

equimundo

MenCare

State of the World's Fathers 2023

Centering Care in
a World in Crisis



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FOREWORD

Sima Bahous

UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women



There is no activity that defines us more as human beings than the care we afford those who need it, whether in our families, communities, societies or nations. That we value that care so little remains a profound failing in the way we understand the world we live in and manage our affairs.

Part of that devaluing of care is very much gendered. It is, as this report argues, reflective of patriarchal norms. It is part of misguided beliefs whereby those things that women more often do are valued and remunerated either less or not at all compared with than those that men more often do.

Differences in time spent on unpaid care work drive women's lower workforce participation, and their diminished participation in public and political life. Conversely, valuing and supporting care work has the potential to unlock huge gender equality dividends for all.

The burden of care is shared extremely unequally. As a result, the world's women in effect undertake countless hours of unpaid work, work that is as demanding, crucial and critical for all of us as any other. This report offers a conservative estimate of the value of that work at some 11 trillion US dollars per year. It may well be much more. But we do not even need to rely on such calculations. We need only imagine for one moment a global strike of the world's carers.

The calls for a fairer, better distribution of the burden of care are longstanding, and there has been progress. Such progress is founded on policy change and an accompanying cultural shift.

Men and boys are central to both. For example, in the HeForShe Alliance we have consistently called on men to recognize the harmful effects of gender inequality on everyone, men, women,

girls and boys alike. We have asked that they be agents for change and reject negative ideas of masculinity. There can be no more harmful an idea that a man has no place in care work.

This is why UN Women is proud of its partnership with Equipundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice, Sonke Gender Justice, and the MenCare Global Fatherhood Campaign. We share both vision and goals and we will work together until those goals are achieved.

The data show how far we have to go but also positive signs that in many households more men are doing a greater share of unpaid care work. The report is encouraging when it shows how men increasingly see the importance of care, value it, and affirm their willingness to advocate for it.

At UN Women and HeForShe, we remain committed to supporting governments and partnering with civil society to make care policies and care equality a centerpiece of gender equality agendas. The MenCare 50/50 Commitments announced in 2019 are a practical set of actions that policymakers, employers, and individual men can take to move the needle on care equality.

Along with the global women's movement, we need men to move. Men must vote, call and march for high quality universal childcare, for workplace policies that support all caregivers, for social protection policies that support all caregivers, whether engaged in formal or informal work, and for equitable, universal, and paid parental leave. The pathways to care equality and to gender equality require all of those. And their rewards will be shared by us all also.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Imagine a world that puts care at the heart of political priorities and daily lives. A world where all have access to healthcare and education, where men and boys share care equally with women and girls, parental leave for all parents is the norm, and where every household has affordable quality childcare and support in caring for aging family members.

Centering care, and care systems, means affirming that men, women and people of all genders have caring responsibilities, that care is skilled work, and that it is a central part of our lives. It means that governments are held accountable for putting care before profit and investing in care infrastructure. A world that centers care must also recognize that all forms of care are interlinked, whether for ourselves, each other, our families, our communities, our countries, or our planet.

This vision seems far from the one we live in today. Care, both paid and unpaid, is, and must be, a universal responsibility. Historically it has been carried mostly by women and girls — and as a result it is undervalued and goes unrecognized and unpaid or is underpaid. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), over 16 billion hours of unpaid care work are performed daily—an amount that would account for 9 % of global GDP, or around \$11 trillion per year, if paid at the minimum wage.

Most unpaid care work and domestic work is done by women and girls, though men in some settings, particularly in middle- and upper-income countries, are doing more than in the past. In the Global South, women do 3 to 7 times more while in the Global North, women do 1.2 to 2 times more. Why aren't men doing their share? The obstacles to care equality range from policies that don't support equal caring, to family decisions about paid work; to poverty; to social norms; to some men's privilege. Globally men spend only 19% of their total non-leisure time is spent on unpaid work compared to 55% for women.

This report, *State of the World's Fathers 2023: Centering care in a world in crisis*, highlights research findings on men's and women's caregiving roles and the barriers that impede equal participation in caregiving. The data come from an online

survey answered by nearly 12,000 people in 17 countries. The survey looked not only at who does the caregiving, but how we care, for whom, and what men and women think about care.

Our findings build on previous *State of the World's Fathers* reports to affirm that an intersectional feminist vision of a care economy needs men and boys – to value care work, both paid and unpaid, to do an equal share of unpaid care work in the home, and to advocate alongside women for care equality in workplaces and public institutions.

From Argentina to Ireland, Australia to Portugal, China to Croatia, Rwanda to India, the research shows many women and men, and people of all gender identities, are calling for care to be firmly at the center of all our lives and are demanding policies that center care. The pandemic made us all think more seriously about what care means, and how it is the foundation that underpins all our lives. Men say they are doing care, and they are willing to take action to do more. But many barriers – structural, norm-based, individual, and financial – to this equal sharing remain. While our new research finds hope, we also find – as do other data – that the pace of change is far too slow. Our key findings and recommendations are summarized below.

WHO CARES AND HOW THEY CARE

Care matters for everyone. 63 percent of respondents care for a partner, 60 percent care for children, and 36 percent care for an elderly family member. 24 percent have care responsibilities for both children and older people, and one in five look after someone with a disability.

Despite these multiple care responsibilities, women and men overwhelmingly speak of care in positive terms and affirm that it brings them happiness and well-being. Men and women who said that they were satisfied with how involved they were in raising their children were 1.5 times as likely to agree that “I am the person I always wanted to be” and to feel a sense of gratitude.

But not all families speak of caregiving in positive terms.

Women and men with the highest economic hardship are the most likely to speak of care work as more exhausting than enjoyable.

Men across diverse countries are doing more of the care work, perhaps an effect of COVID, even as mothers overall are still doing more of it.

Mothers are still carrying out more house cleaning, physical child care, emotional child care, cooking, and caring for their partner. Yet in many countries, fathers say they carry out many hours of different kinds of unpaid care tasks in the home. And 70% to 90% of men across 15 countries agreed that “I feel as responsible for care work as my partner.”

Men who take greater emotional care of themselves -- meaning they are aware of when they need help or emotional support and actually seeking that support -- are more likely to report that they care for others.

Men who say they take care of their emotional selves are 2 to 8 times more likely to care for a family member. And those who care for others may experience greater well-being: respondents who said that they were satisfied with how involved they were in raising their children were 1.5 times more likely to agree that ‘I am the person I always wanted to be’ and to feel a sense of gratitude.

Men’s caregiving varies across and within countries. Even in countries where on average men are not doing their share of care work, there are some men who are doing an equal share and who center care as much as female partners. And even in countries where something closer to equality has been achieved, there are households with large disparities between men’s unpaid care work and women’s, continuing to act as a major barrier to women’s full participation in public life and a barrier to gender equality more broadly.

Although fathers feel equally responsible for care work, mothers overall are still doing the most caregiving. Mothers are carrying out more house cleaning, physical child care, emotional child care, cooking, and caring for their partner. Yet in many study countries, fathers say they carry out many hours of different kinds of unpaid care tasks in the home. And 70% to 90% of men across 15 countries agreed that “I feel as

responsible for care work as my partner.”- though we did not ask women if they agreed with this. The only exception is India.

The majority of mothers - and fathers - said their care levels increased during the COVID pandemic. The proportion of mothers who said the amount of caring they did increased in the lockdown phase was higher on average than that of fathers.

GENDER NORMS - IT MATTERS HOW MUCH MEN (AND WOMEN) BELIEVE CARE IS MEN’S WORK.

The majority of women and men agree that care work is the responsibility of women and men and a majority of women and men believe women can be mothers and leaders. 61% of men and 65% of women overall disagree with this statement: ‘Women who participate in leadership positions cannot also be good wives and mothers. And only 32% of men and 27% of women agree with the inequitable norm that ‘Changing diapers, giving kids a bath and feeding kids are a mother’s responsibility’.

The vast majority of parents believe sons as well as daughters should be taught to do care work, a positive sign of change. A majority of men and women – more than 80% in most countries – disagreed with the statement that ‘boys should not be taught how to do household chores and care work during childhood’.

WOMEN AND MEN CAN’T DO IT ALONE: THE URGENT NEED FOR ADVOCACY AND POLICY CHANGE

While most parents (63%) say they have some kind of support, just under one in five parents (17%) say they have no support. When asked why they don’t have all the care support they need, cost and lack of affordable care scored highest for both mothers and fathers.

More than half of both mothers and fathers said that political activism for care leave policies was important to them. *This ranged from 57% for fathers and 66% for mothers in India, to 92% for fathers and 94% of mothers in Rwanda. Without policy change to support equality in care, individual change will not be enough.*

A significant proportion of both women and men in all countries say they have taken some form of action to improve care policies. The highest percentage (74%) of both women and men had talked to friends and family about the issue, followed by 39% of women and 36% of men who said they had signed or shared a petition online, and 27% of women and 33% of men who had attended an in-person event to support the cause. Finally, 20% of women and 25% of men said they had approached or talked to local leaders. This suggests the untapped promise of engaging men alongside women in demanding the care policies all households need.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENTAL LEAVE: REMUNERATION IS KEY TO LEAVE UPTAKE

Parents perceive the benefits of taking paid care leave. 87% of mothers and 85% of fathers think that taking paid care leave will benefit their partners and their children.

Among those who were employed and offered leave but did not take all the leave available, the lack of sufficient replacement pay was the most common reason, mentioned by 49% of men and women. This is consistent with other research that finds that remuneration is key to leave uptake, particularly for fathers.ⁱⁱ This is because men still often earn more than women, and unless leave is fully paid, the family cannot afford to lose the man's income. And yet, the World Policy Analysis Center found that only 24% of countries with shared parental leave guarantee at least 80% of wages.ⁱ

Other important barriers to taking leave include experiences in the workplace. These included fear of losing their job (40%), unsupportive managers (36%), or fear of being judged poorly by friends or colleagues for taking leave (18%).

Parents care enough about leave to be willing to take action to have more paid leave time. These steps included 'advocating for the issue at work', and life changes such as moving or relinquishing jobs to have more time for

care. Mothers, on average, showed more willingness to take action than fathers, however both groups showed a relatively high level of willingness to take action. In many households around the world, men's higher pay and higher paid workplace participation, job security and adequate wage replacement often takes priority for households over caregiving or leave at reduced wages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Encouraging an ethic of care among men and boys and seeing more men caring in an increasing number of ways, particularly by advocating for the care policies in governments and workplaces, is important for families, and for society as a whole, and is an as yet untapped way forward for helping to break cycles of violence, inequality and the backlash toward women's equality. To achieve full equality in unpaid care work and bring men fully on board as advocates fully invested in care, we must be **CARING**:

Center care systems in policies and public institutions

1. Governments should **establish national care policies** and campaigns that recognize, reduce, and redistribute care work equally between men and women.
2. **Expand social protection programs** to redistribute care equally between women and men who are unemployed or working in the informal economy, while keeping a focus on the needs and rights of women and girls.
3. **Provide state-supported, high-quality childcare** that facilitates the full participation in economic activities for all working parents and caregivers.
4. **Transform health sector institutions** to promote fathers' involvement from the prenatal period through birth and childhood and men's involvement as caregivers.
5. Governments should **hold male political leaders accountable** for their support of care policies, while **advocating for women's equality** in political leadership.

i "Paid care leave" includes maternity, paternity and parental leave, but can also include shared leave or non-parental leave like 'care days' or 'family responsibility leave.'

ii The number of countries that offer paid leave to fathers after a child is born (known as paternity leave) for any period of a day or more has increased significantly, from 25% in 1995 to 63% in 2022, when 186 countries offered any parental leave to care for infants to mothers, and 122 offered any parental leave to care for infants to fathers. However, the length of time for paternity leave is often short: 9 days (1.3 weeks) is the global average, and there are many country variations.

Advocate for a culture of care in all workplaces

6. Establish **equal, paid, non-transferable parental leave** for all parents employed by the company.
7. Create a **family-friendly workplace** by implementing policies such as care days, remote working, flexi-time, childcare or breastfeeding facilities and promote care equality with internal company public relations and marketing channels.
8. **Track indicators on care equality** in company surveys and reports (for example, the ratio of men compared to women who take parental leave and the amount of leave used).

Revolutionize the way boys are taught about care

9. **Start young to promote emotional connection and expression**, to reframe masculinity and boyhood as caring and valuing care. This means engaging parents, teachers, peers, and coaches, and providing hands on opportunities for boys to learn and practice care.
10. Harness the power of digital tools by **creating age-appropriate educational materials**.
11. Manufacturers and producers of toys, games, and clothing, as well as television programs, **should promote gender equality** among children and young people and caring ideas about manhood and boyhood.

Invest in care services, measure equity in access to service coverage across income levels, by gender and age

12. **Invest in care and care systems** so that changes are funded and included in government budgets.
13. **Collect regular data on time use** in unpaid care work and how it is divided between women and men, girls and boys across socioeconomic groups and ages and use it to **measure progress toward equality**, and to inform policymaking and budgeting decisions.

Normalize equal, non-transferable parental leave for caregivers at the national policy level

14. **Establish equal, fully paid, non-transferable parental leave for all parents in national legislation**, in addition to maternity leave for pregnancy and birth-related health needs.
15. Make **more paid parental leave days available for men**, to get to equal, paid, and substantial parental leave for all parents, with 14 weeks for both parents as a minimum and a non-transferable portion for fathers.
16. **National governments must work to ensure the distribution** of paid parental leave by including informally employed workers.
17. **Regional multilateral entities such as the European Union, Organization of American States and the African Union and the multilateral development banks** can work toward regional directives that encourage or mandate parental leave provisions across more countries, especially in the Global South.

Generate mainstream media that portrays men and boys as caring and competent caregivers and normalizes care as universal

18. **Implement communications and media campaigns** to promote men's involvement in care work, prevent gender-based violence, teach the value of care, and promote equitable, nonviolent, caring relationships.
19. Produce, support and amplify campaigns, television shows and other media that **show men and boys doing the care at home and sharing it equally with their partners**.
20. Support active engagement of fathers and male caregivers in care work, by means of **public campaigns that engage communities for change**.

Care is what it is to be human. Care for each other and for our families is how we have survived as a species. It is the only way we will thrive and survive in the midst of the many crises our world is facing. And to center care, we need to build on decades of work by feminists, and ensure that millions of men and boys join the unfinished revolution that is care equality.

SECTION

1

Centering
care in a
world in
crisis



INTRODUCTION

The unfinished revolution: Imagining a caring world

“If men are to reclaim the essential goodness of male being, if they are to regain the space of open-heartedness and emotional expressiveness that is the foundation of well-being, we must envision alternatives to patriarchal masculinity. We must all change.”

– bell hooks, US author and cultural critic²

Imagine a world that puts care at the heart of political priorities and daily lives. A world where our planet is protected and respected, one where everyone – regardless of race, class, religion, gender, identity, sexuality, age, ability, or geography – has enough to live on and a fair chance in life and can live a life free from violence. One where all have access to healthcare and education, men and boys share care equally with women and girls, parental leave for all parents is the norm, and every household has affordable, quality childcare and support in caring for aging family members.

Centering care, and care systems, means affirming that men, women, and people of all genders have caring responsibilities, that care is skilled work, and that it is a central part of our lived realities. Governments must be held accountable for putting care before profit and investing in care infrastructure. A world that centers care must also recognize that all forms of care are interlinked, whether it is for ourselves, each other, our families, our communities, our countries, or our planet.

This report builds on previous *State of the World's Fathers* reports to affirm that this intersectional feminist vision of a care economy needs men and boys – to value care work, both paid and unpaid; to do an equal share of unpaid care work in the home; and to advocate alongside women for care policies and attention to care equality in workplaces.

However, that vision of the world seems far from the one we live in today. Emerging from the pandemic and its aftermath, we are facing unprecedented crises. The

escalating climate emergency threatens our very existence. Economic uncertainty since and beyond COVID has led to massive changes in workplaces and plunged millions of people into poverty. Inequalities of all kinds are increasing. The reverberations of colonization continue to affect global relationships and the way that people of color are treated. Levels of violence by men against women remain staggeringly high. The world's population is aging, fertility has declined below replacement levels, and economies are struggling to find workers.

Conflicts are having implications not just for the people in those countries but also more widely as displacement creates a backlash against asylum-seekers and refugees. The war in Ukraine is drawing the world into food shortages and rising energy prices. Disinformation, spread by authoritarian political leaders and online influencers, is part of a backlash that is threatening to roll back hard-won gains in gender equality and social justice, underpinned by patriarchal masculinities that continue to promote the idea that men are superior to women.³

We will not be able to deal with these crises unless we turn a spotlight on how we care and how we can all build a more caring, more equal, and less violent world. The current backlash against gender equality is attempting to reinforce gender stereotypes and gender roles, including care as a “feminine” task. And the impacts of crises are never gender-neutral.⁴ The latest data from the World Economic Forum warns, “*Global gender parity is going to take more than five*

generations to achieve, as women still lag far behind men in the economy and politics and surging inflation last year disproportionately hurt their financial health.”⁵

But care, both paid and unpaid, is and must be a universal responsibility. According to the International Labour Organization, more than 16 billion hours of unpaid care work are performed daily – an amount that would account for 9 percent of global GDP, or around \$11 trillion per year, if paid at the minimum wage.⁶

Too many men do not live or work in settings that encourage or demand them to do an equal share of the care work. As a result, too few workplaces support men’s care, too few policies and politicians even consider men’s caregiving, and too few boys grow up seeing it exhibited by their own fathers. Other men have to migrate for work for their families and must do their “care” as providers. To be sure, some men don’t pull their weight when it comes to care; they are given a “get out of care for free” card.⁷ They may even leverage their social positions of power and privilege to avoid taking responsibility for unpaid care. Individual men need to be held for accountable for we equality as we also change the structures around men that drive and sustain care inequality.

Feminists have been pushing for this change for many years, asking for care to be recognized, redistributed, and reduced in order to, among many other things, allow women to participate in professional and political life on equal terms with men.⁸ A key component of recognizing care work is valuing it as much as – or, indeed, more than – we value any other tasks we carry out. And yet care work is often seen as low-skilled and of little economic value. This is a norm that extends to paid care work, which is often carried out by women from marginalized groups, seen as less economically valuable than other forms of work, and therefore, underpaid.⁹

Feminist economists make a distinction between “social reproduction” and economic “production,”¹⁰ pointing out that the second could not happen without the first. To this end, they call for what American feminist and philosopher Nancy Fraser describes as “*a massive reorganization of the relation between production and reproduction: for social arrangements that could enable people of every*

class, gender, sexuality and colour to combine social-reproductive activities with safe, interesting and well-remunerated work.”¹¹

There is now an urgent need to break the binary between social reproduction and economic production once and for all, to put care before profit – and for all men and boys to center care as much as women and girls are expected to.

The idea of reframing our economy as a caring economy¹² is increasingly being recognized, although the link between (under)paid and unpaid care is still not fully acknowledged. The international community has included recognizing and valuing unpaid care work as a target in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and the formation of the [Global Alliance for Care](#) in 2021 is another sign of international willingness to back change.¹³ A number of governments are putting national care plans in place, and employers are looking at policies that support their employees in balancing care and paid work. Additionally, more countries and companies are providing paid parental leave, including more days or equal days for male caregivers, although care beyond children remains an issue. A 32-country survey in early 2023 found six in 10 people say that women won’t achieve equality without men taking action.¹⁴

But there is still a long way to go before men and women share care equally or before we frame care more widely in order to build an economy that works in the service of care – not the other way around. This is why partners and signatories of the [MenCare global fatherhood campaign](#) are working with men, fathers and families, workplaces, and governments to improve behaviors, relationships, workplace cultures, and policy frameworks to achieve men doing 50 percent of the daily global unpaid care work. As Canadian feminist and anti-violence educator Lee Lakeman notes, there is hope in the “growing activity of men of goodwill calling on each other to change. When that group hits a critical mass, the majority of men will be more likely to want to change.”¹⁵ We see the promise of individual and groups of men being their best caring selves – coupled with the importance of workplace, policy and structural issues driving the change we all need.

This new research finds hope, even as we find – as does other data – that the pace of change is far too slow.¹⁶ The survey presented here, answered by 11,999 people in 17 countries, shows that from Argentina to Ireland, Australia to Portugal, China to Croatia, Rwanda to India, many women, men, and people of all gender identities are calling for care to be firmly at the center of all our lives. Men say they are doing care, and they are willing to take action to do more care, including political action. And therein lies the path to true change.

We call on men and boys worldwide, and those who influence and shape the lives of men and boys, to join feminist voices in holding leaders, politicians, workplaces, institutions, and decision-makers to account for the changes that need

to happen to make care equality a reality and to build an economy based on care not profit. Many men and boys are already allies for this cause.

We owe it to our children and grandchildren to build a more caring and gender-equal world. Care must be at the center of political, social, and economic plans and spending – and built into structures and institutions. Women have been asking for this for decades. When men do the same, together, we can change our world so that care is at the center of everything we do. In this time of crisis, we have no option but to join this long – and still unfinished – revolution in care. Our future, and the future of our planet, depend on it.

BY THE NUMBERS: GLOBAL DATA ON GENDER EQUALITY AND CARE

THE GOOD NEWS...

Percentage of people globally who think gender equality is good for both women and men:

53%¹⁷

Percentage of women and men, respectively, who define themselves as feminists:

44% AND 37%¹⁸

Proportion of people who believe they can help promote equality between men and women:

3 IN 5¹⁹

Percentage of people **across 34 countries** who think it's important for women in their country to have the same rights as men, **with 74% saying it's very important** (median figures):

94%²⁰

Percentage of people who support LGBTQIA+ people being open about their sexual orientation or gender identity:

51%²¹

THE BAD NEWS...

The number of people of all genders who have a bias against women, according to the UN's Gender Social Norms Index:

9 OUT OF 10

This figure from June 2023 is unchanged from a decade ago.²²

Time it will take to reach gender parity in economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment at the current rate of progress:

132 YEARS²³

Percentage of people who think that when it comes to giving women equal rights with men, things have gone far enough in their country:

54%²⁴

Number of countries that criminalize homosexuality (as of 2022), with the death penalty possible for private, consensual, same-sex activity in 11 countries:

68²⁵

Proportion of women (736 million) who have been subjected, almost always by men, to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both, at least once:

1 IN 3²⁶

UNPAID CARE

The estimated value of unpaid care worldwide:

\$11 TRILLION / 9% OF GLOBAL GDP²⁷

Men's vs. women's share of time spent in unpaid work as a proportion of total work:

19% vs. 55%²⁸

The amount of daily caregiving that women do compared to men:

3 TO 7 TIMES as much²⁹

Percentage of domestic workers worldwide who are women, with **around 81%** in informal employment with few rights:

76% OF 75.6 MILLION³⁰

WORKING LIFE

The average globally that women are paid less than men, with

WOMEN MORE CONCENTRATED IN LOWER-PAID JOBS:

20%³¹

COUNTRIES that have legal frameworks that could be improved to help reduce the gender pay gap:

119³²

2022's level of gender parity in labor force participation, the lowest level registered **SINCE THE INDEX WAS FIRST COMPILED IN 2006:**

63%³³

Economies that still do not mandate women's equal pay for work of equal value, **WITH SOME ECONOMIES EVEN REVERSING RIGHTS** for which women have fought long and hard:

93³⁴

LEGAL RIGHTS

Number of economies – all high income – that have laws giving women the same rights as men:

14³⁵

Number of women of working age who live in economies that do not grant them the same rights as men:

2.4 BILLION³⁶

The global pace of reforms towards equal treatment of women under the law **in 2022:**

20-YEAR LOW³⁷

PARENTAL LEAVE

The number of countries that give any paid leave for mothers:

186³⁸

The number of countries that give any paid leave for **fathers:**

122³⁹

The number of countries that allow **14 weeks** or more of paid parental leave for mothers, although the duration of maternity leave is still below this in **64 countries:**

120⁴⁰

The number of countries that allow **14 weeks** or more of paid parental leave for fathers:

45⁴¹

The number of countries that have **paternity leave that is paid at 100%** of previous earnings – although just **3 in 10** potential fathers across the world live in these countries:

81⁴²

WHO ANSWERED THE SURVEY?

