

UN-WOMEN



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Study Guide

UN SUBSIDIARY COMMITTEE

UNITED NATIONS WOMEN COMMITTEE

(UN-WOMEN) STUDY GUIDE

Agenda Item: Recognition of Care Work and Women's Economic
Empowerment

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1. Opening Letters

1.1 Letter from Secretary-General

To Our Distinguished Participants and Esteemed Delegates,

It is my greatest honor to welcome you all to first ever LeadersMUN'26. On behalf of the entire Secretariat team, I am thrilled to invite you to join us for what promises to be an inspiring and incredible conference.

We find ourselves in an era where unprecedented global challenges face us. From the intricacies of climate change to the subtleties of international security, the world does not simply need conversation; it needs cooperation, it needs innovation. This conference is intended to be an environment in which your voices matter, your solutions weigh heavily, and your diplomacy creates the future.

Remember that diplomacy begins with the courage to speak, the patience to listen and the determination to seek solutions even when challenges seem impossible.

As the Secretary General it is my privilege to say that I have such amazing friends by my side. We went through the good and bad times together. I am excited to see the outcome of our effort.

I am looking forward to witnessing the spectacular debates and resolutions that will emerge from your committees.

Best Regards,
Elvin HANCI
Secretary-General of LeadersMUN'26

For contact, elvinhanci09@gmail.com

1.2 Letter from Under-Secretary-General

As Under Secretary General, I fully support the functioning of this committee and the issues it will advocate for. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Miraç Çağlayan Ekici and the entire LEADERSMUN team for enabling my participation in this committee. Furthermore, to the Chairboard and delegates who choose this committee: I can assure you that it will be a highly contentious, rights-defending, and intensely debated environment. If you want to see the views related to your own country, read about the views and roles of other countries, or access more information, I recommend reading the guide from the first to the last page.

Among my personal experiences, I anticipate this will be my last USG experience (due to my transition to 12th grade), and I am happy to be here, hoping to build friendships, develop vision through discussion, and review the MUN procedure again and again, with delegates, chairs, and a team like yours, and more importantly, with important individuals like yourselves who will illuminate the future of Turkey.

Sincerely,
Özge Özçelik
Under-Secretary General, UN-Women

2. Introduction to the Committee

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, commonly known as UN Women, is the main organization within the United Nations system working on gender equality and women's empowerment. Established by the United Nations General Assembly in July 2010, UN Women was created by merging four separate entities previously run by different departments. This merger aimed to ensure that women-focused work within the UN system was carried out more effectively, coordinated, and efficiently. The establishment of UN Women coincided with a period of increased awareness of women's rights within the international community and a need for a stronger institutional structure in this area. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, forms the basic roadmap for UN Women's work. This document is the most comprehensive international policy document in the field of women's rights and continues to shape UN Women's agenda.

Four main units were merged with the establishment of UN Women. The first of these is the Division for the Advancement of Women, established in 1946, which was responsible for developing policies and standards aimed at improving the status of women. Second, the Development Fund for Women, established in 1976, provided technical and financial support for women's projects. The third unit was the Research and Training Institute for Women, also established in 1976, which conducted research and training activities in the field of gender equality. Finally, the Commission on the Status of Women's Support Office provided secretariat services to the Commission on the Status of Women. The merger of these four units ended the fragmented structure of organizations working in the field of women's rights within the UN system and created a stronger, more effective structure. UN Women is headquartered in New York and continues its work through offices in more than 80 countries around the world.

UN Women is at the center of the international community's efforts on women's rights and gender equality. The organization's core responsibilities and authority are based on international documents such as the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. UN Women's core functions include normative support and policy development, programmatic support and field work, coordination, advocacy and awareness-raising, monitoring and reporting, and capacity development. In terms of normative support, UN Women assists member states in developing policies on gender equality, provides technical support for the preparation of legal regulations that strengthen women's rights at the national and international levels, and shares examples of good practices. In terms of programmatic support and field work, UN Women implements concrete projects to empower women through its programs worldwide, working on a wide range of issues from women's economic empowerment to increasing their political participation, combating violence against women, and including women in peace and security processes.

UN Women's coordination role aims to ensure that gender equality efforts within the United Nations system are carried out coherently and effectively. In this context, the goal is to harmonize the work of different UN agencies in the field of women's rights, develop the capacity of UN country teams on gender equality, and establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating work in this area. In terms of advocacy and awareness-raising activities, UN Women organizes campaigns to raise global awareness on gender equality, draws attention to women's issues through the media, and emphasizes the importance of gender equality. UN Women's "HeForShe" campaign is an important initiative that encourages men to actively participate in the fight for gender equality, and millions of men around the world have been encouraged to support this campaign.

UN Women also monitors and regularly reports on member states' progress in the area of gender equality within the framework of international agreements and commitments. These reports highlight developments in women's rights, identify gaps, and offer solutions. UN Women contributes to monitoring the gender dimension of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5. In terms of capacity development activities, UN Women conducts training programs and technical support activities aimed at developing the capacity of member states and civil society organizations on gender equality, provides gender-responsive budgeting training to public officials, strengthens the project management capacity of women's organizations, and organizes women's leadership programs.

