benefits for the millions who work in the informal sector or are self-employed. Leave policies for fathers include paternity leave, which offers a father the opportunity to take time off from work after the birth or adoption of a child, and parental leave, which refers to leave available to either or both parents that allows them to take care of an infant or child. Jody Heymann, founding director of the WORLD Policy Analysis Center, argues, *“To achieve gender equality both in the workplace and the home, it is essential for men to have an equal chance to be there with their newborn babies.”*<sup>42</sup>

**However, fathers are still allowed little, if any, official leave at the birth or adoption of a child.** Paid maternity leave has been enshrined in key United Nations and ILO conventions<sup>43</sup> and is now offered in nearly all countries in the world (except for eight: the United States, Papua New Guinea, Suriname, and a few South Pacific island nations). According to analysis undertaken for the World Bank Group’s 2019 *Women, Business, and the Law* report, only 90 out of 187 countries (48 percent) provide *any* paid paternity leave that new fathers can take as a matter of national policy.<sup>44</sup> Even in these countries, it remains common for these leave provisions to be shorter than three weeks, often only a few days. This is hardly enough to achieve the equality we seek.

**NEW DATA** The Helping Dads Care Research Project found that many fathers do not take leave even when it is provided. Survey results found many fathers take *no leave at all* after the birth or adoption of their child. Moreover, fewer than half the fathers in the samples took the full amount of time that they were entitled to.

**TABLE 2.**

**Percentage of fathers who took no time off and who took the amount of time they were allocated under their country's policies**

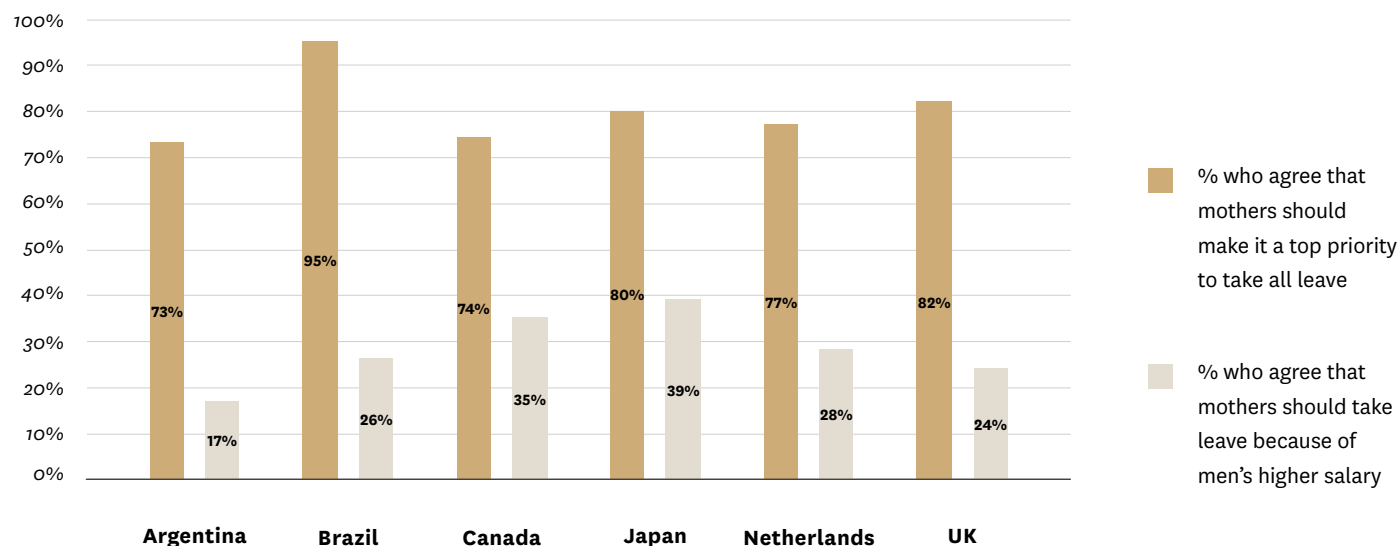
| Country                           | No time off    | Took as much time as country's policy offers |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Argentina</b>                  | 20%            | 29% (1-2 days)                               |
| <b>Brazil</b>                     | 27%            | 32% (5 days)*                                |
| <b>Canada<br/>(except Québec)</b> | 40%            | 40% (2 weeks)**                              |
| <b>Japan</b>                      | 35%            | 1% (12 months)                               |
| <b>Netherlands</b>                | 18%            | 37% (3 days)                                 |
| <b>United Kingdom</b>             | 16%            | 44% (2 weeks)                                |
| <b>United States</b>              | LESS THAN 0.1% | N/A (28% took 2 weeks)***                    |

\* Currently in Brazil, fathers are entitled to up to five days of paid parental leave and, since 2016, are eligible for an additional 15 days of leave contingent on the employer participating in the Programa Empresa Cidadã (Citizen Company Program) and on the fathers completing a good parent course. From the sample, less than 1 percent of fathers took the entire 20 days off after the birth or adoption of their child.

\*\* In Canada, parents of children born after March 17, 2019, are receiving five additional weeks of leave if they opt for the traditional 12-month parental leave, or eight weeks under the new 18-month option introduced in late 2018, so long as the couple agrees to split the time off to care for a new child. If the couple doesn't share the time off, then the family won't qualify for the extra weeks – making it a “use it or lose it” option.

\*\*\* The United States has no policy guaranteeing paternity leave; instead, the employer determines the amount of leave offered.

**NEW DATA** Respondents in the Helping Dads Care Research Project were asked about whether men and women should make it a priority to take the maximum amount of parental leave available to them, paid and unpaid. Results confirm that gendered patterns persist: majorities of men and women felt that mothers should make it a top priority to take all leave, at higher rates than they thought men should make it a priority. Why this gap? According to 16 to 38 percent of mothers, men's higher salaries are part of the rationale for why women should prioritize using leave. Men's higher salaries mean families prioritize women taking leave, and the gender salary gap continues. How can this cycle be broken? It starts with paid, equal leave for fathers.

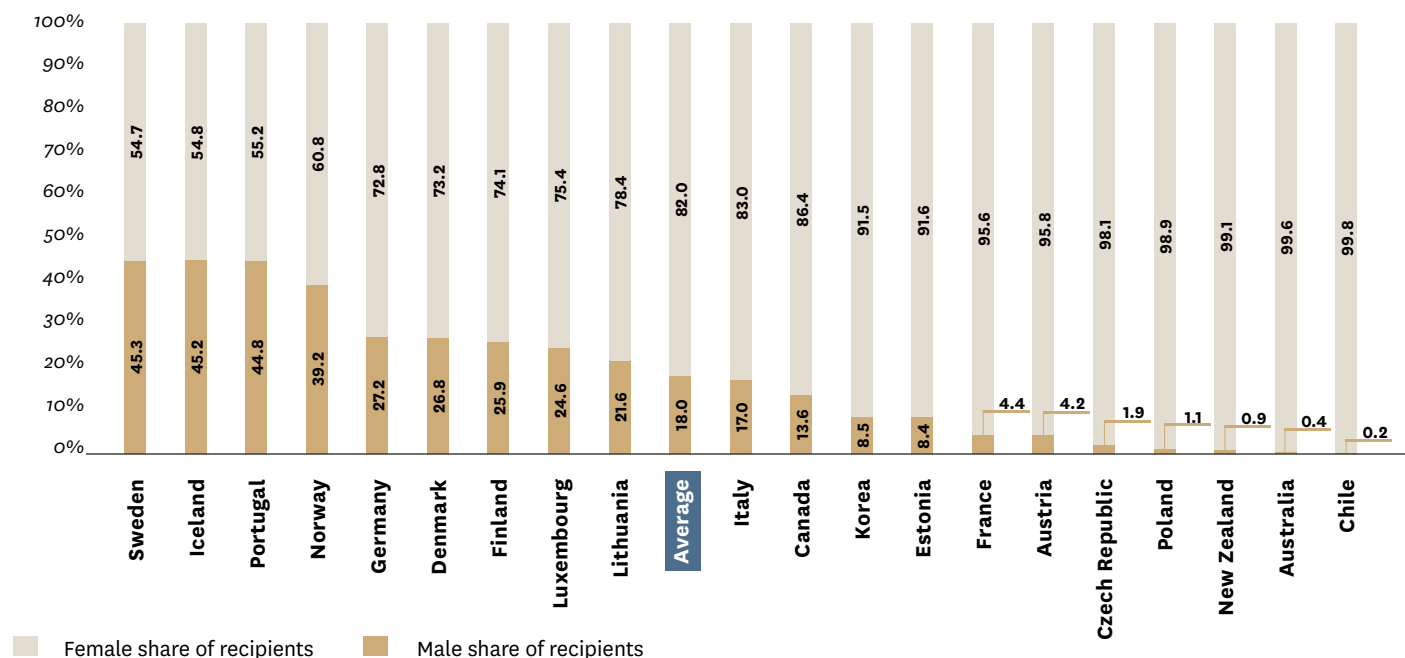
**FIGURE 4.****Attitudes about mothers and parental leave**

**The good news is that, on average – in OECD countries (middle- and upper-income countries) at least – men’s use of parental leave is increasing, although often the number of days taken by fathers remains minimal.** A 2016 OECD report notes, “In Finland, the male share doubled between 2006 and 2013 while in Belgium it grew by almost 10 percentage points over roughly the same period. Still, some countries have seen little change. In Austria and France, men account for just 4 percent of parents taking parental leave, broadly the same as about a decade ago.”<sup>45</sup> In Russia, where fathers are allowed five days of leave, only 7 percent of fathers took even this. Some 54 percent of those who took no leave said it was because they could not afford it.<sup>46</sup> As Figure 5 demonstrates, in most countries, men are still vastly outnumbered by women when it comes to taking parental leave.

**The most effective parental leave policies are those that include a non-transferrable portion for fathers, sometimes referred to as “daddy days,” where the father either uses these days or loses them entirely (that is, he is not allowed to transfer them to the mother).** Indeed, if leave is not specifically designed for fathers or is not adequately remunerated, few fathers actually take it. Longer parental leave, with paid, non-transferable days for fathers, is the most effective in encouraging fathers to take leave and in supporting families toward greater equity between men and women with regard to unpaid care work. The Helping Dads Care Research Project data finds that in Canada, where there is no exclusive paternity leave mandated by policy, 40 percent of fathers (except in Québec) take no time off after the birth of their child; in Québec, where fathers are exclusively entitled to five weeks of leave, 79 percent of fathers take some leave.

**FIGURE 5.**

**Gender distribution of recipients/users of publicly administered parental leave/benefits**



Source: Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development. (2019). Information drawn from the OECD family database: <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>.

## Successful Parental Leave Advocacy in the Netherlands

For many years, paternity leave was limited to two days in the Netherlands. However, new legislation extended this leave from two to five days beginning in January 2019. On top of this, beginning in July 2020, partners will also be entitled to five extra weeks of leave during the first six months after their child's birth, paid at 70 percent of their salary. Adoption and foster care leave for parents has likewise been extended, from four to six weeks.<sup>47</sup> Campaigning, political advocacy, and media engagement by MenCare partner Rutgers, in direct partnership with other (women's rights) organizations, played an important role in contributing to this reform.

Advocates undertook diverse strategies in pursuit of this change. The campaign used the momentum around the parliamentary elections in 2017 and focused on Parliament, ministries, and powerful institutions like employers' organizations. The advocacy effort also reached out to trade unions, private-sector companies, academics, and influencers, forming a unified Fatherhood Platform. Within this platform, the voices and demands of children's rights organizations, fathers' groups, feminists, labor unions, political youth organizations, and academic experts were aligned prior to presentation to the media and decision-makers.

**Paternity and parental leave has limitations, though. First, parental leave policies often have the precondition of stable, salary-based employment.** For instance, in Canada, parents who are ineligible for benefits include those who are unemployed or “part-time, seasonal and unregulated workers, contractors, or students, who might have accumulated insurable hours of work over the previous months, but just not enough to qualify for subsidized leave.”<sup>48</sup> By default, this leaves out a whole segment of parents: those who are unemployed, those who work as freelancers, or those who work in the informal sector, including the large portion of the world’s poorest who work in subsistence agriculture.

**Second, parental leave benefits are often insufficient in terms of their pay replacement to allow families to take time off from work; this can create households that are able to take parental leave and those that are not.** If compensation is too low, fathers are less likely to take the leave, as they are still often the main income earners or are more likely to be paid relatively higher wages for their work than their female partners. When leave policies are not fully compensated, families from poorer households will be unable to take full advantage of what they are entitled to. In Canada, for example, higher-income families are more likely to use parental benefits, mostly because they can afford to live on partial pay.<sup>49</sup> In China, where policies are on a provincial basis, advocates have said that paternity leave is “an embarrassing false reality,” complaining of inadequate company regulations and lost wages.<sup>50</sup> Parental leave policies need to address these unintended consequences if more men are to take up their share of looking after their baby.

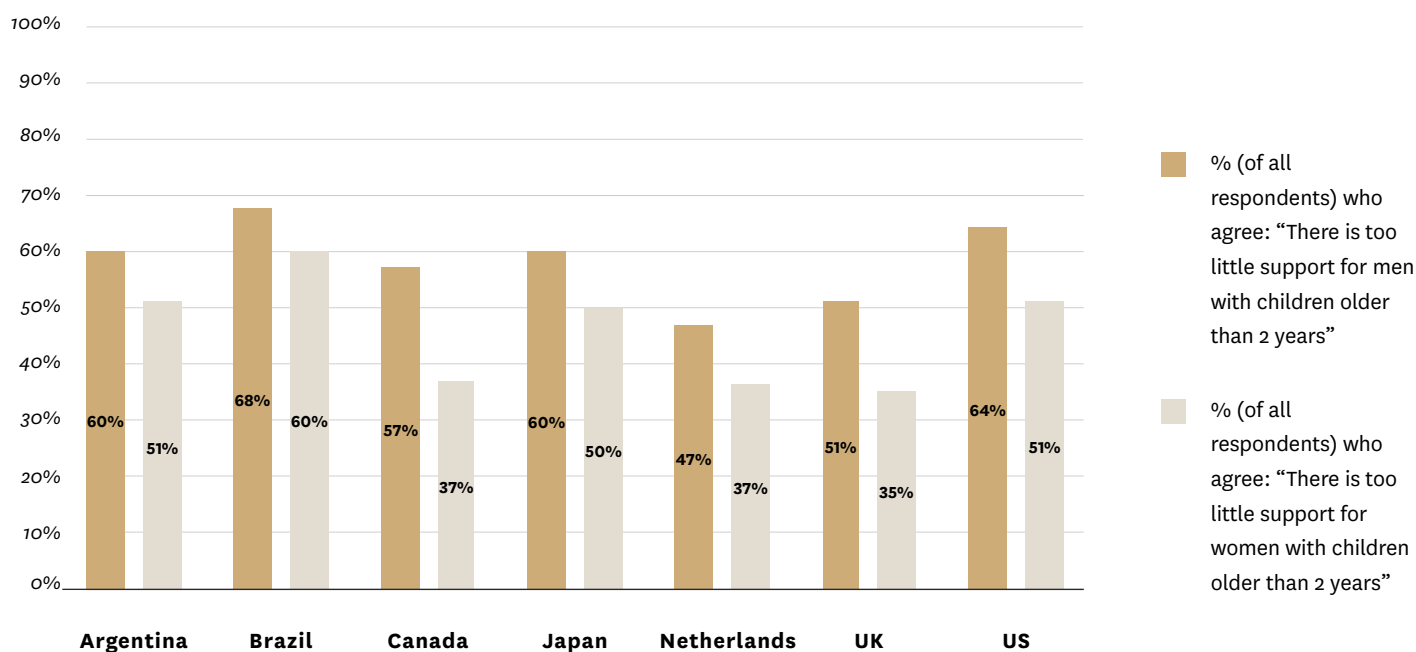
**Third, leave policies often ignore the critical role that gender norms play in who takes leave. Non-transferable leave, therefore, is a critical component of emphasizing the equal rights of men and women with respect to parental leave.** There is a challenge with leave policies that are shared between fathers and mothers. Despite several countries offering shared parental leave, research has consistently found that it is critical for leave to be allocated as non-transferable. For example, in Iceland after the economic recession in 2008, the number of fathers who took shared parental leave fell drastically while the number of mothers who took the same leave went up.<sup>51</sup> In the United Kingdom, parents have the right to a year’s shared leave for the birth of a child, but statutory maternity pay is relatively low, so if the mother has enhanced maternity leave from her employer, she has to give this up in order for the father to take more than the basic two-week paternity leave. As Helen, a new mother, pointed out, “This means that the policy doesn’t do what it says it is doing.”

**Fourth, leave policies tend to focus on newborn babies.** This is important – it allows fathers not only to care for the baby and mother at a time of extreme physical and mental need but also to establish a lifelong bond, develop his confidence

to care for his children, and set the relationship dynamic for caregiving over their lifetimes. However, to support fathers in taking a more equitable share of caregiving beyond the first months after a child is born or adopted, it is invaluable to have policies that provide flexible work arrangements and to have work cultures that support fathers' efforts to prioritize their involvement with their children throughout childhood. Leave policies should also be extended over a longer period of the child's life. Sweden offers 480 days of paid parental leave for both parents that can be used until the child is 12 years old, with each parent having an exclusive right to 90 of these days.<sup>52</sup> This model, possible in a country with strong social welfare benefits, encourages parental involvement and men's caregiving as a lifelong practice, not just during early childhood. In addition, childcare in Sweden is heavily subsidized from when the child is one year old and the fee is based on the parents' income.

**NEW DATA** The Helping Dads Care Research Project data confirmed that many parents agree that there is too little support for their caregiving after their children are two years old. Across the seven countries, 47 percent to 68 percent of respondents said there is little support for fathers who have children over two. The same is true for mothers – 35 percent to 60 percent of respondents across seven countries feel there is less support for mothers of older children than mothers of very young children. Support for care work, and men's care work, must go beyond early childhood.

**FIGURE 6.**  
**Newborns aren't the only children who need care and support**



**While government policies are key, employers also need to step up to provide paid, non-transferable, job-protected parental and caregiving leave for mothers and fathers and should be part of supporting national leave policies when they do not yet exist in a country.** Companies can contribute to greater norms-change efforts around care work, at a minimum, by providing paid, non-transferable, job-protected parental and caregiving leave for mothers and fathers, in accordance with best standards on such policies. They can also promote a culture where it is the norm to take such leave. Businesses are more accountable than ever for their impact on communities, and contributions toward gender equality need to be a core component of this accountability, although not all do so. Netflix, as one example, now allows working fathers to take unlimited leave during the first year after a child is born or adopted, and Facebook, eBay, and Amazon now offer four months, 12 weeks, and six weeks of paid paternity leave, respectively.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, in Ghana, there is no direct provision in any legislation for paternity and paternal leave, yet private companies such as Databank Financial Services, Nestlé Ghana, and Barclays Bank Ghana are all implementing paternal leave policies.<sup>54</sup> Listening to unions and other workers' organizations, in particular those with a women's rights focus, is a vital part of building policies that begin to value unpaid care, to reduce the load for women, and to share it more equally.

### **Dove Men+Care's Paternity Leave Commitment**

Dove Men+Care as a brand has focused on recognizing and valuing men who care for themselves as well as those around them. It is through this that they identified one of the most important moments in a modern man's life: when they become a father and experience the earliest moments of their child's life. However, they also recognize the barriers to men experiencing these moments, and as such, have made a global commitment to championing access and uptake of paternity leave for all fathers.

