



# TIME TO CARE

Unpaid and underpaid care work and the global inequality crisis

**SUMMARY**

**EVEN  
IT UP**



**OXFAM**

## OXFAM SUMMARY – JANUARY 2020

Economic inequality is out of control. In 2019, the world's billionaires, only 2,153 people, had more wealth than 4.6 billion people. This great divide is based on a flawed and sexist economic system that values the wealth of the privileged few, mostly men, more than the billions of hours of the most essential work – the unpaid and underpaid care work done primarily by women and girls around the world. Tending to others, cooking, cleaning, fetching water and firewood are essential daily tasks for the wellbeing of societies, communities and the functioning of the economy. The heavy and unequal responsibility of care work perpetuates gender and economic inequalities.

This has to change. Governments around the world must act now to build a human economy that is feminist and values what truly matters to society, rather than fuelling an endless pursuit of profit and wealth. Investing in national care systems to address the disproportionate responsibility for care work done by women and girls and introducing progressive taxation, including taxing wealth and legislating in favour of carers, are possible and crucial first steps.

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This paper was written by Clare Coffey, Patricia Espinoza Revollo, Rowan Harvey, Max Lawson, Anam Parvez Butt, Kim Piaget, Diana Sarosi and Julie Thekkudan.

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email [advocacy@oxfaminternational.org](mailto:advocacy@oxfaminternational.org)

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Cover photo: Clarice Akinyi washes clothes in Mashimoni village, Nairobi, Kenya. Clarice is proud to be a domestic worker but was frustrated and angry at the bad treatment by employers. Clarice is now an active member of the Wezesha Jamii project, in which women work together to support each other and improve their community. Photo: Katie G. Nelson/Oxfam (2017)

# FOREWORDS



**ROWENA ABEO,  
DAY CARE WORKER,  
SALCEDO TOWN,  
EASTERN SAMAR,  
PHILIPPINES**

My name is Rowena and I am a day care worker from Salcedo Town in the Philippines.

In the past in my community, women used to just work in the house – cooking, cleaning and taking care of children. They also fetched water. Men had more opportunities than women. With all the work that was assigned to women, we could never catch up with the men in our community. There would always be a gap between women and men – with the amount of money they earned, with the education they got or with the time they could spend on things outside the house.

I've been a day care worker in a school for ten years. And I'm also a housewife. Being a housewife takes so much time. I have so many things to do that I can't finish right away. The heaviest housework is fetching water. It takes us three to four hours to go and get water because our water source is far. We have to go to the river and lift our own water cans.

In the past, my husband didn't help in the household at all. It was a lot of work that I had to do on top of what I did in the school, but my husband and I didn't question it. That changed when we started to attend trainings and seminars and learned about unpaid care work. Now he always helps around the house. He helps me do the housework, like cooking, doing the laundry, and cleaning the house, especially when I am working in the school.

We also have water tanks now through the help of Oxfam and SIKAT\*. We finally have taps and a hose, so we don't have to carry water cans and pails anymore. We spend less time fetching water now. While we wait for the water to fill our water cans and drums, we can focus on other work.

Not being responsible for all the work alone or having to walk long hours to get the water we need, changes who I am. I have more time to help in the community. We have a Self-Help Group, a group for women who live near each other. We help in *barangay* (village) clean-up drives, and in other activities where women are involved in the community. It's where we also get funding for our livelihood, for the school fees of our children and for emergencies.

There are many communities where women are still struggling a lot. I am happy that now there is equality here between women and men. Women are more empowered. Someday I hope this will happen not just here in Salcedo, but hopefully in the whole Philippines.

\* SIKAT – Sentro para sa Ikauunlad ng Katutubong Agham at Teknolohiya – is a non-profit, non-government organization in the Philippines. It envisions empowered, sustainable and resilient coastal communities that call for transparent, accountable, participatory and responsive government programmes and processes. With the WE-Care programme, SIKAT works with women-led self-help groups and men to mobilize community members in disaster preparedness and economic empowerment.