UN Women's work is closely linked to the United Nations 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals. While SDG 5 is central to UN Women's work, gender equality is recognized as an integral part of all Sustainable Development Goals. The goals set under SDG 5 include ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls, eliminating all forms of violence against women, ending harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, recognizing unpaid care and domestic work and ensuring its equitable sharing between women and men, ensuring women's full and effective participation at all levels of political, economic, and public life, ensuring universal access to women's reproductive health and rights, strengthening women's access to economic resources, property, and financial services, promoting the use of technology for women's empowerment, and strengthening policies that support gender equality. The item on free care and recognition of domestic work, which is among these goals, directly corresponds to the agenda item that your UN Women committee will address at this conference and demonstrates that care work is recognized by the international community as a central element of development.

The process leading to the establishment of UN Women has developed in parallel with the international community's growing awareness of women's rights. With the founding of the United Nations in 1945, women's rights began to enter the international agenda, and the UN Charter emphasized the need to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms without discrimination based on gender. The Commission on the Status of Women was established in 1946, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948. The United Nations declared 1975-1985 the Decade for Women, during which global awareness of women's issues increased significantly. The First World Conference on Women held in Mexico in 1975, the Second World Conference on Women held in Copenhagen in 1980, and the Third World Conference on Women held in Nairobi in 1985 contributed to strengthening international cooperation on women's rights. In 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women was adopted. The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, marked a turning point in the history of women's rights. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the conference are considered the most comprehensive policy documents in the field of women's rights. During this period, demands for the strengthening of UN units working in the field of women's rights and the creation of a more effective structure increased, and finally, in July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly adopted. The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, marked a turning point in the history of women's rights. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the conference are considered the most comprehensive policy documents in the field of women's rights. During this period, demands grew for the strengthening of UN units working in the field of women's rights and the creation of a more effective structure. Finally, in July 2010, UN Women was officially established by a resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly. In February 2011, Michelle Bachelet, former president of Chile, was appointed as the first head of UN Women.

UN Women has identified six priority areas of work in the field of gender equality and women's empowerment. These are combating violence against women, peace and security, women's economic empowerment, women's leadership and political participation, gender equality in national planning and budgeting, and international standards and norms. In the context of combating violence against women, UN Women works to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women, strengthen laws combating violence, provide support services to women victims of violence, and raise social awareness. UN Women's "Unite" campaign is a global call to end violence against women. In the area of peace and security, UN Women works to strengthen the role of women in conflict zones and peace processes, with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 forming the basis for its work in this area. The area of women's economic empowerment is directly related to the agenda item your committee will address at this conference. In this context, UN Women works to increase women's participation in the workforce, support their entrepreneurship, facilitate their access to financial services, and recognize unpaid care work.

UN Women consists of four main structures. The Executive Board comprises 41 member states and manages the organization's operational activities, makes programmatic decisions, approves the budget, and oversees the organization's work. The Executive Board follows the principle of geographical distribution and includes 10 representatives from Africa, 10 from Asia-Pacific, 4 from Eastern Europe, 6 from Latin America and the Caribbean, 5 from Western Europe and Other States, and 2 representatives from contributing countries. The Office of the Executive Director consists of the head of UN Women, who is appointed by the UN Secretary-General and serves as an Under-Secretary-General. The Executive Director manages the work of UN Women, represents the organization on international platforms, and serves as a global advocate for gender equality. Regional and country offices ensure that UN Women continues its work worldwide through 6 regional offices, more than 20 sub-regional offices, and more than 80 country offices. These offices implement UN Women's programs at the local level, collaborate with national governments and civil society organizations, and develop solutions to the problems women face in their daily lives. The Civil Society Advisory Group was established to strengthen UN Women's collaboration with civil society organizations. This group contributes to UN Women's work from a civil society perspective, amplifies the voices of women's organizations, and ensures that grassroots demands are reflected in the organization's policies.

UN Women has placed particular emphasis on care work since its inception. Reports published and programs implemented by UN Women reveal that unpaid care work is one of the biggest obstacles to women's economic empowerment. UN Women's 2015 report, "Towards Transformative Equality: The Fair Distribution of Paid and Unpaid Work," highlighted the economic value of care work and emphasized the need for it to be shared fairly between women and men. According to the report, women spend three times more time on unpaid care work than men, and this situation seriously limits women's participation in the workforce, educational opportunities, and economic independence. UN Women has also adopted the 3R framework for care work, which stands for Recognition, Reduction, and Redistribution. Recognition means acknowledging that care work is work and is fundamental to the economy. Reduction aims to alleviate the burden of care on women through tools such as infrastructure, daycare centers, and technology. Redistribution, on the other hand, aims to ensure that care responsibilities are shared fairly among the state, the private sector, and households, particularly with the participation of men. This framework forms the basis of UN Women's work on care work and will also guide the discussions you will have in this committee.