As a first step, recognizing the need to drive a culture shift in their own organization, they created the Dove Men+Care Global Paternity Leave Standard, which will give all fathers

employed by Unilever a minimum of three weeks' paid leave by the end of 2019.

Outside of Unilever, Dove Men+Care senior management are also catalyzing a shift in culture and advocating for policy changes to support this. Taken together, these efforts highlight the benefits of paternity leave and demonstrate its positive impact, including working with Promundo and other partners to carry out the research for the Helping Dads Care Research Project for this global report and for national-level advocacy in each of the seven countries. In addition, a digital **Paternity Leave Resources hub** is hosted on [dove.com](https://dove.com), containing resources to help dads and their networks access, or advocate for, paternity leave.

In the United States, Dove Men+Care recently launched a Pledge for Paternity Leave so dads, allies, and business leaders can show their support for the movement for paid leave, and to encourage dads to take time to bond with their new child. To address the urgent need in the United States (the only wealthy country with no national paid parental leave), Dove Men+Care launched a Paternity Leave Fund. This \$1 million fund is available to new or expectant dads whose current circumstances mean they aren't able to

take time off to experience the first moments of fatherhood. According to the pledge campaign's website: "Less than one in five men in the U.S. are offered any paid paternity leave. It's time to change that. Working dads shouldn't have to choose between their children and a paycheck – because when they take paternity leave, it benefits families, workplaces and communities. Take the Pledge for Paternity Leave and join us on our mission to make paid paternity leave the new standard."<sup>192</sup>

## KEY 1: UNLOCKING MEN'S POWER TO CARE BY IMPROVING LAWS AND POLICIES

Laws and policies provide the bedrock of change. To advance this change, the following steps will be essential:

- Implement policies in the health sector to engage men in prenatal visits, childbirth, and postnatal care, ensuring that women's needs and wishes regarding men's involvement are always followed.
- Use poverty alleviation policies, including guaranteeing a living wage, both to ensure the financial stability of families and to nudge men to do more care work; also ensure that such approaches do not increase women's caregiving duties.
- Build a male caregiver inclusion plan into every national social protection program.
- Ensure governments and employers offer equal, fully paid, non-transferable parental leave for all parents, as well as embed paternity leave in national policies as a supplement to maternity leave, not an alternative.\* Extend this leave beyond the first months of a child's life.
- Ensure governments collect data on time use in unpaid care work and how it is divided between women and men, girls and boys, especially in the Global South; these data should be used to inform policy-making and budgeting decisions.

\* For more detail, see the MenCare Parental Leave Platform at <https://men-care.org/resources/the-mencare-parental-leave-platform/>

# LEGAL PROVISIONS

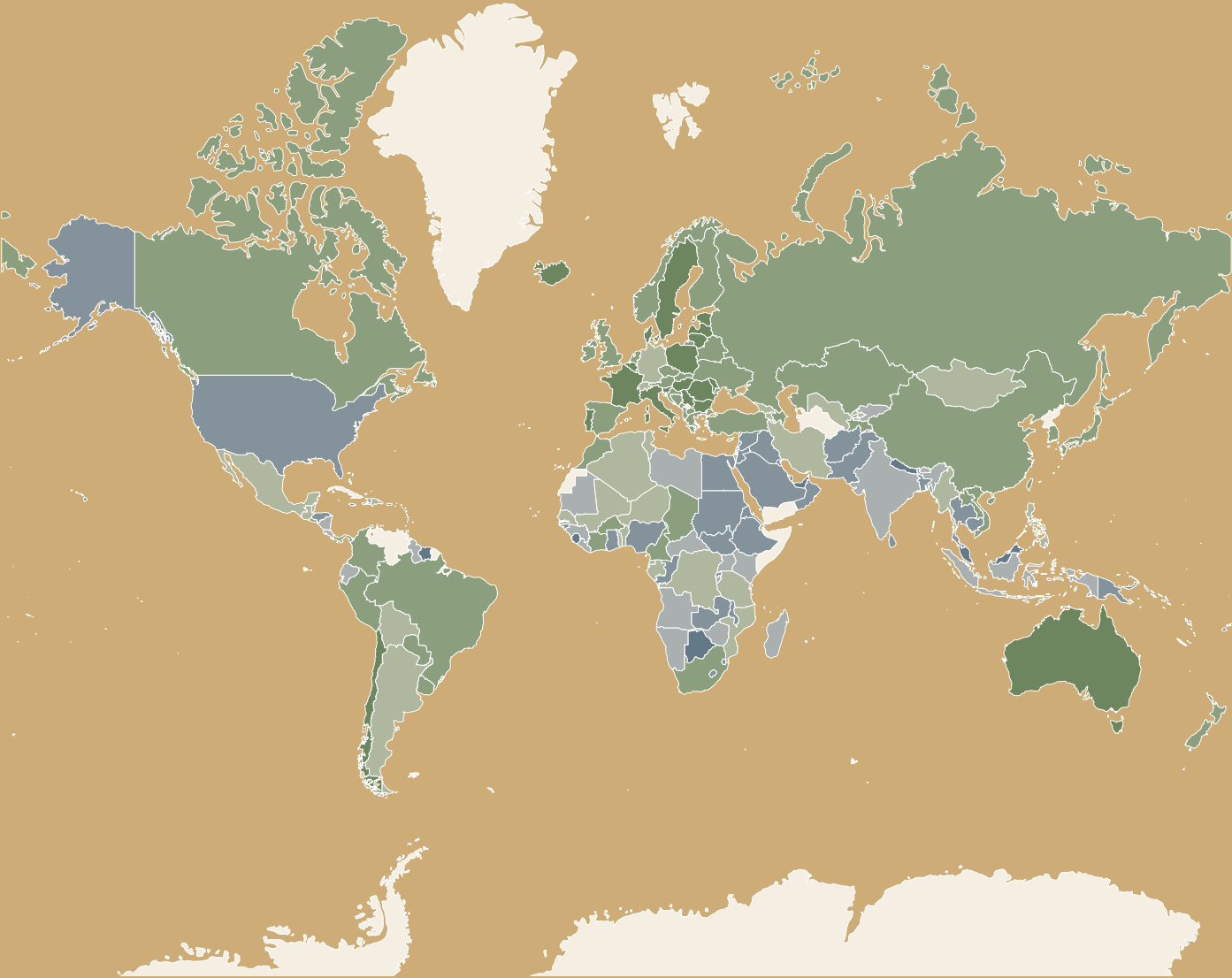
## *at a glance*

With such rapid transformations and variations in laws and policies related to gender equality at home, at work, and in society writ large, including maternity and paternity leave protections, it is challenging to provide an accurate global snapshot of these legal protections. However, the World Bank Group's 2019 "Women, Business, and the Law" report provides a useful glimpse, relying on several recent data sources.<sup>56</sup> This report presents analysis of legal protections related to gender equality in eight categories, one of which is "Having Children." Within this category, countries were given one point each based on five legal provisions:

- 1. Is there paid leave of at least 14 weeks available to women?**
- 2. Does the government pay 100 percent of maternity leave benefits, or parental leave benefits (where maternity leave is unavailable)?**
- 3. Is there paid paternity leave?**
- 4. Is there paid parental leave?**
- 5. Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?**

The map beside presents a global snapshot of this "Having Children" category of legal protections, where countries may score anywhere from 0 (where none of these legal protections exists) to 5 (where all five exist). While of course this snapshot misses the nuances and details of the exact nature and detail of each of these five policies, it is useful as an up to date view of the globally scattered nature of policy protections related to children and childbirth.

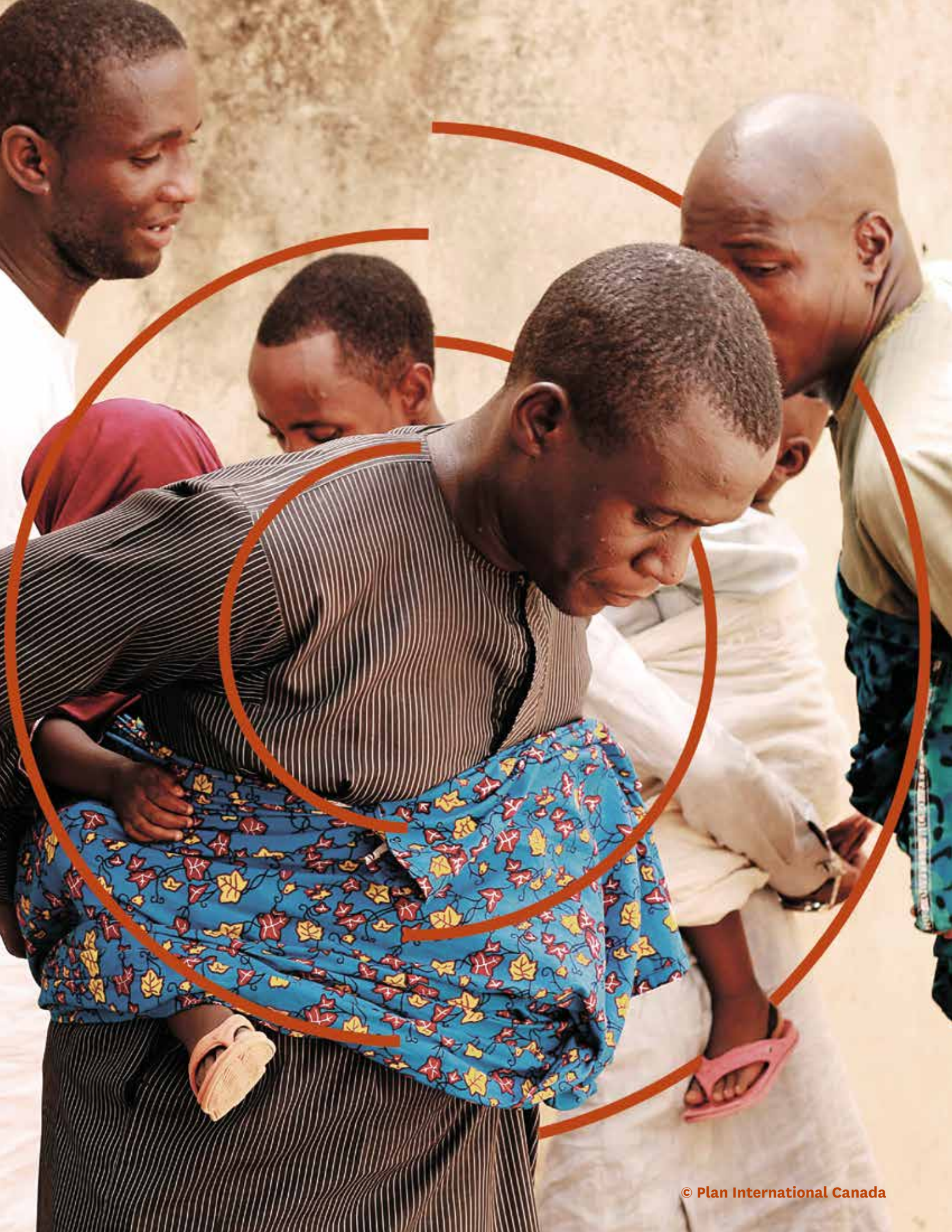
**FIGURE 7.**  
Legal provisions related to having children worldwide

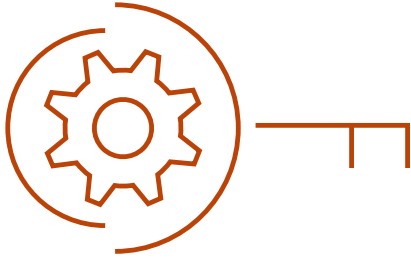


*Parental leave policy score*



*# of policies in place, 0-5*





## KEY 2:

# Transform Social and Gender Norms

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*“If my husband helps me with my work by washing the dishes, even my mother-in-law teases him for doing so...the other people look down upon me for the same...The [men] who want to help hesitate to do so due to the fear of being ridiculed by the village.”*

*- Woman, Nepal<sup>57</sup>*

**Even when supportive laws and policies exist, traditional ideas that women are the default caregivers persist.** Research from high-income countries such as the United States shows that men’s responses to work-family policies may be contingent on a social norm: their perceptions of what their male peers think about the roles they play and about what they do in the household and outside it.<sup>58</sup> In the United Kingdom, similarly, gendered ideas about what men should do and women should do often trump decisions on whether fathers take parental leave even when it is available.<sup>59</sup> As presented in this section, an analysis of data from IMAGES around the world – from low-, middle-, and upper-income countries – confirms that large percentages of women and men think that women are the better, “natural” caregivers. There is an urgent need to redefine social and gender norms about how men and women can be so that care is seen, from early childhood onward, as something neither male nor female. These ideas are often deeply embedded from an early age and lie at the core of what is needed to change minds, hearts, and behaviors in relation to gender.

## What Are Social Norms and Gender Norms?

*“There are many different definitions of **social norm**, but all of them emphasize the importance of shared expectations or informal rules among a set of people (a reference group) as to how people should behave. Most also agree that norms are held in place through social rewards for people who conform to them (e.g., other people’s approval, standing in the community) and social sanctions against people who do not (such as*

*gossip, being ostracized, or violence). **Gender norms** are social norms that relate specifically to gender differences. They refer to informal rules and shared social expectations that distinguish expected behaviour on the basis of gender.”*

- Rachel Marcus and Caroline Harper, *Social Norms, Gender Norms, and Adolescent Girls: A Brief Guide*<sup>60</sup>

### Persistence of Gender Norms Related to Care

*“I don’t think it’s fair that only men work in the fields and the women work at home. I think women can do what men do and vice-versa.”*

- Barbara, age 11, Benin, 2017<sup>61</sup>

Worldwide, there remains a widespread expectation that caring is women’s work, and men’s role as breadwinners should largely exempt them from any household chores or work that includes providing care. This is despite the majority of women also engaging in paid work. In addition, care work is not valued in the same way as paid employment, which historically has been seen as “men’s work.” For example, Oxfam’s WE-Care research found that men felt care work was somehow beneath them: “When asked about the skills required for a range of tasks, across all countries both women and men ranked planting/harvesting crops, house construction/repair, and the care of farm animals as the tasks requiring the most skill. Notably, respondents considered these tasks as requiring more skills than caring for the elderly, disabled and children.”<sup>62</sup> Not only are these attitudes alive and well, but they are a root cause of gender inequality.

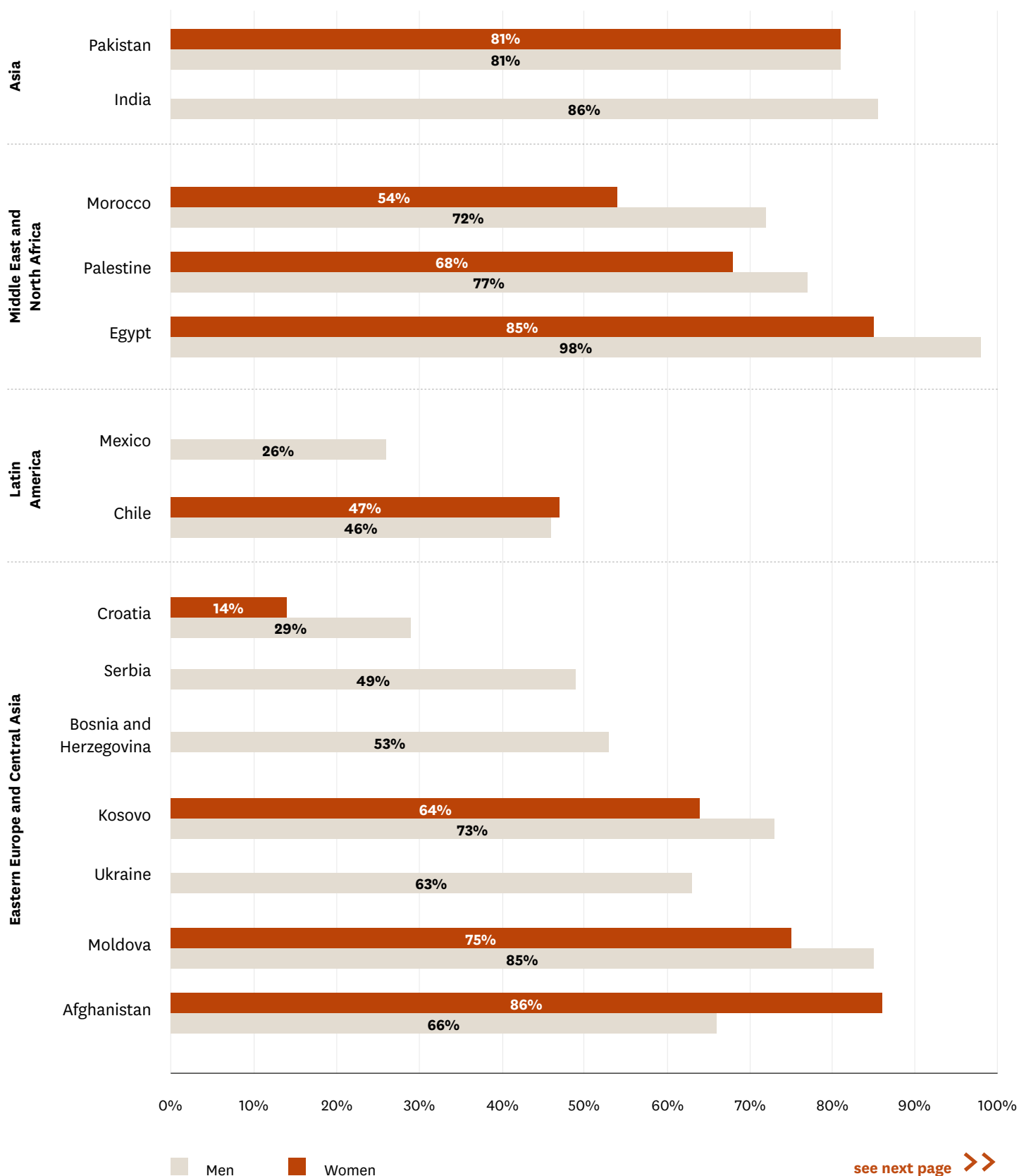
**NEW DATA** Global analysis from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) demonstrates the global persistence of these rigid ideas. Drawing on data from 23 IMAGES reports, regardless of region, significant proportions of both men and women agree that “changing diapers, giving baths to children, and feeding children should be the mother’s responsibility.”<sup>63</sup>

**FIGURE 8.**

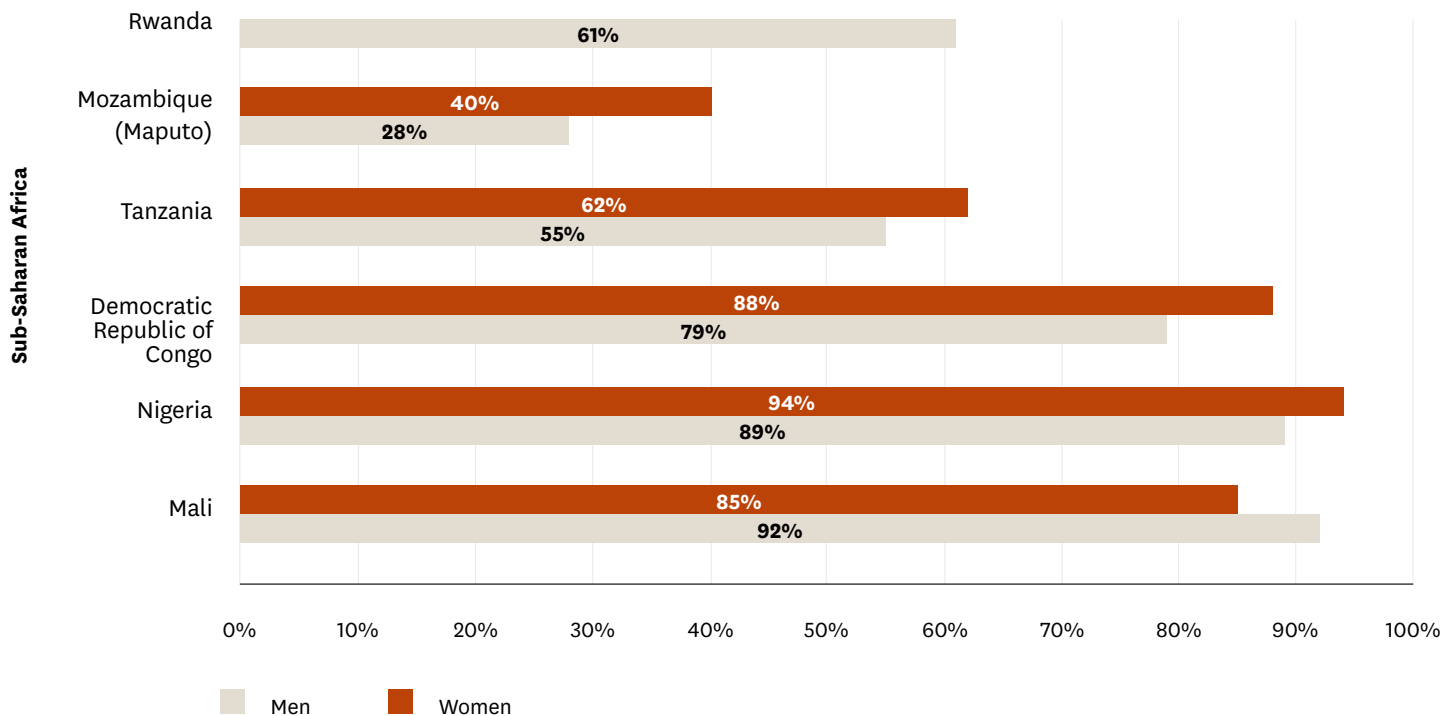
**Breakdown of attitudes on care work by region, using IMAGES data**

IMAGES Respondents who agree or strongly agree with:

*“Changing diapers, giving baths to children, and feeding children are the mother’s responsibility”*



see next page >>



*Note: For Pakistan, this figure presents only responses for the sub-population of married respondents. In Mexico, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, India, and Rwanda, only male respondents were asked this question.*

**NEW DATA** Even in the middle- and upper-income countries in the Helping Dads Care Research Project, where women have achieved some social and economic equality, results show that the idea that men are primary “breadwinners” and women are primary “carers” remains common.