**REEMA NANAVATY,  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
SELF-EMPLOYED  
WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION  
(SEWA)**

It is a well-known fact that despite being the backbone of informal workers' families, the poorest of poor in the world are women workers. The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), which I serve, is the largest trade union of poor informal sector women workers in India, with a membership of more than 1.9 million women workers. SEWA strongly believes that poverty is the worst form of violence perpetrated with the consent of society. Only work, a steady source of employment, and asset ownership can reduce this violence.

From SEWA's experience working with these poor women workers from the informal sector, we have learned that for these women workers, access to care-services is a basic right. If women do not have access to affordable care services, they have to shoulder the care responsibilities of the family, and either reduce their number of work hours and thus income or entrust the elder children with this responsibility – thereby compromising their education. Our founder Ela Bhatt said: 'Women should be paid full-time wages, even if they work part-time.' Only then can one break women's fall into starker poverty.

In our experience, poor women workers do not only contribute to their family and national economy, but also to natural ecology. Therefore, SEWA believes that care work should be considered as skilled work and paid at par with other skilled work. Organizing care workers, building their capacity, designing proper curriculum and training to improve the quality of their services, certification and enabling policies for care givers would bring dignity and self-respect to these workers, and also set standards for the care economy. And this should not start from the top down, but from the care worker herself.

However, we also believe that care services should not replace family care, especially in the informal sector, because informal sector workers often work as a family. Family and care cannot be completely segregated. There is a need to establish this delicate balance.

Never have we faced such an opportunity for welcoming and valuing the work of millions of care workers in the mainstream economy, be it formal or informal. Oxfam's report 'Time to Care' shows us the nature and extent of this opportunity. And if we grab it, we will all move closer to what SEWA calls 'Building an Economy of Nurturance' – a society where economic growth is non-violent.



**DJAFFAR SHALCHI,**  
FOUNDER AND CHAIR  
OF THE BOARD, HUMAN  
ACT FOUNDATION

People sometimes call me a ‘self-made’ multi-millionaire. Nothing could be further from the truth. Yes, I have worked hard in my life. I am proud of what I have achieved. But the truth is I could not have done any of this without help from the Danish welfare system, and the taxes paid by the people to create our happy and equal society.

I was born in Tehran, Iran in 1961. My family moved to Denmark when I was a child, after a series of rejected immigration applications, forced separations and the turmoil in my birth country pushed my family to our limits. I finished my education here, married a Danish woman and had two amazing children, and built my fortune as a self-employed entrepreneur.

I credit my good fortune to Denmark and its robust, inclusive social system that values equality and opportunity for everyone. My country has embraced an advanced social tax system and the tax revenues are used to invest in the people of Denmark. Our tax revenues give everyone health, education and a strong social support system, including universal childcare.

It is quite simple. If we want fairer, more equal and happier societies, then the richest have to pay their fair share of tax. When a billionaire is paying a lower rate of tax than their secretary, something is deeply wrong with society.

I think it is not surprising that some are calling for the abolition of billionaires. They see that these super-rich people think that there is one rule for them, and another for ordinary people.

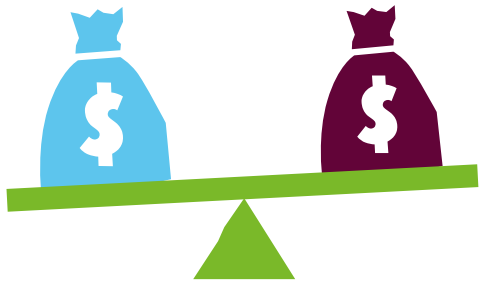
We must tax wealth properly. The rich must pay their fair share of tax. Just a 1% tax on billionaire wealth for example could raise billions to fight global poverty and reduce inequality.

Are we prepared to build a fair society in which wealth and power – including political power – are evenly distributed? Are we ready to resist the myth that poverty is a natural phenomenon – something that will always be there – no matter what we do?

These are the most important questions of our time. Oxfam’s report ‘Time to Care’ addresses these questions and shows that with the right political decisions inequality and poverty can be tackled. Together we must fight economic inequality, structural violence, discrimination and exclusion, environmental destruction and despotic ideology so that the future of our world looks brighter for all of us. There is no time to lose, time is running out.