In 2022, 17 organizations from around the world, coordinated and led by Equimundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice, came together to feed into this report.ⁱⁱⁱ The findings from this study come from almost 12,000 people. The sample is derived from the data collection firm's existing panels of participants who have consented to participate in online surveys. This means that in some countries, respondents are likely to be urban and higher income. Thus, the sample is not nationally representative, but like many existing online global surveys, the report highlights the patterns that emerge from across all these countries. Ethical approval was

obtained for the global study from the International Center for Research on Women's Institutional Review Board.

Table 1 shows the overall sample size broken out by gender identity: male (n=7,110); female, (n=4,702), and other gender identities (n=187). For ease of data interpretation and because some participants chose none of the above, the analysis presented here only focuses on men (a category that includes trans men) and women (which includes trans women). The age groups of participants match demographics in each country.

TABLE 1 - Survey respondents by country and gender

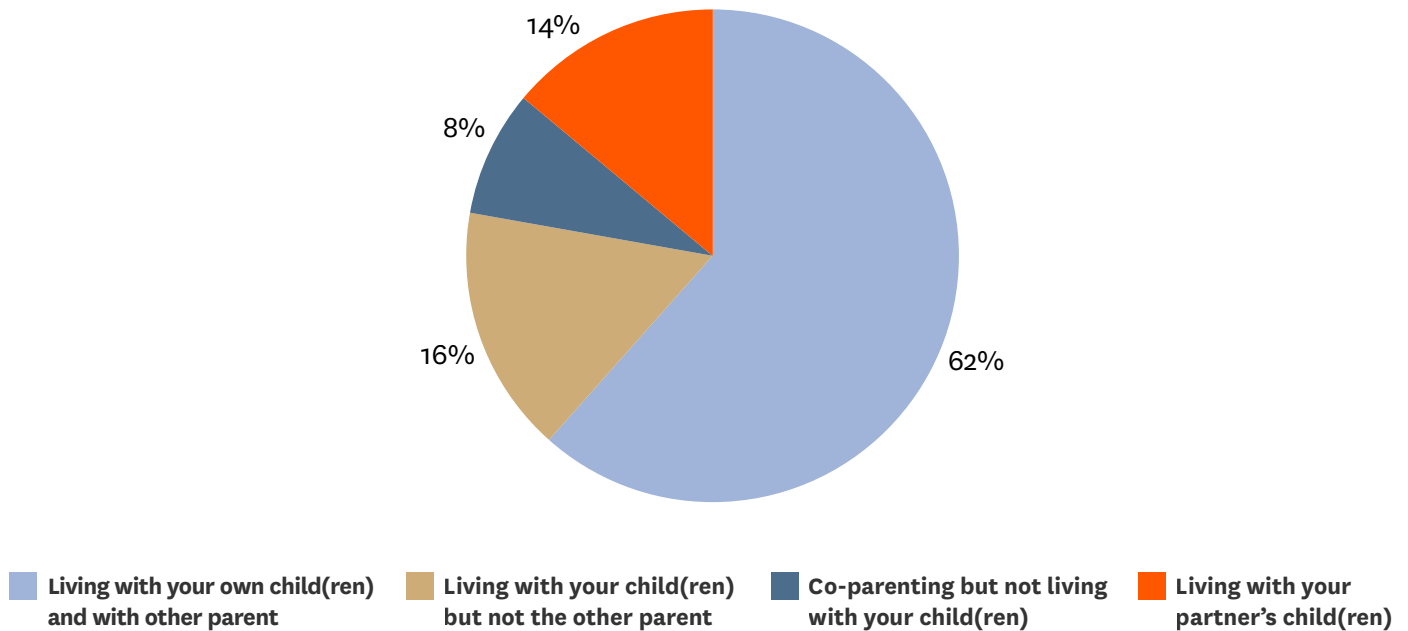
| COUNTRY | WOMEN | MEN | OTHER GENDER IDENTITIES | TOTAL |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Argentina | 287 | 395 | 7 | 689 |
| Australia | 192 | 214 | 19 | 425 |
| Canada | 335 | 466 | 8 | 809 |
| Chile | 284 | 410 | 7 | 701 |
| China | 336 | 461 | 3 | 800 |
| Croatia | 332 | 461 | 7 | 800 |
| India | 233 | 597 | - | 830 |
| Ireland | 267 | 232 | 8 | 507 |
| Lebanon | 159 | 217 | 27 | 403 |
| Mexico | 226 | 410 | 8 | 644 |
| Portugal | 360 | 435 | 14 | 809 |
| Rwanda | 218 | 493 | 18 | 729 |
| South Africa | 331 | 467 | 10 | 808 |
| Spain | 199 | 402 | 30 | 631 |
| Sweden | 325 | 480 | 4 | 809 |
| Turkey | 302 | 500 | 2 | 804 |
| USA | 316 | 470 | 15 | 801 |
| Total | 4,702 | 7,110 | 187 | 11,999 |

ⁱⁱⁱ For 15 countries (Argentina, Canada, Chile, China, Croatia, Ireland, Lebanon, Mexico, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Rwanda, Turkey, and the USA), the data collection firm, Rep Data, relied on online panels to collect data, following a staggered approach in which the survey went live in different countries one at a time. The Equimundo team regularly liaised with Rep Data to monitor the sample. In India, Outline India collected data via phone but followed a similar format in terms of checking translations of the survey. In Australia, the research partner collected data using a snowball sampling technique and programmed the survey into Qualtrics.

Of the overall sample, 66 percent (n=7,903) are parents of at least one biological or adopted child, while 34 percent (n=4,096) are not. As Figure 1 shows, 62 percent of parents

in the study live with their own child and the other parent of the child, while 16 percent live with their own child but not with the other parent of the child.

FIGURE 1 - Analysis of family composition



The complexity of gender-based violence in relation to caregiving: In selecting topics, the survey didn't ask about the key issue of men's use of violence against women in the household or about violence (by parents/carers of any gender identity) against children or others they care for. We know that violence by men against women in the household increased during the pandemic⁴³ and that it remains a major issue. We also know that as many as one in three women globally have experienced or will experience physical violence from a male partner, in addition to other forms of violence inside or outside

the home from men.⁴⁴ We acknowledge that care equality, and engaging men in care equality, require understanding and including efforts to reduce and end violence by men against women. We also have some evidence that rates of some forms of violence may be dropping as men become more involved in care work. For example, in Rwanda, a study found reduced rates of interpersonal violence six years after programmatic work that included more involvement in fatherhood.⁴⁵ We recognize that there are links between violence and care and that violence is an important gap in this research.

SECTION

2

Who cares
– and how
they care



HEADLINE 1

**Care is not a
burden: What
men and women
mean by “care”
– and the link to
well-being**



“The only path ahead is towards inclusion, equity and justice, and a sustainable social economic order based on care, responsibility and accountability. It is a path that must affirm our interdependent humanity and our universal human rights for everyone everywhere.”

– Ubuntu Declaration & Call to Action (2021), MenEngage Alliance.⁴⁶

KEY SURVEY FINDING

While respondents affirmed multiple caregiving responsibilities, they overwhelmingly defined caregiving in positive terms. We asked respondents to come up with three words or phrases when they read the word “care,” using their own language. The differences were minimal between men and women, and so the word cloud in Figure 2 represents the top terms in English and Spanish (languages selected for ease of analysis). The top 10 words were:

1. Love/amor (the most mentioned by far)
2. Help/ayuda
3. Protection/protección
4. Attention/atención
5. Responsibility/responsabilidad

6. Health/salud
7. Kindness/compasión
8. Family/familia
9. Caution/precaución
10. Danger/peligro

Unsurprisingly, almost all of these are positive. Words like “burden,” which often comes up in relation to the word “care,” were conspicuously absent, although our data found that a lack of support made caring for children more exhausting than enjoyable (see Headline 8). This list of words is an affirmation that care is what shapes our lives, makes our lives possible, and – though often undervalued, underpaid, and unrecognized – is central to being human.

FIGURE 2 - Word cloud comprising English and Spanish words associated with “care” according to respondents



KEY SURVEY FINDING

In terms of care for family members, the data shows that large numbers of respondents, both women and men, have multiple care responsibilities. The difference between women and men in this question was small, between 3 percent and 5 percent. Many people have multiple caring responsibilities, and many provide care for multiple generations:

- **PARTNER:** Caring for one's partner is the highest among the types of care measured, at 63 percent.
- **CHILDREN:** 60 percent of respondents in 16 countries say they are looking after children.
- **OLDER PEOPLE:** 36 percent are responsible for older family members.
- **BOTH CHILDREN AND OLDER PEOPLE:** 24 percent have care responsibilities for both children and older people.
- **PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES:** 20 percent are looking after someone with a disability.
- **ALL OF THE ABOVE:** 7 percent care for all three categories – children, older people, and someone with a disability.

KEY SURVEY FINDING

Parents have varied caring arrangements, often relying on intergenerational help: 27 percent of parents in the study

say the child's grandparents support them in childcare, while 21 percent say another family member (apart from their co-parent) does so. Only 6 percent have a nanny/domestic worker at home for care.

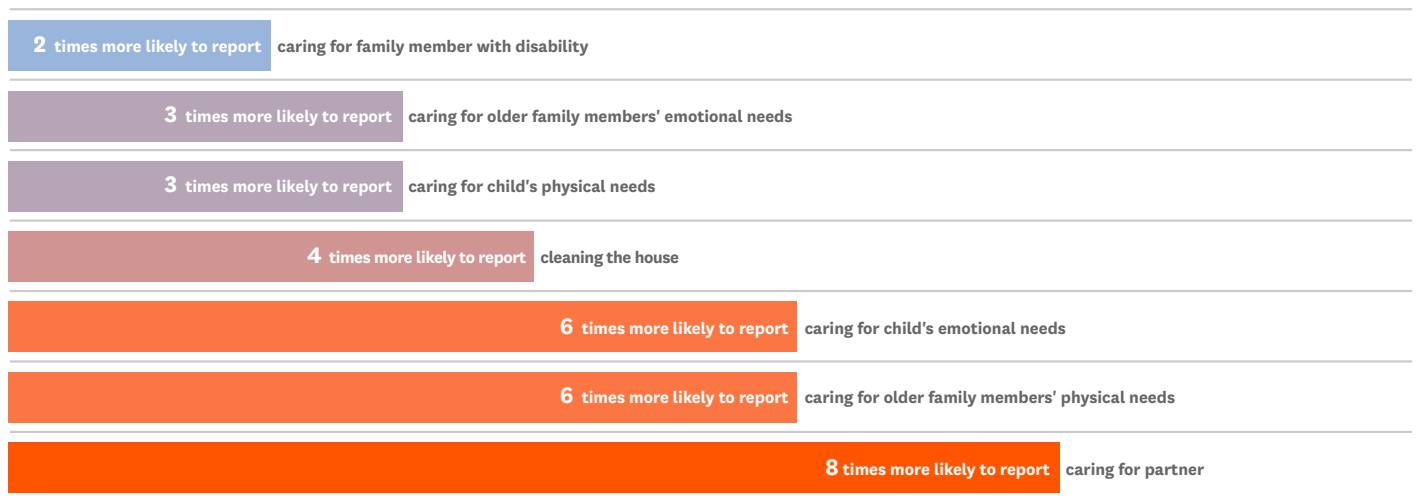
KEY SURVEY FINDING

Men who say they take care of their emotional selves are two to eight times as likely to care for a family member (Figure 3). This has a compounded effect in that those who care for others may experience greater well-being: **respondents who said that they were satisfied with how involved they were in raising their children were 1.5 times as likely to agree that "I am the person I always wanted to be" and to feel a sense of gratitude.** This seems to work both ways: men who have a practice of caregiving are more likely to extend care to themselves, others, and the planet (see Headline 10), and vice versa.

Other data from an Equimundo study in the US found that men who make holistic self-care (i.e., emotional, social, and physical) part of their regular routine spend more than three hours a day caring for others and are twice as likely to help with household work than those who do not.⁴⁷ Interestingly, though, some studies have also found that women who are involved in care work do not prioritize self-care, as they are so involved in taking care of the rest of the people in the family and household chores.⁴⁸

FIGURE 3 - Caring for one's emotional needs as linked to caring for others

Those who report spending time on emotional self care are:



HEADLINE 2

No single story: Men's caregiving has many faces



“By virtue of being a human, we care and care for others. There are hypermasculine ways that say you don’t need care and you don’t need to give care. It translates into relationships and the type of work that we do. We are not taught to care. Care is not a feminine trait; it is a human trait.”

– Ashlee Alexandra Burnett, Founder of Feminitt Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago⁴⁹

Our headlines hint at the millions of diverse stories and realities of how women, men, and people of diverse genders care. Even in countries where, on average, men are not doing their share of care work, some men are doing an equal share and centering care as much as female partners, just as there are same-sex couples who provide care in equal or unequal ways. And even in countries where something closer to equality has been achieved, there are households with large disparities between men’s unpaid care work and women’s, continuing to act as a major barrier to women’s full participation in public life.

Care equality within any couple or household arrangement is a moving target, one that changes based on the paid and unpaid work realities of each partner, the availability of other care providers and care services, and any changes over the course of their lives, as well as social norms, stereotypes, and gendered power relations. Any study that includes so many countries risks oversimplifying this global diversity in men, and in men’s caregiving. With that in mind, a few examples of the variety of men’s care include:

- High percentages of men are biological fathers; some live with their children, and some don’t. Many fathers, most, work outside the home. For lower-income fathers in some settings, this entails migration for work or working long hours to earn income. For those men, care equality may be difficult to attain – and their female partners may also do paid work outside the home with long hours. Some fathers (and some mothers) with higher incomes pay for hands-on care work, while others are highly involved in hands-on care. Households’ economic conditions have a huge impact on how much and what kind of care men carry out, but even those trends are highly diverse.
- Many men care beyond being biological, adoptive, or step-fathers – they are uncles, grandfathers, brothers, coaches,

teachers, friends. In joint family structures, the biological father may not be involved in care, but that does not mean that children in the family haven’t received care from a father figure. We know these diverse caring relationships are meaningful to both men and those they provide care for.

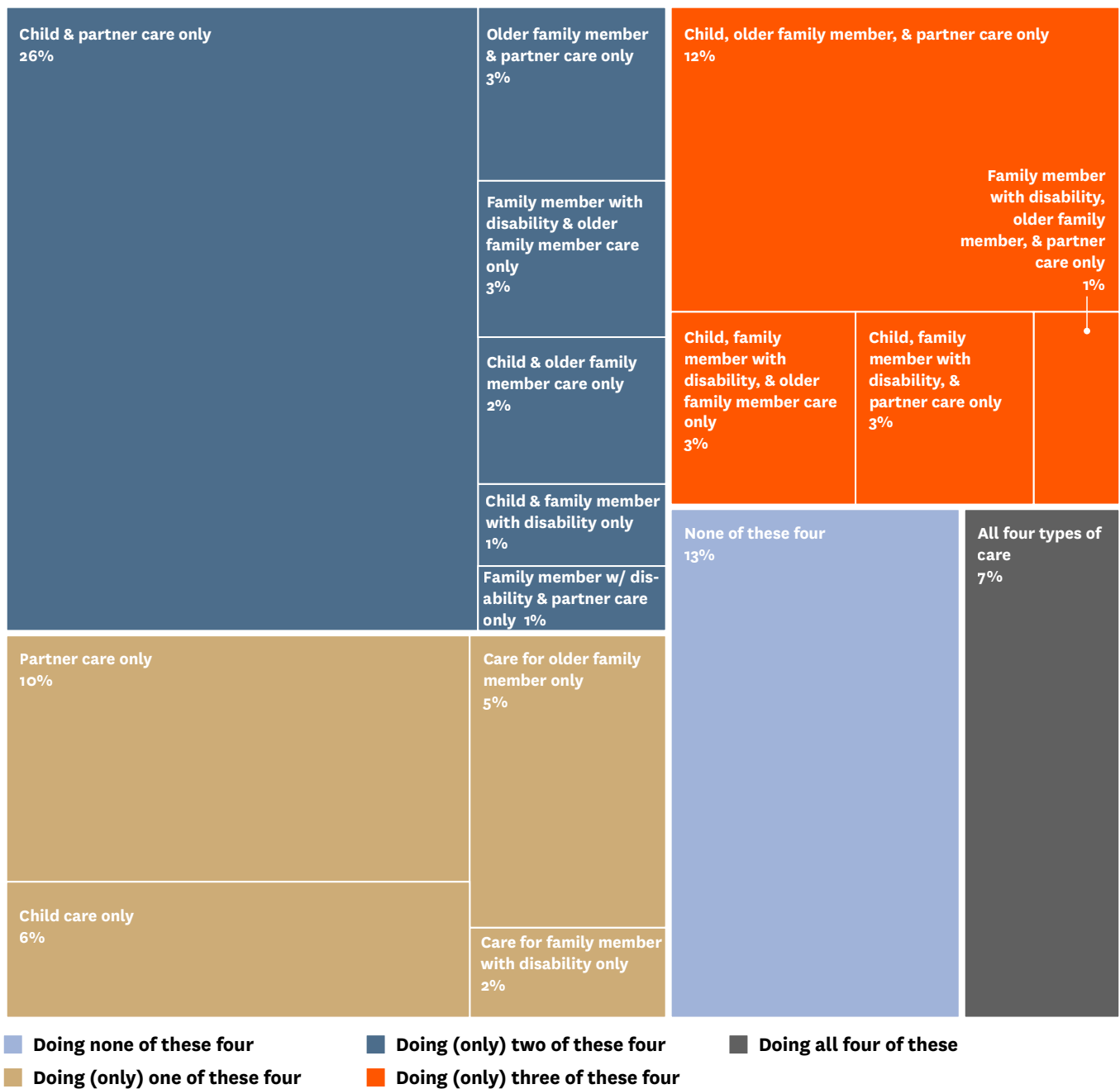
- The nuclear family and “male provider/female carer” model are often seen as the “ideal” family structure, while being far from reality in many countries with bigger, more complex traditional family structures. Too often, we only focus on nuclear family realities, but increasingly – including in wealthier countries – we are relying on extended family. Often, women – grandmothers, aunts, other women in the household – fill these caregiving roles beyond nuclear households, although men do as well. For example, in China, 26 percent of children aged 18 and under – about 96 million in total – lived with one or more grandparents, regardless of socioeconomic group; almost 19 percent of households are multigenerational.⁵⁰ In Eswatini, only 22 percent of young people live with both biological parents. In the US, 59.7 million people lived in multigenerational households as of March 2021; this number has more than doubled over the past five decades.⁵¹ In addition, as the number of older adults is expected to more than double globally by 2050 and more than triple by 2100,⁵² elder care will become an increasing challenge to both the family and the state. As one study in South Africa notes: *“The cost of not paying attention and supporting family caregivers will be felt by society and the economy.”*⁵³
- Men provide care in the context of non-heterosexual relationships and households, as adoptive fathers and co-parents, as foster fathers, as uncles. Our samples were not large enough to make generalizations

about same-sex fathers or trans fathers, so we have to acknowledge a more binary interpretation than we would have liked. What we do know from other research is that non-heterosexual households often find it easier to stay outside the gendered norms that women do more care work and make decisions about care work based on paid work.⁵⁴

KEY SURVEY FINDING

84 percent have at least one kind of caring responsibility, 61 percent have at least two, and 7 percent (almost 900 people) are doing all four (Figure 4). Policies and workplaces must treat all individuals as being enmeshed in multiple care responsibilities rather than as isolated individuals responsible only for themselves.

FIGURE 4 - Percentage of all respondents doing different combinations of care



HEADLINE 3

Fathers are doing more care work than in the past – though mothers are still doing more



“We have the stereotype that caring and rearing children is the job of women. However, men have equal responsibility to care for children and ensure their holistic development.”

– Mohan Dangal, Child Nepal, MenCare partner.⁵⁵

Findings suggest, in line with other surveys, that men report doing more care work than in previous research.

This is true across all countries surveyed. While we did not ask this study’s sample to report on minutes spent on care work per day, as in a traditional time use survey, our study does show somewhat higher estimates of men’s care work than other recent data (including the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] data).⁵⁶

Mothers and women in our survey reported more hours spent on care than fathers and men.

This is consistent with other surveys, which show women doing three to seven times the unpaid care and domestic work of men, depending on country and context; in some countries in the Global North, the difference is closer to 1.5 to 2 times more.⁵⁷

In the context of household surveys where both men and women are interviewed, perceptions of who does what often differ. Men often say they do more hours of work than women say male partners do. This may reveal a gap between men’s perceptions of the importance of care work and their actual practice – but at the very least, men are saying they care more about care than previous studies seem to have shown.

The following headlines reveal that several factors – such as the impact of COVID (Headline 4), changing gender norms related to care (Headlines 5,6, and 7), structural factors (Headlines 8 and 9) and parental leave policies (Headlines 11 and 12) – are all associated with men doing more unpaid care work.

KEY SURVEY FINDING

In our combined 17-country dataset, ***mothers are still doing more care than fathers in all aspects of care tasks but the difference is small on some tasks.*** (Figure 5):

1.36 TIMES house cleaning

1.32 TIMES physical childcare

1.26 TIMES emotional childcare

1.17 TIMES cooking

1.16 TIMES care for their partner

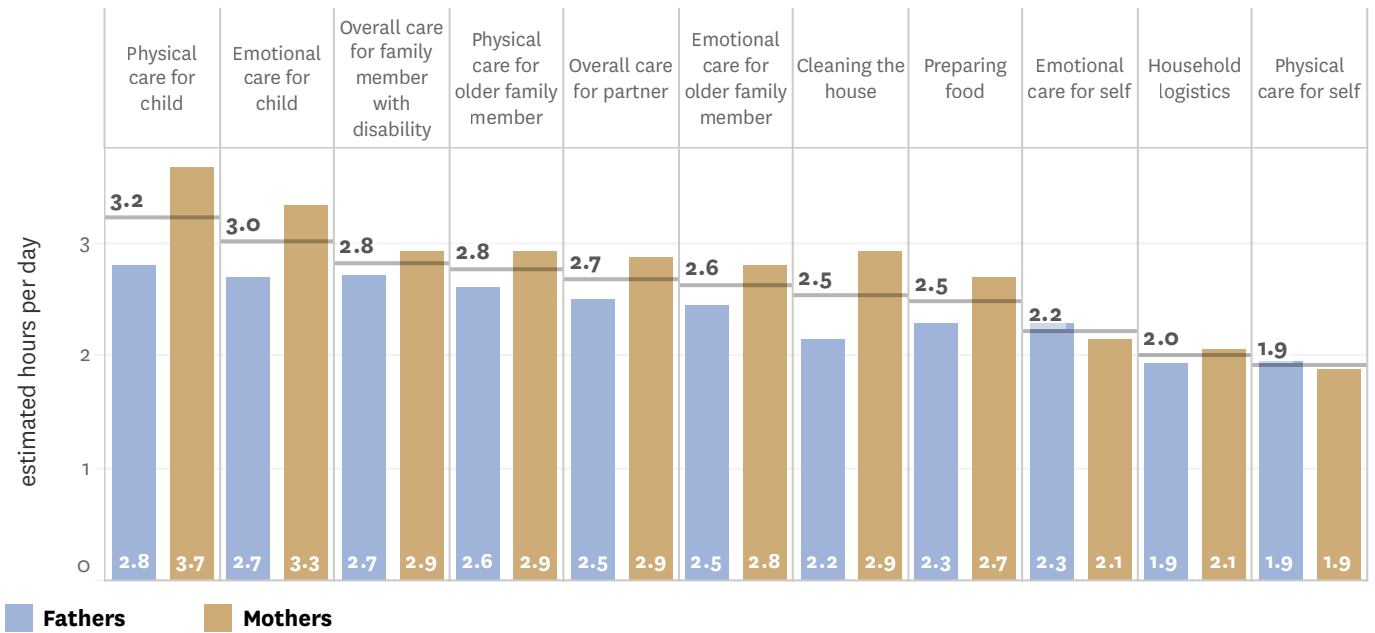
1.11 TIMES household logistics

1.08 TIMES physical care for elders

1.08 TIMES emotional care for elders

1.07 TIMES care for persons with disabilities

FIGURE 5 - Fathers' and mothers' care work, multi-country averages, by task



KEY SURVEY FINDING

A majority of fathers affirm their sense of responsibility for care (Figure 7). Some 70 to 90 percent of men across 15 countries agreed that they “feel as responsible for care work” as their partner/the other parent. At the very least, this suggests men perceive they should be doing more unpaid care work. The only exception is India, where only 25 percent of men feel as responsible as their partner when it comes to unpaid care work.