The gendered nature of caregiving is often situated in a culture’s economic and gender realities, and one can draw inferences within this context by looking at mothers’ and fathers’ reasons for choosing a particular form of work, for example, freelance or self-employed work, which gives them flexibility to juggle paid work and childcare. While samples of respondents working in this way are rather small, the study found that mothers in six participating countries (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) said that their top reason for choosing this kind of work was “flexibility to take care of my child.” By comparison, only fathers in Argentina and the United Kingdom cited this as their main reason; it was a career choice for fathers in Canada and the Netherlands, and it was the only choice for work for those in Brazil and Japan.

In other studies in the United States, research among the millennial generation (typically defined as those born from about 1981 to 1996) has found they have less egalitarian ideals in the home than previous generations – for example, in 1994, 71 percent of high school seniors disagreed with the statement, “The husband should make all the important decisions in the family”; by 2014, this figure had fallen to 63 percent.<sup>64</sup> By contrast, support for gender equality continues to rise among *all* age groups in Europe, where public investments in affordable, high-quality childcare and paid leave for fathers and mothers are much more the norm.<sup>65</sup>

**In spite of the “stickiness” of the belief that care work is “women’s work,” change is possible.** In a 2019 global poll for Ipsos MORI, 75 percent of respondents disagreed that a man who stays at home to look after his children is less of a man compared to just one in five agreeing. Those countries most likely to disagree with this statement were Serbia (92 percent), the Netherlands (90 percent), and Colombia (87 percent), while 76 percent in South Korea and 39 percent in India agreed. In the same poll, 75 percent agreed that employers should make it easier for men to combine childcare with work.<sup>66</sup> Surveys from the Middle East and North Africa and in some high-income countries found that many men want to be involved in their children’s lives even if their involvement is still limited both by laws and policies and by gender norms that are hard to shift. One father in China explained just how difficult it was to challenge gender norms to stay at home to look after his son: *“Almost three years after I quit my job at a state media outlet, I’ve grown accustomed to prying questions when I tell people I’m a stay-at-home dad...I am glad to be different. I hope my choices now will give my son the courage to be different, too, when he grows up. Just as importantly, I hope more young fathers will stand up to the outdated, misogynistic enforcement of traditional gender roles and embrace the joy of being stay-at-home dads.”*<sup>67</sup>

**NEW DATA** Data from the Helping Dads Care Research Project paints a similar picture. On average, 85 percent of fathers say that they would be willing to do *anything* to be very involved in the early weeks and months of caring for their newly born or adopted child.

**However, changing gender norms around care work is challenging.** Families in many parts of the world have historically organized themselves on this traditional household division of tasks: men working more hours outside the home in paid work, and women carrying out more of the unpaid care work (often as well as paid work). It will take bold and integrated action, including policy changes and norms changes, to achieve equality.

**On average, 85% of fathers say that they would be willing to do anything to be very involved in the early weeks and months of caring for their newly born or adopted child.**

**TABLE 3.**

**Percentage of fathers who agree or strongly agree that “I will do whatever it takes to be very involved in the early weeks and/or months of caring for my newly born or adopted child”**

| Country                  | Percentage of fathers |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Argentina                | 76%                   |
| Brazil                   | 82%                   |
| Canada                   | 91%                   |
| Japan                    | 88%                   |
| Netherlands              | 89%                   |
| United Kingdom           | 93%                   |
| United States            | 79%                   |
| Average across countries | 85%                   |

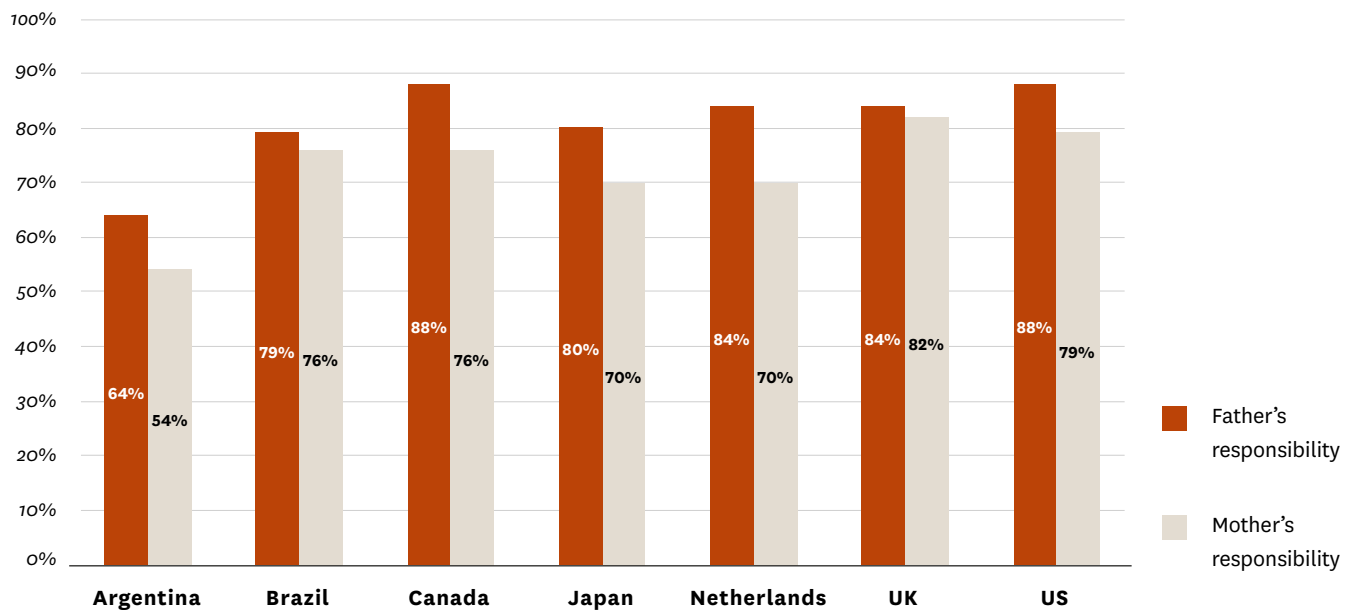
**NEW DATA** In survey data from all seven countries in the Helping Dads Care Research Project, respondents were more likely to say that “financial care” – which includes earning enough money to pay for the expense of raising a child – should be a primary responsibility of fathers compared to mothers (though not statistically significant in every country). No similar trend existed when asking about “emotional care” or “physical care,” suggesting that norms around men as the default breadwinners and women as the default emotional carers of children are particularly strong.

**Humans are social creatures, taking cues from those around them. What people believe, what they see in the media, and what those around them believe often determine how individuals behave and act.** For fathers, anticipated responses from their managers, co-workers, and spouses/partners affect their caregiving. With many fathers spending a majority of their day at workplaces, the new data examined what men thought were *injunctive norms* – perceptions of what others think a person should do – related to caregiving (such as financial, emotional, and physical care of the child, as well as attitudes towards paternity and parental leave).

**NEW DATA** For the Helping Dads Care Research Project, respondents were asked which influential people in their lives – their spouses, friends, co-workers, parents, and others – they expected to hold the most supportive or restrictive ideas related to fathers’ involvement in care work. In general, fathers said their immediate managers were the ones they expected to be most restrictive, while they expected their spouses to be most supportive.

**FIGURE 9.**

**Proportion of respondents across seven countries who agree or strongly agree that it is a father's responsibility or a mother's responsibility to be heavily involved in financial care of the child**



**As these findings demonstrate, many fathers fear workplace stigma if they prioritize (or even balance) childcare responsibilities with professional responsibilities.** At the same time, research has also shown that many fathers reap a net financial reward – sometimes called a “daddy bonus” – in their salary and career trajectory because of their status as fathers.<sup>68</sup> This is in contrast to the “motherhood penalty,” in which women lose out in terms of promotion and salaries once they become mothers. Where does this “daddy bonus” come from? Employers may see fatherhood as a marker for traits such as loyalty and responsibility and therefore treat it as a positive attribute of their male employees.<sup>69</sup> This phenomenon, however, is paradoxical and superficial: men may be rewarded financially for their status as fathers, but only to the extent that their loyalty and responsibility remain firmly focused on professional – rather than caregiving – objectives. That is, fathers likely earn this invisible bonus by dedicating more of their time and energy to the workplace. Those men who want to be fathers in a more meaningful, active, and involved sense, and who seek to balance their home and work priorities, soon find that the “daddy bonus” flips to become the stigma they feared in the first place.<sup>70</sup>

**Men are changing, albeit too slowly. Many men have one foot in a “traditional” or “hegemonic” masculinity and one foot in an evolving, more “caring” masculinity.**

Both types coexist across a variety of settings, as research has found in Belgium, Australia, Canada, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States.<sup>71</sup> However, research also finds that even when fathers take on primary caregiving roles, the provider identity remains foremost. Men continue to see themselves as judged, and they judge themselves based on that they do and earn in the paid workplace.<sup>72</sup> Interestingly, one study over 13 years in Germany with 30,000 parents found that even flexible working was liable to reinforce gender roles: *“Work flexibility helps make job and family more compatible, but it can simultaneously cement the classic role divisions between men and women, or even make them stronger,”* said the study’s author, Yvonne Lott.<sup>73</sup> So, change is never easy, nor is it linear. There is pushback from conservative movements in many parts of the world that still hold that women’s role should be in the home.<sup>74</sup> As one professional woman in Uganda, interviewed for a research project on social norms, pointed out, *“Social norms have held women hostage – even when they appear liberated...things we thought we had overcome 20 years ago are now becoming the norm again, and in a more powerful manner.”*<sup>75</sup>

**Work flexibility helps make job and family more compatible, but it can simultaneously cement the classic role divisions between men and women, or even make them stronger.**

## **Building on the Foundation of the Women’s Movement to Achieve Equality in Care Work**

**While this report focuses on fathers, it would not exist without the decades of women’s political mobilization and the work of feminists who opened space for this conversation.**

The inclusion of Sustainable Development Goal 5.4 on unpaid work, the call to make visible the “unequal distribution of remunerated and unremunerated work between women and men” in the 1995 Beijing Declaration (and even further back), and the Wages for Housework campaign were all milestones along this road to change.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, the international Wages for Housework campaign began in Italy in 1972, and was taken up in multiple countries, changing the conversation for the first time about care work. Silvia Federici, co-founder of the campaign, reflected in 2018 on its foundations and legacy:

*“I think it was transformative because...it changed the relation between women and men and women and the state by exposing the value of our labour and the immense wealth capital [that] has accumulated out of our unpaid labour. The goal was to get wages for housework in order to raise the level of our struggle, not to end it...”*

*We were not successful. Welfare has been practically eliminated and we did not win wages for housework. But we raised consciousness about the fact that housework is real work and it benefits all employers. We raised the whole issue of exploitation in the home, in connection with welfare, at a crucial time, when the state was criminalizing welfare women, mostly black women, and introducing security guards in welfare offices because women were protesting.”*<sup>77</sup>

## How Can Social and Gender Norms Be Changed?

*“The tangible results of sharing responsibilities and planning together [with my husband] motivate us to work harder...lately, I have noticed that a couple of our neighbours have started to copy what we do because they want to make the same progress as we have.”*

– Florence Alur, participant in Oxfam’s WE-Care initiative, Uganda<sup>78</sup>

Examples of effective approaches to change gender norms related to care work include the following.

**SOCIAL GATEKEEPERS SUCH AS RELIGIOUS, TRADITIONAL, AND POLITICAL LEADERS CAN SHOW THE WAY:** In many communities, religious and traditional leaders are in a strong position to promote gender equality and violence prevention, as well as act as role models for other men. For example, in Sri Lanka, MenCare partners trained 30 religious and community leaders on how to promote involved, nonviolent fatherhood and gender-equitable parenting in their work. Participants included Christian pastors and Hindu religious teachers. Plan’s SHOW program worked with Promundo on a series of guides for training religious and traditional leaders to advocate for male engagement in maternal, newborn, and child health, in sexual and reproductive health, and in gender equality more broadly. The guides have been adapted for use by MenCare Campaign partners.<sup>79</sup>

**THE HEALTH SECTOR CAN NUDGE FATHERS TO SHOW UP:** The health sector offers several high-impact, institutional opportunities to shift social norms around care work. The way health and social institutions work with men and women – particularly around maternal, newborn, and child health – can have a significant influence on either reinforcing or challenging inequitable gender norms. New and expectant parents’ interactions with health institutions, for example, represent valuable entry points to tackle harmful attitudes and behaviors, such as the view that supporting a healthy pregnancy is only a woman’s responsibility. Establishing clear protocols to involve men in prenatal care visits and routinely collecting data on men’s participation can help to shift norms, improve mothers’ well-being,<sup>80</sup> and foster a close relationship between father and child in future life.<sup>81</sup> In Kyrgyzstan, for example, healthcare providers from the Childbirth Preparation Schools within the Centers for Family Medicine have gone through a gender-sensitivity training in which they learn about working with pregnant women and male involvement in prenatal sessions. Their school training manual also has a section on male involvement in the process of childbirth preparation.<sup>82</sup>

## Promoting Active Fatherhood in the Health Sector in Chile

CulturaSalud, MenCare coordinator in Chile, provided technical support to the Chilean government to strengthen the focus on men's roles in caregiving in the Childhood Social Protection System ("Chile Crece Contigo," or "Chile Grows with You"). CulturaSalud aims to equip health workers and the institutions to which they belong with the knowledge and insights to foster more equitable family relationships. It published an innovative "Active Fatherhood" with information for new fathers and male caregivers, reaching 70 percent of the country's population.<sup>83</sup>

The program explored the attitudes of health professionals using the Gender-Equitable Men (GEM) Scale and found that when health workers' attitudes are inequitable, they tend to focus on

mothers and leave fathers at the periphery of discussions about maternal, newborn, and child health. These gender biases in health professionals' interactions with parents reinforce gender norms at a critical time in a couple's life that represents an opportunity for change; it can even create barriers to fathers who are deviating from social norms by contributing to an unwelcoming environment.

This kind of institutional change takes time and requires a combination of top-level advocacy and bottom-up approaches. However, the impact of reaching men at a time when they become fathers can have transformative ripple effects in the way fathers see their role and, in turn, how their families see them.<sup>84</sup>

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## Brazil's Ministry of Health Engaging Fathers with Support from MenCare Brazil

Brazil's "Community of Practice" platform is a virtual portal dedicated to knowledge exchange and capacity building for professionals from Brazil's primary care health system. In partnership with Promundo and the Ministry of Health's National Coordinating Body on Men's Health, the platform developed and launched an online course, "Engaging Men: Health, Parenting, and Care," focused on the intersections fatherhood and healthcare. The goal of the course was "to train health professionals in engaging men in maternal, newborn, and child health, to prevent violence

against women and children, and to improve maternal, newborn, and child health outcomes."<sup>85</sup> More specifically, the course was developed with public health workers in mind because of their close contact with parents and "their positive impact on the lives of couples and families who access health services during pregnancy, birth, and the postnatal period."<sup>86</sup> Service providers like public health workers are invaluable in shifting the social norms of father's involvement and can be allies advocating for policy changes from within the health sector.

**SCHOOLS CAN PROMOTE BOYS' CAREGIVING AND CHANGES IN NORMS:** Working with the younger generation on norms around caregiving is vital to ensure lasting changes in attitudes. Norms around gender develop at a very early age,<sup>87</sup> and preschools and schools are fertile grounds to challenge and guide children and adolescents' understanding of gender constructs. There are several

examples and systematic reviews of effective school-based programs to reduce bullying,<sup>88</sup> child sexual abuse,<sup>89</sup> and other forms of gender-based violence. Building gender-sensitive training into the curriculum can be an effective way to modify gendered attitudes, norms, and deeply embedded hierarchies and can help pave the path towards more equitable beliefs for the next generation. These programs should include specific messages and approaches to encourage boys to see care work as their work.

- Many, but not all, examples of good practice programming seeking to teach children in school settings about caregiving are in high-income countries. For instance, **Roots of Empathy** is a program used in primary schools in Canada, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States; it has been shown to improve social and emotional competence, increase empathy, and familiarize boys and girls with the basic underpinnings of caring for young children.<sup>90</sup>
- The **Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS)** project was developed and tested by the International Center for Research on Women and partners in 2008 in India. Children who participated in the program showed increased support for gender-equal practices, including greater male involvement in household work.<sup>91</sup> The first phase of the program, implemented in Mumbai public schools between 2008 and 2010, reached more than 8,000 girls and boys.<sup>92</sup> Since then, GEMS has been expanded to other countries, and a 2017 evaluation of the project in India, Bangladesh, and Vietnam showed the degree of exposure and the number of sessions had an impact on gender stereotypes and attitudes.<sup>93</sup>
- **The Brave Men Campaign** was started in 2012 by the National Human Rights Commission (JAMAKON); supported by the United Nations Development Programme, the Swiss Confederation, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, and the Danish International Development Agency; and implemented by the Center for Men and Masculinities Studies and the United Nations Youth and Students Association of Bangladesh. Participants maintain a “Brave Man Diary” in which they narrate and reflect on their interactions with and treatment of female acquaintances. The program has expanded from the original format to include both male and female students in various regions of Bangladesh, with the addition of community activities, consultations with guardians and community leaders, and sexual and reproductive health rights fairs at participating schools.
- **The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)** is a pan-African NGO with 34 “chapters” that aims to promote girls’ and women’s education. Using a four-pronged approach, FAWE works on advocacy and policy engagement,

intervention programs, and research, including efforts to shift social norms in school environments. In collaboration with Plan International Canada, one recent 10-day teacher training focused on practical pedagogical applications in low-resource classroom environments; increasingly, FAWE's materials include breaking gender norms that limit the options and behaviors of boys related to gendered expectations of emotional expression and care, among other objectives. FAWE's work is also pioneering in the advancement of sexual and reproductive health and rights and reduction of intimate partner violence.