3. Agenda Item: Recognition of Care Work and Women's Economic Empowerment

2.1 The Concept of Care Work and Its Global Dimension

The concept of care work refers to a reality that has existed since the dawn of humanity but has been rendered invisible within economic systems. Activities such as childcare, care for the elderly and sick, housework, cooking, cleaning, and meeting the daily needs of family members are all considered care work. Although these activities are essential services that keep a society functioning, they have long been viewed as work with no economic value and have not been included in national accounts. However, research conducted by the International Labor Organization reveals that the economic value of care work globally amounts to trillions of dollars. Despite this enormous economic magnitude, the vast majority of those who perform care work do so without receiving any pay and remain invisible within the economic system.

When looking at the global dimension of care work, the picture that emerges is quite striking. According to United Nations data, women worldwide spend three times more time on unpaid care work than men. This ratio means that women spend an average of 4.5 hours per day on unpaid care work, while men spend only 1.5 hours. In some regions, this gap widens even further, with women in South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa spending up to six times more time on unpaid care work than men. This situation leads to a concept known as women's time poverty, preventing women from finding time for basic human activities such as education, employment, and rest. According to the ILO's 2018 report on Care Work and Care Services, if unpaid care work were to be calculated in economic terms, it would contribute \$11 trillion annually to global GDP, a figure almost equal to the combined total of the world's three largest economies.

The impact of care work on women is not limited to the economic dimension; it also profoundly affects women's participation in social and political life. Women who cannot find the time due to the burden of unpaid care work are unable to take advantage of professional development opportunities, participate in politics, and may even experience difficulties accessing basic health services. World Bank data shows that the rate of women's participation in the workforce worldwide lags behind that of men by approximately twenty-five points, and that one of the most significant reasons for this gap is the burden of unpaid care work. Women's inability to participate in the workforce not only hinders economic independence at the individual level but also makes it difficult for countries to achieve their development goals. Research shows that every one percentage point increase in women's labor force participation rate leads to significant growth in a country's GDP, demonstrating that solving the care work problem is actually a development issue.

Gender norms constitute one of the fundamental reasons for this disproportionate burden of care work on women. Throughout history, in many cultures, housework and caregiving responsibilities have been seen as women's natural duties, and the economic and social value of this work has not been questioned. These norms manifest themselves in encouraging girls to help with housework from an early age, while exempting boys from these responsibilities, and are passed down from generation to generation. Social structures such as education systems, the media, and religious institutions also play an important role in reinforcing these norms. However, achieving gender equality requires breaking down these stereotypes and ensuring that caregiving responsibilities are shared fairly between women and men. For this reason, international organizations, led by UN Women, are implementing various programs to transform gender norms and encourage men's participation in caregiving responsibilities.

The lack of recognition of care work also increases women's risk of poverty. Women who are unable to earn a regular income due to unpaid care work become more vulnerable to economic shocks and face the risk of falling into poverty in situations such as divorce, the death of a spouse, or unemployment. This phenomenon, known as the feminization of poverty, means that the majority of people living below the poverty line worldwide are women. According to World Bank data, women make up 55% of adults living in extreme poverty worldwide, and this percentage is even higher in some regions. Women's poverty affects not only themselves but also the children and elderly they are responsible for caring for, causing the cycle of poverty to continue for generations. Therefore, recognizing care work and empowering women economically is of strategic importance in terms of combating poverty and sustainable development.

2.2 The Economic and Social Dimensions of Care Work

When considering the economic dimensions of care work, it is evident that this labor plays a vital role not only within households but also within national economies. This field, referred to as the care economy, encompasses not only direct care services but also other economic activities made possible by these services. For example, a woman caring for her child at home enables her husband to go to work and contribute to economic production. Similarly, without unpaid care services, many families would have to purchase care services from outside sources, placing a significant burden on the household budget. Therefore, unpaid care work actually functions as an invisible subsidy to the economic system, ensuring the survival of the market economy. As feminist economists have emphasized for many years, no economic system can function without unpaid care labor because the reproduction of the workforce—that is, the nourishment, rest, and upbringing of workers and the future workforce—is only possible through this labor.

The social dimensions of care work are at least as important as its economic dimensions. Care services encompass not only the fulfillment of physical needs but also functions such as emotional support, socialization, and cultural transmission. Activities such as teaching children language, transmitting values, and instilling social norms all take place within the scope of care work and ensure the cultural continuity of society. Caring for the elderly and sick is also critically important not only in terms of meeting medical needs, but also in terms of ensuring a life worthy of human dignity and strengthening social solidarity. Therefore, supporting care services through public policies and professionalizing them will not only lighten the burden on women but also improve the quality of life for all segments of society.

The effects of care work on women are also evident in terms of access to educational opportunities. Girls, especially in rural areas and low-income families, take on more housework and care responsibilities than their brothers, which reduces their school attendance rates and negatively affects their educational achievement. According to UNESCO data, household chores and caregiving responsibilities are among the top reasons for primary school-aged girls not attending school worldwide. This gap widens at the secondary level, with adolescent girls sometimes forced to drop out of school due to household chores and caring for siblings. Girls who do not have equal access to educational opportunities are also disadvantaged in the labor market as adults, forced to work in low-paying and insecure jobs or remain outside the labor force altogether. This creates a vicious cycle that contributes to the intergenerational transmission of female poverty.