Most men report they perform care responsibilities for a considerable number of hours in the day.^{iv} We also know that men often feel responsible for care work in gendered ways, such as providing financial care. While we didn’t

ask women whether they agreed with this assessment, this data affirms that men want to show they care. There are certainly country-level differences: for instance, in India, Lebanon, and Turkey, the gap between women’s reporting of hours spent on childcare tasks and men’s reporting of hours spent on childcare tasks is much larger than in other countries. Clearly, wanting to care more means different things to different men. More time use studies are needed to determine if these trends hold up. We remain hopeful these changes will not be a one-off COVID-era reality, but signal a leap forward in men’s participation in centering care that will become a norm across the world.

^{iv} This survey is not a classic time use survey asking respondents to assess their time use on a 24-hour clock. That data exists and is publicly available. In this survey, participants were asked to report the range of hours they spend on an activity in a day, which relies on self-reports. We know that in heterosexual couples, men sometimes report more hours than women say their male partners are actually doing. In this study, we have no way of knowing who is over-reporting and who is under-reporting. We do know from our own lives and from other research that self-perception and our perceptions of others doing things are filtered through our own subjectivities.

FIGURE 6 - Mothers' and fathers' daily estimated hours of care work, by country and task

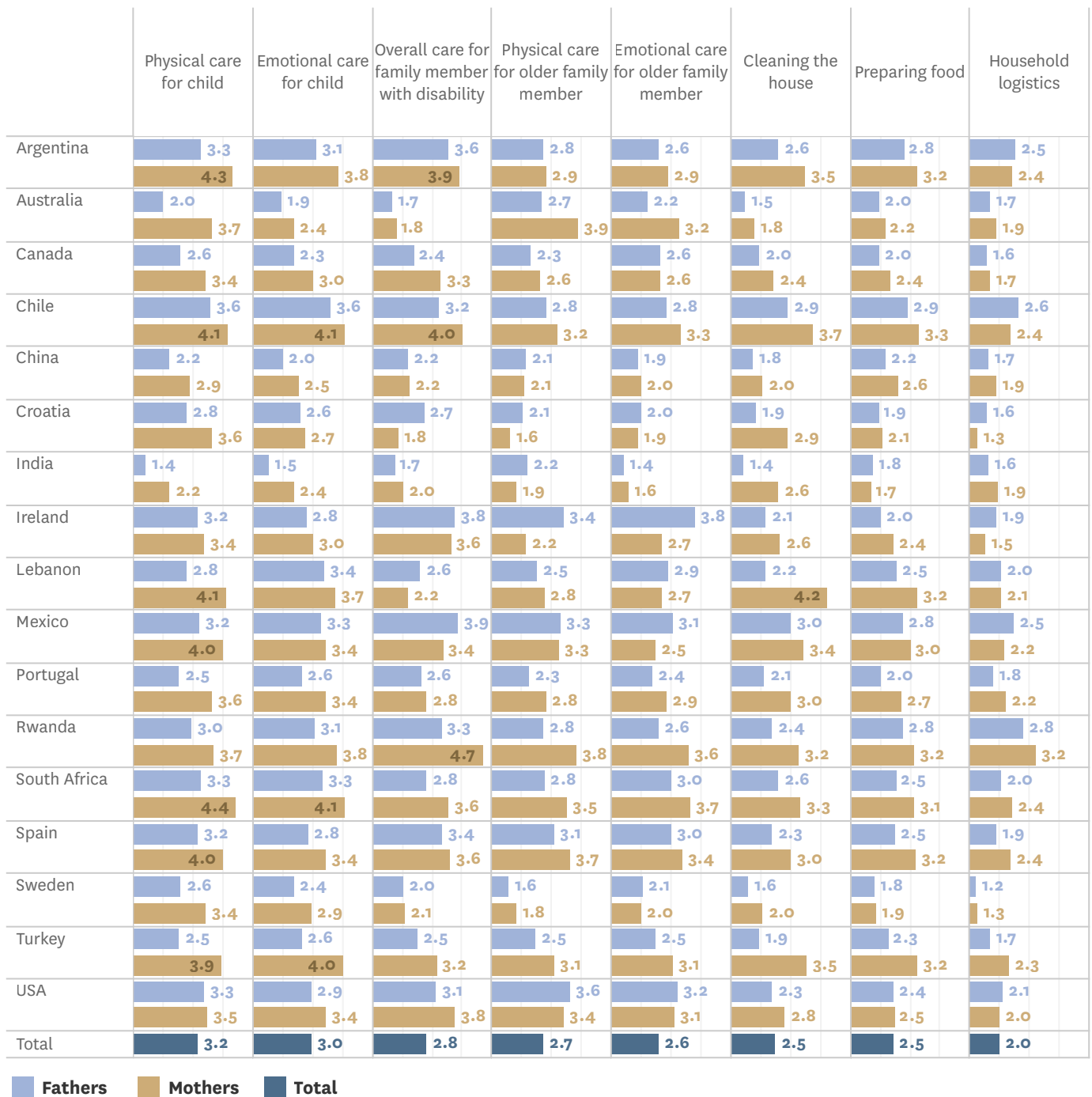
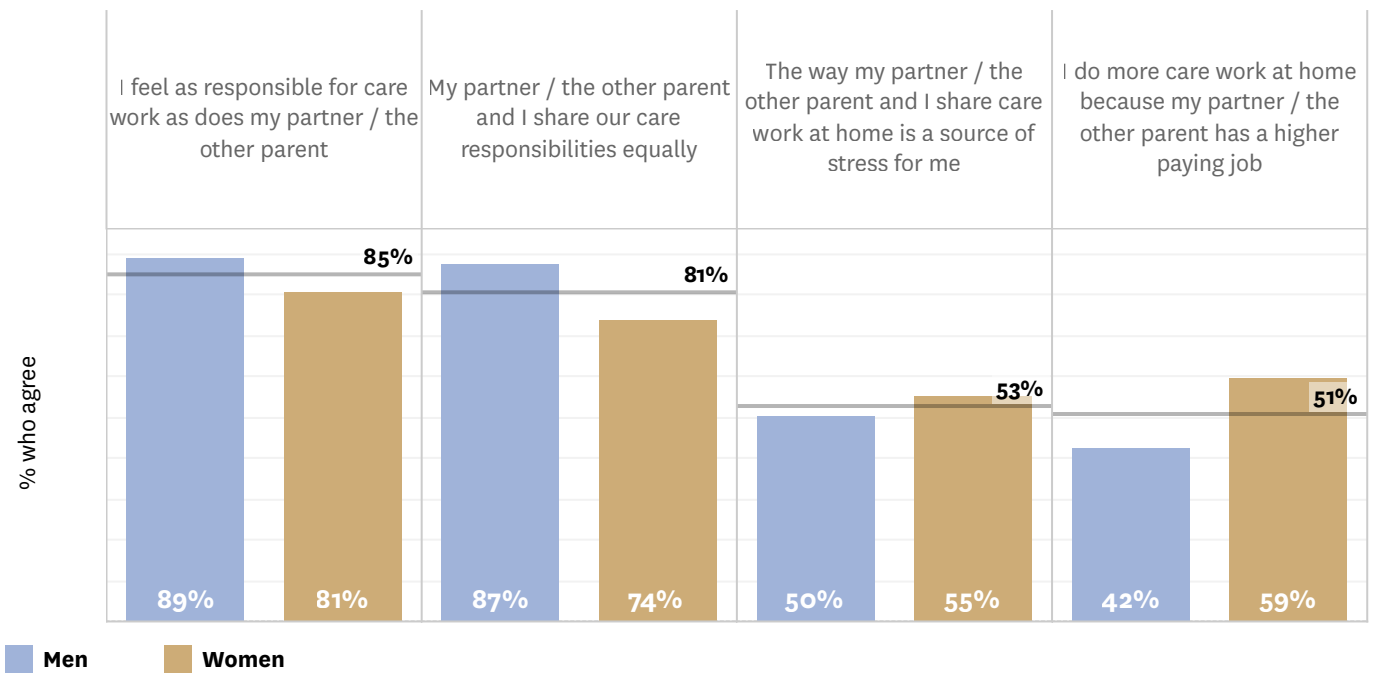


FIGURE 7 - Women’s and men’s reported attitudes toward sharing care, multi-country averages



HEADLINE 4

COVID as a catalyst? The majority of mothers – and fathers – say their care levels increased during the pandemic, but has that continued?



“The global community now has a fundamental choice: we can either recycle failed austerity measures, which are likely to further deepen inequalities, or set things right by enabling a recovery that re-values care, encourages men to play full and equitable roles in unpaid care, and builds an inclusive feminist future.”

– Bolis et al (Oxfam, 2020)⁵⁸

KEY SURVEY FINDING

Our survey shows that as expected, and in line with other studies, many mothers and fathers in all countries say they did more care work during COVID lockdowns.

This included household care, elder care, childcare, caring for anyone with disabilities, and caring for a partner. While the differences between women and men for most of these were not huge, women reported doing more of the childcare, elder care, and care for those with disabilities than men, and more of the household cleaning (50% vs. 44%), but responsibility for food, and in particular for household logistics showed very little difference (43% vs. 41% and 36% for both). These figures are in line with a 2020 UN Women survey in 47 countries, in which 56 percent of women and 51 percent of men said they were spending more time on unpaid care work.⁵⁹

KEY SURVEY FINDING

A higher proportion of mothers than fathers reported their time spent caring increased in the lockdown phase, although many fathers reported more care work as well (Figure 8). This evidence supports surveys carried out during lockdowns, which showed that both women and men were doing more care in the home – although women bore the brunt of juggling responsibilities such as paid work, supervising children’s schoolwork, running the household, and caring for toddlers and older relatives. Indeed, the fact that in many countries, fathers spent more time at home with their partners and children – even if women were still doing more of the care work – could be seen as one positive outcome of the pandemic, among the many negatives. We reported on this more in State of the World’s Fathers 2021.⁶⁰ For example, in 47 countries, between 35 percent and 80 percent of women said their male partner had increased the time given to unpaid care during the pandemic.⁶¹

KEY SURVEY FINDING

In 10 of the countries we surveyed, those who faced economic hardship showed statistically more stress,

anxiety, and worry during the pandemic (see Figure 9, which includes all respondents in these 10 countries regardless of gender).

This corroborates other studies showing that those with the fewest resources or those who were marginalized due to their race, ethnicity, class, or other factors carried out the most care during COVID lockdowns. This is perhaps unsurprising when so many of the systems supporting children (education, daycare, or extracurricular activities) were not operational, thereby increasing parents’ burden of care. For example, June 2020 data from Oxfam and Equimundo in the US found that 57 percent of White women said their daily domestic and care work had increased, compared to 71 percent of Black or African American women, 71 percent of Latina women, and 79 percent of Asian women.⁶²

These trends and examples show that the pandemic continues to affect both paid and unpaid work. While this is not the case everywhere, evidence does show that fathers in some countries may be doing more care as a result of having done more in lockdown. For example, in Rwanda, an assessment of male engagement by Save the Children US found that while the incidence of gender-based violence and child protection risks increased, men’s more permanent presence at home fostered an environment in which men felt they could “safely explore” fatherhood and build new relationships with their children. It is too early to tell whether these changes will continue, but there is broad recognition that the pandemic created possibilities for a more equitable distribution of parenting responsibilities, particularly in urban areas, creating conditions that foster the evolution of “daily practices into habits that, in turn, become new social norms.”⁶³ What we don’t yet know is whether this is a structural transformation or only temporary. It does show that if men want to, they can be equally involved in care work, as well as that the mindset and norm is still that care work is a women’s issue.

COVID, gender relations and unpaid care: The continuing story

- In September 2021, 26 percent of women and 20 percent of men globally reported losing their jobs since the start of the pandemic.⁶⁴
- In 2018, the International Labour Organization found that 606 million women were out of the workforce due to unpaid care commitments compared to 41 million men.⁶⁵ Women’s labor force participation globally was projected to remain below pre-pandemic levels in 169 countries by the end of 2022.⁶⁶
- In September 2022, the United Nations noted: “In 2020, school and preschool closures required 672 billion hours of additional unpaid childcare globally. Assuming the gender divide in care work remained the same as before the pandemic, women would have shouldered 512 billion of those hours.”⁶⁷
- In September 2022, the United Nations reported that women accounted for only 21 percent of projected employment gains between 2019 and 2022 despite making up 39 percent of total employment in 2019.⁶⁸
- Young women aged 15 to 24 have been particularly affected – 5 million fewer young women were employed in 2022 compared to 2019.⁶⁹
- In 2022, gender parity in the labor force was 63 percent, the lowest level since reporting began in 2006.⁷⁰
- It is also important to remember that the pandemic saw an increase in men’s violence against women in the home, affirming the need to promote care equity post-COVID while also redoubling our efforts to finally end cycles of violence.⁷¹

FIGURE 8 - Fathers and mothers reporting increases in care tasks during COVID lockdowns

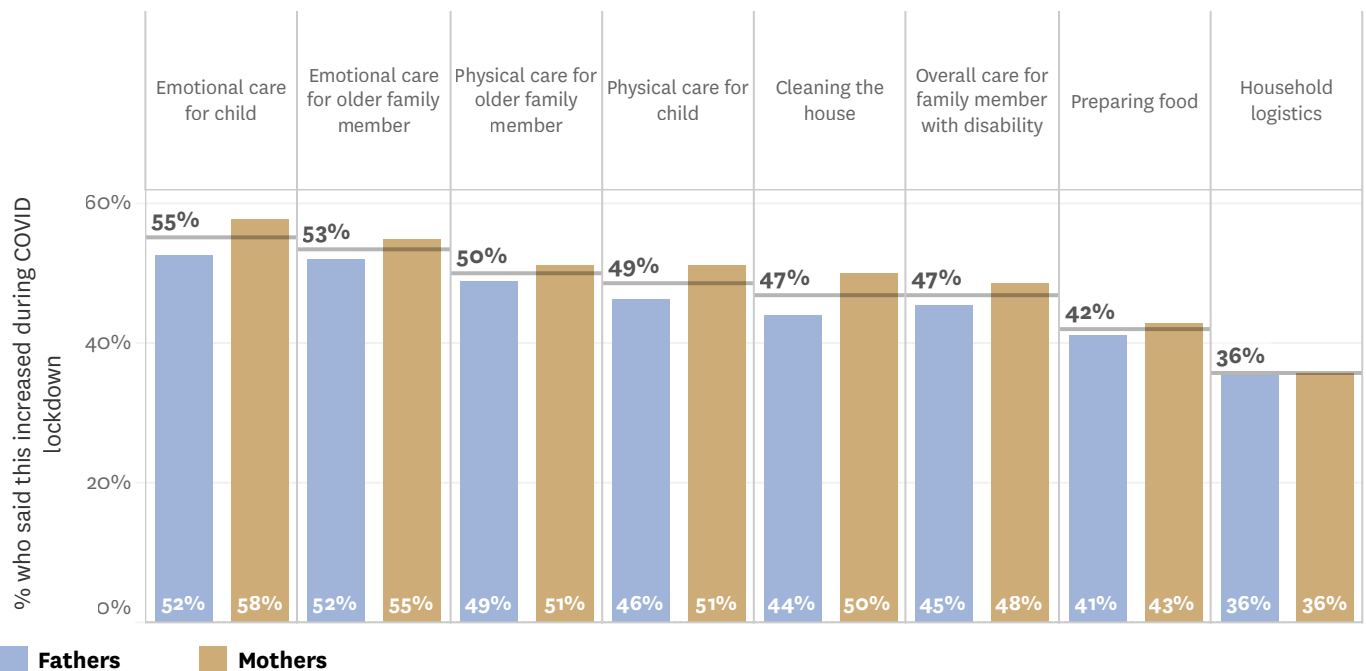
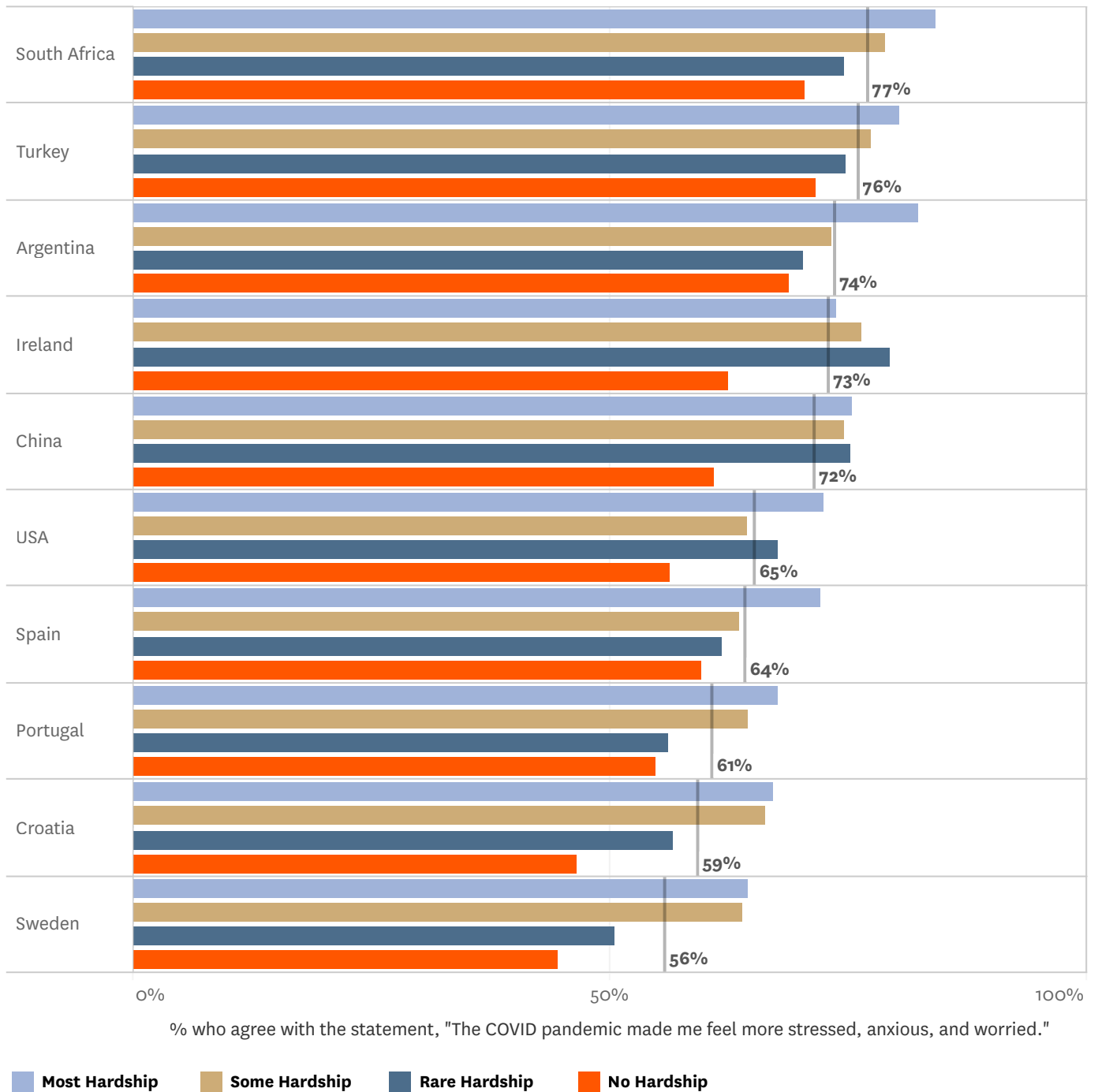


FIGURE 9 - Increase in stress by country and economic hardship, all respondents*



*NOTE: This figure only depicts the countries for which the differences among levels of hardship were statistically significant.

SECTION

3

Changing
gender
norms
related
to care



HEADLINE 5

**Gender norms: It matters
how much men (and women)
believe care is men's work**



“Although in the new generations of young parents, especially with the introduction of more and more people working from home, the care of fathers has increased, there is still the belief that the main job of raising and caring for every aspect of the child’s life is for the mother.”

– Plamena Nikolova: Director of Child Policies, National Network for Children, Bulgaria, MenCare partner⁷²

There is still no country in the world where women and men share care equally. Unless care is embedded in the way we all relate to the world, and in a transformative approach to men and masculinities, care work alone will be insufficient to cause the shift in our societies that we wish to see.

Survey respondents were asked about the gendered norms that shape and underpin the way we care and how much care we do (Figure 10).

KEY SURVEY FINDING

The majority of respondents believe women can both be leaders and caregivers. 61 percent of men and 65 percent of women disagreed with the statement: *“Women who participate in politics or leadership positions cannot also be good wives and mothers.”* In general, more women than men disagreed, but women in many countries also uphold these inequitable views.

KEY SURVEY FINDING

A majority of women and men disagree that caregiving is solely a mother’s responsibility. 32 percent of men and 27 percent of women say that *“changing diapers, giving kids a bath, and feeding kids are a mother’s responsibility,”* suggesting that a majority believe caregiving is both men’s and women’s responsibility. Agreement with this statement varies by country, with lower percentages of disagreement in India, Turkey, and Lebanon, but the fact that overall figures are low may be an indication of norm change.

For all these questions on gender norms, the percentage of respondents who disagree with harmful norms is at least 39 percent, highlighting that there is room for optimism that norms are changing, albeit slowly. This is borne out by other research: for example, a 34-country

study found that in almost all countries, majorities of both women and men say that a marriage in which both the husband and wife have jobs and take care of the home is more satisfying than one where the husband provides for the family and the wife takes care of the house and children.⁷³ Equimundo’s International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) in 32 countries finds that gender traditionalism is, unfortunately, alive and well (even more so among younger men), including support for maintaining inequitable gendered roles, men’s domination in decision-making, and justification of violence against women. In some locations, women also uphold some of these ideas, although younger women are less likely across countries to agree with those norms than older women.⁷⁴

Overall, it is unclear if there is a generational arc toward more gender-equitable norms. Some research has found this is the case. In Lithuania, 71 percent of people under 30 say they prefer an egalitarian marriage compared to 43 percent of those over 50. In the USA, Canada, Italy, the UK, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Australia, South Korea, Lebanon, Tunisia, Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, the differences were more than 10 percent between older and younger groups.⁷⁵ However, the IMAGES global study also shows that norm change is not simply an inevitable generational change – where data is available, men’s attitudes follow a curved pattern, whereby the oldest and the youngest men hold more restrictive views than those in their early 30s.⁷⁶

Overall, our new survey data plus other survey research suggests that gender norms are changing, albeit slowly in some countries and with large variations by country, age, and other factors. Supporting these changes in women as well as men takes time but is a necessary step in order to achieve care equality.