- **Champions of Change** is Plan International's community-wide approach for promoting gender equality and social norm change through youth engagement and peer-to-peer mobilization. Operating in 35 countries, it aims to advance gender equality by engaging girls in a process of empowerment and by working with boys to challenge dominant masculinities and to support girls' empowerment, including the development of new curricula for girls and boys. Each curriculum is based on a journey of change. The journey for girls focuses on empowerment, self-esteem, rights awareness and collective power, while the boys' journey focuses on unpacking dominant masculinities to understand how boys are affected by gender norms, and showing how they can begin to recognize their own privileges, support girls' rights, and promote gender justice for all.<sup>94</sup>

An emerging best practice within the education sector is the inclusion of gender-responsive teacher training (in-service and pre-service), which recognizes the important role of teachers and pedagogical practice in breaking harmful gender norms and modeling gender equal behavior and attitudes, including modeling equitable care work among boys and girls.

## NEW DATA

### Fathers' Clubs in Low-Income Countries Challenge Gendered Social Norms

New data from Plan's SHOW\* program indicate positive attitude and behavior changes related to normative gender roles, caregiving, and household labor amongst participants in the program's Fathers' Clubs. Findings also reinforce that changing entrenched gender norms requires sustained effort – and that social norms themselves, more so than financial barriers or time poverty, can often be a central barrier to change.

Fathers who participated in the study across all four countries reported an increased level of support for and engagement with their spouses and an increased recognition of the benefits of shared household labor and childcare. However, the findings also serve as a reminder that changes in individual behaviors related to gendered roles are not always immediately accompanied by changes in normative attitudes about gendered roles. Responses (from fathers and mothers) were mixed about whether these increased support activities were equally the responsibility of fathers, or whether their engagement was to support “her” work. For example, while most male participants in Haiti asserted that couples should divide household and childcare tasks equally – *l'union fait la force* (“union makes strength”) – their descriptive language still suggests a traditional gendered assignment of responsibility. As one Fathers' Club member said, “At home, women have too much to do and men have to give some relief and help her.”

The corollary, of course, is that changes in community-level social norms around power and decision-making need to occur alongside changes in individual behavior in order to shift to a more equal balance between men and women – and social norms only shift when changes are

widespread and sustained. While study findings across all four countries reflect positive changes in the normative behavior of fathers in caregiving and household work, most Fathers' Club members and their partners in each study country identified social stigma from extended family, community, and peers as a challenge to achieve behavior change, including claims that husbands had been “charmed” or “bewitched.”

***“Initially, some friends of mine did not understand the reason for my change and tried to mock me. But I rather explained to them, and they now understand the reason for the change, hence their support.”***

***– Fathers' Club Member, Ghana***

Despite these challenges, participants also discussed several factors that suggest these changes would be sustained at the household level and also influence community social norms. Many in Bangladesh and Nigeria, for example, mentioned how knowledge is “internalized” and cannot be “unknown.” Others cited the positive benefits to their families and their communities, as well as the intergenerational effect of modeling behavior change.

***“It will last by the will of Allah, because it's something that is well planned and even my children will grow up to emulate my actions.”***

***– Fathers' Club Member, Nigeria***

***“I appreciate the changes made. I would like to have a lot more courage. These changes allow [us] to have much more affection and love, understanding at home. And I do not want to go back to previous bad habits.”***

***– Fathers' Club Member, Haiti***

\* Strengthening Health Outcomes for Women and Children (SHOW) is a 4.5-year multi-country gender-transformative program on maternal, newborn, and child health and on sexual and reproductive health. It is implemented in targeted, remote, and underserved regions in five countries: Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, Nigeria, and Senegal.

**PUBLIC EDUCATION AND CAMPAIGNS CAN MODEL AND PROMOTE MEN'S CAREGIVING:** Online and offline campaigns aimed at men and boys, and at men as fathers, can be catalysts for change and promote male allyship. These can target men in the workplace, at sporting and leisure activities, and at home. They can harness the power of information and communication technologies to change gender norms, portray care work as skilled and valuable, and shift how fathers and mothers are portrayed. At the city level, the government of Mexico City has newly recognized, through its La Nueva Cultura Laboral campaign, that women's unpaid care responsibilities hold back their participation in the paid labor force. The campaign also advances the message that fathers' involvement in childcare delivers multiple benefits for children's development.<sup>95</sup> In Bogotá, Colombia the city government implemented a campaign called Sin Vergüenza ("Without Shame," a play on the word "shameless") encouraging men to take on unpaid care work without being ashamed.

**PRINT, RADIO, TV, AND ONLINE MEDIA CAN LEND THEIR VOICES, SHOWING MEN DOING THE HANDS-ON CARE WORK:** Media – including print, radio, television – can be key to social norms change. Proctor and Gamble's Gillette advertisement "We Believe: The best a man can be" caused much controversy but also conversation about the nature of modern masculinities.<sup>96</sup> In Zimbabwe, as part of Oxfam's WE-Care program, men acted as "ambassadors" in their communities, participating in radio broadcasts to encourage other men to recognize the significance of care work in households. This resulted in attitude changes about tasks in the home that were commonly regarded as only for women.<sup>97</sup> In the Philippines, youth "care champions" led social media campaigns, and a TV advertisement on sharing unpaid care that was shared on social media reached over 17 million people in one month.<sup>98</sup> The digital age represents a critical point to understand the portrayals of fathers and mothers, including the gender roles they embody, that shape the larger narrative and discourse on fatherhood and motherhood. The current research on men's use of information and communication technologies emerges predominantly from the Global North and describes how fathers often feel neglected across media platforms (blogs, pregnancy apps, and social media sites) that are often directed at mothers and their experiences.<sup>99</sup>

**NEW DATA** The Helping Dads Care Research Project data from seven countries shows respondents appreciated it when fathers were depicted in media as being competent co-parents. It is long overdue for more advertisers, as well as TV and other media outlets, to present fathers and men as competent caregivers – these new data suggest the marketplace will eagerly embrace these depictions.

Online and offline campaigns aimed at men and boys, and at men as fathers, can be catalysts for change and promote male allyship for gender equality.

It is long overdue for more advertisers, as well as TV and other media outlets, to present fathers and men as competent caregivers.

## **KEY 2: UNLOCKING THE POWER OF CARE BY TRANSFORMING SOCIAL AND GENDER NORMS**

To achieve equality in unpaid care work, laws and policies are not enough. The research presented here confirms the largest barriers to men using paternity leave are social norms holding that women are the “natural” caregivers. To change social norms and promote men’s caregiving:

- Governments must provide training to change attitudes of service providers such as teachers, childcare workers, and health care providers.
- Schools and educators must teach children, boys and girls, the importance of care from an early age, building on the evidence-based curricula that exist for gender-transformative education.
- Employers and workplaces must train their human resources staff and carry out workplace-based campaigns and employee outreach programs that create a workplace environment that fully supports the caregiving duties of women and men.
- Advocates must implement media campaigns to inspire men, their families, and their communities to support men’s caregiving through TV advertisements, posters, slogans, short films, photos, radio advertisements, and advertisements for local fathers’ groups.

# WHICH COMES FIRST, THE LAW OR THE SOCIAL NORM?

## *Visualizing the Interplay between Laws and Norms*

Sometimes laws change norms. A law is passed, a policy implemented, and individuals change behaviors. Sometimes changes in norms cause countries to change policies. For issues as deeply ingrained as gender norms, societies need to pass laws offering equitable leave for fathers and mothers alike, and they need to encourage men to take leave by changing how they view who does the care work.

Figure 10 below visualizes this interplay. The horizontal axis shows the legal environment for gender equality, going from the least supportive on the left to the most supportive on the right; the vertical axis visualizes settings with the least supportive norms on the bottom and the most supportive on the top.

**FOR THE LAWS AXIS:** the figure draws on the World Bank's 2019 Women, Business, and the Law index scores.<sup>100</sup> These scores combine ratings on eight

different categories of legislation related to gender equality, reflecting a wide range of policy provisions and protections to advance gender equality and women's rights at home, at work, and in society. To increase comparability, the index scores have been standardized, where the numerical value reflects the distance, in standard deviations, from the mean index score for any particular country.

**FOR THE NORMS AXIS:** the figure uses the OECD SIGI Index item on the ratio of women's to men's daily time spent on unpaid care.<sup>101</sup> This variable is originally calculated as a ratio, in hours, of women's daily time spent on unpaid care as compared to men's. To increase comparability, these ratios have been standardized, where the numerical value in the figure above reflects the distance, in standard deviations, from the mean index score for any particular country.

**FIGURE 10.**  
**Plotting laws and norms together**



The figure reveals a broad pattern whereby laws and norms, for the most part, move in tandem with one another. All the same, notable outlier countries in all four quadrants emerge:

- **Countries with both supportive norms and supportive laws.** This is the ideal combination. Countries with positive, outlying scores in this quadrant include Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. El Salvador is an example of a lower-income country in this quadrant.
- **Countries where the laws are more supportive than the norms, in comparative terms.** Countries with outlying scores in this quadrant include Albania, Japan, Greece, and Portugal.
- **Countries where the norms are more supportive than the laws, in comparative terms.** Countries with outlying scores in this quadrant include Belarus, Switzerland, and the United States.
- **Countries where, comparably speaking, both the laws and norms are relatively resistant to gender equality and equal caregiving.** Algeria,

Bangladesh, and Cameroon have the most outlying scores in this quadrant, but higher-income countries of note in this quadrant include Brazil and Turkey.

Countries that have achieved the most significant change in terms of care equality (which are generally also the countries that have achieved the most equality in terms of pay equality) have typically had a range of progressive policies in place – for at least a decade – and have had supportive norms, which also became more supportive alongside policies (particularly parental leave). Generous paternity leave by itself – as in Japan or Portugal, for example – is not enough to ensure that men use this leave. Campaigns and other efforts to change norms should go hand in hand with policy changes.

In sum, it's not a question of changing laws versus changing norms. The international evidence confirms the need for *both* – laws supporting gender equality and changing norms about who does the care, moving toward the idea that men can and should be equal caregivers and that women can and should be equal providers and workers.





## KEY 3:

# Guarantee the Economic and Physical Security of Families

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*“Communicating and respecting my wife and my children means that I am a good man.”*

*– 33-year-old Syrian man living as a refugee in Lebanon<sup>102</sup>*

### ***Fatherhood and Economic Insecurity in the Family***

Globally, the historic role for men in heterosexual households has been as protectors and providers. That fathers – together with mothers and others – fulfill these functions was, and still is, vital for family survival and well-being. However, what does it mean in 2019 for men to live up to the widely held belief that a father’s only role is as a “provider and protector” for the family? As social economist Naila Kabeer notes, *“Men’s higher labor force participation relative to women in most regions of the world reflects the breadwinning responsibilities ascribed to them in most cultures.”*<sup>103</sup> Being a provider and protector are not the only social expectations placed on men and fathers based on their gender, to be sure, just as women face socialized expectations far beyond their caregiving work. In a fundamental way, though, the expectation that a man/father protects the safety of his family and provides financially for them is alive and well. There may be even more pressure on a man to provide when he does not live with his children, as is the case for a growing proportion of fathers worldwide.

**Studies on gender norms have repeatedly shown that most men around the world define their major social role and their identity as being providers.** A study of fathers in the Philippines found that identity-defining

**Men’s higher labor force participation relative to women in most regions of the world reflects the breadwinning responsibilities ascribed to them in most cultures.**

characteristics that fathers considered positive attributes of being an “ideal” father (for many, but not all, participants) were often based on an inner desire to conform to external social norms.<sup>104</sup> In the United States, fathers aged 18 to 45 reported in one study that their desire to have children is an opportunity to express, receive, and nurture love in another being, which is accompanied by financial responsibilities for the child.<sup>105</sup> In South Africa, a qualitative study on the reasons for fathers’ non-involvement in their children’s lives found that men defined themselves as “ATM fathers” and identified adherence to this role as a barrier to caregiving if they were unable to provide financially.<sup>106</sup>

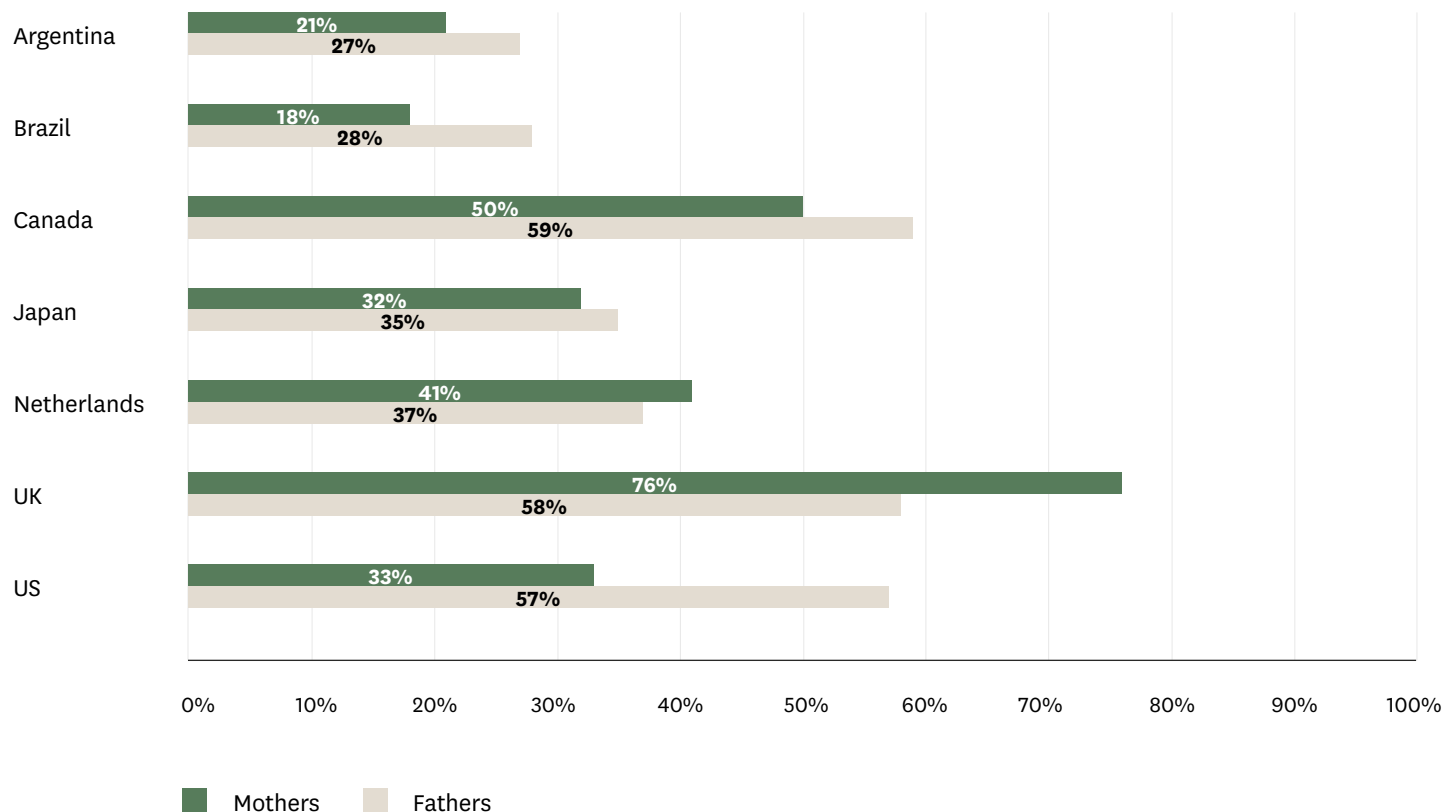
**When men are unable to provide financially for their families, a reality in many low-income and economically insecure settings, it affects their self-esteem and health, with follow-on effects for their families.** Studies in the United Kingdom show that men are more likely to suffer adverse health consequences than women when unemployed, especially in the short term. Men who are unemployed are twice as likely as women to be depressed, and unemployment may double or even triple the risk of male suicide, as well as increase the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors. This same research also suggests “the strong cultural connection between work and masculine status means that the loss of employment may affect men’s sense of well-being more adversely than it does women.”<sup>107</sup> Men’s unemployment has major effects on women as well. For example, studies in a number of countries have shown links between male unemployment and increased intimate partner violence.<sup>108</sup>

**Economic insecurity, and fathers’ difficulty in being a full financial provider, have clear effects on the whole family, including on care work.** Traditional gender norms often lead women to keep up with the demands of unpaid care work in the home while they are simultaneously trying to contribute to the family’s income and maintain social networks within their communities – creating the so-called “triple burden” of reproductive, productive, and community labor. A recent ILO report finds that women with major care responsibilities are more likely not to be in work, to be self-employed, and to work in the informal economy, and less likely to contribute to social security.<sup>109</sup> This creates a ripple effect through the world’s poorest families, who are also the families least likely to have childcare.

**NEW DATA** The Helping Dads Care Research Project data supports the fact that despite men and women wanting to be involved caregivers, stress about making ends meet is one of the strongest reasons for women and men alike not taking as much parental leave as they would like.

**FIGURE 11.**

**Percentage of fathers and mothers across seven countries who ranked financial barriers as the greatest reason why they couldn't take more leave with their newly born or adopted child**



**Financial constraints at home, combined with poverty and unemployment, often create contexts where women and men are forced to migrate to make ends meet.** It is often other women and girls in the family who look after the children left behind.<sup>111</sup> However, this is not always the case. In Poland and Ukraine, when mothers migrate for work, grandmothers predominantly offer caregiving, with fathers also playing a role. However, fathers are also known to take on single-parent tasks, such as in families where female Ukrainian migrants have left to work in Italy.<sup>112</sup> One study found that in families with female care migrants from Slovakia and Romania to Austria, fathers have taken over care and domestic work from their wives during their absence.<sup>113</sup>

Men's role as financial providers can mean the difference between poverty and economic stability. At the same time, globally, women's paid work represents a growing portion of household income. Some research finds that men in some

**Worldwide, 42 percent of women (606 million) who are economically inactive, meaning they are out of the paid workforce, say it is due to their care responsibilities. This applies to only 6 percent of men (41 million).<sup>110</sup>**

settings spend more of their income on their own needs, but increasingly, studies are finding that fathers spend money in similar ways to mothers.<sup>114</sup> Research is clear that families make decisions about who does care work – and who foregoes income outside the home – based on factors such as who has the ability to earn more and opportunity cost. Thinking about promoting men’s equitable care work and women’s equitable paid work also requires considering poverty, stability of livelihoods, and the impact of poverty and economic insecurity.