A similar picture emerges regarding women's participation in the workforce. Women who are unable to participate in working life or are forced to work part-time due to unpaid care responsibilities are unable to advance in their careers, are not promoted, and face low incomes in retirement. According to ILO data, while the female labor force participation rate worldwide is around 47 percent, the rate for men is 74 percent. Much of the 27-point difference stems from the unpaid care burden on women. Working women are forced to take on caregiving responsibilities at home in addition to their work responsibilities, leading to a phenomenon known as the double shift. The double shift means that women work more, rest less, and are exposed to more stress than men, which negatively affects their physical and mental health.

Another important aspect of care work is that it is largely carried out in informal and precarious conditions. Women working in paid care jobs often face low wages, long working hours, a lack of social security, and poor working conditions. Occupational groups such as domestic workers, childcare workers, and elderly caregivers are excluded from labor laws in most countries or lack adequate protection. While ILO Convention No. 189 on Domestic Workers is an important step in this area, there are significant shortcomings in its transposition into domestic law and implementation by signatory states. Migrant women constitute the most vulnerable group in the care sector, forced to work in even worse conditions due to the uncertainty of their legal status, language barriers, and discrimination. Therefore, the recognition of care work should cover not only unpaid care work but also the safeguarding of the rights of those working in paid care jobs.

2.3 International Legal and Policy Framework

The recognition of care work and the economic empowerment of women have increasingly been addressed in international legal and policy documents. The most important international document in this area is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Adopted in 1979 and ratified by 189 countries, CEDAW defines discrimination against women and obliges state parties to take the necessary measures to end such discrimination. Article 11 of the Convention regulates women's right to work and specifically envisages the removal of barriers women face in working life due to family responsibilities. In addition to the Convention, the general recommendations published by the CEDAW Committee also clarify the issue of care work. In particular, General Recommendation No. 37, published in 2017, emphasizes the need to reduce the burden of unpaid care work on girls and women and to share this responsibility fairly between women and men.

Another important international document is the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. This document provides the most comprehensive international policy framework for the economic empowerment of women and calls for the recognition of unpaid care work, the acknowledgment of its value, and its inclusion in national accounts. The section of the Platform for Action entitled “Women and the Economy” recommends strengthening the capacity of national statistical offices to measure and value unpaid work, conducting time-use surveys, and using this data in policy-making processes. This issue has remained on the agenda during the Beijing+5, Beijing+10, Beijing+15, and Beijing+20 processes, and countries' progress in this area has been monitored.

The Sustainable Development Goals have ensured that the issue of care work has been elevated to the top of the international development agenda. Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015, Gender Equality, directly refers to care work in its target 5.4. According to this target, unpaid care and domestic work will be recognized and valued through public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies, and these responsibilities will be shared fairly between women and men. SDG 5.4 aims not only to recognize care work but also to reduce and redistribute it, thus fully aligning with UN Women's 3R framework. Furthermore, other goals such as SDGs 1, 3, 4, 8, and 10 are directly or indirectly related to the issue of care work, and achieving these goals depends on resolving the care work problem.

The International Labour Organization is one of the leading organizations conducting the most comprehensive studies on care work. The ILO's 2018 report on Care Work and Care Services provides a comprehensive analysis of the global care economy and develops policy recommendations. The report estimates that investment in care services will not only increase women's employment but also create nearly 300 million new jobs by 2030. The ILO also provides a framework for improving the working conditions and protecting the rights of domestic workers through its Domestic Workers Convention, No. 189. This Convention emphasizes that domestic workers should have equal rights with other workers and introduces regulations on issues such as working hours, weekly rest, minimum wage, and social security.

The World Bank is also showing increasing interest in the issue of care work, particularly through its Women, Business and the Law reports, which provide a comparative analysis of countries' legal frameworks that promote women's economic participation. These reports document the negative impact of unpaid care burdens on women's labor force participation and highlight the importance of policies such as childcare services, maternity leave, and paternity leave. The World Bank also implements loan and grant programs in various countries to develop care services and empower women economically. Regional development banks and other international financial institutions also contribute to strengthening the care economy through similar programs.

2.4 Recognition and Measurement of Care Work

Recognition of care work means making this work visible and accepting its economic value. Recognition should not remain merely symbolic; it must also be supported by concrete policy measures. The first step in recognizing care work is to measure it and make it statistically visible. To this end, many countries conduct time-use surveys, measuring the time women and men devote to daily activities and incorporating this data into national statistical systems. Time use surveys not only reveal the extent of unpaid care work, but also provide the basic data source for calculating the distribution, intensity, and economic value of this work. The United Nations Statistical Commission is working to standardize time use surveys and ensure international comparability.