# TIME TO CARE<sup>1</sup>

The world's billionaires, only **2,153 PEOPLE** in 2019, have more wealth between them than **4.6 BILLION PEOPLE**.



The combined wealth of the world's 22 richest men is more than the wealth of all the women in Africa.



If you saved \$10,000 a day since the building of the pyramids in Egypt you would have only one-fifth the average fortune of the 5 richest billionaires.

The world's **RICHEST 1%** have more than twice as much wealth as **6.9 BILLION PEOPLE**.



The monetary value of **UNPAID CARE WORK** globally for women aged 15 and over is at least \$10.8 trillion annually –three times the size of the world's **TECH INDUSTRY**.



Taxing an additional 0.5% of the wealth of the richest 1% over the next 10 years is equal to investments needed to create:



**117 MILLION JOBS**

in education, health and elderly care and other sectors, and to close care deficits.

# SUMMARY

## A TALE OF TWO EXTREMES

Economic inequality is out of control. In 2019, the world's billionaires, only 2,153 people, had more wealth than 4.6 billion people.<sup>2</sup> The richest 22 men in the world own more wealth than all the women in Africa.<sup>3</sup> These extremes of wealth exist alongside great poverty. New World Bank estimates show that almost half of the world's population live on less than \$5.50 a day, and the rate of poverty reduction has halved since 2013.<sup>4</sup>

**IN 2019, THE WORLD'S BILLIONAIRES, ONLY 2,153 PEOPLE, HAD MORE WEALTH THAN 4.6 BILLION PEOPLE.**

This great divide is based on a flawed and sexist economic system. This broken economic model has accumulated vast wealth and power into the hands of a rich few, in part by exploiting the labour of women and girls, and systematically violating their rights.

At the top of the global economy a small elite are unimaginably rich. Their wealth grows exponentially over time, with little effort and regardless of whether they add value to society.

Meanwhile, at the bottom of the economy, women and girls, especially women and girls living in poverty and from marginalized groups, are putting in 12.5 billion hours every day of care work for free,<sup>5</sup> and countless more for poverty wages. Their work is essential to our communities. It underpins thriving families and a healthy and productive workforce. Oxfam has calculated that this work adds value to the economy of at least \$10.8 trillion.<sup>6</sup> This figure, while huge, is an underestimate, and the true figure is far higher. Yet most of the financial benefits accrue to the richest, the majority of whom are men. This unjust system exploits and marginalizes the poorest women and girls, while increasing the wealth and power of a rich elite.

Without decisive action things will get far worse. Ageing populations, cuts in public spending, and climate change threaten to exacerbate further gender and economic inequality, and to fuel a spiralling crisis for care and carers. While the rich and powerful elite may be able to buy their way out of facing the worst of these crises, the poor and powerless will not.

Governments must take bold and decisive action to build a new, human economy that will deliver for everyone rather than a rich few, and that values care and wellbeing above profit and wealth.

**CARE WORK IS ESSENTIAL TO OUR COMMUNITIES. IT UNDERPINS THRIVING FAMILIES AND A HEALTHY AND PRODUCTIVE WORKFORCE.**

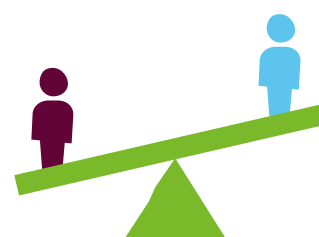
## THE SCALE OF THE GAP BETWEEN RICH AND POOR TODAY



A woman rides a scooter through a low-income neighbourhood that is surrounded by upscale developments on the outskirts of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Photo: Sam Tarling/Oxfam (2017)

The gap between the super-rich and the rest of society remains unimaginably huge.<sup>7</sup>

- In 2019, the world's billionaires, only 2,153 people, have more wealth than 4.6 billion people.
- The 22 richest men have more wealth than all the women in Africa.
- The world's richest 1% have more than twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people.
- If you saved \$10,000 a day since the building of the pyramids in Egypt you would have one-fifth the average fortune of the 5 richest billionaires.
- If everyone were to sit on their wealth piled up in \$100 bills, most of humanity would be sitting on the floor. A middle-class person in a rich country would be sitting at the height of a chair. The world's two richest men would be sitting in outer space.
- The monetary value of women's unpaid care work globally, for women aged 15 and over, is at least \$10.8 trillion annually – three times the size of the world's tech industry.
- Taxing an additional 0.5% of the wealth of the richest 1% over the next 10 years is equal to investments needed to create 117 million jobs in education, health and elderly care and other sectors, and to close care deficits.