### ***Fatherhood and Family Physical Safety***

**In many locations around the globe, physical safety – including active conflict or war, political instability, related displacement, and high rates of community violence – presents tremendous caregiving challenges.** Many policy conversations about caregiving presume relative stability within the family and society, but we know that this presumption excludes a great number of families and children in the most vulnerable situations worldwide. These harsh realities can hold an extremely negative impact specifically for women and girls, who are burdened with the full load of caregiving while navigating all the risks that come with living in a community or country at war or in conflict, including various forms of gender-based violence.<sup>115</sup> Research carried out by Promundo in Brazil finds that gender-based violence is often higher in settings where there are high levels of violence in the community.<sup>116</sup>

High rates of urban violence often link with high rates of mother- or woman-headed households, increasing pressure on women.<sup>117</sup> However, studies in such settings also find that some men go to great lengths to protect their children and keep them out of harm’s way. Far from any clear pattern, what is clear is that armed violence, conflict or war, and urban insecurity place additional stress on families. Sometimes, these can shift gender norms and dynamics, and sometimes they can exacerbate inequalities for women’s care work. Given high rates of trauma that affect children and this extra stress on women’s caregiving, particular attention needs to be paid – and more research done – on how positive, engaged fatherhood can support children affected by community- and country-level war and violence.

## Fatherhood and Family Security in the Context of War

Since Syria erupted into civil war in 2011, more than five million refugees – half of whom are minors – have fled the country; already, over a million children have been born into a condition of displacement.<sup>118</sup> Children experience their own psychological stress and trauma as a result of the crisis, and they are also affected by the distress of their parents. Given that the first three years of life contain the most rapid period of brain development, it is important to provide a safe, nurturing environment for children in these early years and to equip parents and caretakers with the necessary knowledge and skills to lay the foundation for their children’s lifelong learning, abilities, and outcomes.<sup>119</sup>

Toward this goal, Promundo and the Lebanese NGO ABAAD adapted and implemented Program P – a fatherhood curriculum aiming to transform gender norms – with Lebanese and Syrian fathers and couples in Beirut, with a special focus on early childhood development (ECD). Over the second half of 2018, 316 parents participated in the program, and (as yet unpublished) quantitative and qualitative research demonstrates both the enormous constraints on their lives and the potential of well-designed programming to prompt positive change in caregiving ideas and practices.

- **Physical and humiliating punishment:** When asked about whether they had spanked, shaken, or hit their children in the last month, 21 percent fewer men and 56 percent fewer women said they did so at the end of the program compared to the beginning, with one participating Syrian father (age 33) stating, “Using violence with my children will not solve the problem and they will not know what they have done wrong.”
- **Men’s violence against women:** Attitudes justifying men’s use of violence against women also fell substantially over the course of the program, with one participating Syrian mother (age 31) reflecting, “My husband is now apologizing for the things that he did without feeling that he is losing his masculinity. He is taking my opinion in everything and I am sharing with him all the responsibilities in the household. He used to think that violence can be justified when I was not doing my duties properly but this changed since he took part in the program.”
- **Unpaid care work and family needs:** At baseline, 29 percent of men reported participating equally or taking on the bulk of at least one of three housework tasks typically considered “women’s work” – washing clothes, cooking, and cleaning – while a smaller proportion of women (17 percent) reported the same about their partners. At endline, however, around two-thirds of both men (63 percent) and women (67 percent) reported that men were participating in these ways. Says a participating Lebanese woman (age 37), “It is amazing, my husband is specifying a time at night to communicate with me about our family and the problems and conflicts that we have.”

Program P-ECD in Lebanon represents a promising approach to promoting less violent, more equitable and nurturing homes among families experiencing extreme threats to their economic and physical security. Arabic and English versions of the Program P curriculum for use in Lebanon are available at [www.abaadmena.org](http://www.abaadmena.org).

**New research on the experiences of refugee families has painted a complex picture of the caregiving implications.** Household roles often change as a result of displacement, war, and the realities of being refugees. In some cases, this means men having more power, but they can also find that their roles as economic providers, protectors, or decision-makers are undermined. As a recent OECD report notes: *“The new, often limited, societal and economic openings for women and girls that may arise in these situations may lead to fears of loss and a backlash from men and boys. Preventing violence both in the public and private spheres as well as building more inclusive societies requires engaging with men and boys as well as transforming expectations and practices of what it means to ‘be a man.’”*<sup>120</sup>

In some cases, these shifts are in the direction of mothers taking on additional tasks. In one study among Syrian refugees in Lebanon, many women – who had been full-time caregivers in Syria – reported taking on paid employment outside the home. This came at a cost of feeling afraid of leaving their children unsupervised when the fathers were also away.<sup>121</sup> Another study found that Syrian refugee men were likely to be harassed or stopped by security forces or often had trouble finding work, while women were able to find employment as domestic workers. In these cases, men ended up being at home more and taking on more care work than they had before leaving Syria.<sup>122</sup> Conflict and/or displacement may provide such opportunities for shifts in gender roles. For instance, in Yemen, men are participating more in household tasks since the conflict began, although women still spend more time on them.<sup>123</sup> More women are also entering the labor market and becoming their family’s primary breadwinners, as men are working less due to the conflict; this is leading to more openness to women engaging in different professions and giving them more decision-making power in the family.<sup>124</sup>

**Experiences of conflict and displacement often result in family separation and single-parent households; predominantly, this means households with no father or male caregiver present.** A qualitative study of parental loss and family separation in post-conflict Liberia found that youth who lost a parent had ongoing problems with depression, coping with loss, and turning to substance abuse. Participants who experienced loss at younger ages tended to have the most negative experiences.<sup>125</sup> Research by Plan International in the Sahel found that in the context of conflict, family separation presented a major risk for adolescent girls, while the presence of fathers in particular was seen as a key factor in instilling a sense of safety.<sup>126</sup> As one 17-year-old girl from Niger commented, *“If the father is not present, girls may be beaten and raped and given very difficult tasks. Most of the time it is the child’s uncle, neighbor or stepmother. It happens because the girl no longer has their parents to protect them.”* In South Sudan, adolescent girls reported higher levels of physical violence from other family members when fathers were not present, along with loss of income, of capacity to access resources such as humanitarian aid, and of family property due to inheritance issues.<sup>127</sup>

**Even in cases where fathers and families are able to resettle together, some evidence points to particular challenges faced by fathers, all intertwined with the “protector” and “provider” identities.** Several studies with migrants who have settled in the United States and Canada indicate that resettled men often wind up in lower-status or lower-paid jobs than they held prior to resettlement.<sup>128</sup> Among other consequences for families, this experience “undermines fathers’ views of themselves” and perhaps also the perceptions of fathers’ status and success in the eyes of their families. In the case of Sudanese fathers, these workplace challenges are magnified by the racism they face.<sup>129</sup> These are only a few among many intersecting consequences of refugee and resettlement realities, but they point to the ongoing influence and harms of the gendered expectations that men be protectors and providers even in extremely difficult contexts.

**Unfortunately, research on caregiving in these contexts is scarce, particularly research investigating fatherhood.** The few studies that do exist, however, highlight the stress on parenting and on father involvement when violence and displacement exist; they find increased violence and economic hardships often push fathers further away from caregiving and create additional pressures on mothers and other female caregivers.<sup>130</sup> In other settings, dynamics may shift and women are able to work in specific professions while men’s movement is curtailed (e.g., Syrian refugees in Lebanon), which leads to men doing more caregiving.

### **KEY 3: UNLOCKING THE POWER OF CARE BY GUARANTEEING THE ECONOMIC AND PHYSICAL SECURITY OF FAMILIES**

Unpaid care inequalities affect the poorest families the most and are exacerbated by conflict. Therefore, this report calls for:

- Programs and policies for marginalized families, including refugees and internally displaced persons, that are aware of the pressures that economic and political insecurity put on the household, as well as how this affects women and men differently. They must take into account the possible changes in gender roles that result from conflict and their differentiated impact on women and men.
- Large-scale refugee and internally displaced persons support programs to ensure that programming accounts for the importance of the role of fathers and mothers in children’s psychosocial well-being. Programming can be used to support the achievement of the target of men doing 50 percent of caregiving.
- Social protection policies, including cash transfer programs, that consider the roles of fathers and male caregivers in their planning phases and include specific elements to support men’s caregiving. They should also seek to understand the specific stresses and identity loss that men often experience in situations of economic insecurity.

# FATHER OF THE MAN:

## *Shifting Norms about Fatherhood in the Middle East*

As night falls in Beirut, one of the best parts of the day is about to begin for Adnan Melki, the father of two young daughters. “I put my girls to bed every night and tell them bedtime stories, over and over,” he laughs. “My eldest [aged 3] is a tough negotiator – no less than five stories a night.” Adnan’s most interesting tale, though, is the one of how he came to be so involved in family life, sharing the domestic load – from childcare to housework – with his working wife. “My father worked really hard. He used to suffer from a lack of time with his children; now I have this blessing and I can spend more time with my children and show them my emotions.” Besides, he notes, “I really love ironing.”

Adnan is both an example of, and an exception to, the shifting lives of men across the Arab region. Since 2015, IMAGES MENA has surveyed over 10,000 men and women in Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, and Palestine on their attitudes and practices related to gender equality, including parenting. Results from these four Arab states both confirm and confound stereotypes about gender roles and rights in the Arab region. While between one-quarter and three-quarters of respondents thought it was more important for a woman to marry than to have a career, men also took family and fatherhood very seriously. More than three-fifths attended at least one antenatal visit with their wives, and across all four countries, at least two-fifths said they wanted paid paternity leave.

More than three-fifths of men rejected the notion of any shame associated with men looking after

children—but attitudes are one thing, actions quite another. Adnan’s involvement in the nitty-gritty of toddler care is unusual; one-quarter or fewer of men in the survey had bathed or fed their youngsters in the past month, although almost three-quarters of men in Egypt, for example, reported playing with their kids and over 60 percent of fathers in Palestine spoke with their children about personal matters.

Like many men in the survey, Adnan’s journey on the home front started in childhood: “My mother was educated, though she stayed at home. There was no discrimination between boys and girls in our family,” he recalls. “Always in my memory is the precious time we spent with my father, collecting olives. In Lebanon, picking the olives from the tree is a man’s work, but picking them from the ground is for women. But I was good at picking from the ground and my sister would often climb the trees. Sometimes people would make fun of us.” The pressure of social convention – to conform to traditional “masculine” and “feminine” roles – continues to this day. “I do the household chores when my wife is busy. But this is not accepted in our society. Sometimes they blame her for travelling for work and leaving [the] children with me, but if I travel, no one scolds me.”

Social convention, though, comes at a cost. Men and women in the survey defined manhood, above all, as the ability to provide for their families. However, times are tough, and aside from the double-digit unemployment rates that face younger men, even those with jobs are

having a hard time making ends meet. Around half of men in Egypt and Palestine, for example, said they were frequently stressed or depressed, or sometimes felt ashamed to face their families, because of a lack of work. Around 60 percent of men in all four countries said they spent too little time with their kids because of work or the search for it, and more than two-thirds of men across the board worried about not being able to meet their families' daily needs.

IMAGES MENA shows that sons, unsurprisingly, follow in their fathers' footsteps: those who saw their father rolling up his sleeves in the kitchen, or sharing household decision-making with his wife, are more likely to do the same when they start their own families. Case in point is Abu Rashed, a Syrian refugee in his fifties, who lives with his wife and seven of his ten children in a makeshift camp in the Bekaa valley, about two hours' drive and a world away from Adnan's educated, affluent life in downtown Beirut.

Like most of the men in the camp, Abu Rashed is out of work most days. Many Syrian refugees in the study described how emasculated they felt by the double whammy of job scarcity and state surveillance – which means the women and girls of the family are more mobile and the ones bringing home the money – be it from small jobs or humanitarian handouts – thereby upending the

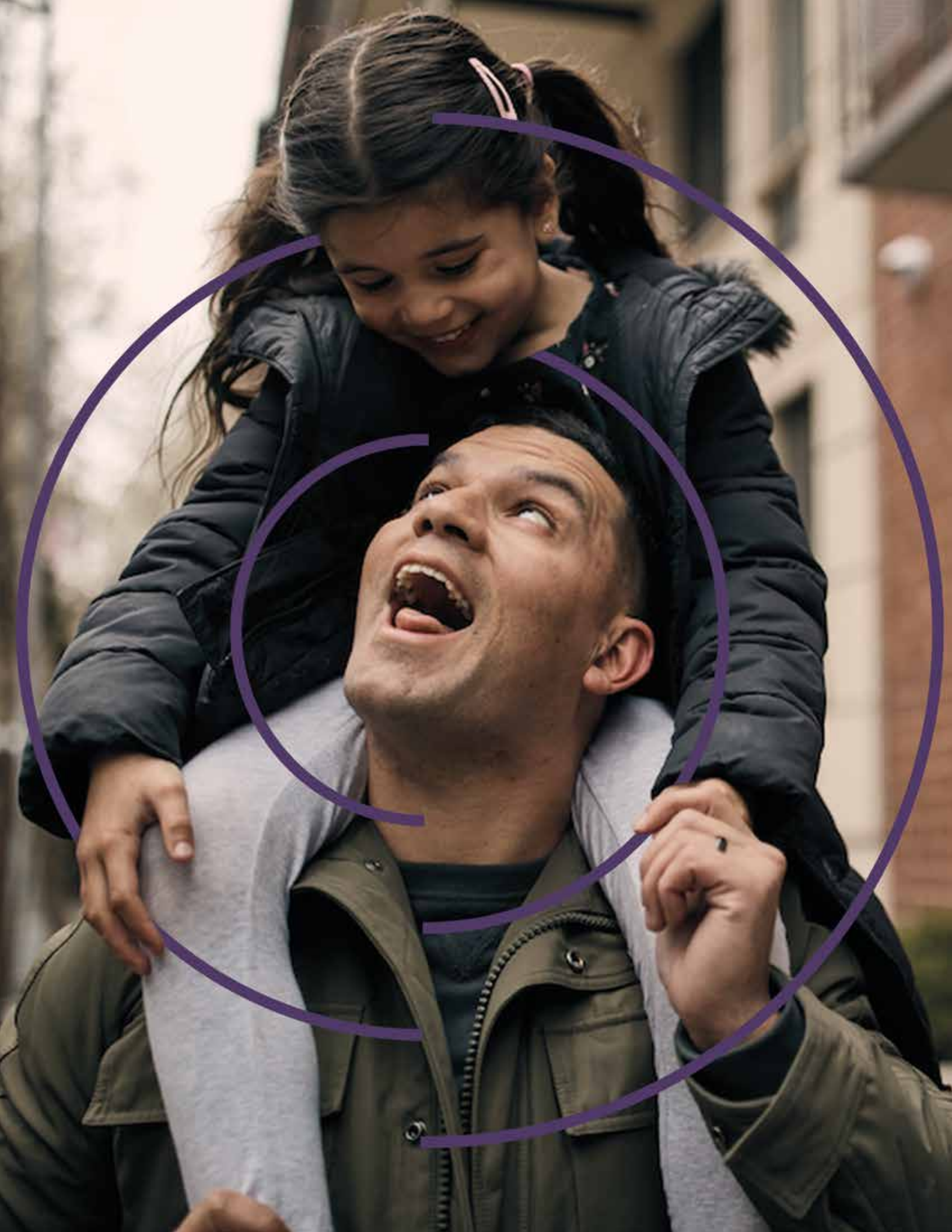
order of domestic life they knew back home. Not Abu Rashed, though, who proudly helps his wife with the cooking and cleaning in their two-room tent when there is no other work at hand. Omar, their 16-year-old son, goes even further, not only doing the laundry but also hanging it out in front of the neighbors – a public display too taboo-busting for many men. “I do this, because it is normal in my family; my father does it,” Omar explains.

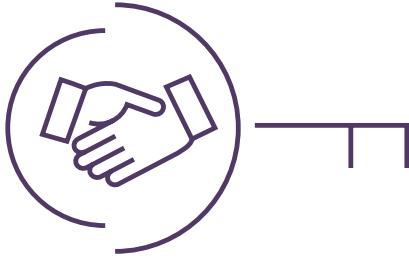
The importance of fatherhood across the Arab region opens exciting possibilities of engaging men on gender equality. Among them is Program P, Promundo and partners' flagship initiative to transform gender norms around fatherhood and caregiving. Along with Lebanese NGO partner ABAAD and UN Women, Promundo has been piloting a local version of Program P, with a focus on Lebanese and Syrian refugee fathers' involvement in early childhood development, as well as improved couple communication (see box on page 66).

Elsewhere in the region, Quartiers du Monde, an NGO based in Morocco, has been working with participatory video and community theater to engage men on gender equality through fatherhood. In Egypt, UN Women's “Because I'm a Father” campaign has brought together local artists to create original works based on the theme

***By Shereen El Feki, Regional Director, Middle East and North Africa, Promundo***

The IMAGES MENA report is available in English and Arabic at [www.imagesmena.org](http://www.imagesmena.org)





## KEY 4:

# Help Couples and Co-Parents Thrive Together

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*“[S]he listens to me, and I also listen to her...The communication is also good. You solve the issue peacefully without a tug of war.”*

*– Man involved in SASA!, a violence and HIV prevention program in Uganda<sup>131</sup>*

**Fathers’ relationships with their intimate partners and co-parents, who are predominantly (but not always) women, are often where the balance or imbalance of care work has the most immediate effects.** What can be said about couples who are striving for true equality in their own lives, and about the factors that support or impede this goal? What can new research reveal about the ways couples learn about, negotiate, and then put into practice, new attitudes and behaviors related to gender roles? This chapter investigates how couples negotiate care work and how demographic changes in family formation are influencing this, in addition to putting the known benefits of equal care up against what women in research say they want from their male partners and fathers of their children.

While this section focuses largely on couples, and most research has been carried out with heterosexual couples, we also affirm the need to respect and support families and caregivers in all their diversity, including nuclear families; extended families; single-parent households; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) couples, parents, and caregivers; adoptive families; and all other caregiving arrangements that amplify the well-being of all people, regardless of age, sexual orientation, marital status, or gender.<sup>132</sup> We also recognize that children, and particularly girls and young women, are part of any care work distribution at the household level. Fathers as well as mothers – the way they

model relationships (both positively and negatively) and how they share the unpaid care work in the home – have a major impact on how their children will think and behave once they become parents.