The inclusion of unpaid care work in national accounts constitutes another important dimension of the recognition process. Traditional national accounts cover only market transactions, leaving unpaid care work outside their scope. However, the System of National Accounts developed by the United Nations encourages member states to create satellite accounts that also cover non-market activities. These accounts, known as care satellite accounts, calculate the monetary value of unpaid care work and present it alongside the main national accounts. This allows policymakers to see the size of the care economy, calculate the return on investment in this area, and make more informed decisions about resource allocation. Countries such as Mexico, South Korea, Spain, and Turkey have pioneered efforts to establish care satellite accounts.

Recognizing care work also means acknowledging its social value and appreciating women's contributions in this area. To this end, awareness campaigns are being organized in various countries, the importance of care work is being emphasized through the media, and care issues are being included in education curricula. Gender-responsive budgeting practices also contribute to the recognition of care work by analyzing the impact of public resources on women and men and ensuring that more resources are allocated to care services. Countries such as Australia, South Africa, Spain, and Sweden have significant experience in gender-responsive budgeting.

Another step that can be taken to recognize care work is to recognize care services as a profession and to guarantee the rights of those working in this field. Professions such as domestic work, childcare, and eldercare are included in official occupational classifications in many countries, but the status and wage levels of these professions are generally low. Enhancing the prestige of these professions, developing education and certification programs, establishing minimum wage standards, and including them in social security coverage are critical for the recognition of care work. ILO Convention No. 189 serves as an important guide in this area and obliges member states to take the necessary measures to protect the rights of domestic workers.

2.5 Reducing the Care Burden and Infrastructure Investments

Reducing the care burden means alleviating the unpaid care responsibilities placed on women, thereby enabling them to devote more time to activities such as education, employment, and leisure. One of the most effective ways to reduce the care burden is to support care services through public policies and establish adequate infrastructure in this area. Institutional care services such as nurseries, kindergartens, after-school care centers, nursing homes, and daycare centers significantly reduce the care burden on women and facilitate their participation in the workforce. Many European countries, particularly the Scandinavian countries, have succeeded in raising women's labor force participation rates to over 70% thanks to widespread and accessible public care services.

Infrastructure investments also play a critical role in reducing the burden of care. Basic infrastructure services such as access to clean water, electricity, transportation, and communication directly affect the care burden on women, especially in rural areas. Activities such as carrying water, collecting firewood, and cooking require women in areas with inadequate infrastructure services to spend hours every day, preventing them from finding time for activities such as education, employment, and rest. According to World Bank data, investments in water and energy infrastructure significantly reduce the burden of care on women and increase women's participation in the workforce. Therefore, development projects must take into account the gender dimension of infrastructure investments and consider women's needs.

Technological innovations also hold significant potential for reducing the burden of care. Household appliances such as washing machines, dishwashers, and vacuum cleaners have significantly reduced the time spent on household chores; however, even the widespread adoption of these technologies has not eliminated the burden of care on women. Today, new technologies such as smart home technologies, remote healthcare services, and online education platforms have the potential to enable care services to be delivered more efficiently and effectively. However, for technological developments to contribute to gender equality, access to these technologies must be equal, and women must be involved in technology design processes. Otherwise, technological developments may further deepen existing inequalities.

The role of the private sector in reducing the burden of care should not be overlooked. Employers providing daycare support, implementing flexible working hours, and offering remote working opportunities alleviate the care burden on working parents and make it easier for women to remain in the workforce. In some countries, employers are required to open daycare centers, or tax incentives are provided to employers who provide daycare support. Support for care services can also be provided within the scope of corporate social responsibility projects. The private sector's contribution to the care economy should not be limited to services for its employees but should also be extended to the wider community. Therefore, public-private partnerships can be an effective model for developing and expanding care services.

2.6 Redistribution of Care Responsibilities and Male Participation

The redistribution of care responsibilities means removing this responsibility from solely resting on women's shoulders and sharing it fairly among the state, private sector, society, and households. One of the most important aspects of redistribution is increasing men's participation in care responsibilities. Gender norms discourage men from engaging in care work, often limiting the role of fatherhood to financial provision. However, men's active participation in childcare, eldercare, and housework not only lightens the burden on women but also contributes to children's development, strengthens family relationships, and promotes gender equality.

Paternity leave is one of the most effective ways to encourage men's participation in caregiving responsibilities. While maternity leave is guaranteed by law in many countries, paternity leave practices remain quite limited. However, paternity leave ensures that fathers participate in the care of their children from birth, helps fathers develop their caregiving skills, and lays the foundation for a more equal sharing of caregiving responsibilities in the long term. Scandinavian countries such as Sweden, Norway, and Iceland encourage men's participation in caregiving through generous paternity leave policies, with some countries even making a certain portion of paternity leave mandatory. Thanks to these policies, the amount of time fathers in Scandinavian countries devote to childcare is well above the global average.