## BOX 1

### MEASURING WEALTH INEQUALITY IN THE WORLD

When highlighting the extent of global economic inequality, Oxfam focuses primarily on wealth inequality, because it fuels the capture of power and politics and perpetuates inequality across generations.

In compiling the facts on economic inequality<sup>8</sup> for our annual reports Oxfam's wealth analysis makes use of the Credit Suisse Global Wealth report, as it is the most comprehensive dataset of global wealth distribution.<sup>9</sup> Collecting figures on wealth is very difficult due to the poor quality of much of the data. It is widely felt that the data used by Credit Suisse and others to estimate wealth systematically underestimates the true scale of wealth.<sup>10</sup>

There is an urgent need for much greater investment in wealth and wealth inequality data collection, so that every country can understand the true scale of the inequality crisis and can measure progress in tackling it.

### Leaders are failing to act, people are taking to the streets

Despite much handwringing about the divide between rich and poor, and the evidence of its corrosive effects, most world leaders are still pursuing policy agendas that drive a greater gap between the haves and the have nots. Strongman<sup>11</sup> leaders like President Trump in the US, and President Bolsonaro in Brazil, are exemplars of this trend. They are offering policies like tax cuts for billionaires,<sup>12</sup> obstructing measures to tackle the climate emergency, or turbo-charging racism,<sup>13</sup> sexism<sup>14</sup> and hatred of minorities.<sup>15</sup>

Faced with leaders like these, people everywhere are coming together to say enough is enough. From Chile to Germany, protests against inequality and climate chaos are huge. Millions are taking to the streets and risking their lives to demand an end to extreme inequality and demand a fairer, greener world.

Below: Naima Hammami, the first woman elected to the executive board of the National Trade Union Centre of Tunisia (Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail – UGTT), celebrating with colleagues. The Women Commission of the UGTT works on the participation of women in public and political space and the rights of women in the MENA region. Photo: Ons Abid/Oxfam Novib (2017)



## THE VIEW FROM THE TOP: ALL PAY AND NO WORK

The very top of the economic pyramid sees trillions of dollars of wealth in the hands of a very small group of people, predominantly men. Their wealth is already extreme, and our broken economy concentrates more and more wealth into these few hands.

Recently some commentators have asked whether it would be better for the world to ‘abolish billionaires’,<sup>16</sup> suggesting that they are a sign of economic sickness rather than economic health. It has been estimated that one-third of billionaire wealth exists because of inheritance.<sup>17</sup> Such levels of inheritance have created a new aristocracy that undermines democracy.

Once secured, the fortunes of the super-rich take on a momentum of their own; the wealthiest people can simply sit back and watch their wealth grow over time, with the help of highly paid accountants who have delivered them an average annual return of 7.4% on their wealth over the last ten years.<sup>18</sup> Despite admirably committing to give his money away, Bill Gates is still worth nearly \$100bn, which is twice what he had when he stood down as head of Microsoft.

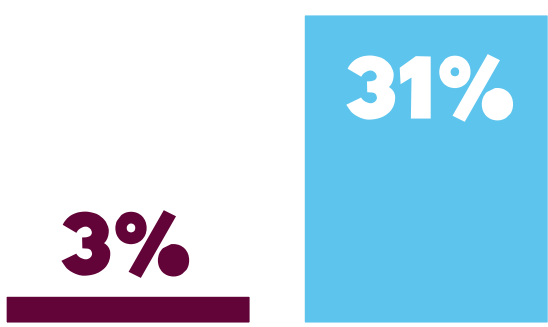
One reason for these outsized returns is a collapse in taxation of the super-rich and the biggest corporations because of falling tax rates and deliberate tax dodging. At the same time, only 4% of global tax comes from taxation of wealth,<sup>19</sup> and studies show that the super-rich avoid as much as 30% of their tax liability.<sup>20</sup> Extremely low corporate taxation helps them cream the profits from companies where they are the main shareholders; between 2011 and 2017 average wages in G7 countries increased by 3%, while dividends to wealthy shareholders grew by 31%.<sup>21</sup>