FIGURE 10a - Men's and women's disagreement with norm statement, "Women who participate in politics cannot be good wives or mothers," by country

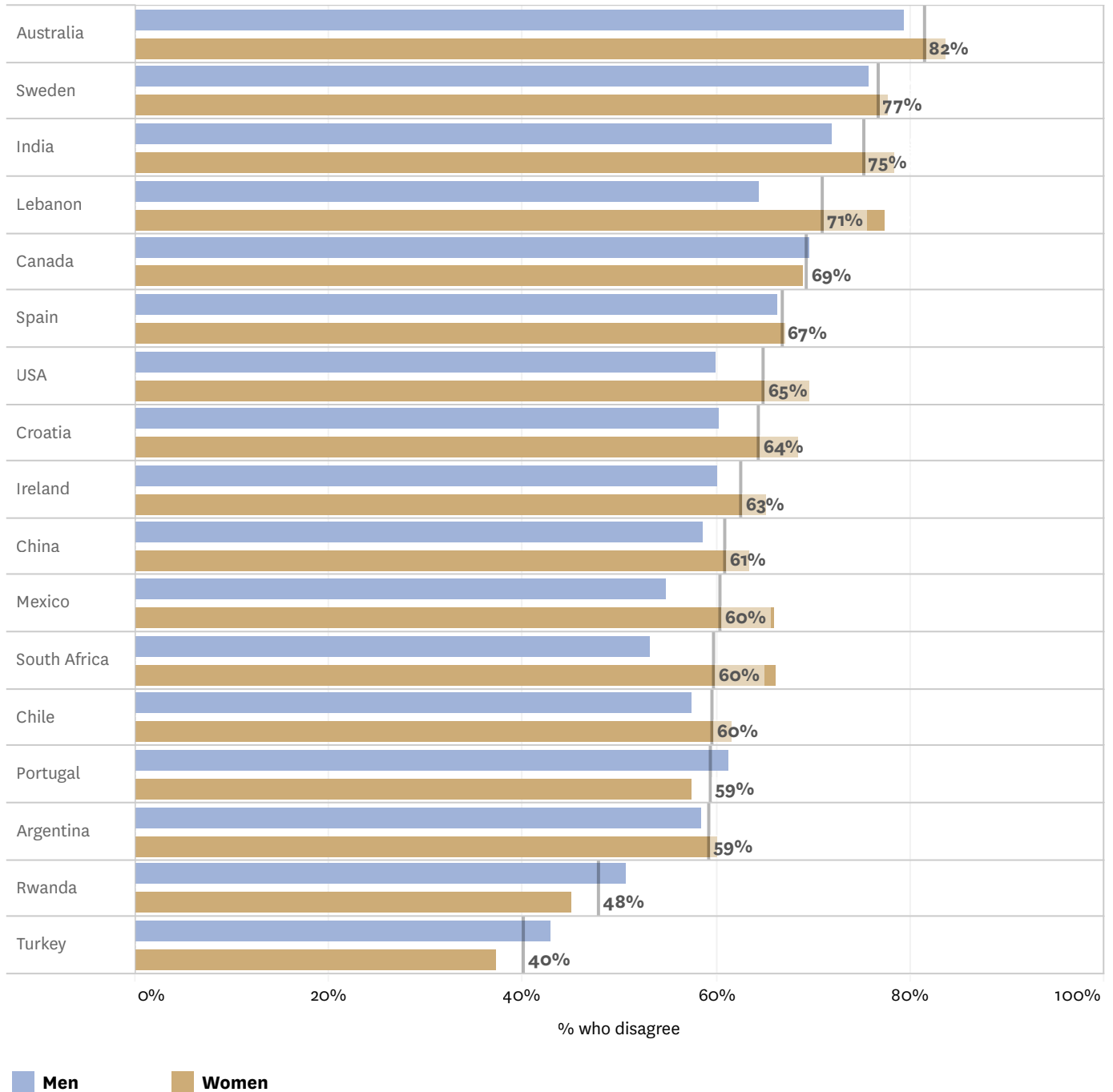
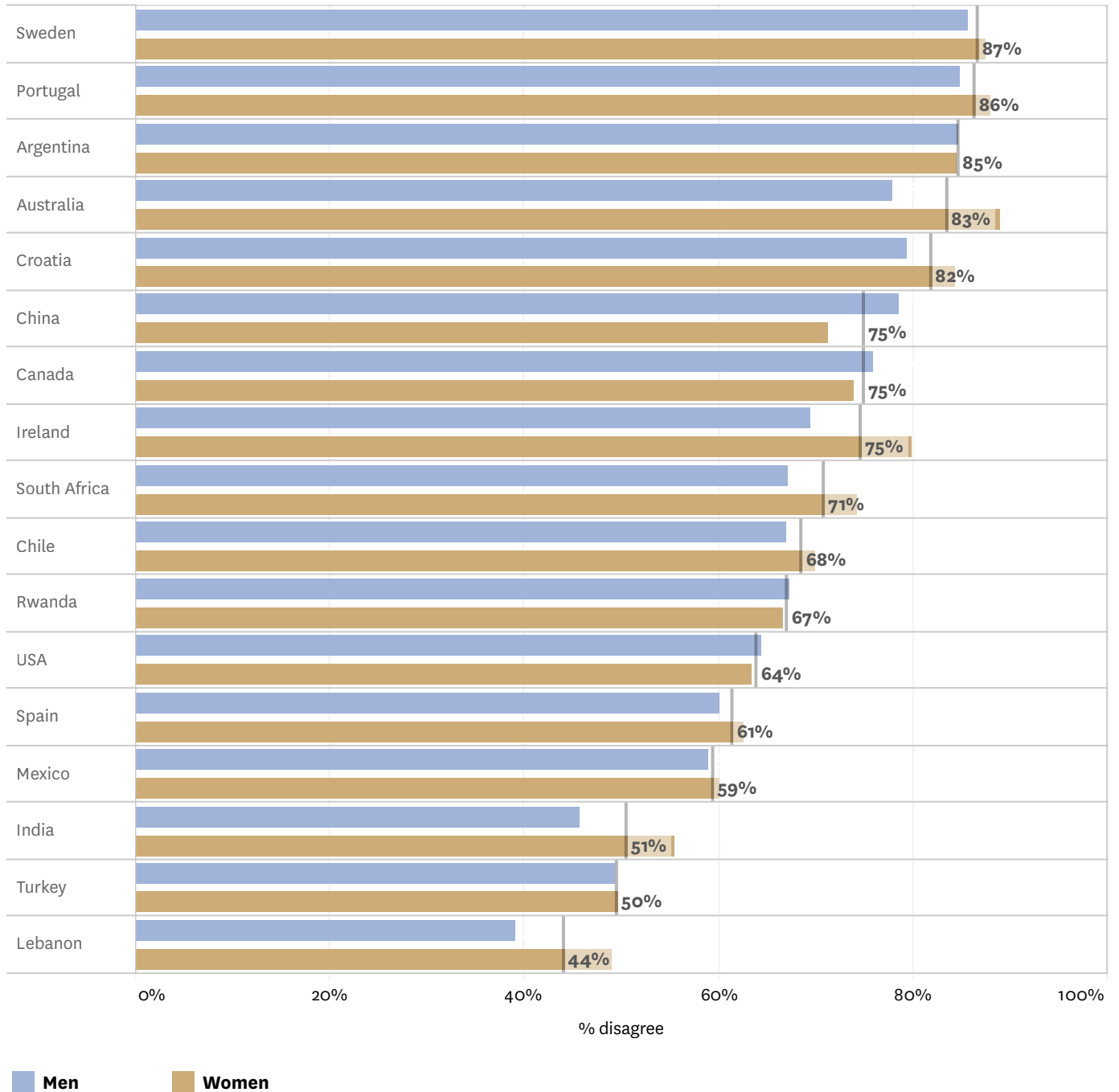


FIGURE 10b - Men’s and women’s disagreement with norm statement, “Changing diapers, giving kids a bath, and feeding kids are the mother’s responsibility.”



HEADLINE 6

The changing state of boyhood: Parents believe sons as well as daughters should be taught to do care work



“As boys, we were kept at a distance from nurturing and tenderness, the very qualities we want to offer our children.”

– Eric Marsh Sr., The Fathering Circle, USA⁷⁷

Research carried out by Equimundo and many others has affirmed that gender divides in unpaid care start in early childhood. Girls typically do, and feel obligated to do, more care work in the home (almost always unpaid), while boys generally either do more chores outside the home (sometimes paid) or have more non-chores free time. There have not yet been studies as to how this applies to nonbinary children.

KEY SURVEY FINDING

A majority of men and women – more than 80 percent in most countries – disagreed that “boys should not be taught how to sew, cook, clean, or take care of siblings” meaning they agree that boys, too, should be encouraged to do care activities (Figure 11). In Turkey, 52 percent of men and 41 percent of women disagreed, and in India, 58 percent of men but 79 percent of women disagreed.

Other questions revealed the ways in which boys are socialized to believe they are in charge in the household, and that they should not show their feelings.

KEY SURVEY FINDING

In the second statement about norms, “A man should have the final word on any decisions in the household,” between 66 percent and 96 percent of men and women disagreed (Figure 11). Only in South Africa (59 percent), the USA (56 percent), Lebanon (48 percent), and India (47 percent) did lower percentages of men disagree, and the percentages of women in those countries disagreeing were higher, between 70 percent and 84 percent.

KEY SURVEY FINDING

In the third statement, *“Men should not be too quick to tell others they care about them,”* countries varied considerably in their rate of disagreement, from high scores in Argentina

for both women and men (89% and 83%, respectively) to low scores in Lebanon (32% for men and 44% for women). ***In most countries, these scores were lower than for the other two statements, which shows the norm that men don’t show emotion is still very much entrenched.***

Equimundo’s research has affirmed that two key ways to break the gender binary in childhood are: 1) for men and fathers to do their share of the care work, and 2) for boys to be taught to do the care work. IMAGES findings in 32 countries show that this carries forward across generations.⁷⁸ What, then, can be done to expose boys to care work early on? Initiatives like the [Global Boyhood Initiative](#) – which works in Latin America, North America, and Europe to engage boys ages 4 to 13 in healthy, equitable views of manhood – take such discussions into schools, where boys and girls reflect critically on gender norms, including who does care work.⁷⁹

Another international initiative – [Roots of Empathy](#) – works in multiple countries bringing babies into classrooms, where girls and boys interact, observe, and reflect on how young children grow and thrive and, in the process, learn what care is – for boys and girls. In India, the [Gender Lab Boys Program](#) similarly works in schools to engage boys in discussions about gender inequalities, including care inequalities, and encourage them to take on a greater share of care work. The [BraveMen Campaign](#) in Bangladesh engages boys to do more chores in the household and includes a diary in which boys note the gender-inequitable ways that household tasks are carried out.

These programs point toward the kind of deliberate programming that needs to be built into schools, and the interactions between parents and their sons and daughters, to set children on a lifelong path toward engagement in care.

FIGURE 11 - Men's and women's disagreement with norm statements, by country

| A man should have the final word on any decisions in his home (% disagree) | | Men should not be too quick to tell others that they care about them (% disagree) | | Boys should not be taught to sew, cook, clean, or take care of their siblings (% disagree) | | | | |
|--|-------|---|--------------|--|-------|--------------|-----|-----|
| Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | | | |
| Argentina | 85% | 94% | Argentina | 83% | 89% | Rwanda | 93% | 94% |
| Sweden | 85% | 92% | Australia | 71% | 87% | Sweden | 89% | 95% |
| Croatia | 78% | 96% | Portugal | 76% | 79% | South Africa | 85% | 90% |
| Portugal | 81% | 91% | Sweden | 73% | 70% | Croatia | 83% | 92% |
| Spain | 80% | 88% | Canada | 68% | 74% | Portugal | 83% | 89% |
| Australia | 76% | 90% | Ireland | 67% | 73% | Australia | 83% | 89% |
| Chile | 77% | 90% | South Africa | 62% | 64% | China | 86% | 84% |
| Ireland | 71% | 88% | Croatia | 58% | 61% | Argentina | 85% | 85% |
| China | 77% | 82% | USA | 56% | 63% | Lebanon | 80% | 84% |
| Canada | 76% | 83% | Chile | 56% | 59% | Canada | 76% | 83% |
| Mexico | 70% | 85% | Spain | 59% | 54% | USA | 77% | 80% |
| Turkey | 66% | 85% | Turkey | 51% | 64% | Chile | 76% | 78% |
| Rwanda | 72% | 67% | China | 45% | 65% | Ireland | 70% | 81% |
| South Africa | 59% | 84% | Rwanda | 50% | 44% | Mexico | 70% | 81% |
| USA | 56% | 77% | India | 47% | 55% | Spain | 67% | 81% |
| Lebanon | 48% | 72% | Lebanon | 32% | 44% | India | 58% | 79% |
| India | 47% | 70% | Mexico | not asked in this country | | Turkey | 52% | 41% |

HEADLINE 7

The joy of caring for children: Fathers and mothers say this is one of the most enjoyable things in their lives



“I always depended on my wife to raise and tutor my children. I was the person they feared... I have a closer relationship with them now. They run to me when I arrive home. I see that my children feel happier – and I have almost stopped smoking too.”

– Salim, Syrian refugee father and participant in a Save the Children US program in Iraq⁸⁰

KEY SURVEY FINDING

Nine in 10 parents say that caring for children is one of the most enjoyable things in their lives. Fathers’ positive involvement with their children has a significant impact on a wide range of outcomes for children and parents, and it is key to moving the dial on gender equality.⁸¹ ***Overall, controlling for country, age, gender, and economic hardship differences, we find that when men and women are satisfied with their involvement in care, they are 1.5 times as likely to feel a sense of gratitude and 1.5 times as likely to feel they’re the person they always wanted to be.*** More equally sharing household and childcare responsibilities supports women in joining the paid workforce, improves children’s cognitive development and academic achievement, brings meaning and satisfaction to men’s and women’s lives, and can lead to stress reduction, especially for mothers, as well as improved relationships between partners and spouses.

The fact that fathers – and men in general – say they are doing more care is a good sign. Men, too, are emotional beings who often want to be involved with care work. But norms remain strong around how men and boys are supposed to be, and these norms are one of the root causes of the lack of men’s involvement and equal uptake of care work. They can also be a key motor for reducing the care equality gap if acted upon, as mothers in this survey still say they do an average of 98 minutes more physical and emotional care daily for their children than fathers say they do, even as some individual men are doing equal amounts.

KEY SURVEY FINDING

On average, mothers reported 3.4 hours of emotional care and 3.7 hours of physical care for the youngest child per day. Fathers reported 2.7 hours and 2.8 hours, respectively. Other research affirms that fathers often do the fun bits of childcare (such as playing with their children), while bathing them and cleaning up to a lesser extent, for

example. That said, research is also clear that fathers, male caregivers, and all caregivers support children’s development by involvement in play. The objective is not for fathers to do less play but to encourage them to do all kinds of care. But sometimes, this is hard when the economic constraints of providing for the family take up much of men’s – and sometimes, of women’s – time.

KEY SURVEY FINDING

Respondents who reported that they did the most care work were also most likely to make major work sacrifices to prioritize having leave and time for care (Figure 12). The majority of those who were doing more daily physical and emotional care of children say they are willing to accept a pay cut or change jobs to get better parental leave, or even to take unpaid leave for more time to care.

KEY SURVEY FINDING

Similarly, large proportions of both mothers and fathers say that “caring for my children is worth giving up some career opportunities for” (Figure 13). In the majority of countries, more than half of both parents agreed with this statement, and in some, it was more than 75 percent. In only a handful of countries were the numbers under 50 percent. Interestingly, in Portugal, the USA, Lebanon, South Africa, Spain, and Mexico, a higher percentage of fathers than mothers agreed with this statement. The role of social class cannot be ignored here – where those who can afford at-home childcare are probably less likely to give up their careers.

Yet it is important to think of who actually gives up employment opportunities. In Spain, the National Statistics Institute finds that having children does not affect current employment for 85 percent of men, while for women, this is just 65 percent.⁸² Similarly, 17 percent of women who have part-time jobs report the main reason is taking care of children and/or older adults. However, this is the main reason for only 4 percent of men.⁸³

The amount of care that women do compared to men is one factor maintaining the gender gap in paid work. More dads doing the care, and more, better childcare,

along with a range of other necessary policy changes, can help shift the dial on the gender pay gap. It is time to make this possible.

The motherhood penalty and the fatherhood bonus

“An 18-year-old woman entering the workforce today will not see pay equality in her working lifetime. At the rate the gender pay gap is closing, it will take more than 50 years to reach gender pay parity.”

– Larice Stielow, senior economist at PwC UK⁸⁴

- In six OECD countries, women’s earnings in the decade after the birth of their first child were up to 61 percent lower than men’s.⁸⁵
- Across 25 European countries, the motherhood penalty accounted for 60 percent of the gender pay gap. Other factors – social norms, gender stereotyping, and discrimination – made up the remaining 40 percent.⁸⁶
- The motherhood penalty can cross generations of women. A 2019 study in Denmark found that women

whose mothers worked significantly fewer hours than their fathers also earned less after having children compared to women whose mothers and fathers worked similar hours.⁸⁷

- In Spain, 21 percent of women – versus only 3 percent of men – have had to reduce their number of working hours to care for children,⁸⁸ and the employment rate of women with children (70 percent) is less than those without (75 percent), while the reverse is true for men (90 percent with children versus 84 percent without).⁸⁹
- On the other hand, fathers may actually enjoy a “fatherhood bonus.” For example, a study by the Trades Union Congress in the UK found that full-time employed fathers earned 21 percent more than men who did not have children by age 42.⁹⁰

FIGURE 12 - Relationship between caring for children and potential work sacrifices

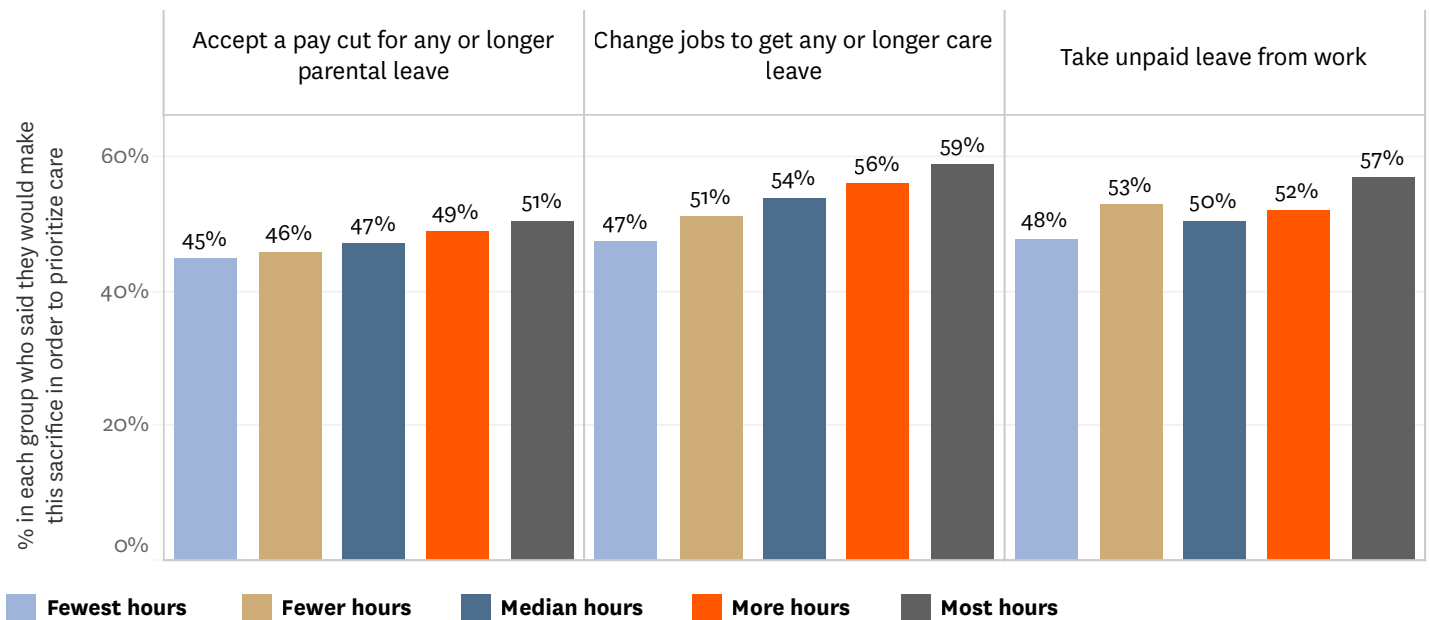
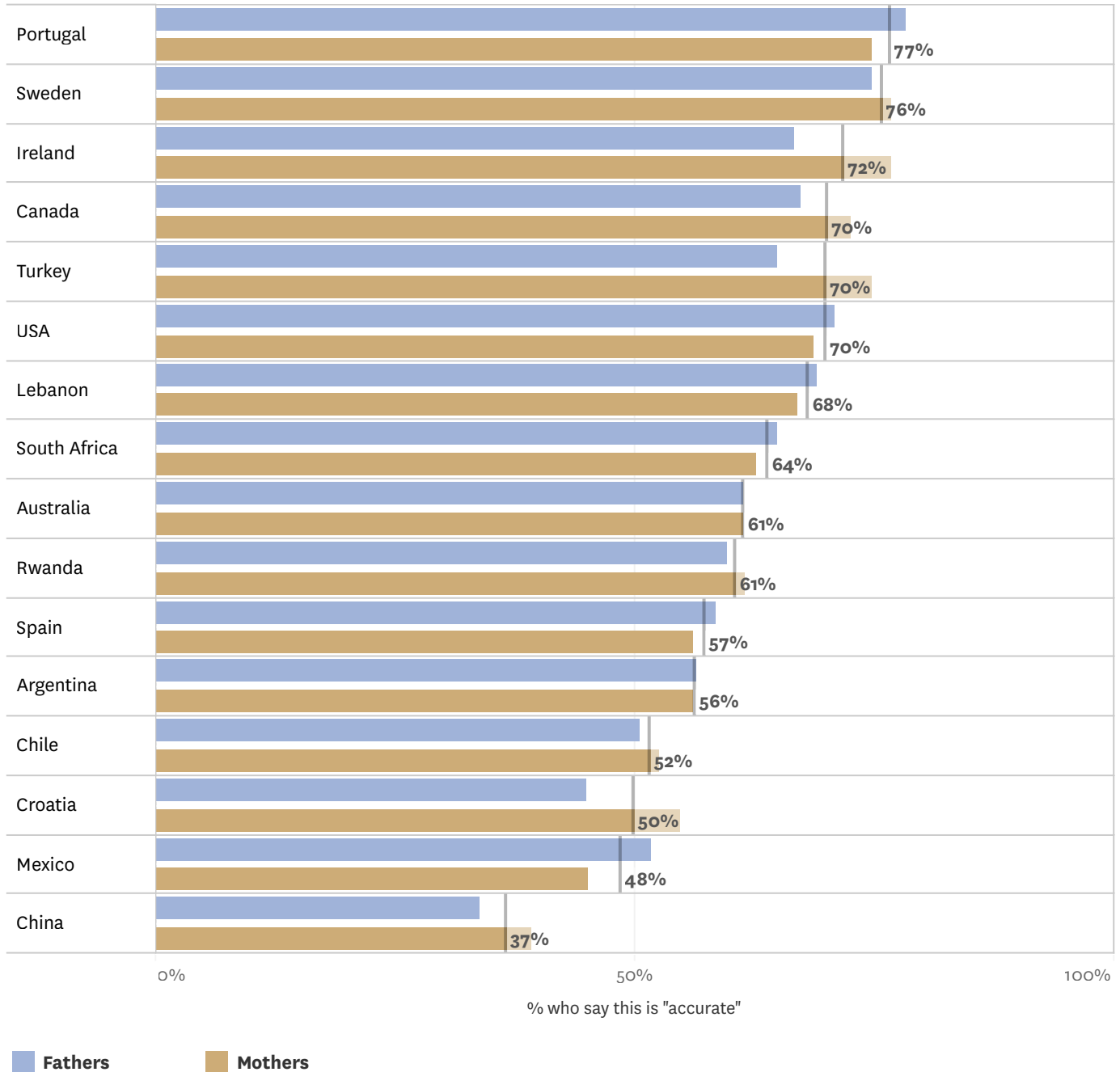


FIGURE 13 - Percentage of mothers and fathers who said “caring for my children is worth giving up some career opportunities for” by country



SECTION

4

Building a world that centers care



HEADLINE 8

It's structural: Women and men can't do it alone



“Comprehensive care systems recognize, redistribute and reduce the unpaid care work and accelerate the pace towards societies’ welfare, the creation of quality jobs and women’s greater labour participation, and the achievement of gender equality, while also generating income for the State via taxes. This is the transformative power of the care economy.”