Education and awareness-raising efforts also play an important role in increasing men's participation in caregiving responsibilities. Starting with preschool education, children should be taught that caregiving tasks are not solely the responsibility of women and that men should also share this responsibility. Media campaigns showcase male role models participating in caregiving tasks, contributing to the transformation of social norms. UN Women's HeForShe campaign encourages men to actively participate in the fight for gender equality and emphasizes that men must also take responsibility in this regard. Fatherhood programs run by civil society organizations help men develop their parenting skills and participate more actively in childcare.

The role of the state should not be limited to paternity leave regulations, but should also include the expansion and accessibility of public care services. Public care services such as nurseries, kindergartens, after-school care centers, and nursing homes mean that the state assumes responsibility for care, thereby lightening the burden on women. In addition, support can be provided to families with care responsibilities through tax policies and social assistance programs. Through practices known as care credits, the state covers the pension contributions of women who perform unpaid care work, thereby aiming to provide women with economic security in their old age. Practices implemented in Turkey, such as maternity leave, and practices in Germany, such as counting child-rearing periods toward retirement, can be cited as examples of care work being recognized by social security systems.

2.7 Recognition of the Economic Value of Care Work and Policies

Recognition of the economic value of care work means acknowledging its place in national economies and taking it into account in policy-making processes. The economic value of care work is not limited to the monetary equivalent of unpaid care work; it also includes employment created in the care sector, spending on care services, and the care economy's links to other sectors. According to ILO calculations, investments in the care sector have the potential to create nearly 300 million new jobs by 2030, with a significant portion of these jobs providing employment opportunities for women. Furthermore, investments in care services have a high economic multiplier effect; that is, every unit of investment in the care sector leads to economic growth in other sectors as well.

Investments in the care economy are critical not only for economic growth but also for social development. Quality care services support children's healthy development, improve school performance, and enhance the quality of the future workforce. Care services for the elderly and sick ensure that dependent individuals live with dignity and alleviate the care burden on families. Furthermore, expanding care services contributes to economic growth by increasing women's participation in the workforce and helps reduce poverty. Therefore, investments in the care economy should be seen not as a cost but as an investment in the future.

Recognizing the economic value of care work also requires improving the wages and working conditions of those employed in the care sector. The care sector is characterized by low wages, long working hours, a lack of social security, and poor working conditions. This situation is also a gender inequality issue, given that the vast majority of those working in the care sector are women. Increasing the wages of care workers, improving their working conditions, and developing vocational training and certification programs will contribute to the economic empowerment of women working in this field and improve the quality of care services. ILO Convention No. 189 serves as an important guide in this area and obliges member states to take the necessary measures to protect the rights of domestic workers.

Countries' care policies vary depending on factors such as economic development level, social welfare tradition, cultural norms, and political will. Scandinavian countries stand out for their widespread and accessible public care services, generous maternity and paternity leave policies, and strong legal protections for care sector workers. In continental European countries, care services are generally provided through a mixed model, with the private sector and civil society organizations playing an important role alongside public services. In southern European countries, while the tradition of family solidarity is stronger, steps have been taken in recent years to expand public care services. In developing countries, care services are generally inadequate, the burden of care on women is much heavier, and the informal care sector is widespread. These differences will cause countries to approach the discussions in the UN Women committee from different perspectives and may make it difficult to find a common solution.

2.8 The Visible Future of Invisible Labor

The recognition of care work and the economic empowerment of women are among the most important development and human rights issues of the 21st century. Scientific data have shown that women globally spend three times more unpaid care work than men, that this situation seriously limits women's education, employment, and political participation, and that it is one of the fundamental causes of female poverty. Gender norms play a significant role in perpetuating this inequality, with stereotypes that care responsibilities are women's natural duty being passed down from generation to generation.

The international community is increasingly recognizing the importance of care work and is implementing various regulations in this area. Numerous international documents, notably CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Sustainable Development Goals, call for the recognition, reduction, and redistribution of care work. However, there are significant gaps in the implementation of international norms at the national level, and differences in development and cultural differences between countries make it difficult to develop common policies.

Finding a solution to the issue of care work requires a multidimensional and holistic approach. Supporting care services through public policies, increasing paid and secure care employment, encouraging men to participate in care responsibilities, and recognizing the economic value of care work are the fundamental elements of this holistic approach. In addition, infrastructure investments, technological innovations, education and awareness campaigns, tax policies, and social protection systems also play an important role in alleviating the burden of care.

2.9 Key Countries

This section will examine the situations, policies, and international stances of the countries represented on the committee regarding care work and the economic empowerment of women. Each country develops different approaches to the issue of care work within the framework of its own socio-economic structure, cultural dynamics, and development priorities. This diversity will enrich the committee discussions and develop your negotiation skills for producing common solutions.

Afghanistan is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world in terms of women's rights and care work. After the Taliban took power in 2021, the process of excluding women from public life accelerated. Today, the vast majority of women in Afghanistan remain outside the labor market, girls are not sent to school after sixth grade, and women are banned from attending university. This situation condemns women entirely to the domestic sphere and unpaid care work. According to United Nations data, almost all Afghan women are forced to spend most of their daily lives doing activities such as housework, childcare, and eldercare, are unable to earn any economic income, and face great difficulties even in accessing basic health services. Despite this, UN Women and other international organizations continue their work to empower Afghan women economically, supporting women's entrepreneurship in permitted areas and providing vocational training to women for home-based economic activities. The example of Afghanistan starkly illustrates how care work can render women completely invisible and the societal consequences of depriving women of economic independence.