**ONLY 4% OF  
GLOBAL TAX COMES  
FROM TAXATION  
OF WEALTH.**

### FIGURE 2: RETURNS TO RICH SHAREHOLDERS COMPARED WITH AVERAGE WAGES

#### GROWTH BETWEEN 2011 AND 2017

- Average wages in G7 countries
- Dividends to wealthy shareholders



Today’s extreme wealth is also founded on sexism. Our economic system was built by rich and powerful men, who continue to make the rules and reap the lion’s share of the benefit. Worldwide, men own 50% more wealth than women.<sup>22</sup> Men also predominate in positions of political and economic power; just 18% of ministers and 24% of parliamentarians globally are women, and they occupy an estimated 34% of managerial positions in the countries where data is available.<sup>23</sup>

### FIGURE 3: THE WORLD'S ECONOMIES REWARD MEN MORE THAN WOMEN

Worldwide, men own 50% more wealth than women.



On average, globally, 18% of government ministers and 24% of parliamentarians are women. As a result, women are often excluded from decision making.



Women are supporting the market economy with cheap and free labour and they are also supporting the state by providing care that should be provided by the public sector.<sup>24</sup> Oxfam has calculated that women’s unpaid care work alone is adding value to the economy to the tune of at least \$10.8 trillion a year, a figure three times larger than the tech industry. This figure, while huge, is an underestimate; because of data availability it uses the minimum wage and not a living wage, and it does not take account of the broader value to society of care work and how our economy would grind to a halt without this support. Were it possible to put a figure on this support, the total value of unpaid care work would be even higher. What is clear is that this unpaid work is fuelling a sexist economic system that takes from the many and puts money in the pockets of the few.

**WOMEN’S UNPAID CARE WORK ALONE IS ADDING VALUE TO THE ECONOMY OF AT LEAST \$10.8 TRILLION A YEAR.**

Lan works in a factory and has two other jobs in Dong Nai province, Vietnam. Her low wages and high cost of living mean that she can’t afford for her children to live with her full time, and relies on her parents to take care of them while she is away working. Photo: Sam Tarling/Oxfam (2017)



## THE VIEW FROM THE BOTTOM: ALL WORK AND NO PAY

Nearly half the world is trying to survive on \$5.50 a day or less,<sup>25</sup> according to new figures from the World Bank. Many people are just one hospital bill or failed harvest away from destitution. Inequality is one of the major reasons for this; a huge share of global income growth consistently accrues to those at the top, leaving those at the bottom further and further behind. Thomas Piketty and his team have shown that between 1980 and 2016, the richest 1% received 27 cents of each dollar of global income growth.<sup>26</sup> This was more than twice the share of the bottom 50%, who secured only 12 cents of every dollar.<sup>27 28</sup> If the economic system is left to distribute the fruits of growth so unevenly, we will never eliminate poverty.<sup>29</sup> Unequal and unbridled growth is also unsustainable and makes it impossible to live within the environmental boundaries of our planet.<sup>30</sup>

Economic inequality is also built on gender inequality, and the majority of those at the bottom of the economic pyramid are women. Women and girls are more likely to be found in poorly paid and precarious employment, and they do the bulk of unpaid and underpaid care work.<sup>31</sup> The dominant model of capitalism actively exploits and drives traditional sexist beliefs that disempower women and girls,<sup>32</sup> counting on them to do this work, but refusing to value them for it.