### ***How Do Couples Negotiate Care?***

**Assumptions about who does the unpaid care work in the home often remain unquestioned and undiscussed between couples.** One of the key elements is how much couples discuss who is doing what, and why, and how much they trust each other. Due to gender norms and expectations, as well as practice, women may feel that men are unable to do a task as well or as quickly as they can. In addition, men and women may have different perceptions of how much work their spouse does in the home. In one United Kingdom study, six in ten women said they do more than their fair share of the household work, but only four in ten men said they do less; these numbers changed very little between 2002 and 2012.<sup>133</sup>

**TABLE 4.**  
**Perceptions of fairness of housework in the United Kingdom**

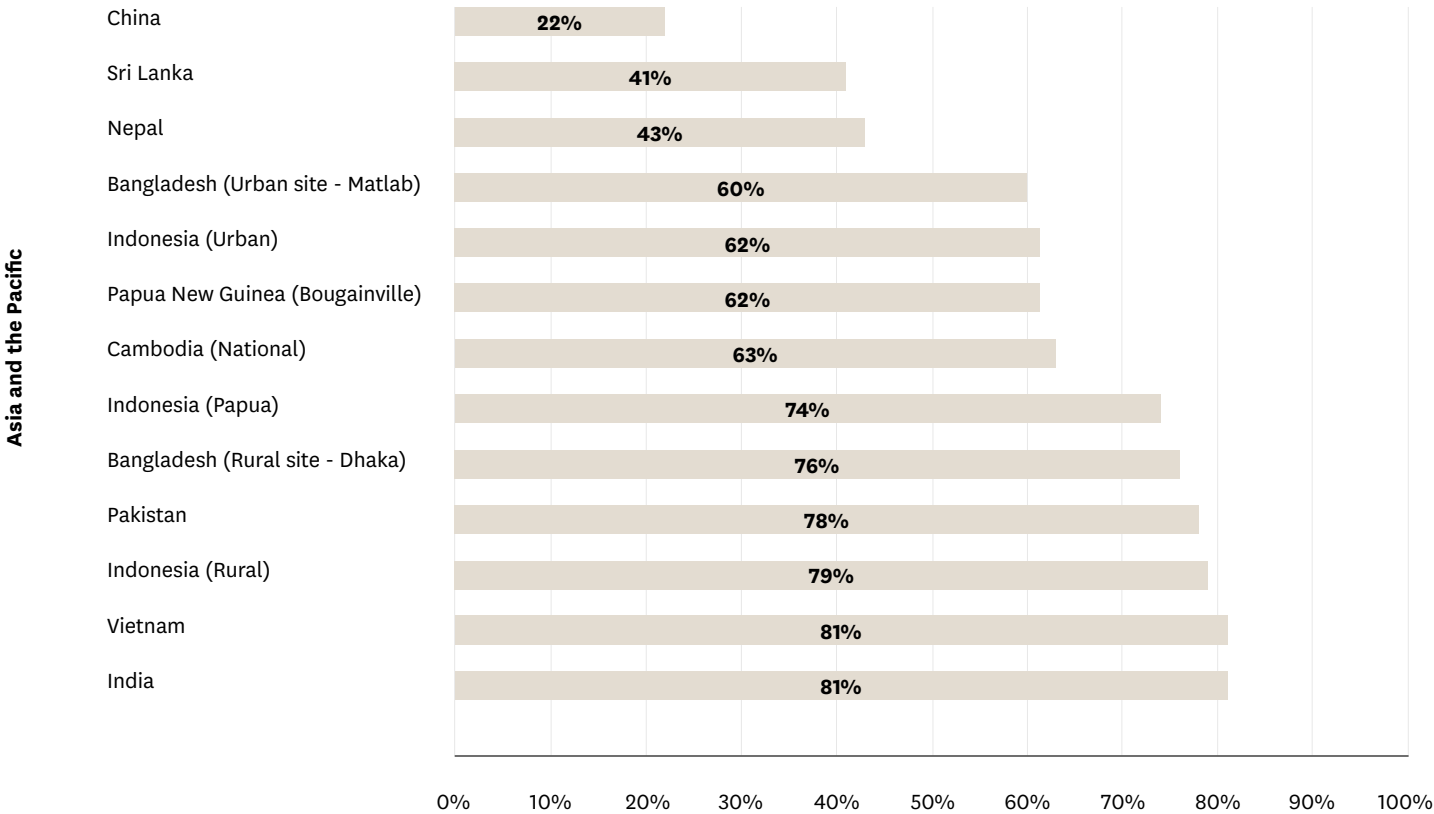
|                                                         | 2002 |       | 2012 |       |
|---------------------------------------------------------|------|-------|------|-------|
|                                                         | Men  | Women | Men  | Women |
| Perception of fairness of housework divide by sex       | %    | %     | %    | %     |
| "Much more" or "a bit more" than my fair share          | 10   | 63    | 15   | 60    |
| Roughly my fair share                                   | 45   | 31    | 46   | 31    |
| "A bit less" or "much less" than my fair share          | 44   | 4     | 37   | 6     |
| <i>n = weighted respondents in heterosexual couples</i> | 616  | 723   | 390  | 273   |

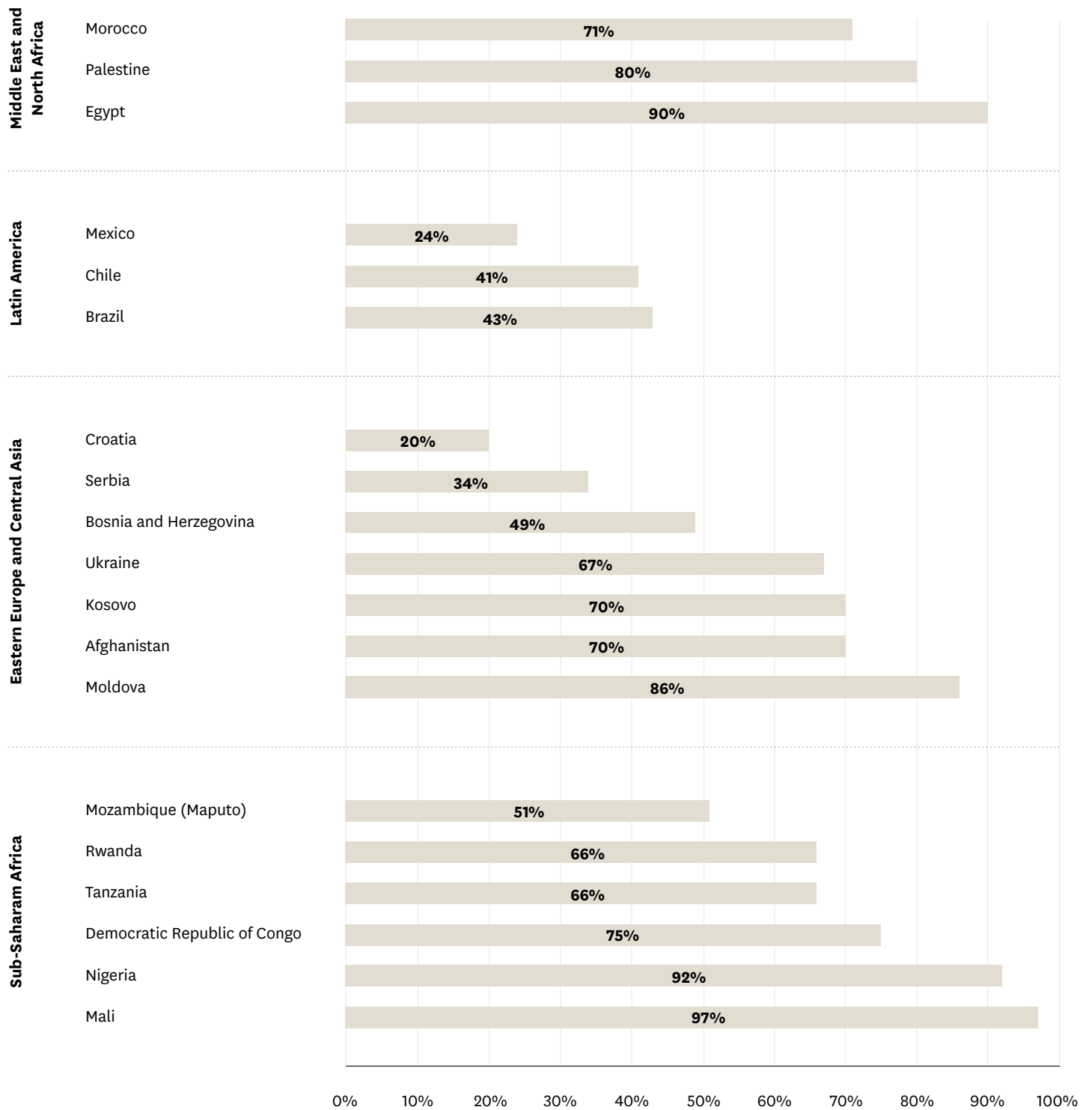
Source: Park, A., Bryson, C., Clery, E., Curtice, J., & Phillips, M. (2013). *British social attitudes 30*. London, United Kingdom: NatCen. Retrieved from [www.bsa-30.natcen.ac.uk](http://www.bsa-30.natcen.ac.uk)

Drawing from the same data source as this table, men in the United Kingdom reported doing 7.8 hours a week of housework in 2002 and 8.3 in 2012, a small improvement. Interestingly, however, their partners thought they were doing much less – and this had actually decreased in that time, from 5.9 hours in 2002 to 5.7 in 2012. In Australia, between 2002 and 2016, men increased the amount of housework they were doing by about 55 minutes a week.<sup>134</sup> Taking a longer view, evidence in the United States shows that over the past 30 years, fathers have increased the time they spend with their children during the workday by 65 percent.<sup>135</sup>

**NEW DATA** Figure 12 presents the proportion of male respondents in worldwide IMAGES studies who hold a rigid view about household decision-making. With some variation within and between regions, the presumption of men’s household decision-making power is problematically widespread: most men in many IMAGES settings believe men should have the final say in household decision-making.

**FIGURE 12.**  
**Proportion of male respondents in IMAGES studies who agree that “a man should have the final word about decisions in his home”**





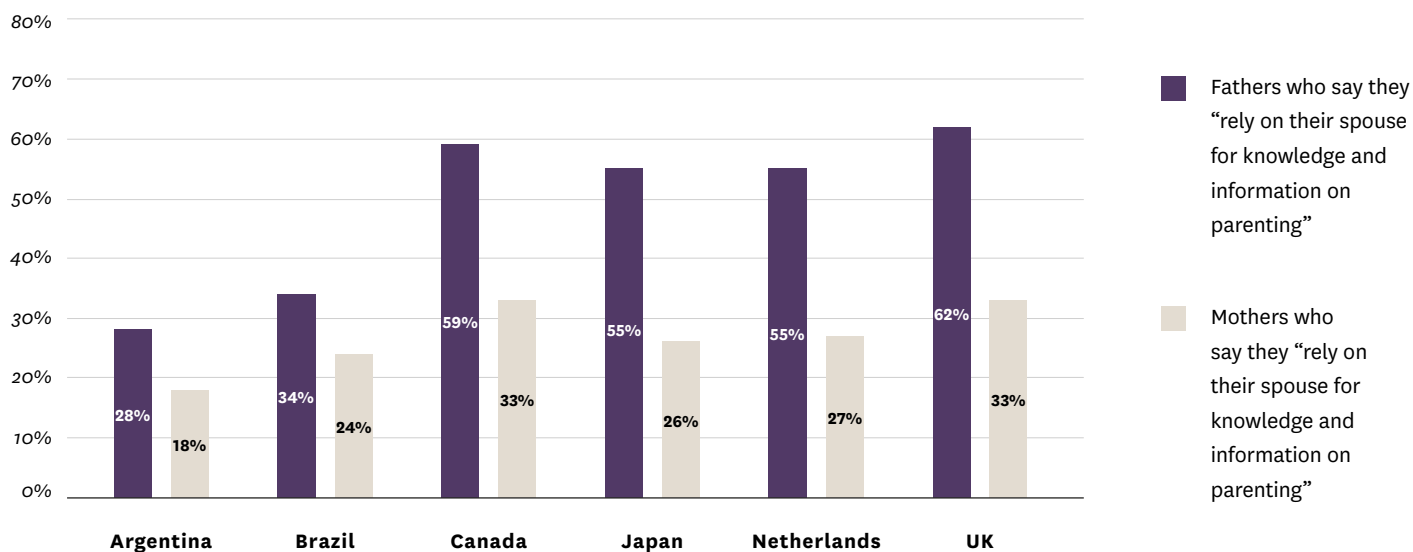
Source: Original analysis of multiple IMAGES country reports for inclusion in State of the World's Fathers 2019.

In any collaborative caregiving relationship, parents will rely upon one another; some evidence shows this is more men relying on women (or fathers relying on mothers) as the default parenting experts. Indeed, the belief that women are “naturally” good at parenting lies deep in the belief systems of many women and men even in settings where men are doing more of the hands-on caregiving.

**NEW DATA** The Helping Dads Care Research Project found in all countries that fathers are more likely to say they “rely on [their] spouse/partner for knowledge and information on parenting” than vice versa (see Figure 13). This finding underscores why working with fathers, as well as couples, is key to building their confidence and skills around parenting and to make these relationships more mutually supportive. Women, however, rely far less on their male co-parents for knowledge and information on parenting – again reflecting these views that women are competent parents and that mothers are the “referent” parent.

**FIGURE 13.**

**Men are more likely to rely on women for parenting information than women rely on men**



**New research also demonstrates that even in contexts where social and gender norms are the most rigid, changes within relationships related to gender roles are possible.** For example, research with participants in the SASA! program, run by Raising Voices and the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention in Uganda, demonstrates how programs can combine lessons to introduce new ways of thinking about “relationship values” and gender norms, along with specific skills for communication and mutual decision-making, in ways that ultimately support couples and lead to transformations in relationship satisfaction and

a reduction in intimate partner violence.<sup>136</sup> As the study suggests, *“Often the changes were the result of one partner making a small change, which enabled the other partners to make changes without fear of losing their perceived power or influence in the relationship, generating intimacy and a gradual improvement in their relationship.”*<sup>137</sup> The multi-country Men Who Care study, which included interviews with involved male caregivers in Brazil, Chile, Mexico, South Africa, and India, similarly concludes that the quality of the relationship between parents significantly affected the extent to which men participated in care work in the household.<sup>138</sup>

**Evidence, including from the recent adaptations and implementations of Program P – Promundo’s fatherhood curriculum aiming to transform gender norms – also shows benefits of engaging couples together in guided discussions and trainings.** Contrary to the belief that men won’t change in terms of their participation in household care, and particularly in their parenting, research from multiple settings finds that couple-focused approaches and changes in relationship dynamics – from case transfers, parent training, or support groups for women, among other methods – can lead to consistent and sometimes long-term changes in the parenting involvement and styles of fathers and mothers.<sup>139</sup> Implementation and evaluation of Program P in multiple locations shows encouraging findings in this regard. The Program P approach brings together four elements: (1) background research on engaging men as caregivers; (2) a guide for health professionals on how to engage men at prenatal consultations and in primary health clinics; (3) a series of interactive modules for gender-transformative group education with men and their female partners; and (4) a step-by-step guide to creating and launching a community campaign.

To date, Program P has been adapted and implemented in at least ten countries. A randomized controlled trial of Program P in Rwanda found positive impact of the intervention across multiple outcomes, including reduced physical or sexual intimate partner violence; less physical punishment of children; greater use of modern contraceptive methods; more men attending antenatal care visits with their partner; greater partner support during pregnancy; and more participation of men in care work.<sup>140</sup> Results from Program P’s implementation have shown other positive changes in the lives of men and their families, as well. For example, young fathers in Nicaragua, one of the locations where Program P was originally tested, reported improved relationships with their children and partners, as well as greater participation in household work and childcare. In addition, when World Vision partnered with Promundo to adapt Program P for implementation in Sri Lanka, men who participated learned to manage difficult emotions and reported a decrease in substance abuse among themselves and their partners. Furthermore, many of the men and staff who were involved have continued to spread the program’s messages throughout their communities and have recruited other men to participate.

**Research from multiple settings finds that couple-focused approaches and changes in relationship dynamics can lead to consistent and sometimes longterm changes in parenting involvement and styles.**

## Shared Caregiving Leads to Greater Couple Happiness: Learning for the Next Generation in the Philippines

Oxfam and Unilever, with its Surf laundry brand, have partnered to support the Women's Economic Empowerment and Care initiative (WE-Care) in challenging notions about unpaid care work, making it clear that care and domestic work make a valuable contribution to society and should be shared, thus dismantling deep-seated gender inequalities.<sup>141</sup>

In the Philippines, Nestor, a community official, says: "Our culture is that the woman should be the one to do everything." However, he acknowledges that as a result of the project, his behavior has changed a lot: "Before, every day when we woke up, my wife, used to bring me my coffee at 5 a.m. Now I wake early and bring her coffee. I didn't use to help with the laundry and now I do. My children now also share the care work. I have learned that it is not good if the women do all the work. My wife is very happy. And she hugs me more."

Jeanette, who lives in the same community as Nestor, says: "It used to be a stigma if the husband shared the housework. Now we share it and work closely together, and it has helped me to become a better mother. When men and women share what there is to do, they have a better relationship."

There is general agreement in all WE-Care communities in the Philippines that younger people are better at this sharing than their parents. Modeling a new way of running relationships in the home is something that can be passed on from parents to children, as Nestor points out: "This learning we can do for the next generation," he says. "They will not think it strange that a couple share the tasks in the home. There is a new learning. The millennials will have different attitudes about this sharing between men and women. Every person is responsible for a better future."

### *How Are Couple Relationships Changing, and How Does This Affect Care?*

**Relationships all over the world are changing quickly.** In many countries, couples are marrying later (or, in countries where cohabitation without marriage is the norm, legally marrying at lower rates). Many country populations reveal that today's families are more diverse, often with fewer children, greater numbers of older adults in need of care, and more women participating in the labor force than prior generations – although these trends are certainly not universal. Later ages of marriage, greater freedom for women and men to divorce, entering into relationships, and having children at later ages all potentially bode well for greater equality within couples.

#### **What indicators exist on the equality of care work within same-sex households?**

Data are limited, but one small study in the United States suggested that gay and

lesbian couples divide chores much more equally than heterosexual couples, but only until they become parents.<sup>142</sup> When gay and lesbian couples in the study became parents, this changed, with one partner taking on the bulk of household chores and childcare, and the other (often the highest earner) being the provider. This likely has more to do with the expense of private childcare than with any innate characteristics of the participating couples or their sexuality. Notably, however, the gay and lesbian couples in the study felt happy with the division of roles and tasks, partially because the division of labor was based on communication and mutual decision-making, not based on the “baggage” of gender.<sup>143</sup> In Sweden, too, research has found that lesbian couples continue to be more equal than heterosexual ones even after becoming parents.<sup>144</sup>

### ***What Do Women Say They Want in Couple Relationships (or From Their Male Partner)?***

**Achieving equality at the household level requires understanding the diversity of household arrangements, of couple arrangements, and of caregiving patterns. It means listening to women’s voices on what equality would look like to them.** This also has to be viewed in the context of continuing high levels of intimate partner violence against women, of thousands of girls still being married at a young age, and a wide backlash in many countries against women’s rights. As such, advocates for equal care need to listen to women and girls: what demands are they making in terms of men’s care work contributions? Multiple data sources help provide insights to address these questions.

The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey report concludes that at current rates, it will take another 30 years for men to do as much housework as women.<sup>145</sup> Some 80 percent of women in an Oxfam five-country study expressed the desire for their husbands to help with one or more care activities; 66 percent mentioned specifically that they’d like their husbands to help more with childcare.<sup>146</sup> Girls, too, feel that they are taking on an unfair share of household tasks, driven by gender norms that are hard to shift. In a cohort study for Plan International UK, girls were resistant to such rigid divisions, seeing them as unfair: “*My parents prefer the boys to concentrate on field work and the girls on household tasks. I don’t find this fair,*” said Essohana, age 11, from Togo.<sup>147</sup> However, change is possible. In the same study, one mother in Uganda said: “*Previously, during rainy seasons, we would say only girls or only boys should do this or that, but we discovered that it affects them. Now, if I say that only girls cook, it seems so unfair but previously it was that boys are not supposed to cook. As for me, I noticed that it was unfair, so I decided that everyone should get involved.*”<sup>148</sup>

**Advocates for equal care need to listen to women and girls: what demands are they making in terms of men’s care work contributions?**

Achieving equality in caregiving thus starts with this simple adage, adapted from the field of HIV/AIDS: Know the caregiving dynamics in your setting. Map the inequality. Drive the change from there. Rather than making assumptions about men's limited participation, baseline research and participatory inquiries can prove powerful tools in driving local solutions.

#### NEW DATA

### What Women Want: Women's Needs and Perspectives regarding Fathers' Participation in Care Work

The Plan International study in Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, and Nigeria explores women's perspectives on how household labor and care work should be divided, their views on fatherhood, and their reaction to increased participation of their male partners in caregiving and household labor. According to women, fathers' increased participation is a desirable behavior change that is moving in the right direction, regardless of whether they had been requested or demanded by women. This holds true for women even across countries with varying levels of rigidity in terms of gendered norms and restrictions. Other key findings include the following:

**Women weren't protective of the caregiving "space."** Due to gendered social expectations that assign women virtually exclusive caregiving responsibility, it was hypothesized that women might be "protective" of the unpaid care space – that they would attach value to their leadership and ownership of it and be resistant to male partners' increased involvement. However, the results rejected this hypothesis. While most women still expect some gendered division of labor at home, many described an ideal distribution of household and care work that was more balanced, and even equal.