– Belen Sanz, Representative of UN Women Mexico⁹¹

KEY SURVEY FINDING

While the majority of parents (63 percent) say they have some kind of support, just under one in five (17 percent) say they have none. When asked why they don’t have all the care support they need, ***cost and lack of affordable care scored highest for both mothers and fathers*** (Figure 14).

KEY SURVEY FINDING

Apart from the other parent, grandparents and other family members are important sources of support for 28 percent and 21 percent of parents, respectively. Low percentages of parents say they use daycares, nurseries, nannies, domestic workers, or childminders, perhaps due to the socioeconomic background of respondents in some countries.

| | |
|--|---|
| Partner is stay-at-home parent: | 25 percent of parents (14 percent of mothers say this, 33 percent of fathers) |
| Grandparents | 28 percent of parents |
| Other family members | 21 percent of parents |
| Daycare | 21 percent of parents |
| Domestic worker | 7 percent of parents ^v |
| Nanny/babysitter | 6 percent of parents |

KEY SURVEY FINDING

Mothers and fathers who say they have little or no support are more likely to find caring for children more exhausting than enjoyable (Figure 15). This varies from 16 percent of those with no support in Croatia to 58 percent of those with no support in Turkey. Overall, 29 percent of fathers and 32 percent of mothers say looking after children is more exhausting than enjoyable. Most of those respondents who had little or no support were from low-income families.

In eight countries (Portugal, Spain, Turkey, China, Mexico, Sweden, Chile, and Croatia), men who felt the greatest economic hardship affirmed that caregiving is more exhausting than enjoyable. For women, this was only true in Croatia and Sweden. Contributing factors likely include a lack of government or other support, precarious jobs, stress, feeling that they are failing as providers, more working hours or more than one job, and not being able to afford to outsource any care.

Childcare provision varies hugely between countries, and most governments around the world do not prioritize childcare, or indeed, early childhood education and care. A report by the UK’s Overseas Development Institute from 2016 – before the pandemic made childcare even more inaccessible for many – noted: *“The world is facing a hidden crisis in childcare. That crisis is leaving millions of children without the support they need, with damaging consequences for their future. It is also having severe impacts on three generations of women – on mothers, grandmothers and daughters. There is an urgent need to solve the global care crisis to improve the lives of both women and children and to grow economies.”*⁹²

As the World Bank notes, *“Expanding quality childcare can yield multi-generational impacts by promoting equity and improving women’s employment and productivity, child outcomes, family welfare, business productivity, and overall economic development.”*⁹³ The fact that childcare costs are outpacing income growth in many countries means that women are even more likely to drop out of the workforce. When families face choices in times of economic stress, they often make economic decisions that reinforce the idea that care is women’s work while income generation is men’s. Often, the term “work-life balance” is used, but that puts the

^v India data was predominantly low-income households that presumably were unlikely to outsource care.

onus on the individual or couple to figure it out. Additionally, in many contexts, social norms (including workplace stigma) and unsupportive policies can undermine and exclude men who choose or want to do care work.

KEY SURVEY FINDING

Of the 4,000 respondents who say they do not have all the childcare support they need, cost and lack of publicly funded childcare top the list for both mothers and fathers.

As the world recovers from the pandemic and enters other crises, investing in care, care equality, and childcare services is vital not only to support children and families but also for economic development and gender equality.⁹⁴

There is another key component here: most of the people who provide childcare services are women, who tend to be very poorly paid – again, because their work is not valued. An Oxfam report notes: *“Domestic workers in particular are often women from low-income countries and from marginalized groups who provide care services to higher-income families in wealthier countries. Rooted in asymmetries of power, this has created ‘global care chains’ where care is transferred from high-income households in wealthier countries to low-income women from poorer countries. This is where the notion of underpaid care work is so important.”*⁹⁵

Early years and childcare

- Only 57 out of 178 countries have a statutory provision of early childhood educational development programs for children aged 0 to 2.⁹⁶
- Taking other factors into account, this means only one in 10 potential parents across the world have free or affordable state childcare provision available.⁹⁷
- Over 40 percent of children, or nearly 350 million children below primary school entry age, need childcare but do not have access to it.⁹⁸
- The childcare challenge disproportionately impacts families in low- and middle-income countries, where a child is nearly five times less likely to have access to childcare than a child living in a high-income country.⁹⁹
- An estimated 43 million new childcare jobs are needed to meet the current gap in access.¹⁰⁰ Many of the people now filling such roles are women belonging to under-represented communities.¹⁰¹
- An estimated 90 percent of domestic workers have no access to social security (e.g., maternity protection and benefits).¹⁰²

FIGURE 14 - Why some parents say they don't have all the care support they need, by fathers and mothers

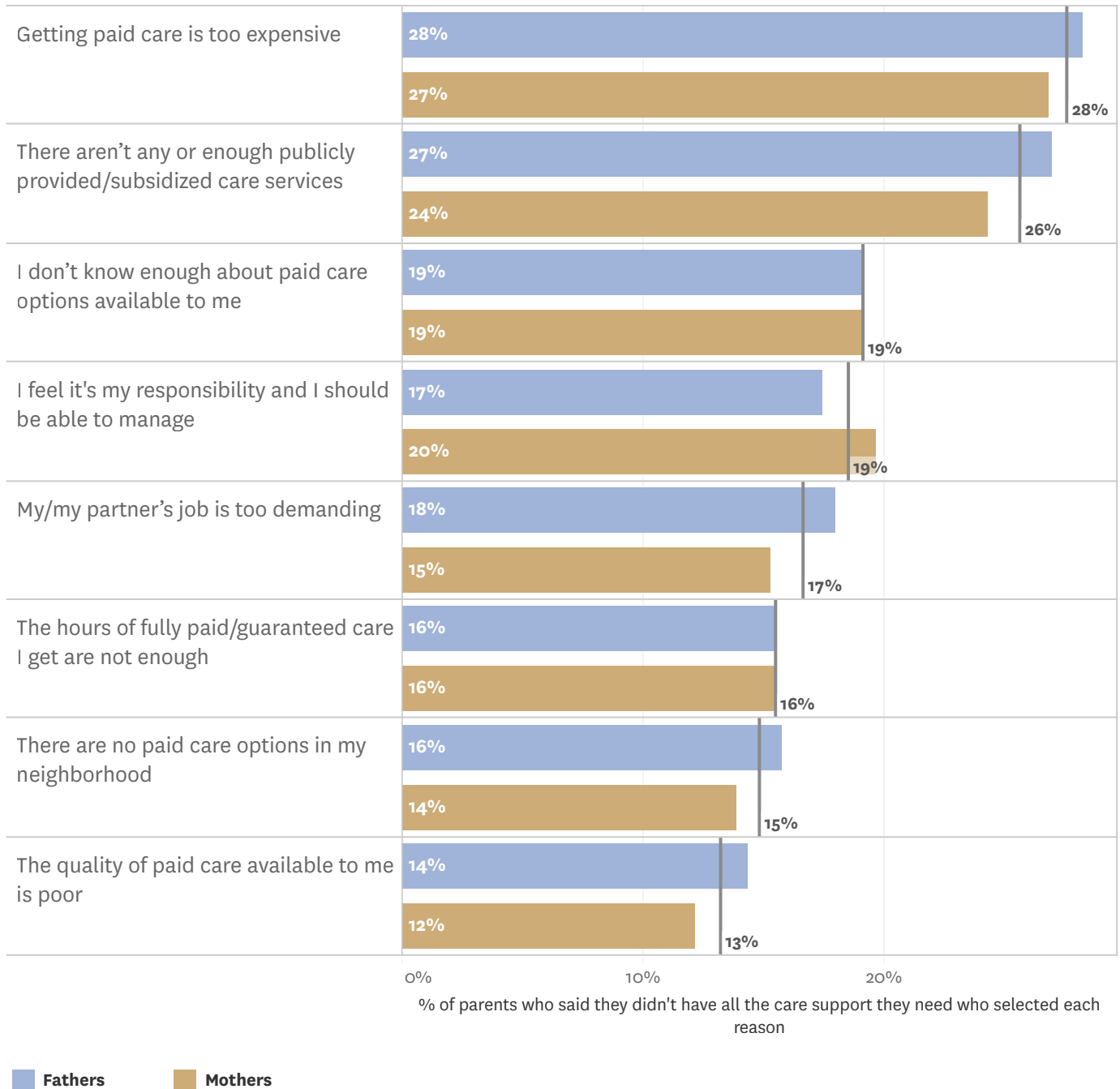
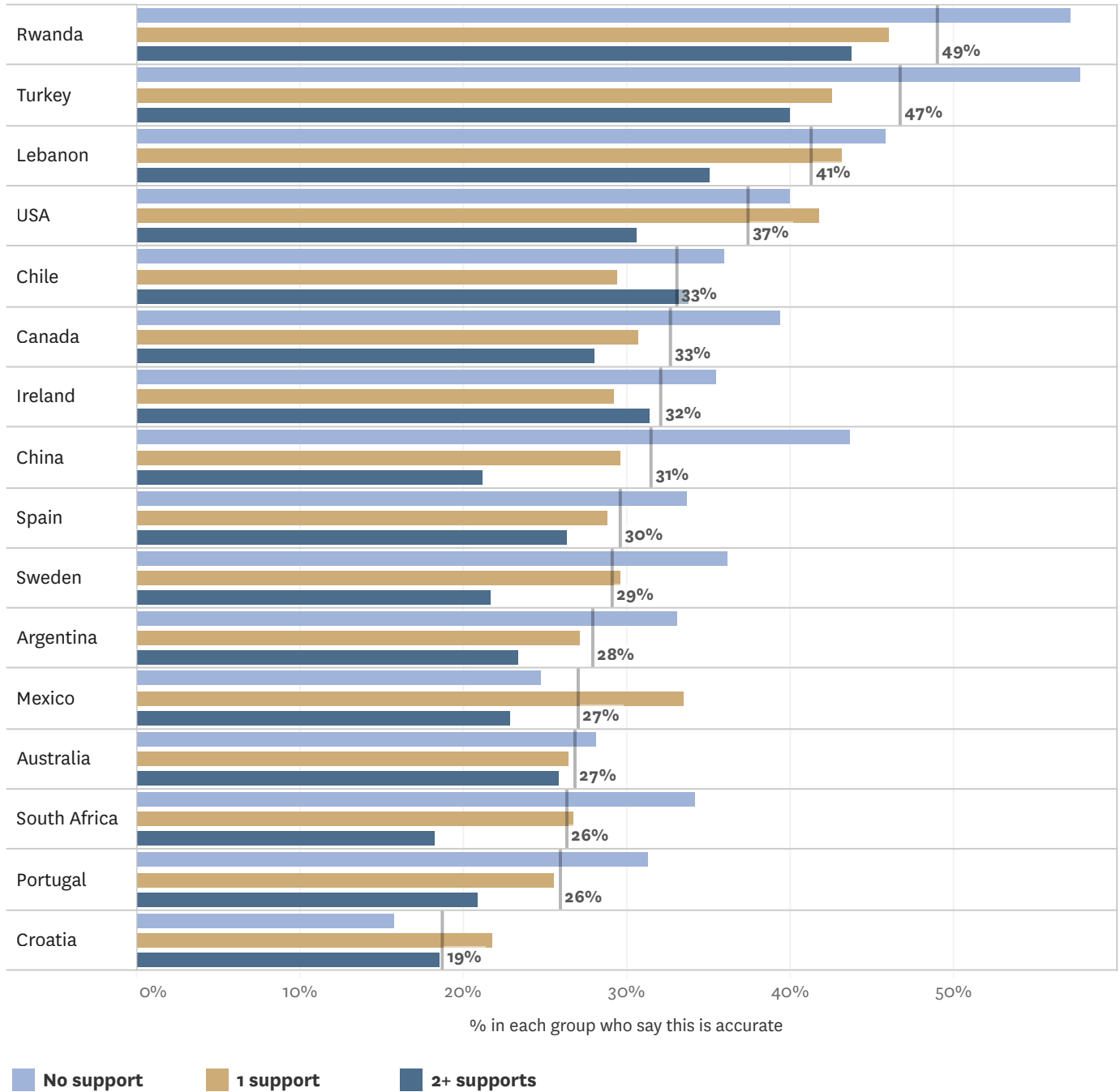


FIGURE 15 - “Caring for my children is more exhausting than enjoyable,” by country and number of care work supports



HEADLINE 9

**The urgent need for
policy change:
It's time for
more men to be
advocates**



“Involving men in caregiving allows us to reconfigure masculinities, build affective fatherhoods, violence-free homes and more equitable societies.”

– Marco Rojas, Early Childhood National Advisor, Plan International Ecuador, MenCare partner¹⁰³

KEY SURVEY FINDING

More than half of both mothers and fathers say political activism for care leave policies is important to them (Figure 16). This ranged from 57 percent of fathers and 66 percent of mothers in India to 92 percent of fathers and 96 percent of mothers in Rwanda. Sweden was lower than most, possibly because it already has adequate care policies in place.

KEY SURVEY FINDING

Women are more likely than men to prioritize care policies, as well health care and gender equality policies. Cost of living tops many people’s lists of concerns – including more women (58 percent) than men (53 percent) (Figure 17). The data on people’s other priorities is similar to other research – still mostly in the Global North – that shows women and men may prioritize different policy areas, with women tending to lead on issues related to care, while men are more concerned about corruption or military spending. However, priority areas may be more divided by race and political party in some countries (e.g., the USA):¹⁰⁴

- Healthcare is a high priority, more so with women (51 percent) than men (44 percent).
- Women’s rights/gender equality is a higher priority for women (31 percent) than men (19 percent), as are elder care and childcare. It seems that the men who said they were doing high levels of care did not link it to these issues.
- Climate change is relatively low on the list, at 24 percent of both women and men across the 16 countries.
- The military and national security are prioritized by more men (15 percent) than women (10 percent).

KEY SURVEY FINDING

A significant proportion of both women and men in all countries say they have taken some form of action in relation to improving care policies (Figure 18). The highest percentage of both women and men (74 percent) had talked to friends and family about the issue in the previous six months, followed by 39 percent of women and 36 percent of men saying they had signed or shared a petition online, and 27 percent of women and 33 percent of men who had attended an in-person event to support the cause. Finally, 19 percent of women and 25 percent of men said they had approached or talked to local leaders.

This data correlates with other evidence. A study across 18 countries in the Global North found that women are less likely than men to join a demonstration, but more likely to sign a petition or raise money for a political cause. At the same time, women may participate differently in politics than men, preferring less formal modes of engagement rather than contacting representatives or joining political organizations.¹⁰⁵ And yet feminist movements all over the world have made a huge difference, both to women’s engagement in civic life and to violence against women.¹⁰⁶ It is time for men to step up in the public and private spheres. As Duarte Pacheco, president of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, notes: *“The only way to make real progress toward achieving gender equality in parliaments is to share the responsibility between men and women.”*¹⁰⁷

In terms of civic engagement, women’s additional unpaid care and domestic work – and in particular, having primary responsibility for family care – is another factor that may prevent them from becoming more involved in activism.¹⁰⁸ Men need to be allies for women’s public leadership so that women and men can have equal leadership in the workplace, in parliaments, in the civil service, in negotiations for peace and on climate change, and in all other spheres of life.

FIGURE 16 - Importance of activism for better care leave policies, by fathers and mothers

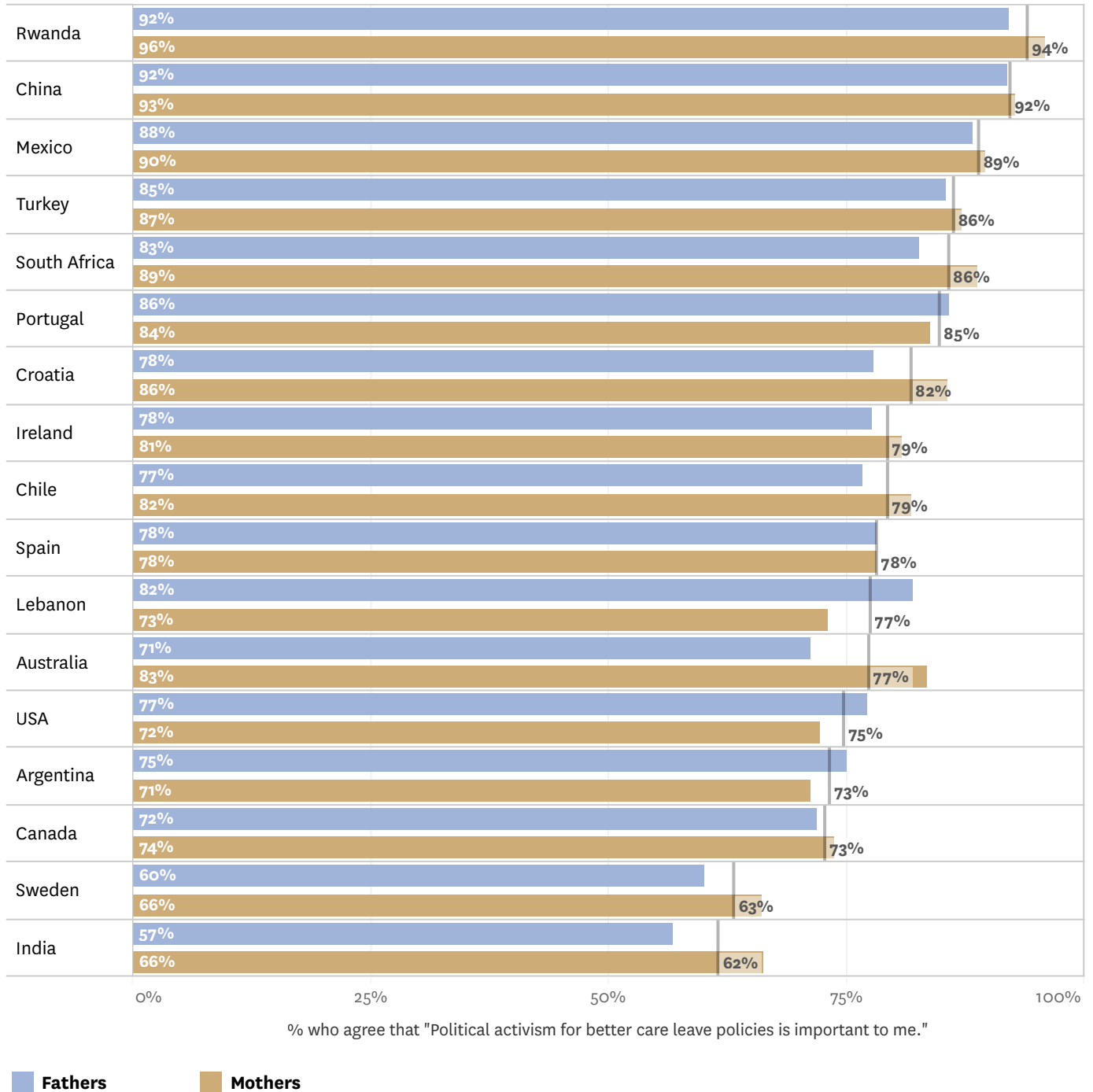
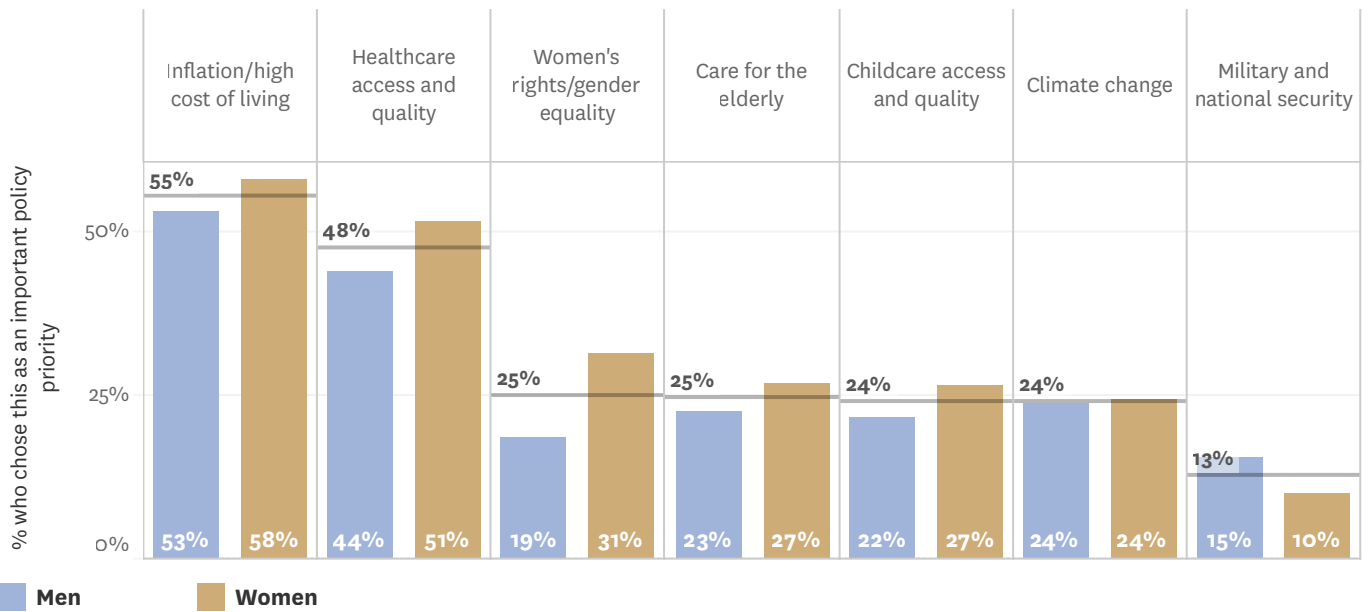
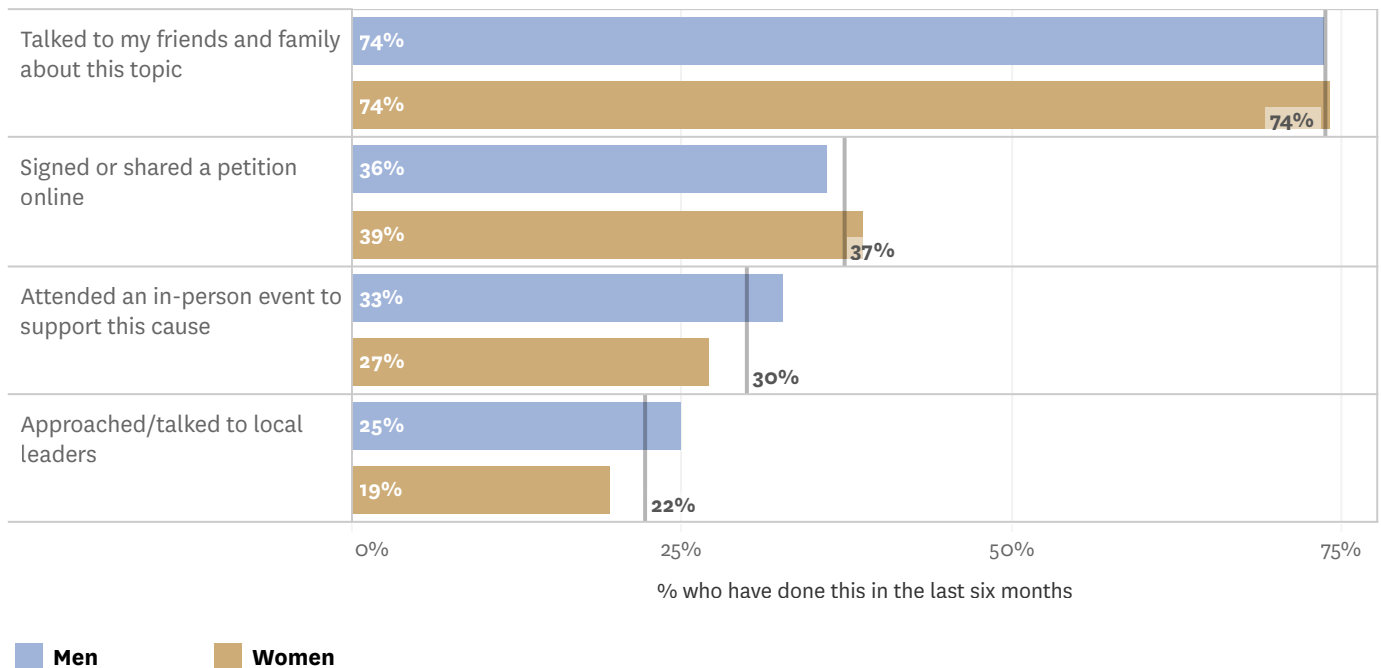


FIGURE 17 - Top policy priorities, for men and women



Respondents were asked, "Thinking of all the problems that political leaders in your context are working to address, which is the most important to you?" followed by a list of 14 options. Each respondent chose up to five as their own priorities.