**MANY PEOPLE ARE JUST ONE HOSPITAL BILL OR FAILED HARVEST AWAY FROM DESTITUTION.**

**ECONOMIC INEQUALITY IS ALSO BUILT ON GENDER INEQUALITY.**



Shienna Cabus and her daughter collect water from a local water source in Eastern Samar, Philippines. They use a cart to transport the heavy load home. Shienna is a member of the Bangon Pangdan Self-Help Association. Photo: Aurelie Marrier d'Unienville/Oxfam (2017)

## UNDERSTANDING WHO CARES

Care work is crucial to our societies and to the economy. It includes looking after children, elderly people, and those with physical and mental illnesses and disabilities, as well as daily domestic work like cooking, cleaning, washing, mending, and fetching water and firewood.<sup>33</sup> Without someone investing time, effort and resources in these essential daily tasks, communities, workplaces, and whole economies would grind to a halt.

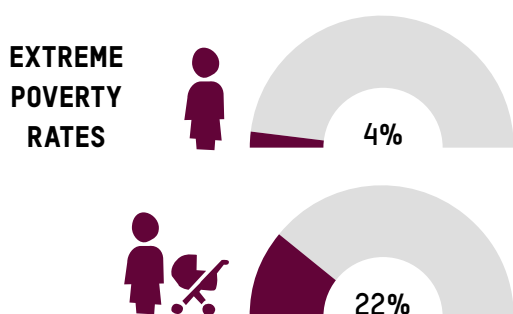
Across the world unpaid and underpaid care work is disproportionately done by poor women and girls, especially those from groups who, as well as gender discrimination, experience discrimination based on race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality and caste.<sup>34</sup> Women undertake more than three-quarters of unpaid care and make up two-thirds of the paid care workforce.<sup>35</sup>

**WITHOUT SOMEONE INVESTING TIME, EFFORT AND RESOURCES IN THESE ESSENTIAL DAILY TASKS, COMMUNITIES, WORKPLACES, AND WHOLE ECONOMIES WOULD GRIND TO A HALT.**

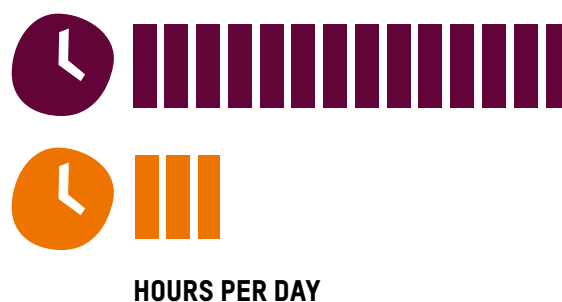
**FIGURE 4: THE HEAVY AND UNEQUAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR UNPAID CARE WORK FALLING ON WOMEN AND GIRLS**

● Women ● Men

The gap in income poverty between women and men increases during women's peak productive and reproductive ages.<sup>36</sup> Time poverty increases the gender gap further.<sup>37</sup>



Women in rural communities and low-income countries spend up to 14 hours a day on unpaid care work, which is five times more than men do in such communities.<sup>38</sup>



Globally, 42% of women of working age are outside the paid labour force, compared with 6% of men, because of unpaid care responsibilities.<sup>39</sup>