Saudi Arabia has implemented significant reforms in recent years to increase women's participation in the workforce. Under the Vision 2030 program led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the female labor force participation rate has risen from 17.5 percent to 35 percent over the past six years. These reforms include allowing women to drive, partially relaxing the guardianship system, and encouraging female employment in the retail sector. However, the female labor force participation rate in Saudi Arabia is still well below the global average, and the female unemployment rate is three times higher than that of men. In terms of care work, the burden of childcare, which has traditionally fallen on women in Saudi Arabia, is one of the biggest obstacles to women's participation in the workforce. Developing and expanding the childcare sector is among the government's priorities, but the problem of insufficient quality and accessible nursery services persists. As Saudi Arabia transforms into a more conservative society, it is seeking to develop policies to reduce the impact of the care burden on women.

India, as one of the world's most populous countries, exhibits great diversity and complexity in terms of care work. The female labor force participation rate in India has been declining in recent years, and one of the main reasons for this decline is the unpaid care burden on women. In rural areas, women spend an average of more than five hours a day on basic care activities such as fetching water, collecting firewood, and cooking, making it nearly impossible for them to work in paid jobs or pursue education. In urban areas, even in middle-class families, women take on the bulk of housework and childcare, making it difficult for them to advance in their careers. The Indian government has launched programs in recent years to expand daycare services, but there are significant shortcomings in the quality and accessibility of these services. In addition, millions of women working in the informal economy are employed in the care sector for low wages, without any social security.

Despite being one of Europe's leading economies, the UK is a country that has been criticized for its care work and parental leave policies. The shared parental leave system, which came into effect in 2015, aimed to balance the burden of care between women and men, but has encountered significant problems in practice. Only 5% of fathers in the UK take shared parental leave, mainly due to the complexity of the system, the requirement for the mother to agree to share the leave, and low-paid leave payments. Although there is a legal entitlement to 52 weeks of maternity leave, only the first six weeks are paid at 90% of the mother's salary, with the remaining 33 weeks paid at a low rate of just £187 per week, and the final 13 weeks are unpaid. The two weeks of leave granted to fathers are similarly low-paid. This situation prevents parents, especially those in low-income families, from fully exercising their leave rights and causes women to continue to bear the burden of care. Furthermore, research shows that both mothers and fathers are reluctant to take leave due to career concerns and fear of discrimination in the workplace.

Germany is one of Europe's most advanced countries in terms of care work and parental leave policies. The parental leave system in Germany is designed to encourage both mothers and fathers to participate in childcare. Each parent is entitled to up to three years of parental leave per child and can receive parental allowance paid by the state during this period. The use of parental leave by fathers in particular is increasing in Germany, contributing to a more equal sharing of childcare responsibilities. Parental leave in Germany applies not only to biological children, but also to the spouse's children, foster children, and adopted children. In addition, parental leave can also be taken to care for grandchildren or nieces and nephews in exceptional cases. Germany's extensive network of daycare centers and after-school care services also facilitates women's participation in the workforce, raising the country's overall female employment rate above the European average. The German model serves as an important example in terms of the state assuming responsibility for childcare and encouraging men to participate in caregiving.

Turkey is experiencing a transition period between traditional gender norms and modern economic requirements regarding care work. The female labor force participation rate in Turkey is less than half that of men, and one of the most important reasons for this is the unpaid care burden on women. Activities such as housework, childcare, and caring for the elderly and sick are traditionally seen as women's responsibilities, which prevents women from taking advantage of education and employment opportunities. In recent years, Turkey has introduced maternity leave benefits, allowing women's child-rearing periods to count toward their retirement, and has introduced various incentives to expand daycare services. However, the inadequacy of public childcare services, the limited availability of flexible working models, and the underdeveloped paternity leave practices remain obstacles to alleviating the burden of care on women. In Turkey, the vast majority of women working in the paid care sector, such as domestic workers and childcare providers, are employed informally, lacking social security and working for low wages.

The United States is one of the few developed countries that does not have a federally paid parental leave policy. There is no federal-level mandatory regulation regarding maternity leave, paternity leave, or parental leave in the US; this issue is left to the initiative of states and employers. Although some regulations grant unpaid leave, low-income women are forced to return to work immediately after giving birth for economic reasons, which negatively affects both mothers' health and babies' development. Although women's participation in the workforce is high in the US, women perform more unpaid care work than men, which hinders their career advancement. During the pandemic in particular, the closure of schools and restrictions on daycare forced millions of women to leave the workforce, once again highlighting the impact of the care burden on women. Although some states have established paid leave systems within their own jurisdictions, the lack of a comprehensive federal policy places the US in an exceptional position among developed countries in terms of care work.