FIGURE 18 - Actions taken for better care policies, by men and women



HEADLINE 10

Simple acts of kindness: Men and women are committed to caring beyond their own families – for their neighbors, their communities, and our planet



“Altruism improves the subjective well-being of actors and even observers. This positive association between altruism and well-being appears to be bidirectional, as happier people have also been observed to engage in more altruism.”

– World Happiness Report 2023¹⁰⁹

Care leads to care. As the results from the global World Happiness Report show, caring about others makes us happy. And the care we feel is not just for our families, children, partners, households, or ourselves. Fostering an ethic of care requires engaging in care within and beyond our families. ***Encouraging an ethic of care among men and boys, and seeing more men caring in an increasing number of ways, is important for individuals and for society as a whole. It is also an as-yet-untapped way forward in helping break cycles of violence, inequality, and backlash against women’s equality in many countries.***

KEY SURVEY FINDING

Many people in all 17 countries say they take some action each week to care for the planet. There are no significant differences between women and men in most countries (Figure 19).

KEY SURVEY FINDING

A smaller proportion say they help their neighbor at least weekly, from 18 percent of women in Sweden to 70 percent of women in Rwanda. Volunteering in the community is a form of care that fewer people say they do at least weekly, with percentages ranging from 12 percent of women in Croatia to 67 percent of men in Rwanda. This obviously also has to do with the kind of communities that exist around the world. For example, in Sweden or the USA – particularly in urban areas – neighbors don’t necessarily know each other; by contrast, in countries like Rwanda or Nepal, everyone in a community may know each other, although this

sometimes changed during the pandemic. Rwanda ranked at or near the top across all measures for both women and men, with Turkey having the next highest scores. Rwanda has a national law mandating a monthly day of collective community service, a policy designed to build community relations after the 1994 genocide and an example of how policy can establish a sense of connection.

There is evidence that COVID-19 has helped to widen the circle of those we care for. Research in 2020–2021 showed that globally, more people reported they had donated to charity, volunteered, or helped a stranger in the previous month than before the pandemic.¹¹⁰ In an Ipsos MORI survey of 22,508 online adults aged 16–74 across 32 countries, during December 2022 and January 2023, just over half (56 percent) said they had taken at least one action to promote gender equality.¹¹¹ Examples of this kind of mutual aid can be found in almost every country in the world.

KEY SURVEY FINDING

In all countries, men and women say their time spent helping neighbors and volunteering in their community increased during COVID (Figure 20). The figures for helping neighbors are highest in Rwanda, with 43 percent of respondents saying this had increased, and lowest in Croatia, China, and Canada. Interestingly, men in India reported increased time on both activities more than women in India did, perhaps because culturally, women were already embedded in a strong community/neighborhood network pre-COVID.

Gender and caring about the climate crisis

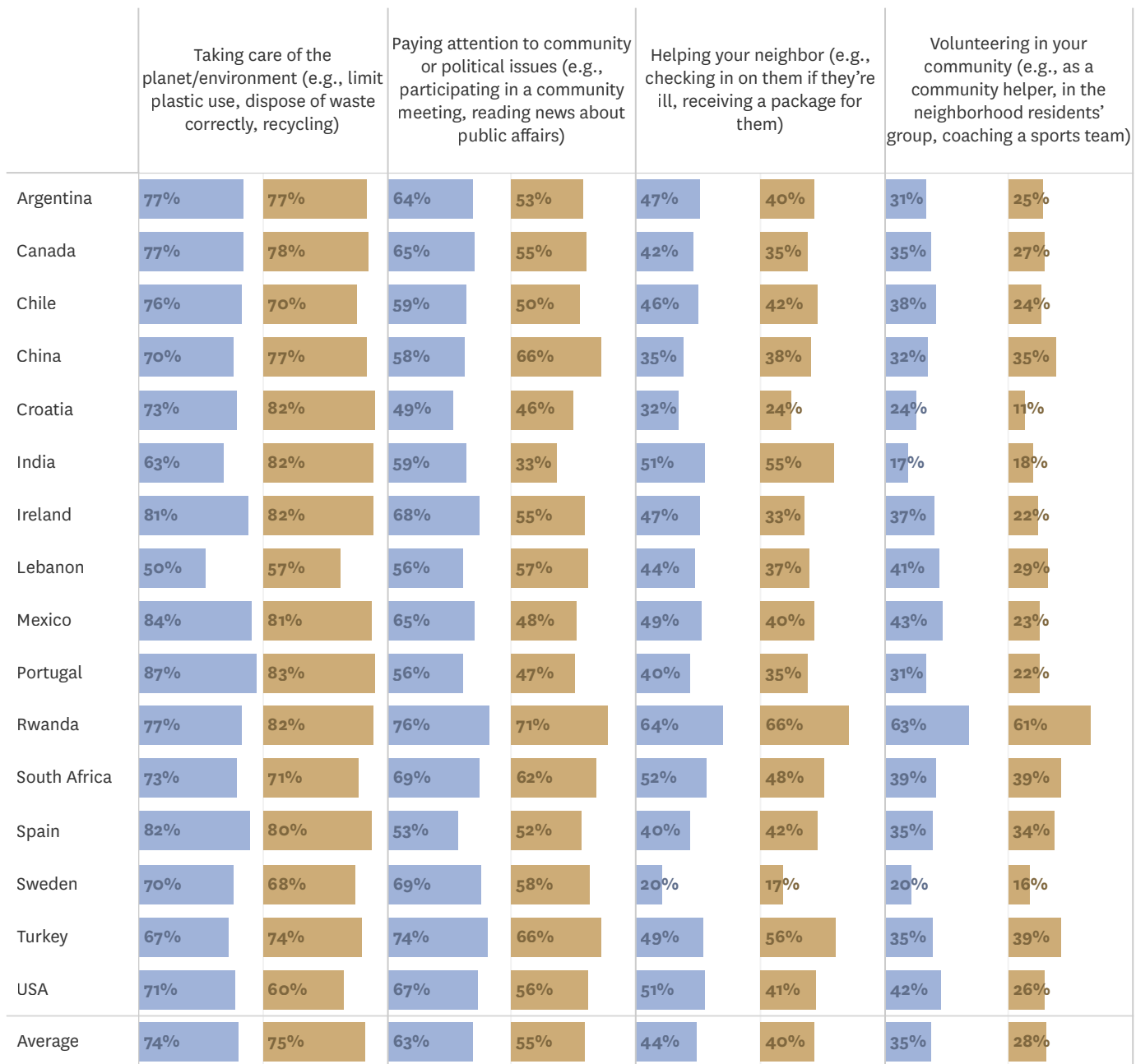
In the Global North, men are less likely than women to agree that personal lifestyle changes are needed to reduce the effects of climate change¹¹² or to think that climate change will affect them personally.¹¹³ This appears to be true even among young people. A poll in the US found that 46 percent of girls versus 23 percent of boys said climate change was “extremely important” to them personally.¹¹⁴ Older women, such as the Swiss women taking their government to court over climate change,¹¹⁵ and the thousands of young people,

often led by young women, taking part in protests around the world are key to the climate change movement. In addition, women, often from low-income households, play a critical role in fostering sustainable practices at the household and community levels in many countries.¹¹⁶ We need more deliberate efforts to engage men of all ages in such action and to understand how norms around manhood can either increase or decrease men’s support for urgently needed climate responses.

However, it is still men with political and economic power who make many of the decisions that affect climate change – only 34 percent of climate change negotiators are women.¹¹⁷ Even if gender parity is achieved numerically, women’s voices are still heard less than men’s. For example, one study of 2021’s COP26 in Glasgow found

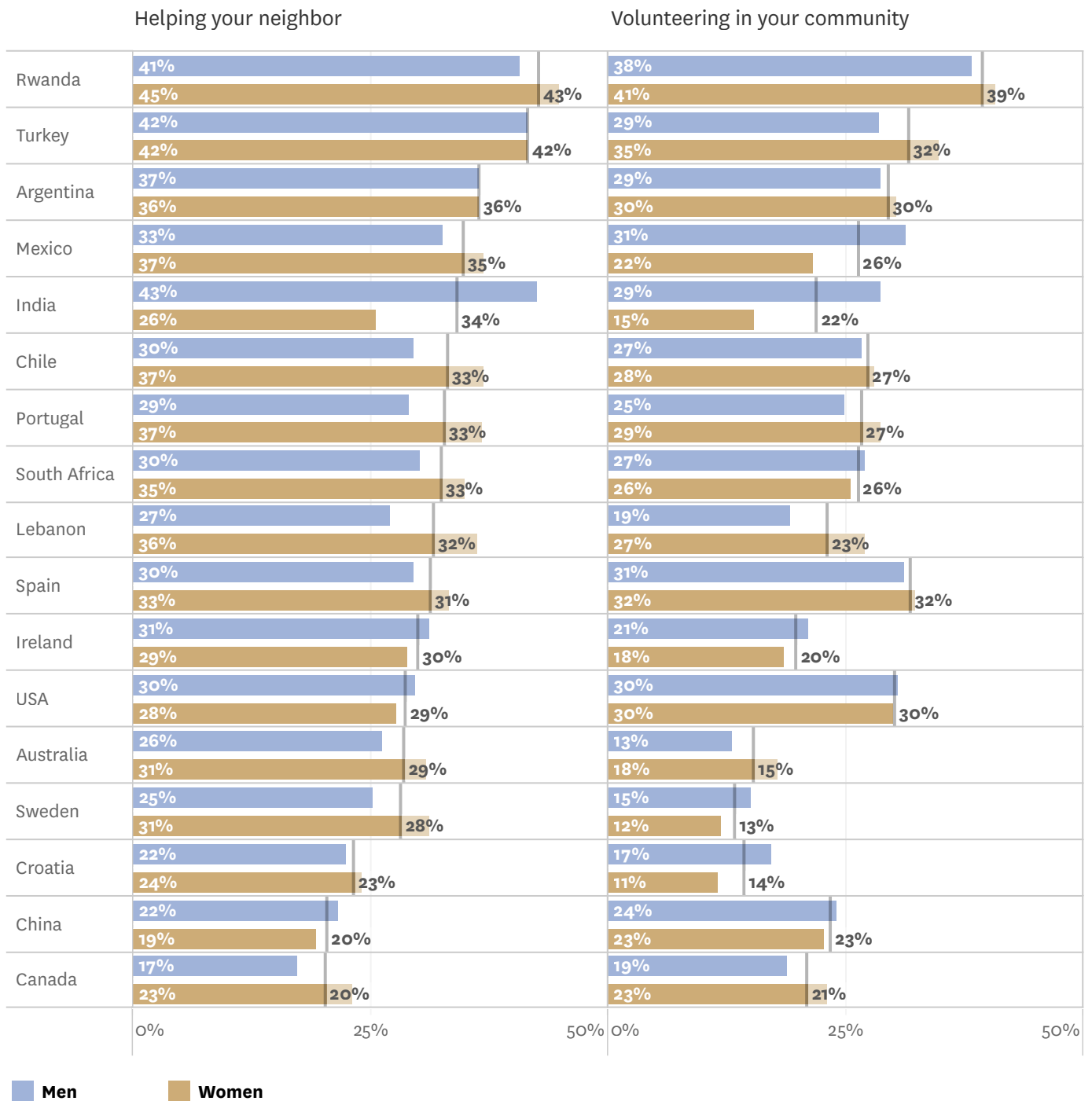
that men took up 74 percent of the speaking space.¹¹⁸ And although the lowest-income women and men are the ones most likely to live the effects of climate disaster – and have the least economic means to recover – their voices are missing in most of the key decisions related to climate worldwide.

FIGURE 19 - Percentage of men and women who undertake wider care tasks (community and environment) at least weekly



Men Women

FIGURE 20 - Men and women reporting their community care increased during COVID-19



SECTION

5

The importance of parental leave



HEADLINE 11

**Mind the gap:
Parents want to
take leave, and paid
leave for fathers is
on the rise – but not
always where it is
most needed**



“The beginning of becoming parents was a very important time to be together. We both learned together about the baby, how to raise a child, and the approach we would take as parents and how to be part of that process together.”

– New father, in a 2021 McKinsey & Company report¹⁹

KEY SURVEY FINDING

Fathers as well as mothers want to take the leave^{vi} available to them and feel it is beneficial for them, their partners, and their children: 87 percent of mothers and 85 percent of fathers think that mothers taking paid care leave^{vii} will benefit their partners and their children, and 83 percent of mothers and 88 percent of fathers think that fathers taking paid care leave will benefit their partners and their children (Table 2), although we recognize that the length of leave (and, therefore, the answers) may vary from country to country.

We know from research cited in previous *State of the World's Fathers reports* that men, their partners, and their children benefit from the emotional bonding and attachment that come with fathers' time spent on childcare and caregiving. Governments and employers are increasingly recognizing this by offering leave for fathers, though in many cases, this is still only a few days and not fully paid. Additionally, although maternity leave

is usually longer than paternity leave and is established in most countries, there is also much room for improvement. For example, the International Labour Organization points out that in 64 countries, maternity leave is still below the recommended 14 weeks, which leaves three in 10 “potential mothers across the world without entitlements to sufficient time off to rest and recover from childbirth and care for their new-born child.”²⁰

The most successful leave for fathers is fully paid and nontransferable, meaning that if the father does not use his allocated days, he loses them. In addition, equality in caregiving implies the equal provision of leave for parents. The gold standard for parental leave is, therefore, paid leave that is equal and nontransferable. Paid parental leave is mostly relevant for those working in the formal economy, and progress has mostly happened in the Global North. The following sections outline the changes in leave for fathers in recent years by governments and in the private sector and look at leave provision in the informal economy.

vi Different countries and regions use different terms. Within the broad spectrum of care leave (i.e., leave taken to care for adults or children), a specific category focuses on parents. Generally, this includes maternity and paternity leave for expecting or new parents; parental leave usually starts upon the birth or adoption of a child, and could extend over a longer term to provide parental leave for the care of toddlers or young children. While our survey asked parents about “paid care leave” to collect answers across a range of contexts and to be able to include answers about leave taken to care for older people in need of care, Headlines 11 and 12 focus specifically on leave for parents.

vii “Paid care leave” includes maternity, paternity, and parental leave, and it can also include shared leave or non-parental leave like “care days” or “family responsibility leave.”

PATERNITY LEAVE OFFERED NATIONALLY BY GOVERNMENTS

The proportion of countries offering paid leave to fathers after a child is born (known as paternity leave) for one day or more has increased significantly over the last three decades, from 25 percent in 1995 to 63 percent in 2022 (Figure 21).^{viii} As of 2022, 186 countries offered any parental leave to mothers for infant care, and 122 offered any parental leave to fathers for infant care.¹²¹ However, paternity leave is often short: nine days is the global average, with many country variations.¹²² For example, in Chile, parental leave for mothers is six months (including a shared portion), while nontransferable leave for fathers is only five days. In addition, only 42 countries have paternity leave for adoptive fathers, and only 20 countries provide equal paternity leave rights to same-sex parents.¹²³

OECD high-income countries constitute the main region that has made significant progress toward granting longer paid leave for fathers. These economies account for more than a third of all leave reforms in the past five decades, and progress in the rest of the world has been slow. According to the World Bank's *Women, Business and the Law 2023*, only three economies (China, Malta, and the Netherlands) introduced paid parental leave in the past year, three introduced paid paternity leave (Costa Rica, Malawi, and Mongolia), and reforms tend to be minimal overall.¹²⁴ For example, Costa Rica now grants new fathers fully paid leave, but only two days a week during the first four weeks following the birth of a child – or eight days in all.

A significant global disparity also exists in the duration of leave. On average, mothers are granted 192.3 days of leave, while fathers receive only 22.5 days.¹²⁵ In addition, the conditions and delivery mechanisms vary considerably, with some including options for fathers to use portions of maternity leave offered to mothers. Some countries have tried to reduce the gap and equalize paid leave available to mothers and fathers without taking leave away from mothers, which is also important. In Spain, for example,

since 2021, both mothers and fathers are entitled to 16 weeks of paid leave following the birth of a child. However, only 45 countries provide 14 weeks or more paid leave for both parents (Figures 21 and 22).

PATERNITY LEAVE FOR FATHERS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Employers are increasingly providing parental leave for fathers, and in some cases, providing longer and more fully paid leave options than governments are. A survey of FTSE 350 companies found evidence that those with more generous leave policies for men and women have a higher proportion of women in their workforce.¹²⁶

Yet change is varied. The FTSE 350 survey reported that over 90 percent of the companies surveyed in the financial sector had expanded their parental leave policies in recent years, with the rest showing a mix of significantly generous offerings, less generous offerings, and no changes at all in the past five years.¹²⁷ In the private sector, and especially in industries where talent retention and attraction are important, companies have an opportunity to raise the bar and offer leave more quickly than statutory regulators can. This needs to be both leveraged and encouraged (see the recommendations).

WORKERS IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

For workers in the informal economy (including agricultural workers, domestic workers, home-based workers, street vendors, waste pickers, contributing family workers,^{ix} workers in the gig economy, and more), parental leave provisions for both mothers and fathers do exist in some countries. But these are not as prevalent as provisions for formally employed workers. Only 30 countries offer paternity leave to self-employed men, and only four in 100 self-employed men live in these 30 countries. Since 2011, only six countries have introduced paternity leave cash benefits funded by social protection, supporting lower-income families.¹²⁸ Recent estimates find that explicitly guaranteed paid paternity leave is provided by only:

viii This is a complex issue, and different data approaches it in different ways. For the purposes of this report, we have used the national data from the WORLD Policy Analysis Center documenting policies applicable to entire country populations, not to subcategories like states or provinces.

ix These are workers who hold a “self-employment” job in a market-oriented establishment operated by a related person living in the same household.