**Women reacted positively to men's behavior changes,** even when they did not demand or even expect this change. The study asked all women how they felt about the increased caregiving

and household work by fathers. Reflecting rigid norms, respondents in Nigeria and Bangladesh still frequently referred to the help as a "bonus" or kind of "favor." Nevertheless, additional support was universally well received by study participants, and the reduction in their burden of work was valued. Individual mothers in one focus group in Ghana reported feeling proud of their husband, united with and better able to relate to him, loved, relaxed, and less worried, for example.

***"[My] husband gives time to the children, so I can get some free time."***

*– Mother, Bangladesh*

**Women reported positive effects on relationships between partners.** This manifested in several key areas, including more participation in decision-making, improved communication, reduced verbal and physical violence or conflict in the household, and increased love and affection.

***"There is now much understanding between us and we make all decisions together. We now share ideas and make decisions together."***

*– Mother, Ghana*

Women were less likely to use language explicitly referring to domestic violence, rather reporting a reduction in men's temper, anger, and arguments. However, adolescent children and community leaders did explicitly discuss a reduction in physical violence:

***“Before, my father and my mother quarreled very often. Several times, I watched my father slap my mother. But since my father’s participation in the club, they have not quarreled anymore. They became very in love and that makes me happy.”***

*- Adolescent girl, Haiti*

***“Previously, husbands used to behave roughly with their wives because of simple problems but they have now changed and they behave nicely to their wives.”***

*- Male community leader, Bangladesh*

While the study found that women reported widespread and positive changes in their relationships and in support for care and household work, many participants also indicated a desire for more change. This included additional support for care and household work in Nigeria, where several women’s groups laughed while they suggested that the men could even start making “tuwo,” (a pudding dish) and in Bangladesh, where several groups wanted men to spend more time with children and supporting housework.

At the same time, women want a rest. When asked what they’d do if they had an extra two hours every day, the most consistent response was that they’d rest, relax, and sleep. In addition to rest, many women in Ghana responded that they would spend time with family; many mentioned “chatting” with their children, and engaging in business activities (e.g., farming or trade). In Bangladesh, women said they would rest and “spend time with their husband”; in Nigeria, they would rest, read (usually the Qur’an), and engage in small business activities (e.g., tailoring, sewing, or trade). In Haiti, they would rest and show more “affection” to their husbands and children, and some would go for walks and share ideas with their families.

***“I would use that time to think about life.”***

*- Mother, Nigeria*

***“I believe there shouldn’t be a distinction between which chores men can do and what women can do. For example, I can do the washing, cooking, and fetching of water and men can do same.”***

*- Mother, Ghana*

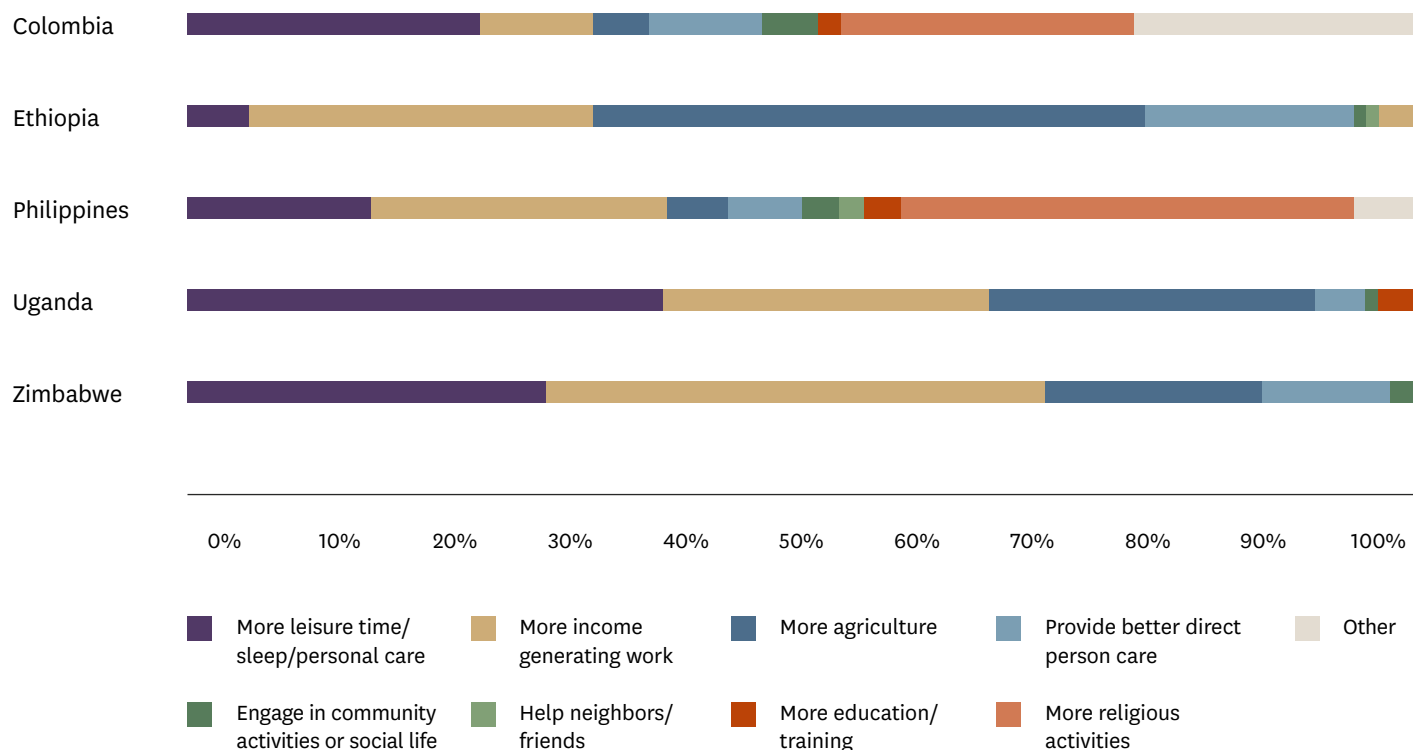
### **What are the opportunity costs of women’s inequitable burden of care work?**

Sleep, leisure, paid work, and many more. For girls in some settings, the amount of unpaid care work they do can mean dropping out of school.<sup>149</sup> When asked what they would do with any spare time, women in the Oxfam study prioritized sleep, leisure activities, and paid work over anything else. This is not the only study to demonstrate a direct link between women’s care workload and a reduction in sleep. A related study in Colombia shows that looking after one additional household member reduces the time a woman sleeps by more than 20 minutes a day.<sup>150</sup>

**FIGURE 14.**

**“What would you do if you spent less time on care work?”**

**Responses from women participants in Oxfam’s 2015 Household Care Survey**



Source: Karimli L., Samman, L., & Rost, L. (2016). *Factors and norms influencing unpaid care work: Household survey evidence from five rural communities in Colombia, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Uganda and Zimbabwe*. Oxfam GB.

## Benefits of Shared Caregiving at the Relationship Level

*“The training inspired [my husband] to join in the house and farm work. When both of us are working, we complete the tasks much faster, we have increased our productivity and raised enough money to invest in an ox, so we can cultivate larger areas of land. We’ve also been able to buy a motorbike...a couple of our neighbours have started to copy what we do because they want to make the same progress as we have.”*

– Female participant in WE-Care, Uganda<sup>151</sup>

**Men taking on an equal role in care work has the potential to bring concrete material and physical benefits at the relationship level, specifically for women.** This is at the heart of the rationale for this report’s consistent refrain that men need to take on fully 50 percent of unpaid care work.

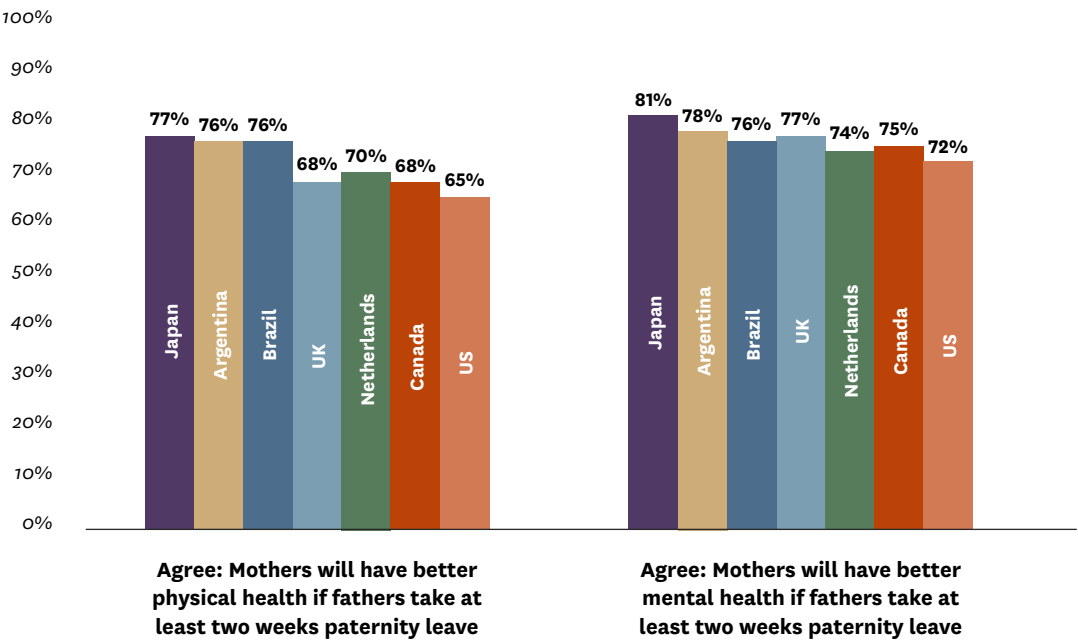
**HEALTH BENEFITS:** Men’s increased involvement in the home can lead to **improvements in women’s health, both physical and mental.** Benefits to women are physical in a labor-saving sense; much unpaid work is hard labor, especially for the poorest families or where resources are scarce (such as locations where women and girls routinely travel long distances daily to retrieve water). As one woman in India reflected:

*“[The] whole day we work and return at six in the evening. When we return...we have to cook, feed our children, do the dishes, wipe the floor and look after our children...If we are given an hour’s break from work we come and feed our children and have our lunch as well...we go to sleep at 11 and then wake up at 4–5 in the morning... there are some days when we go to sleep without food since we’re too tired to eat.”<sup>152</sup>*

**NEW DATA** Plan’s Fathers’ Clubs have also demonstrated that men are very concerned for their partners during childbirth and afterward. This can be a powerful driver of behavior change in men around care work and shared decision-making in the home. Multi-country research also reveals benefits for women: when fathers attend prenatal visits with their partners, women experience safer and less painful births and have a decreased risk of postpartum depression.<sup>153</sup>

**NEW DATA** Research from the Helping Dads Care Research Project in seven countries also shows widespread agreement that women will have better mental and physical health if fathers take paternity leave (see Figure 15).

**FIGURE 15.**  
**What women say about the effects of fathers taking paternity leave**



**ECONOMIC BENEFITS: There are also material economic benefits for individual women and economies.** As affirmed earlier, if women's unpaid work is calculated on the basis of an hourly minimum wage, estimates suggest it could make up 9 to 11 percent of global GDP.<sup>154</sup> The hard fact is that the more unpaid work women do, the less paid work they are able to do. OECD data demonstrate that a decrease in women's unpaid care work is related to a 10 percent increase in women's participation in the labor force (for a given level of per capita GDP, fertility rate, female unemployment rate, female education level, urbanization rate, and maternity leave), for instance.<sup>155</sup> Analysis by the McKinsey Global Institute suggests that in countries with high female labor force participation, women spend less time on routine housework and men spend more time caring for family members.<sup>156</sup> This relates directly to the gender pay gap. OECD research found that in countries where women spend twice as much time as men on unpaid care, their average earnings are less than two-thirds of men's.<sup>157</sup> This is linked to quality of employment; where women do the majority of the unpaid care work, they are more likely to take part-time or vulnerable jobs, often well below their skill levels.<sup>158</sup>

**RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SAFETY: Men's more equitable caregiving leads to better relationships between couples and can be linked with a reduction in rates of men's violence against women.** In the United States, when men do more in the home, women say they are more satisfied in their relationships with their partners or husbands.<sup>159</sup> Couples in Norway who experienced the designated month of leave for fathers (often referred to as a "daddy's quota") reported fewer disagreements over housework than those who did not take the leave.<sup>160</sup> In Germany, research found that when men did more housework, the couple had more sex and reported greater sexual satisfaction.<sup>161</sup> Fathers' positive involvement in the home has the potential to contribute to protecting children from violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect, as well as to the realization of their rights to safety, education, development, and participation.<sup>162</sup> It relates directly to children's right to be cared for and the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Articles 3 and 18). In the Plan International study conducted for this report, participants in Ghana reported that since they are sharing work and decisions more within the household, they are also "making more love." Women and adolescent children frequently mentioned a reduction in arguments, violence, and ill-temper of their husbands/fathers that went along with their increased participation and shared work and decision-making in the home. Fathers also recognize the change: "The children are no longer scared of me, this brings a more cordial relationship," shared a Fathers' Club participant in Ghana.

**GENERATIONAL BENEFITS TO CHILDREN:** There is ample evidence from all over the world that involved and engaged fatherhood has a positive impact on children, including effects that empower them to break gender stereotypes. Having an involved father helps boys to be more gender-equal and girls to have a greater sense of autonomy and empowerment.<sup>163</sup> Research has shown that children of fathers who are positively involved in their lives have higher academic achievement, better cognitive and social skills, higher self-esteem, fewer behavioral problems, and increased tolerance of stress.<sup>164</sup> Even when fathers do not live with their children – and in the United States, there are approximately 8 to 10 million nonresident fathers<sup>165</sup> – positive involvement in their children’s lives continues to the same effect.<sup>166</sup> There is also evidence that sons who report their fathers were more involved in caregiving and modeled more equitable household decision-making are themselves more gender-equitable in their views. They are also less likely to use violence against female partners as adults.

**NEW DATA** As one mother in the Plan International program in Ghana noted: *“Our children are learning from the way they see us relating now and we hope they also take it to their future homes when they grow up. And before, the men didn’t sit with their girls to hear their needs but now they have even become closer.”*

#### **KEY 4: UNLOCKING THE POWER OF CARE BY HELPING COUPLES AND CO-PARENTS IN ALL THEIR DIVERSITY THRIVE TOGETHER**

Experiences of parenthood are influenced by social, economic, and political situations, and men may be involved as biological fathers, adoptive parents, nonresident fathers, gay or trans fathers, adolescent fathers, as well as grandfathers, brothers, cousins, and uncles. The role that the extended family may play in bringing about change must also be recognized. This report calls for:

- Programs and policies that seek to recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care in the interests of gender equality and to take into account the diversity of families, preventing discrimination and understanding the needs of caregivers of all sexual orientations and gender identities.
- Parent- and father-specific training must be implemented and mandated nationally to build men’s skills, confidence, and competence and to promote shared decision-making and good communication. Evidence-based, father-inclusive parent training exists and has shown to achieve reductions in violence against children, reduced violence by men against women, and increased participation by men in caregiving.

# CHILD'S EYE VIEW:

## *Adolescent Perspectives on Fatherhood from Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, and Nigeria*

To better understand the perspectives of children on their fathers' behaviors when it comes to household work and caregiving, and their perspectives on what it means to be a father in general, Plan International staff conducted focus group discussions with adolescent sons and daughters of participants in the Fathers' Clubs.

When asked to define what a good father was, adolescent girls and boys had very similar responses and shared that fathers have many responsibilities beyond providing financially for their children's basic needs. Adolescents in Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, and Nigeria discussed their expectations of good fathers as those who show affection for their children and who show their children that they love them. Adolescents explained that good fathers listen to their children when they speak, share their concerns, and provide good counsel to their children. Adolescents place a great deal of value on fathers who spend time with their families and children instead of spending their leisure time outside the family home.

***"A father should do more to care about the future of his children and motivate them to be a successful***

***person in further life."***

*- Adolescent girl, Bangladesh*

***"He should give both male and female children the opportunity to go to school and not discriminate."***

*- Adolescent boy, Nigeria*

They place a great deal of value on their own relationships with their fathers, as well as on how their fathers' attitudes and behaviors play a critical role in determining the dynamics and relationships amongst all family members. Adolescents in all four countries identified that it is important for their father to help their mother and have a good relationship with her. Adolescent girls and boys expressed appreciation when their fathers began to prioritize their mothers' happiness and needs as they started taking a more active role in household labor and childcare. As indicated by several adolescent boys and girls, when parents have cordial and collaborative relationships, there are positive impacts for their children, and this is something adolescents value and want from their fathers.

***“My parents are the closest people in my life. Their relationship has improved, and they are happy. That is why I am happy, too.”***

– Adolescent girl, Bangladesh

***“Before we were always scared and not comfortable with the relationship among our parents because they were always fighting which made us very sad, but now that there are changes, we are happy and comfortable and even improve in our studies.”***

– Adolescent girl, Nigeria

Adolescent girls and boys from all four countries prize good communication with their fathers. They discussed not only appreciating when their fathers spend time with them, share information with them, and teach them things but also how important it was for them to be listened to by their fathers, to be able to participate in decision-making, and to share their ideas and opinions with their fathers.

***“Now we can sit with our parents and discuss our concern, worries, and seek advice from them since there is mutual understanding and peace among them.”***

– Adolescent girl, Nigeria

Both boys and girls recognized a relationship with their fathers that allows adolescents to feel loved and supported

as something they cherish and want more of. With changes in their fathers’ behaviors at home, including in how their fathers interact with their children, adolescents described feeling more at ease and comfortable with their parents.

***“[It has] brought joy and happiness in my relationship with my father.”***

– Adolescent girl, Ghana

***“Not only me is happy about it, all the family members like the changes and pray he doesn’t return to his former ways.”***

– Adolescent boy, Nigeria

Finally, these improved relationships with their fathers and their fathers’ changed behaviors at home have long-lasting impacts that adolescents already recognize. Adolescent boys and girls explained that being part of this change themselves at a young age has provided inspiration for skills they want to carry forward when they become parents, including adolescent boys imagining their future as fathers.

***“It will last because the children will learn from him.”***

– Adolescent boy, Ghana

***“I feel so good when I see my father helping my mother, and it inspires me to help her as well.”***

– Adolescent boy, Bangladesh





## KEY 5:

# Put Individual Fathers' Care into Action

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*“I think God has given me another chance to fulfill my childhood dreams. God gave me a daughter. I want to fulfill all her dreams. As my family always taught me about the equality between men and women according to Islam, now I want to teach my daughter as well and make her feel that she is no less than a man.”*

*– Father, 29, Kabul province, Afghanistan<sup>167</sup>*

**In addition to the actions needed by policymakers and the outside world, individual fathers need to step up and do their share of the care work.** Looking to fathers as individuals, however, it's important to ask: To what extent do men feel that they are personally equipped to contribute equally in care work and what is each individual's capacity for care? To what extent do men see caregiving as their responsibility? What's stopping or assisting fathers in being fully equal caregivers? Does male privilege and power prevent men participating equally in care work? How can these transformations be encouraged?