Syria has been experiencing a deep crisis in terms of care work and women's economic situation due to the civil war that has been ongoing for over a decade. Millions of people have been displaced by the war, families have been torn apart, and women who have lost their husbands have been forced to provide for their families. This situation has meant that Syrian women, who traditionally performed unpaid care work in the home, have suddenly become the breadwinners of the household as well as the caregivers for their children and elderly relatives. Syrian women living in refugee camps and temporary settlements are forced to devote much more time to tasks such as carrying water, cooking, and childcare due to inadequate basic services, and are unable to find paid work. Syrian refugee women living in neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, on the other hand, generally work in informal and low-paid jobs, having to bear both the burden of care at home and the difficulties of working life.

Pakistan is one of the countries where women's participation in the workforce is low, and the burden of unpaid care work places heavy pressure on women. In Pakistan, women, especially in rural areas, spend most of their days on activities such as housework, fetching water, caring for animals, and raising children, leaving them no time to work in paid employment. In many parts of the country, girls are not sent to school, are married off at an early age, and are directed towards housework, causing the burden of care to be passed down from generation to generation. The Pakistani government has launched various programs in recent years to empower women economically, but the impact of these programs has been limited. Furthermore, the influx of refugees into Pakistan due to developments in Afghanistan has further increased the burden of care on women, especially in border areas.

Despite being one of the world's youngest countries, South Sudan faces major problems in terms of the situation of women due to internal conflicts and political instability. Thousands of children in the country have been used as child soldiers during internal conflicts, causing girls in particular to suffer the trauma of war and be deprived of their rights to education and care. Women in South Sudan traditionally bear a heavy burden of care; almost all activities, such as water collection, wood gathering, childcare, and agricultural production, are carried out by women. International organizations are implementing programs to rehabilitate and reintegrate former child soldiers into society in South Sudan, and are providing vocational training to empower women economically.

Norway is one of the world's most advanced countries in terms of care work and gender equality. Thanks to generous parental leave policies, mandatory paternity leave, and widespread public childcare services, the female labor force participation rate in Norway is over 70%. In the Norwegian model, a certain portion of parental leave is allocated to fathers, and if it is not used, this time is lost. This practice encourages fathers to actively participate in childcare and ensures a more equal sharing of care responsibilities. Norway also implements policies to improve the wages and working conditions of those employed in the care sector, thereby increasing the quality of care services while providing economic security for women working in the sector.

China, as the country with the world's largest population, has unique dynamics regarding care work. The implementation of the one-child policy for many years has led to a rapid increase in the elderly population and a growing need for care. Traditionally, elderly care has been provided within the family, particularly by women, but urbanization and the increasing participation of women in the workforce are challenging this traditional structure. In recent years, the Chinese government has implemented policies to expand daycare services and build nursing homes, but there are significant shortcomings in the quality and accessibility of these services. China also generally takes a diplomatic and cautious stance on women's rights and care work in international forums, emphasizing that it is an internal matter.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a country where women face significant challenges due to humanitarian crises in conflict zones and widespread poverty. Armed groups operating in the eastern regions perpetrate violence against women, abducting girls to use them as child soldiers or sexual slaves. This situation deprives girls of their rights to education and care, further increasing the burden of caregiving on women. Women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo traditionally undertake almost all activities related to agricultural production, water collection, wood gathering, childcare, and eldercare, and are unable to find paid employment. International organizations are implementing various programs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to rehabilitate former child soldiers, empower women economically, and improve care services.

North Korea, one of the world's most closed countries, lacks reliable data on care work and the status of women. While official rhetoric emphasizes gender equality, in practice, women are responsible for housework and childcare in accordance with traditional gender roles, and their participation in the workforce occurs within quotas set by the state. International sanctions and economic hardship have further increased the burden of care on women in North Korea, requiring them to exert greater effort to meet basic needs.

Russia has inherited a widespread network of daycare centers and maternity leave policies from the Soviet era, but these services have significantly declined since the 1990s. Although women's labor force participation rate is relatively high in Russia today, women still bear the bulk of household chores and childcare, which hinders their career advancement. The Russian government has implemented policies in recent years aimed at increasing birth rates and providing financial support to families with multiple children, but there has been insufficient investment in the quality and accessibility of care services. The economic difficulties and humanitarian crisis exacerbated by the war in Ukraine have further increased the burden of care on women, particularly those living in war zones.

4. Questions to be Concerned

1. How can governments design tax and social security policies to encourage women's participation in the formal labor force?
2. How can the international community support women entrepreneurs' access to credit, loans, and financial services, particularly in developing countries?
3. What measures can be taken to close the gender pay gap and ensure equal pay for equal work across all sectors?
4. What types of accountability mechanisms can the international community establish to monitor progress in women's economic empowerment and ensure commitments are implemented?
5. What policies can be implemented to support women's transition from informal employment to formal, secure, and socially protected jobs?
6. How can countries eliminate workplace discrimination against women, particularly during pregnancy, maternity, and childcare years?

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Sincerely,

Miraç Çağlayan Ekici
Head of Academy