- 28 percent of countries to self-employed workers (compared to 57 percent providing maternity leave)
- 19 percent of countries to domestic workers (compared to 38 percent providing maternity leave)
- 29 percent of countries to agricultural workers (compared to 29 percent providing maternity leave)¹²⁹

Progress is being made as more countries and employers recognize the importance of paternity leave as part of a wider package of leave, but there is still a long way to go before all countries have the gold standard of at least 14 weeks of equal, fully paid leave for parents, with fathers' days being nontransferable.¹³⁰

TABLE 2 - Parents' agreement with the benefits of paid parental leave

87%

OF MOTHERS SAY

MOTHERS' LEAVE WILL BENEFIT
FATHERS AND CHILDREN

83%

OF MOTHERS SAY

FATHERS' LEAVE WILL BENEFIT
MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

85%

OF FATHERS SAY

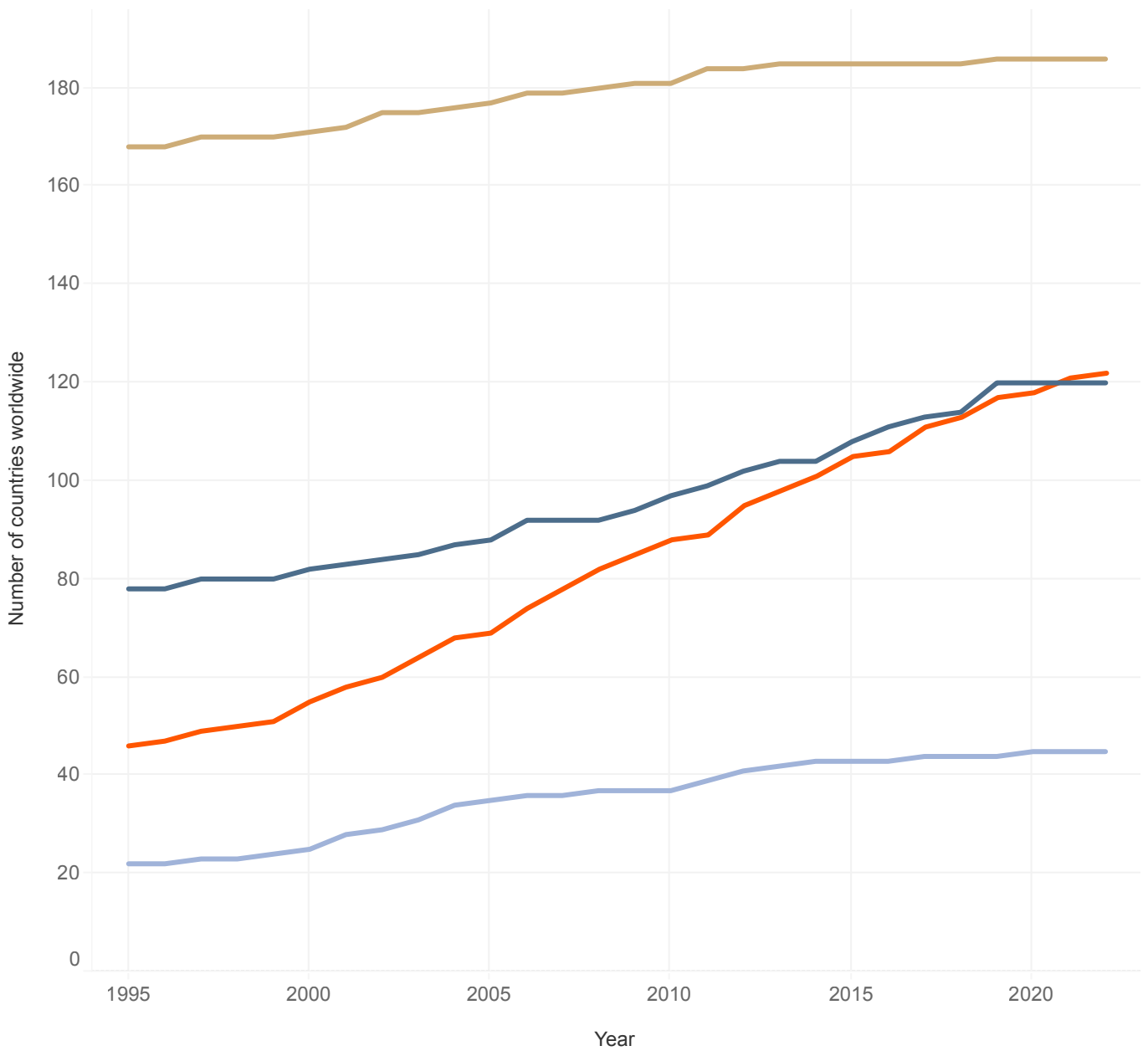
MOTHERS' LEAVE WILL BE BENEFIT
FATHERS AND CHILDREN

88%

OF FATHERS SAY

FATHERS' LEAVE WILL BENEFIT
MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

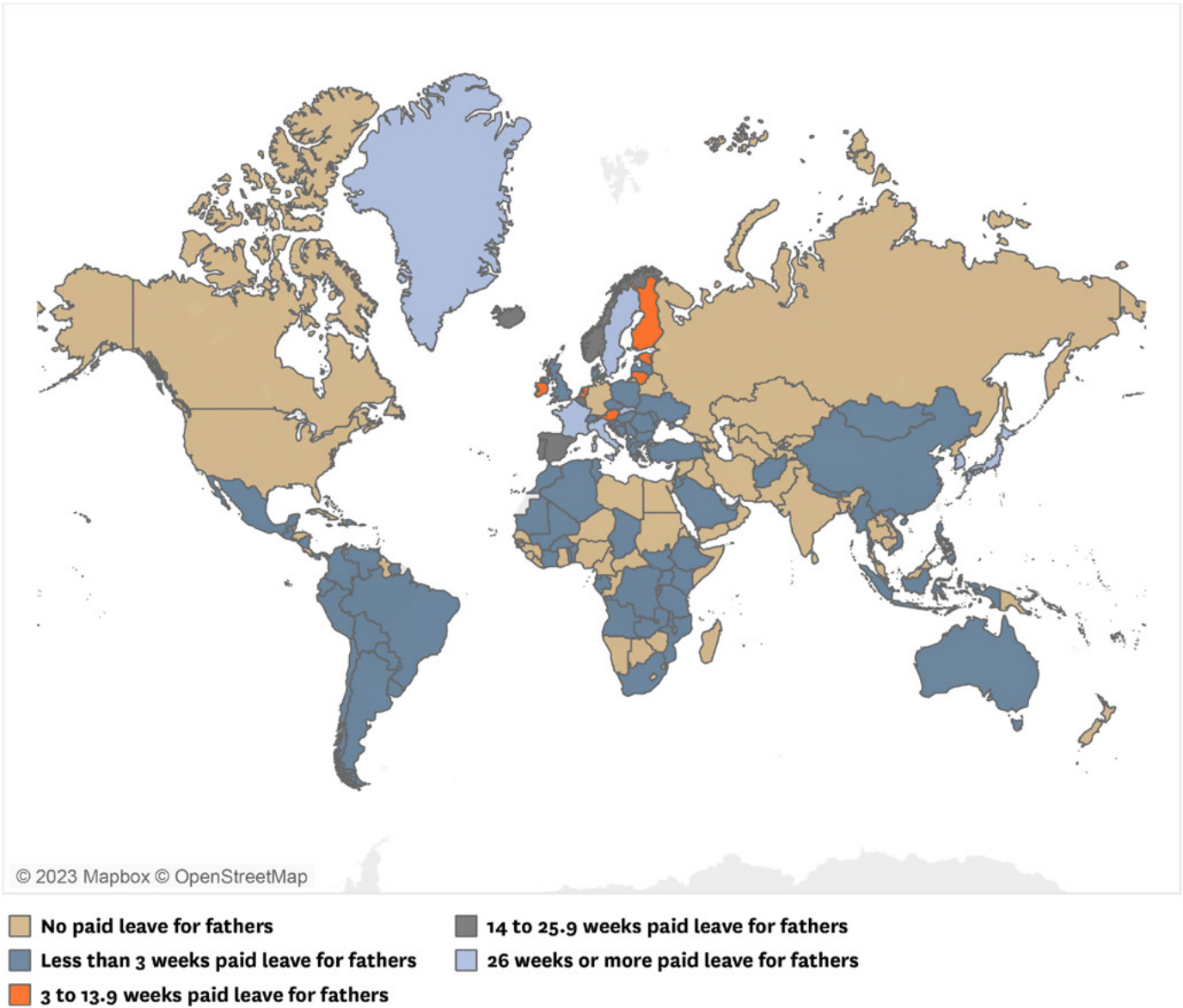
FIGURE 21 - Increases in countries offering paid parental leave for mothers and fathers¹³¹



Number of countries offering:

- 14 weeks or more parental leave to fathers
- Any parental leave to fathers
- 14 weeks or more parental leave to mothers
- Any parental leave to mothers

FIGURE 22 - Availability of nationally guaranteed, paid paternity leave for fathers¹³²



HEADLINE 12

Barriers to taking leave – and what actions mothers and fathers are prepared to take for better leave



“Not all Malaysian men are able to bond with their newborns from their first days of life, as there are still zero days of paid paternity leave provided in employment laws in parts of Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak). It is still widely believed that a man’s role as a parent is to ‘help’ rather than be an active and engaged partner.”

– Sabrina Aripin, president and founder of the Society for Equality, Respect And Trust for All Sabah (SERATA), MenCare partner, Malaysia

KEY SURVEY FINDING

Among those who were employed and offered leave but did not take all the leave available, the greatest proportion of men and women (49 percent) mentioned not receiving fully paid leave as the chief barrier. This is consistent with other research finding that remuneration is key to leave uptake, particularly for fathers. This is because men still often earn more than women, and unless leave is fully paid, the family cannot afford to lose the man’s income. And yet the WORLD Policy Analysis Center found that only 24 percent of countries with shared parental leave guarantee at least 80 percent of wages.¹³³

KEY SURVEY FINDING

Other important barriers to taking leave focused on experiences in the workplace. These included fear of losing their job (40 percent), unsupportive managers (36 percent), or fear of being judged by friends or colleagues (18 percent).

KEY SURVEY FINDING

A majority of parents are willing to take action to have more paid leave time (Figure 23). These include advocating for the issue at work or taking unpaid leave, as well as life changes such as moving or relinquishing jobs to have more time for care.

KEY SURVEY FINDING

Mothers showed greater willingness to take action for paid leave than fathers, although both showed a relatively high level of willingness to take action (Figure 24). In the current context of men being more likely to earn more and be breadwinners, job security and adequate wage coverage often takes priority for households over caregiving or leave at reduced wages.

To sum up, rates of paternity and parental leave are slowly improving in some countries, though the number of days and the rates of pay for fathers too often remain ludicrously low. Several factors seem to be driving the increase. There is a growing recognition of the benefits of fathers’ involvement in children’s lives, linked to the push for greater gender equality in the workplace and in society more broadly. And there is a recognition that parental leave policies can have economic benefits. Our survey results support the argument that men and women want this leave and that men will use it if the incentives and conditions are right. It is time for governments and employers to sit up and take note.

FIGURE 23a - Specific actions parents are prepared to take to get better care leave (actions at work)

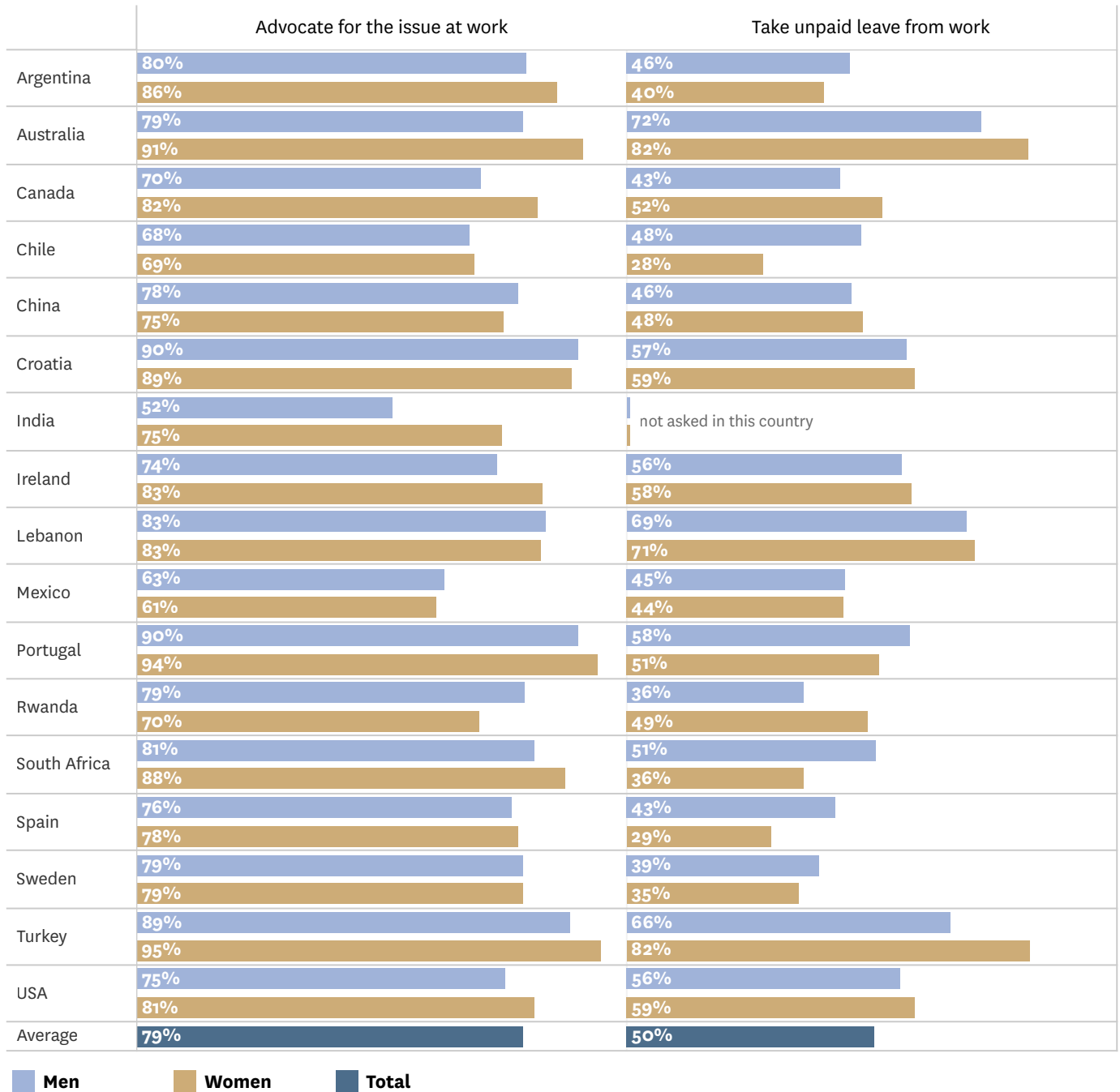


FIGURE 23b - Specific actions parents are prepared to take to get better care leave (more serious steps)

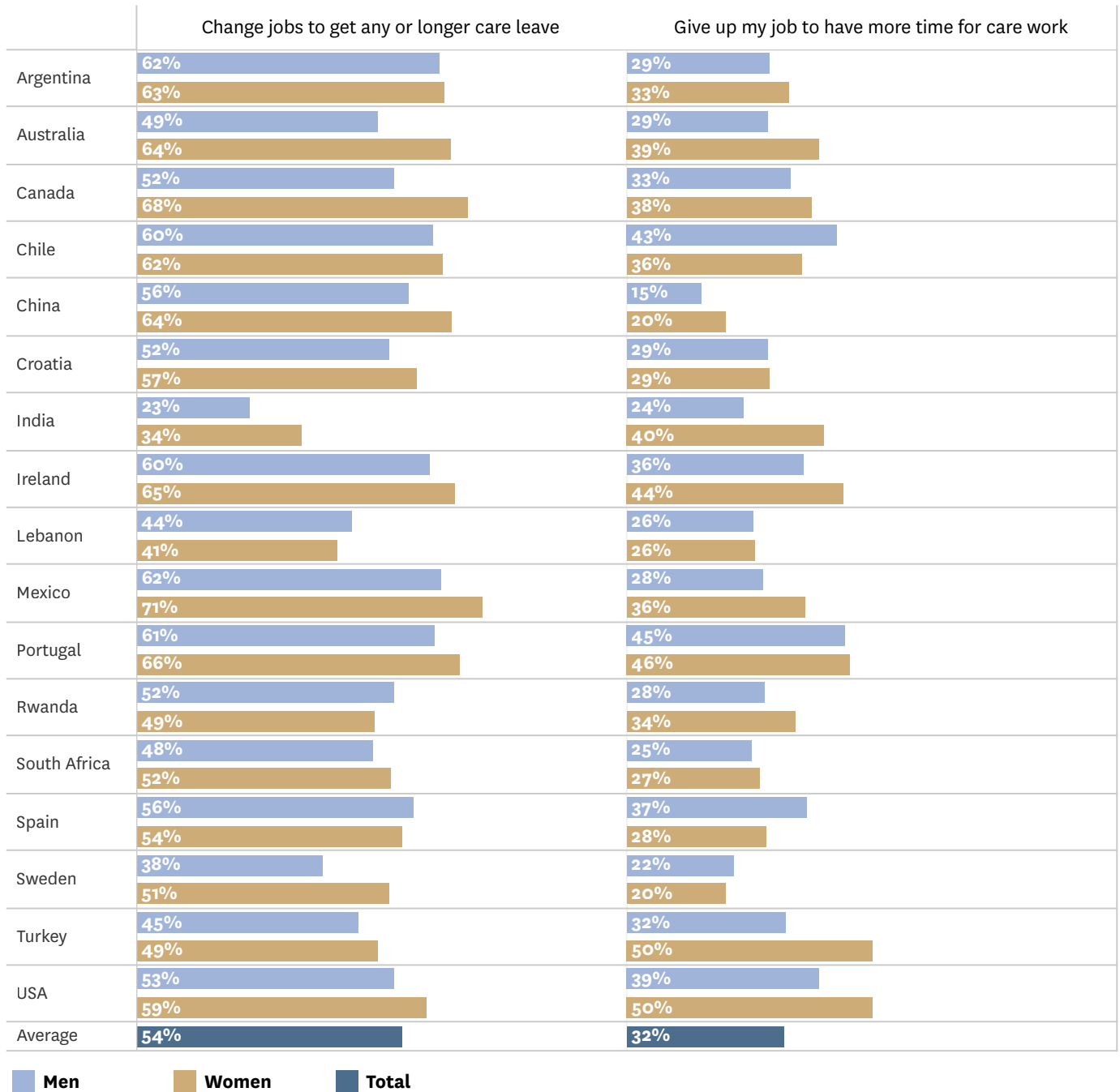
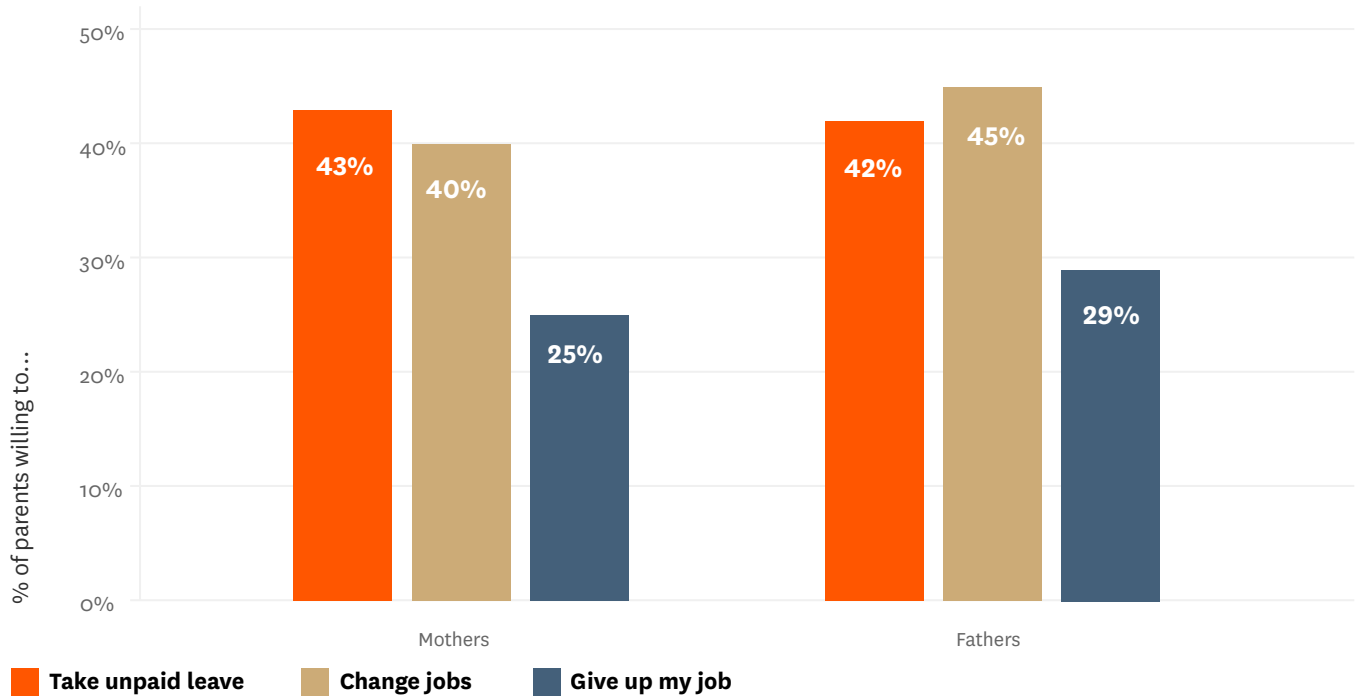


FIGURE 24 - Percentage of fathers and mothers willing to make changes for more parental leave

SECTION

6

Recommendations for urgent, structural action on CARING that includes men and boys



“Investing in care policies holds the potential to generate decent work in care sectors, strengthen social protection systems, and close long-standing gender gaps at work and at home that were exacerbated by the pandemic.” – Addati et al. , 2022 International Labour Organization¹³⁴

Care matters. It matters even more as we face the fallout from COVID-19; conflict in a number of countries; increasing inequalities; a backlash against women’s rights; an economic crisis; and a climate emergency. We cannot deal with any of these unless we radically review the way we view, share, fund, and center care in our lives. Governments and workplaces that see care as an impediment to workers must shift to see care as an overarching goal for business and as central to their business models, their human resources policies, and how they structure all they do. This change must rest not only on women and girls, who have traditionally been the carers in our world, but equally on men and boys. This means changes to both who does the hands-on care work and also who advocates for the care economy – and fathers can play a particular role in this.

The data from our survey show that respondents understand this. Across all the countries surveyed, men as well as women, fathers as well as mothers, say they are doing a huge amount of caring, even though women and mothers are doing more. This includes childcare and household work as well as caring for older adults and those with disabilities, for friends and neighbors, and for the environment. In addition, parents are prepared to take action where they think governments, employers, or politicians are not taking care seriously.

This gives us hope for a future where, as scholar Joan Tronto writes, care will move *“from its current peripheral location to a place near the center of human life.”*¹³⁵ For men and boys, change may start with individuals, but it will not be sustained unless it is structural and transformative, and unless we widen the definitions of care and engage policymakers, employers and key influencers in media.

The following recommendations build on those from [the four previous *State of the World’s Fathers* global reports](#), as well as the survey data. They are also based on the [MenCare 50/50 Commitment](#) that asks governments, employers, and individual men to commit to enacting the changes in structures,

policies, attitudes, and behaviors that lead to care being valued and shared equally, as well as to motivate men to do a fair and equitable share of unpaid care work, while acknowledging the many decades of feminist work in this area.

Therefore, to achieve full equality in unpaid care work and bring men fully on board as advocates fully invested in care, we must be **CARING**:

Center care systems in policies and public institutions, focusing on the most marginalized

Advocate for a culture of care in all workplaces

Revolutionize the way boys are taught about care

Invest in care, measure it, and disaggregate by gender, social class, and age

Normalize equal parental leave for mothers, fathers, and all caregivers, and for care of all kinds

Generate and disseminate mainstream media that portrays men and boys as caring and competent caregivers

Center care systems in policies and public institutions, focusing on the most marginalized

Currently, no government counts unpaid care and domestic work as part of its GDP or national revenue, and only a handful have national care plans. Vietnam, for example, has a range of labor market policies that focus on care – including six months of maternity leave at 100 percent pay, paid paternity leave, and paid breaks for antenatal care and breastfeeding. South Africa has put in place a number of care policies focusing on children: for example, an older persons grant recognizing grandparents' role, a child support grant, and a grant for those who look after children with disabilities. Argentina is also putting a national care plan in place (see box below).

But most care policies are not comprehensive or connected, focusing instead on one aspect – parental leave, childcare, social protection, or healthcare – and only applying when men are heads of households for data or benefits. While important, this sector-by-sector or issue-by-issue approach is piecemeal. And all too often, any focus on care does not look at care equality or men and boys' involvement. Health policymakers and health sector workers often assume that men do not want to attend antenatal classes with their pregnant partners, and hospital visits clash with paid work hours and, thus, make it impossible for men to attend.

National care plans need to take the most marginalized into account, which involves examining social protection programs (e.g., cash transfers, subsidies, and leave policies) to ensure they aim to reduce and redistribute care more equitably, as well as providing quality childcare that is subsidized so that the lowest-income families can also use it. Uruguay offers an example of this. Its National Care Plan, adopted in 2015, includes a focus on men and boys: *“To generate a co-responsible model of care, shared by families, government, community and the private sector...so that men and women may share care responsibilities in an equitable manner as an attempt to do away with the unjust gender-based division of work that has historically characterized our society, and which still does.”*¹³⁶

Finally, the majority of decision-makers, and 73.5 percent of the world's politicians, are men¹³⁷ – generally, men with economic and social power. There is an urgent need for men in these positions to step up on care policies, as well as advocate for equality in political leadership. One step in the right direction was the Inter-parliamentary Union's October 2022 adoption of the Kigali Declaration on *“gender equality and gender-sensitive parliaments as drivers of change for a more resilient and peaceful world.”*¹³⁸ The declaration encourages parliaments to take concrete steps to advance their efforts to promote gender equality in institutions and society.