### ***Benefits of Caregiving***

**Involved fatherhood is good for men.** Research has also shown that men themselves benefit from greater engagement in caregiving, including improved physical, mental, and sexual health and reduced risk-taking.<sup>168</sup> Men who are involved in the home and with their children report the relationship is one of their most important sources of well-being and happiness.<sup>169</sup> Some 97 percent of fathers who participated in a digital course offered by MAAM, which aims to “turn parenthood into a Master’s,” reported that they were happier since

becoming fathers, as just one example.<sup>170</sup> MAAM participants also said that being a father had improved their efficacy at work, their listening and communication skills, and their emotional intelligence; as one father shared, *“As a dad, I practice my listening skills all the time: every day my daughter receives all the attention I can give her, even when it’s just for five minutes – they’re the most important minutes of the day.”*<sup>171</sup>

**NEW DATA** The Helping Dads Care Research Project data indicated that in all seven countries, fathers who reported taking longer paternity leave after the birth or adoption of their child were also more likely to reap personal benefits in terms of mental health and life satisfaction. The analysis showed that across age, regional variation, and socioeconomic status, longer leave-taking to care for a child was associated with:

- Increased interest or pleasure in doing things, and increased satisfaction with overall life, job, and sex life for fathers in Brazil, the United Kingdom, and Japan.
- Increased feelings of hopefulness, and increased satisfaction with overall life and involvement with children for fathers in Canada and Argentina.
- Better satisfaction with their sex lives for fathers in the United States. Additionally, data showed an association between US fathers’ involvement with their children and their workplace and overall life satisfaction.
- Lower rates of feeling down, depressed, or hopeless for fathers in the Netherlands.

### **Caregiving Knowledge, Skills, and Confidence**

**Many men doubt their own skills and competence as caregivers, affirming the need to help fathers achieve this sense of competence.** The belief that mothers have a greater skill set and higher level of competence in caring for children persists among many men – and women. A global systematic review found that one of the main barriers to engaging fathers in couple interventions was a severe undervaluing of co-parenting (in contrast to mothering) by program designers and implementers.<sup>172</sup> A poll in the United States found that 53 percent of Americans believed that, breastfeeding aside, mothers generally do a better job caring for a new baby than fathers.<sup>173</sup> Interestingly, that same poll found 71 percent believe it is important for infants to have equal time with their mother and father. This speaks to a social dissonance, visible in other countries as well, in which the importance of fathers’ engagement and care is recognized but their proficiency at being able to provide that care is seen as lacking in comparison to mothers.

**Fathers who reported taking longer paternity leave after the birth or adoption of their child were also more likely to reap personal benefits in terms of mental health and life satisfaction.**

**NEW DATA** Data from the Helping Dads Care Research Project also reflect that in most study countries – including Argentina, Brazil, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States – fathers believe that they are *less* competent at caregiving than their partners, despite reporting relatively high levels of competence in themselves in the first place.

**Fathers who are able to see caregiving roles as interchangeable between parents are better able to provide care for their children and share the load of unpaid caregiving with their partners.** Evidence from the United States, Australia, Spain, Indonesia, and the United Kingdom suggests that fathers are embracing more caring masculinities and interchangeable parenting roles.<sup>174</sup> A UK study of 24 heterosexual dual-parent households who regarded themselves as primary or equal caregivers for children aged three or under found that the fathers who were more comfortable with this were more focused on emotional interactions and their effects than on protection or provision.<sup>175</sup> The men who actively had these interchangeable roles were also more open to reducing or adjusting their professional schedule to support those roles.

### **Boosting the Skills, Confidence, and Experience of Fathers as Primary Caregivers: The Case for “Solo Care”**

*“You really can’t appreciate it until you’ve done it. Forget the 9 to 5, this was the 6 to 9 and beyond of looking after kids. Changing nappies, making bottles, making meals; it was relentless. But it was also full of joy. Over time I found my own parenting tricks; everything from how to negotiate with a toddler to how to get them to eat vegetables. There were days when I was overwhelmed with exhaustion but there were many, many others that were full of so much fun.”*

*– John O’Malley, 35, a father reflecting on his period of solo care<sup>176</sup>*

**Some advocates for equality in caregiving emphasize the importance of fathers (or other partners of the mother) taking a large proportion of their available paid leave when the mother goes back to work.** This approach, designed to guarantee that fathers are alone for an extended period at home with the baby, is called “solo care.” Even as *State of the World’s Fathers* sets its sights on men undertaking 50 percent of unpaid care work, an intentional, if limited, period of solo “100 percent” care can break down the common gendered reality that

even the most committed male caregiver is the “secondary” or “helper” carer. Solo care is also a blessing for working mothers on leave; when fathers take leave as their partners return to their jobs, mothers can go back to work more easily, trusting in the partner at home. As a result of time alone with children, fathers will also begin to feel more responsibility for – and confidence in – their caregiving role, helping break down gender-unequal divisions of labor in the home throughout the years. Solo care may also boost the father-child bond. All participating fathers in one study

felt that solo care strengthened this bond, with one respondent remarking, “*Time together promotes closeness, mutual understanding, affection, sharing and involvement.*”<sup>177</sup> Of course, such an approach may be culturally relevant for settings where families are typically small and nuclear. In some parts of the world, community and extended family arrangements mean that men as fathers are rarely ever alone when they do caregiving, just as few mothers may be. Still, in such settings, the importance of men feeling competence, and being encouraged to do hands-on care work, is important.

Margaret O’Brien of University College London is an advocate of this approach, remarking, “*Fathers become more independent caregivers and are more responsible for housework if they parent solo for some time.*”<sup>178</sup> O’Brien says that when fathers take only a couple of weeks off around the birth, the division of tasks in the home over subsequent years continues to follow a more traditional, gendered model. In contrast, when a father spends a longer period caring solo for very young children, he has a closer relationship with them in the longer term and takes on more responsibility for domestic tasks as well.

**New research has also affirmed that men are as biologically equipped as mothers to carry out care work and to bond with their babies.** It is important to shatter the myth of men’s biological incompetence as caregivers, and neurobiological research helps achieve this. For example, research has found that the hormone oxytocin, which responds to positive interaction and supports bonding, is released in similar ways after childbirth not only in birth mothers, but in caregiving fathers and adoptive parents as well.<sup>179</sup> Research also shows that simply being a more involved caregiver for children can change a father’s neurological responses and make him more attuned to infants’ social cues.<sup>180</sup> Other research shows that if fathers spend time caring for a baby or child by themselves, the empathy network in the brain is activated in a similar way as that of mothers.<sup>181</sup> So, what other factors are at play?

**It is important to shatter the myth of men’s biological incompetence as caregivers.**

### ***Life Experiences of Men and Intergenerational Factors that Drive Involved Fatherhood***

***“It affects everyone because if the boy sees his father telling his mother that she is useless, that she can’t work and that she is only there to be abused and do the chores, the boy would also learn to abuse women.”***

***– Boy, Colombia<sup>182</sup>***

**There is clear evidence that life experiences, especially intergenerational factors, affect boys’ and men’s care-related behaviors within their families.** These factors present both positive and negative manifestations. Decades of research on men’s perpetration of intimate partner violence show that experiencing abuse or witnessing abuse as a child is among the strongest drivers of adult perpetration of this violence.<sup>183</sup> Just as witnessing or experiencing violence leads to modeling such behaviors as adults, one of the most invaluable outcomes

of fathers being more equal and enthusiastic caregivers is the lasting effect modeling that behavior has for their children. Recent analysis of the IMAGES datasets shows that, in nearly every country where data exist, men who reported their fathers had participated in certain forms of “traditionally feminine” domestic work were more likely, as adults, to carry out this work themselves.<sup>184</sup> Likewise, these data show that when children see their mothers in positions of leadership in the workplace, in their communities, or in politics, they come to see it as normal for women to occupy leadership roles as it is for men.<sup>185</sup>

**Men need to move from “helping” to seeing caregiving as fully their role, too.** A report from the Boston College Center for Work & Family in the United States found that although the majority of millennial dads believe in equally sharing childcare with their spouses, nearly one in four agreed that providing childcare is to “help” his partner rather than to assume parental responsibility.<sup>186</sup> In the same study, 62 percent of dads disagreed with the statement, “It is more my responsibility than my partner’s to care for our sick child.”<sup>187</sup>

#### NEW DATA

### Even Where Traditional Gendered Parenting Roles Persist, Fathers Are Able and Willing to Take on Increased Caregiving Roles

Plan’s Fathers’ Club participants tended to identify traditionally “masculine” skills and responsibilities when asked about their roles in the home. At the same time, it was clear that they were also confident in learning new skills and engaging in more caregiving. Fathers in Bangladesh specifically talked about increased childcare and proudly cited examples of activities traditionally done by women: cooking for and feeding children, ensuring children’s health, and “providing love.” In Ghana, an adolescent daughter reported that her father now fetches water, sweeps, washes clothes, and cooks. He also takes care of her younger siblings while her mother works on the farm. Haitian fathers reported increased care work and building new skills related to household labor.

As a result of this behavior change, fathers in Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, and Nigeria reported

they had experienced ridicule or been taunted by other men and community members. While social stigma was the most frequently mentioned obstacle to change, fathers consistently expressed that it was not a strong deterrent for them and, often, that they were able to convince others of the benefit and change attitudes of ridicule. Fathers in Nigeria, in particular, seemed to express pride in their strength to *withstand* the ridicule and not be deterred.

*“People in the community say that my wife is doing magic to try to [get me to] help with housework and caring for the children. I am not discouraged by the words of people.”*

*– Fathers’ Club Member, Haiti*

*“If I need to go through any more changes to bring peace to my family, I will.”*

*– Fathers’ Club Member, Bangladesh*

*“[Neighbors] stigmatize us and make jest of us in society, but I am less concerned and I believe they will later understand.”*

*– Fathers’ Club Member, Nigeria*

While participating men were overwhelmingly the “breadwinners” of the household in the four study countries, economic barriers to engaging in more care work were not frequently mentioned. Only in Ghana and Haiti, where some fathers had to travel or migrate for work, did some cite time poverty as a barrier; however, it was often mentioned with regret.

*“The nature of my job, fishing and farming, sometimes does not allow me to do as much as I wish.”* – Fathers’ Club Member, Ghana

Despite these obstacles, and possibly a motivation for overcoming them, fathers and their families reported seeing fathers who have demonstrated

meaningful change as role models for their children and communities. Adolescents in Nigeria and Ghana, especially adolescent boys, expressed pride in their fathers’ contributions and strongly emphasized the “praise” their fathers receive in the community. Community leaders also reflected on the benefits of Fathers’ Club members becoming role models.

These findings confirm the “push” and “pull” factors that affect the success of behavior change programs, including real or perceived economic and social factors and how they are expressed in the low-resource communities of Plan’s SHOW project. Importantly, the findings also indicate that despite – and sometimes because of – these factors, **individual fathers who are provided with the information and opportunity to increase their caregiving role will have the confidence and ability to do so.**

## REAL (Responsible Engaged and Loving) Fathers Initiative in Uganda

The REAL Fathers Initiative began in 2013 in post-conflict northern Uganda, developed by Save the Children and the Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).<sup>188</sup> The initiative worked with young fathers aged 16 to 25 who were cohabiting with their wife or partner and had children aged one to three. It aimed to foster acceptance of non-traditional gender roles in parenting, improve attitudes and confidence in using positive discipline, and decrease the use of both intimate partner violence and physical and humiliating punishment of children. It included

a mentoring program that focused on “positive masculinity” to build relationship skills and positive parenting techniques and a poster series using emotion-based messages to support fathers and community members to reflect on gender inequalities and domestic violence. An evaluation found that young fathers who had attended at least one group and one individual mentoring session were half as likely as those who were not involved to use any form of violence with their partners (physical, psychological, or verbal) and half as likely to use physical punishment on a child. They were also more than twice as likely to listen to their partner and tell them that they appreciated

them – both at the end of the intervention and a year later.<sup>189</sup> Similar programs have been implemented by Save the Children in a variety of countries, including Sri Lanka and Nepal.

*“I really want to work hard for our children together with my wife, while raising them in a caring and positive way.” – Locham Lokut, father, Uganda*

## Écoles des Maris (Schools for Husbands)

Écoles des Maris is a program funded by the United Nations Population Fund in Niger to involve and empower men in improving maternal and infant health. Niger has high levels of maternity and infant mortality and low literacy rates for women, as well as male dominance in decision-making. In this context, the program aimed to educate men, as well as their communities, about reproductive health, birth complications, hygiene, and healthy eating for women and children, and to improve the use of local reproductive health services. It trained husbands who would then advise fellow male community members on reproductive health topics. Some mobilized the community to fundraise for and build more clinical facilities and services. By 2011, there

were 175 “schools.” From testimonies by male participants and by expectant and new mothers, the program was successful in transforming attitudes towards reproductive healthcare and in getting more people to use services such as pre- and post-natal consultations and births or childhood vaccinations.<sup>190</sup>

*“The activities of the school opened my eyes and improved our life as a couple. I started to help my wife with daily tasks in the home and we made family decisions together, also about family planning. I went with her to the health clinic. Sometimes I even made meals when she was busy.” – Tanimoune Amadou, farmer, husband and, father of five children<sup>191</sup>*

## KEY 5: UNLOCKING THE POWER OF CARE BY PUTTING INDIVIDUAL FATHERS’ CARE INTO ACTION

Men need to step up, and in practice, this means doing more of their share of the care work each day. There must be a deliberate, collective effort to nudge men to do the 50 percent of care work. It’s vital to challenge limited ideas of what it means to be a man and the notion that men are “helping” rather than sharing the care equally. To do this:

- Efforts must start young. Early years and baby groups should be more inclusive of dads, and there is a need for more programs working with adolescents, particularly adolescent boys, as a key entry point for change.
- Build fathers’ confidence and competence. This means talking to – and listening to – men, women, and children. It means building alliances of men and organizations working for gender equality at the local, national, regional, and global levels to add more voices to calls for systemic changes that support women’s rights and promote shared caregiving. For example, visit: [www.men-engage.org](http://www.men-engage.org).
- Finally, individual men must commit to carrying out 50 percent of the caregiving in their homes.



# III. CONCLUSION: A CALL TO ACTION

**This 2019 edition of the *State of the World's Fathers* has set out five key areas that will help achieve greater equality in care work and increased involvement of fathers.** Each focuses on a specific slice of our social fabric: policies, social norms, families, relationships, and individual fathers. If we are able to mobilize new laws and policies, shift social norms, promote family and relationship equality, and encourage fathers to fully embody gender equality, this report argues, then we expect to see radical transformations in care work and family well-being.

## **A New Plan: The MenCare Commitment** **50 minutes, 50 percent**

**Along with all the data and analysis presented above, *State of the World's Fathers* 2019 also aims to introduce a bold commitment to unlock the power of care.**

To reach 50 percent of the unpaid care work, time use data analysis finds that men would need to increase their time spent by a minimum of 50 minutes a day. This report calls on governments, employers, and members of civil society around the world to take action to promote gender equality by supporting men to do their fair share of the unpaid care work by 2030. To reach equality on care, we must set national goals, measure who does the care, and track progress toward equality. Learn more about the MenCare Commitment at: [www.men-care.org/mencarecommitment](http://www.men-care.org/mencarecommitment)

The aim is that this ambitious, specific target can prompt unified action and demands among global partners pushing for true equality in care work.

**This report has also set out a new, thorough set of recommendations to activate all five keys elaborated above.** All of these steps will be critical in advancing the goal of equality in unpaid care and domestic work as an urgent matter of gender justice and women's rights.

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## Key 1: Improve Laws and Policies

Laws and policies must provide the bedrock of change. Recommendations related to improving laws and policies include the following.

- Implement policies in the health sector to engage men in prenatal visits, childbirth, and postnatal care, ensuring that women's needs and wishes regarding men's involvement are always followed.
- Use poverty alleviation policies, including guaranteeing a living wage, both to ensure the financial stability of families and to nudge men to do more care work; also ensure that such approaches do not increase women's caregiving duties.
- Build a male caregiver inclusion plan into every national social protection program.
- Ensure governments and employers offer equal, fully paid, non-transferable parental leave for all parents, as well as embed paternity leave in national policies as a supplement to maternity leave, not an alternative.<sup>1</sup> Extend this leave beyond the first months of a child's life.
- Ensure governments collect data on time use in unpaid care work and how it is divided between women and men, girls and boys, especially in the Global South; these data should be used to inform policy-making and budgeting decisions.

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## Key 2: Transform Social and Gender Norms

Laws and policies are not enough. Social norms related to caregiving are also holding back progress toward equality in care work. Recommendations to transform social and gender norms include the following.

- Governments must provide training to change attitudes of service providers such as teachers, childcare workers, and health care providers.
- Schools and educators must teach children, boys and girls, the importance of care from an early age, building on the evidence-based curricula that exist for gender-transformative education.
- Employers and workplaces must train their human resources staff and carry out workplace-based campaigns and employee outreach programs that create a workplace environment that fully supports the caregiving duties of women and men.
- Advocates must implement media campaigns to inspire men, their families, and their communities to support men's caregiving through TV advertisements, posters, slogans, short films, photos, radio advertisements, and advertisements for local fathers' groups.

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### **Key 3: Guarantee the Economic and Physical Security Of Families**

Unpaid care inequalities affect the poorest families the most and are exacerbated by conflict, displacement and community violence. Recommendations related to guaranteeing family security include the following.

- Advance programs and policies for marginalized families, including refugees and internally displaced persons, that are aware of the pressures that economic and political insecurity put on the household, as well as how this affects women and men differently. They must take into account the possible changes in gender roles that result from conflict and their differentiated impact on women and men.
- Invest in large-scale refugee and internally displaced persons support programs to ensure that programming accounts for the importance of the role of fathers and mothers in children's psychosocial well-being. Programming can be used to support the achievement of the target of men doing 50 percent of caregiving.
- Consider the roles of fathers and male caregivers in the planning phases of social protection policies, including cash transfer programs, and include specific elements to support men's caregiving. They should also seek to understand the specific stresses and identity loss that men often experience in situations of economic insecurity.

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### **Key 4: Help Couples and Co-parents in All Their Diversity Thrive Together**

Families are changing, and everyone has a role to play in ensuring that they change for the better of all. Recommendations related to helping couples and co-parents thrive together include the following.

- Increase programs and policies that seek to recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care in the interests of gender equality and to take into account the diversity of families, preventing discrimination and understanding the needs of caregivers of all sexual orientations and gender identities.
- Father-specific parent training must be implemented and mandated nationally to build men's skills, confidence, and competence and to promote shared decision-making and good communication. Evidence-based, father-inclusive parent training exists and has shown to achieve reductions in violence against children, reduced violence by men against women, and increased participation by men in caregiving.

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## Key 5: Put Individual Fathers' Care into Action

Men need to step up, and in practice, this means doing more each day. Recommendations related to putting individual fathers care into action include the following.

- Efforts must start young. Early years and baby groups should be more inclusive of dads, and there is a need for more educational programs working with adolescents, particularly adolescent boys, as a key entry point for change.
- Build fathers' confidence and competence. This means talking to – and listening to – men, women, and children. It means building alliances of men and organizations working for gender equality at the local, national, regional, and global levels to add more voices to calls for systemic changes that support women's rights and promote shared caregiving. For example, visit: [www.men-engage.org](http://www.men-engage.org).
- Finally, individual men must commit to carrying out 50 percent of the caregiving in their homes.

*State of the World's Fathers 2019* has called for a radical new reality – with actions required from governments, the corporate sector, civil society, couples, and individuals alike – in which care is valued as much as our economic and work lives. A reality in which an ethic of care is instilled in our children. A reality in which we care about care. All of us should accept nothing less than full equality in the sharing of the daily care that fuels our lives.

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