This report recommends that governments:

RECOMMENDATION 1: Establish national care policies and campaigns that recognize, reduce, and redistribute care work equally between men and women.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Expand social protection programs to redistribute care equally between women and men who are unemployed or working in the informal economy, while keeping a focus on the needs and rights of women and girls.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Provide state-supported, high-quality childcare that facilitates full participation in economic activities for all working parents and caregivers.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Transform health sector institutions to promote fathers' involvement from the prenatal period through birth and childhood, as well as men's involvement as caregivers.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Hold male political leaders accountable for their support of care policies, while **advocating for women's equality** in political leadership.

Promising example - Comprehensive care policies in Argentina

In 2020, Argentina's government formed an inter-ministerial roundtable on care policies, led by the Ministry of Women, Genders, and Diversity.¹³⁹ The roundtable brought together 15 national public agencies to facilitate dialogue across the entire national government and advance comprehensive care policies, with a special focus on encouraging male co-responsibility by proposing equal parental leave. It convened civil society in a participatory process in which the voices of different sectors from different provinces were heard: trade unions, businesses, civil society organizations, co-operatives, and care workers, among others. The project to create a national

care system was submitted to the National Congress in May 2022 and is now awaiting legislative agreement.

Additionally, in March 2022, Article 179 of the Labor Contract Law (the main labor regulation of the private sector), required companies with 100 or more employees to have care spaces for babies and children from 45 days to 3 years old; this regulation includes fathers, unlike the 1974 law that only included mothers.¹⁴⁰ Where care spaces are not possible, the alternative (through union negotiations) is enabling payment for the child's care, including the salary of a registered care worker.

Promising example - A school for men and caregiving in Colombia

As part of its District Care System, Bogotá has a program called "Manzanas de Cuidado" ("Blocks of Care")¹⁴¹ to ensure that existing and new services meet the demands of women's disproportionate burden of care work, as well as to support these women by increasing the shared responsibility for care between the public/private sectors and families. Manzanas de Cuidado integrates the care services provided by different local entities (such as the secretariats of health, education, culture, social integration, environment, economic development, and habitat) with the objective of packaging services close to the homes of caregivers and those requiring care, ensuring the person requiring care can access welfare and capacity-building spaces while the caregiver has access to training or respite.

Part of this program is a virtual school for men, called "A Cuidar Se Aprende" ("Caring Is Learned"). This is part of the "Hombres al Cuidado" ("Men in Care") strategy

implemented since 2021 by the Undersecretariat of Citizen Culture and Knowledge Management, which also has a mobile school to take the program to companies, neighborhoods, and fairs throughout the city; it also has a telephone line offering men aged 18 and above professional counseling and psychoeducational tools for cultural and behavioral change. Its purpose is to ensure the equitable redistribution of unpaid care work and to increase the active participation of men in caregiving and domestic work through unlearning machismo and learning practical skills in areas for which they haven't been trained or socialized to intervene. According to surveys conducted by the Secretariat of Culture, Recreation, and Sports in 2021, "50 percent of men in Bogota believe that they should help at home, but that is not their responsibility." Washing toilets, controlling their emotions, learning about waste separation, or handling children's tantrums will be some of the topics covered.

A dvocate for a culture of care in all workplaces

COVID-19 has changed the world of work, probably for a long time. Many people have become used to working from home and to a more flexible way of operating – though those who care for others have not had this possibility. The pandemic has left a legacy of huge disadvantages, too, with many workers – particularly women – losing their jobs and with many families in crisis. Millions of those working in care jobs – the majority of whom are women and many of whom work part-time and in jobs with little protection – risked their lives for others, and yet their work remains underpaid and undervalued.

But the pandemic has also given women and men a new perspective, one that enables them to demand other changes to make their work-life balance more manageable so that they can center care in their lives. Our survey shows that people want change – they want parental leave for both parents, more support with childcare and elder care, and more freedom to choose where and how they work. They know it will make them happier and improve their well-being. And they are prepared to ask for it.

Some businesses and employers, both public and private, are beginning to respond to these demands. There is an urgent need – and a demand from workers – to create cultures and policies that value care and recognize that skills and experience learned at home are of value in the workplace. Businesses with large proportions of women

must provide on-site childcare or pay toward private provision. Employers must assume that men, women, and people of all genders have caring responsibilities outside their paid work. This means changing culture and policies in the workplace. Men who are doing paid work will be seen, and see themselves, as much a part of care at home as they are at work, and women will no longer have to do the paid and unpaid work on their own.

This report recommends that employers should:

RECOMMENDATION 6: Establish equal, paid, nontransferable parental leave for all parents employed by the company.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Create a family-friendly workplace by implementing policies (such as care days, remote working, flexi-time, childcare, or breastfeeding facilities) and promote care equality with internal company public relations and marketing channels. Implement evidence-based educational programs for men on workplace gender equality.

RECOMMENDATION 8: Track indicators on care equality in company surveys and reports (for example, the ratio of men compared to women who take parental leave).

Promising example - The Liberia Electricity Corporation

The power industry in Liberia is still overwhelmingly male. The Liberia Electricity Corporation (LEC), a signatory to the [MenCare 50/50 Commitment](#), is striving to achieve gender parity by increasing the number of female employees in technical and leadership roles, with a targeted representation of 40 women to 60 men and 30 women to 70 men in leadership roles by 2030, with technical support and training provided by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) Engendering Industries program. To achieve this, LEC has developed a strategic Gender Action Plan that includes eliminating recruitment bias, training female technicians, and creating a corporate culture that supports gender equality. The program aims to achieve an equitable environment where both men and women have access to economic opportunities and where leaders are seen to walk the talk.

Resistance from male colleagues remains a barrier to gender equality, and so the LEC has also launched a Male Engagement Program. This focuses on training and mentoring senior management staff, outreach, cross-functional opportunities, and creating male change agents/gender champions. The corporation's strategy is to ensure that leaders embody corporate core values so other employees follow suit. According to the LEC's gender manager, "*When leaders demonstrate bad behaviors, employees tend to emulate those.*" The hope is that the reverse is also the case. In addition, male workers in the LEC have contributed US\$5 from their monthly salaries to support the Female Workers' Association.

Revolutionize the way boys are taught about care

In a historical moment when parents in many countries are worried about their sons following online misogynistic content, care has become a key countermeasure and necessary path forward. Research confirms that boys who see their fathers do care work are far more likely to carry it out.¹⁴² Two decades ago, the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) push for girls started and has produced important results – slowly, but still not fast enough, girls and women are becoming a part of the tech economy. There has been no similar global push for boys to do care work and enter the care professions. Indeed, in most countries, men's participation in care professions – nursing, elder care, childcare, primary school teaching, and others – has barely changed. Most people haven't even heard of the HEAL professions – health, education, administration, and literacy.

Quite simply we must teach, oblige, nudge, and support boys to see care as normal and necessary, to appreciate it, and to do it alongside their sisters and female peers. For this to happen, we also need to acknowledge that gendered norms around care

start very early. The care revolution must begin in childhood – and boys must be part of it.

RECOMMENDATION 9: Start young to promote emotional connection and expression, to reframe masculinity and boyhood as caring and valuing care. This means engaging parents, teachers, peers, and coaches, and providing hands on opportunities for boys to learn and practice care.

RECOMMENDATION 10: Harness the power of digital tools by creating age-appropriate educational materials since even young children may spend much of their time online and in digital worlds.

RECOMMENDATION 11: Manufacturers and producers of toys, games, and clothing, as well as television programs, need to ensure that, at the very least, they do not reinforce stereotypes and, at best, they actively promote gender equality among children and young people.

Promising example - The Global Boyhood Initiative

Changing how boys learn gender norms and engaging boys in hands-on care will not be a small, one-off effort or led by a single “project.” It will instead require schools, media, parents, after-school programs, coaches, writers of children’s books, and others to make this a concerted, combined effort: teaching boys to do and value hands-on care. It is about changing childhoods for boys and girls, making care normal and equitably shared, and making care professions aspirational for boys and girls.

Through the [Global Boyhood Initiative](#), Equimundo and partners are working in several countries to map gender

norms that start in childhood (with a focus on boys ages 4 to 13) and carrying out research with parents and children on their expectations of boys and of boyhood. Partners are also testing and beginning to scale up in-school and after-school group education processes engaging boys and girls in questioning inequitable gender norms. Equimundo and partners have also been studying how the media portrays manhood in the TV boys watch and engaging with media content makers as allies in presenting more equitable views of manhood. Ultimately, the initiative seeks to change broader societal narratives about boyhood to plant the seeds for caring, equitable, nonviolent boyhood from an early age.

Promising example - The KINDER project

The [KINDER project](#) targeted educational professionals working with children ages 3 to 12 in three countries: Croatia, Portugal, and Spain. The program was built on the assumption that learning processes play a key role in boys’ and girls’ socialization and have a major impact on children’s future life options, including career choices. The project provided teachers, educators, and other school staff with gender-responsive and -transformative tools, mostly focusing on masculinities, allowing them to respond to girls’ and boys’ specific needs in teaching and learning processes from a gender equality perspective. At the same time, it engaged families in a participatory

process to promote diversity within and outside schools. The strategy aimed to equip teachers with knowledge, skills, and attitudes for a gender-responsive pedagogy, while promoting a behavioral change in the sometimes-unconscious transmission of gender stereotypes by these professionals. KINDER hopes to support school management and national public authorities to mainstream gender issues at an early age. KINDER is funded by the European Commission and coordinated by the Centre for Social Studies (Portugal), in partnership with Fundación Cepaim (Spain) and Status M (Croatia) and in collaboration with the International Step by Step Association and Equimundo.

Invest in care...

The current economic system is not working. In the context of increasing inequalities and climate crisis, it continues to focus on profit alone, and as the UK's Women's Budget Group notes, *"has treated the earth, nature and people carelessly in pursuit of profit."* The report continues: *"Responding to these crises requires redesigning the economy around care: caring for the earth and its ecosystems, caring for the people who currently inhabit it, and caring for future generations."*¹⁴³

An economy based on care rather than profit could even be a richer economy – one estimate found that equalizing labor force participation rates between men and women would add \$11 trillion to the global economy over a decade.¹⁴⁴ Other estimates show that investing in the care sector could generate employment that is good for the environment: in the UK, for example, the average job in health and care

produces 26 times less greenhouse gas than a manufacturing job, over 200 times less than an agriculture job, and nearly 1,500 times less than a job in oil and gas.¹⁴⁵

Gender budgeting is now something that many governments recognize as a useful tool to *"expos[e] how gender inequalities may have inadvertently become embedded in public policies and the allocation of resources and promot[e] budget measures that will be effective at closing gender gaps."*¹⁴⁶ But it rarely includes a perspective on men and boys.

Investing in care makes good social sense. It is good for our well-being. But it also makes economic sense. And to do it properly, an investment plan for care systems needs to take gender and other intersecting inequalities into account and to include men.

...measure it, and disaggregate by gender, social class, and age

Gender plays a key role in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the Leave No One Behind Agenda. Gender data allows decision-makers to identify the most marginalized and understand how they are affected by policy. Unless we know how women, men, and people of all genders are caring – and how this differs not only among genders but also according to race, class, caste, income, age, geography, location, ability, and sexuality – it is hard to make progress in care equality. Without an evidence base, it is difficult to make and implement policies or to assess needs.

And yet the majority of data collected is often not disaggregated. When it is, the focus is rightly on the most

marginalized, which often includes women and people from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, time use surveys have been key in analyzing who undertakes which care tasks and for how long, especially in unpaid care and domestic work. But other data collection rarely looks at the gender dynamics of sharing unpaid care in the home or includes men in a gendered way. For example, national surveys often assume a male head of household but do not ask men and boys about their experiences of gender relations or their attitudes on masculinities and care. Data on masculinities in particular is unevenly available and incomplete, making it difficult to base policies, campaigns, and action on evidence.

Promising example - Financing care as a right in Spain

The Co-Responsibility Plan aims to guarantee care as a right in Spain from the perspective of equality between women and men. The Secretary of State for Equality and the Ministry of Equality promoted this public policy in 2021, and the policy's three main objectives are to: 1) promote reconciliation in families with girls, boys, and young people under 16; 2) create quality employment in the care sector; and 3) dignify and certify the professional

experience of non-formal care. The plan has an annual budget of EUR190 million (US\$210 million). Training on men's co-responsibility and care is one of the projects to be implemented as part of the plan. All regional administrations are obligated to dedicate a minimum of 3 percent of these budgets to this type of action, meaning about EUR5.7 million dedicated in 2023 to promoting men's co-responsibility through such training plans.¹⁴⁷

This report recommends that governments should:

RECOMMENDATION 12: Invest in care and care systems so that changes are funded and included in government budgets.

RECOMMENDATION 13: Collect regular data on time use in unpaid care work and how it is divided between women and men, girls and boys, across diverse socioeconomic groups and ages; use this data to measure progress toward equality and inform policymaking and budgeting decisions.

Promising example - Measuring masculine norms to promote women's empowerment

The OECD Development Centre's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) has produced an online book looking at the importance of measuring masculine norms to promote women's empowerment. *Man Enough? Measuring Masculine Norms to Promote Women's Empowerment* notes the importance of gender-disaggregated data in the context of gender equality:

Data on masculinities is one of the critical tools which can provide insight into the current state of masculine norms and allow policy makers to measure the impact that actions such as policies, legal reforms and campaigns have on masculinities. For instance, with the right data, policy makers can better understand the way norms of masculinities are influencing the low uptake of paternity leave. Equipped with this knowledge, they can create campaigns, national programmes and legal changes to address these norms and promote

*gender-equitable masculinities, especially when it comes to care. Furthermore, data on masculinities will enable a better knowledge of the role that large-scale phenomena, such as economic crises and the Covid-19 pandemic, play in shaping masculine norms.*¹⁴⁸

Ireland was the first country to implement the instrument, and one finding was that about half of people believed that "gender equality has been achieved in leadership positions in the workplace and in politics in Ireland, yet roughly 1 in 6 believed that women do not have the necessary qualities and skills to fill positions of responsibility in politics."¹⁴⁹ The research benefited from high-level political support; at the launch of the report, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth Roderic O'Gorman said: "The data can inform our approach on a number of issues, such as paternity leave, boosting female participation in politics and leadership roles and health care policy."¹⁵⁰

Normalize equal, nontransferable parental leave for mothers, fathers and all caregivers and for care of all kinds

Our survey affirms that mothers and fathers support paid parental leave for fathers. Normalizing equal parental leave would mean fathers *not* taking leave to care for infants would be abnormal and workplaces would find it strange if male employees did *not* use the leave available. MenCare envisions a world where men not doing care work becomes the anomaly. The MenCare global fatherhood campaign advocates that the gold standard for parental leave provision is fully paid, equal parental leave of at least 14 weeks for all parents, regardless of sex, including a portion of nontransferable leave for fathers.

More countries and employers are offering parental leave to fathers, and this trend is likely to continue as governments and employers increasingly appreciate care, including men's care. However, the provision of parental leave for shorter periods – a few days or weeks – has grown the most over the past two decades, and more substantial leave provisions show slower growth. Often, too, this leave is not fully paid. The people who need parental leave most, however, receive the least. Informally or self-employed workers have the least available parental leave across all countries, and countries offering more leave for fathers are mostly Global North, OECD countries.

Even in countries like Poland where the leave available is generous, men frequently do not use all the leave available – often, in fact, only using a tiny percentage. Tracking and reporting on leave uptake, cultivating workplace cultures of care, and portraying men on parental leave in public media platforms are all steps toward normalizing equal parental leave. Multilateral regional pressure on governments to comply also plays an important role, as the effects of the European Union directive on work-life balance have shown.

RECOMMENDATION 14: Governments should **establish equal, fully paid, nontransferable parental leave for all parents**, in addition to maternity leave for pregnancy- and birth-related health needs.

RECOMMENDATION 15: Make **more paid parental leave days available for men**, getting to equal, paid, and substantial parental leave for all parents, with 14 weeks for both parents as a minimum and a nontransferable portion for fathers.

RECOMMENDATION 16: Governments must work to **ensure the distribution** of paid parental leave across diverse income groups and employment categories, including informally employed workers.

RECOMMENDATION 17: Regional multilateral entities, such as the European Union, Organization of American States, and African Union, can work toward regional directives that encourage or mandate parental leave provisions across more countries, especially in the Global South.

Promising example - Sharing the care in Poland

Poland implemented the European Union's work-life balance directive in April 2023. Although the Polish parental leave system is one of the most generous in the European Union (52 weeks: 20 weeks of maternity leave plus 32 weeks of parental leave, both with reimbursement of an average of 80 percent of salary), it is mostly based on a mother's individual right, which she can transfer (or not) to the father. As a result, the level of uptake by fathers is only 1 percent.

Since 2020, the [Share the Care Foundation](#) has conducted a campaign for the implementation of the work-life balance directive, preparing recommendations and a proposal

for the government and participating in meetings with parliamentarians and others. As a result, fathers gained the right to the entire length of parental leave, regardless of the mother's employment status. This is an important step toward recognizing fathers as equal carers. Additionally, the length of parental leave will increase from 32 to 41 weeks, with nine weeks reserved for the second parent/father (paid at 70 percent). Share the Care had hoped for more than 80 percent reimbursement, but is continuing to put pressure on the government and encourage discussion on fathers' role, building parental equality at home, and parental equality's impact on gender equality and equal opportunities for women in the labor market.

Generate and disseminate mainstream media that portrays men and boys as caring and competent caregivers

What makes men and boys feel that all forms of caring are natural for them, as much their responsibility as women and girls'? The answer is complex, resting not just on individual decision-making but also on social and gender norms, the *"implicit informal rules that most people accept and follow."*¹⁵¹ For example, on the one hand, men in every country we surveyed say they do a substantial amount of care – even if they are not doing as much as they say they are or as much as women. This could be one positive sign that gender norms around care are changing, that men feel it is not only acceptable to care, but also that they should be seen as caring.

On the other hand, global surveys find that norms around gender equality are not necessarily improving. An Ipsos MORI study found the proportion of people who think that "things have gone far enough in my country" when it comes to giving women equal rights with men increased from 42

percent in 2019 to 49 percent in 2023.¹⁵² Could this be part of the backlash against gender equality, an important part of which is that men and boys feel they no longer have a role and blame feminism?

The influences on these changing norms are many – our families, our peers, the media, social media, gaming, politicians, and even celebrities. The world of gaming, in particular, provides important opportunities for boys and young men to connect, but it is also often full of violence and many gendered, racial, homophobic, and other slurs that reinforce harmful masculinity and prejudice.

In popular media, a study of scripted broadcast and streaming television shows in the USA from 2013 to 2020 found that positive portrayals of men – as husbands, partners, fathers, or sons – as caring and as competent caregivers remain the minority. While men are depicted

doing hands-on caregiving at higher rates than in the past, they are often shown as abusive, incompetent, and/or emotionally distant.¹⁵³ Similarly a recent survey of men in the US and the UK by the communications firm New Macho finds that most men think versions of “success” presented in the media and advertising, which focus on material gain, do not align with their desires to be in positive relationships, to care for themselves and to care for others. More than half of men surveyed for the study affirmed that media is making them feel worse about themselves because their desires in life do not align with what media portrays.¹⁵⁴

Campaigns should target fathers, or young men who might be drawn into more negative views of women and care, without forgetting that women and girls can also have norms around the fact that men should not be caring. These campaigns should focus on the places where ideas around gender equality and masculinities are formed, such as traditional and social media, gaming platforms, schools, and workplaces. More specifically, the media should break down gender stereotypes and show men doing cooking and cleaning and women doing tasks like mowing the lawn or fixing the sink. They should depict the diversity of family formations, including LGBTQIA+ parents and non-nuclear

families, and avoid racial stereotypes in depictions of male caregivers. Media also needs to be open about male vulnerability, include men showing emotions and giving affection, and depict the complexities of real-life caregiving. And they should tell stories that reflect men’s desires to be socially connected to their friends and family, emotionally grounded and caring.

RECOMMENDATION 18: Implement communications and media campaigns to promote men’s involvement in care work, prevent gender-based violence, teach the value of care, and promote equitable, nonviolent, caring relationships.

RECOMMENDATION 19: Produce, support, and amplify campaigns, television shows, and other media that **show men and boys doing the care at home and sharing it equally with their partners.**

RECOMMENDATION 20: Support the **active engagement of fathers and male caregivers** in care work by means of public campaigns that engage communities for change.

Promising example - The Babe Locofto campaign in Eswatini

Kwakha Indvodza, a national NGO and MenCare partner in Eswatini, has implemented the Babe Locofto (“The Good Dad”) campaign since 2019. It aims to encourage and celebrate how fathers can be present and positive influences in their children’s lives, as well as to support women and other men in giving fathers the space to explore this new responsibility. To date, the campaign has reached over 230,000 people, with many prominent figures, (including artists, influencers, and political figures) providing support through methods such as songs, poetry, and visual art. Hundreds of children and young people aged 10 to 16 joined in the campaign,

sharing their insights on fatherhood through annual “Letter to My Father” competitions. A photography project showcased stories of hope and resilience, of fathers going above and beyond to play, provide, protect, and be positive. Each week, a different man would be the focus of Fatherhood Fridays on Kwakha Indvodza’s website. In addition, Kwakha Indvodza celebrated and mentored new and expectant fathers through three-day fatherhood workshops and produced a facilitators’ manual, loosely based upon Equimundo’s best-practice Program P manual, as well as Kwakha Indvodza’s decade of experience implementing programs for men and boys.

Promising example - “El Hombre Blandengue” campaign in Spain

In September 2022, the Ministry of Equality launched a campaign addressing men: “El Hombre Blandengue” (“The Wimpy/Sissy Man”). It aims to highlight how gender equality has evolved in Spanish society over the past 40 years and encourage men to live a more open and healthy masculinity. The campaign combines

a voiceover from a 1984 TV interview with the singer and actor El Fary, with modern images depicting how masculinity has since changed in Spain; it shows that with progress in feminism and equality, men also win and society benefits. The campaign includes a TV spot and radio spots.¹⁵⁵

A final reflection

The components are in place for the care revolution to advance – and for the world to achieve care equality. Women want men to care, and men want to do more care. An aging world requires more care, and global crises – from war to climate to an unsteady post-COVID economy – mean we must center care. Caregiving brings us more happiness and life satisfaction, something urgently needed in a moment when some countries show increasing evidence of loneliness, time spent online, and social isolation.

On the other hand, progress is still slow. More countries and more employers now offer paid leave for male caregivers, but can't seem to support full equality in those policies. And when leave is offered, men often don't take all they have the right to, at least partly because they don't feel supported to do so, and partly for reasons beyond their control such as policies, social norms, or lack of family resources. Women and men say we must teach boys to be equal caregivers, but we don't seem to do it. Bringing a more intersectional and inclusive feminist lens into the care debates is still a struggle.

Ultimately, the biggest challenge to care equality is political will and a lack of support from some powerful voices in the private and public sectors who still do not value care or do not support and fund the policies needed. These include extensive paid leave for caregivers;

universally available, subsidized, high-quality childcare; and paid leave and income support for the lowest-income workers. As clichéd as it may sound, we must repeat it: too many decision-makers value profit over people and over the care policies and services that people need. Such political opposition to care policies is untenable and perpetuates inequalities – our research clearly shows that the care burden and care inequality affect women, and those in the poorest households and most marginalized groups, the most.

There is no question about it: universal care policies cost money. Implementing universal childcare and adequate leave requires public funding to shift and for corporations and the wealthiest to pay fair taxes. But ultimately, this investment pays off – in the gender equality dividend of women's work and well-being, in more satisfied workers and citizens, and in the well-being, health, and development of children and of us all.

Care is what it is to be human. Care for each other and for our families is how we have survived as a species. It is the only way we will thrive and survive in the midst of the many crises our world is facing. And to center care, we need to build on decades of work by feminists and ensure that millions of men and boys join the unfinished revolution that is care equality.

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