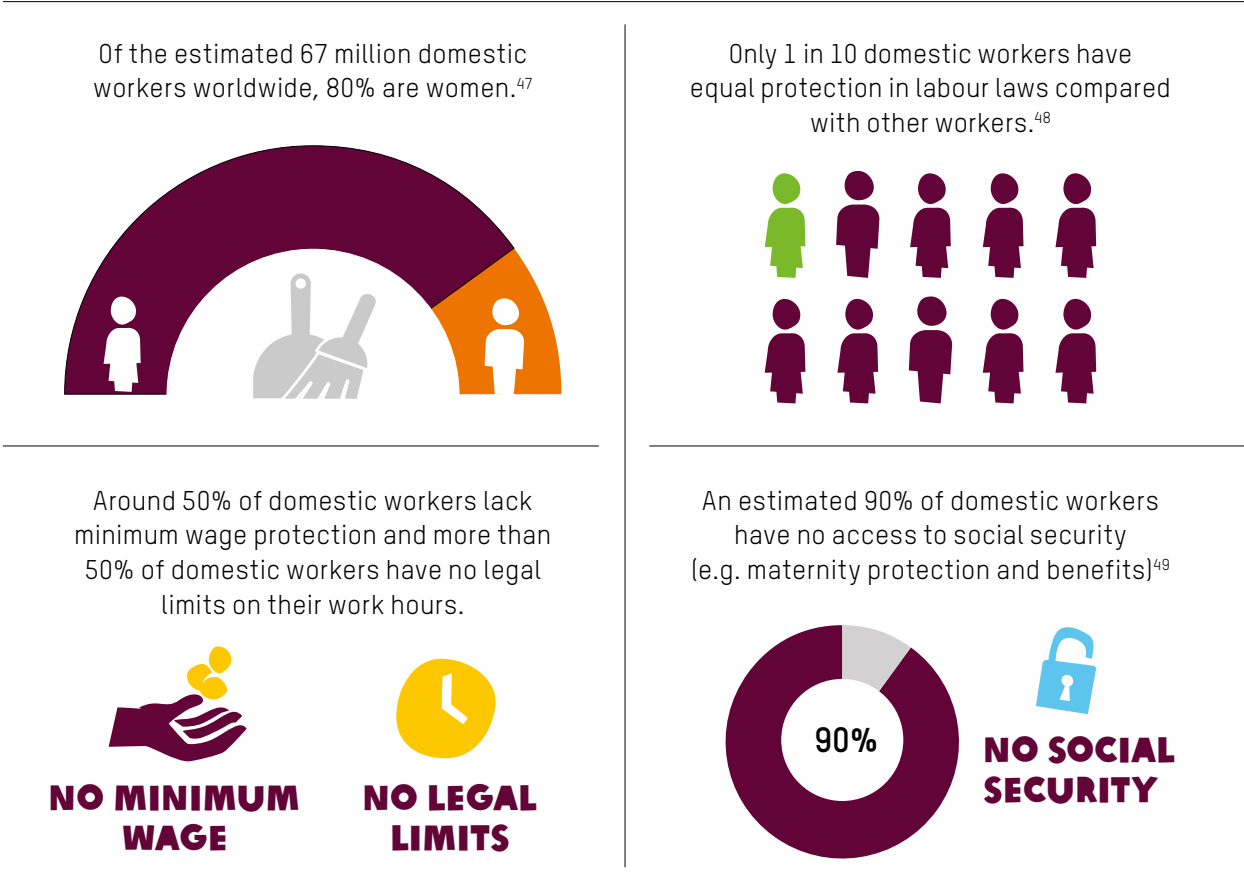


Girls who undertake a large amount of unpaid care work have lower rates of school attendance than other girls.<sup>40</sup>



As well as doing care work for free at home, many poor women also work providing care for others, for example as domestic workers,<sup>41</sup> who are among the most exploited workers in the world. Just 10% of domestic workers are covered by general labour laws to the same extent as other workers,<sup>42</sup> and only around half enjoy equal minimum wage protection.<sup>43</sup> More than half of all domestic workers have no limits on work hours under national law.<sup>44</sup> In the most extreme cases of forced labour and trafficking, domestic workers find themselves trapped in people’s homes with every aspect of their lives controlled, rendering them invisible and unprotected.<sup>45</sup> It is estimated that globally, the 3.4 million domestic workers in forced labour are being robbed of \$8bn every year, equating to 60% of their due wages.<sup>46</sup>

**FIGURE 5: DOMESTIC WORKERS – AMONG THE MOST EXPLOITED WORKERS IN THE WORLD**



**BOX 2**

**ABUSE OF DOMESTIC WORKERS**

‘Regina’ (not her real name) was trafficked to the UK by a rich employer to work in their private household. Regina explained that once she arrived in London she was made to work from 6am to 11pm every day in the employers’ smart central London apartment. She was not paid at all during her time there and was not allowed to contact her family or to speak to people outside of her employers’ household. She slept in the laundry room and ate leftovers. Her passport was taken from her and she described being regularly verbally abused by her employers, who would call her ‘stupid’ and ‘useless’.<sup>50</sup>



Catalina Sántiz puts firewood into the oven before cooking. Yocwitz, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo: Martiza Lavín

The heavy and unequal responsibility of care work perpetuates gender and economic inequalities. It undermines the health and wellbeing of predominantly female care workers and limits their economic prosperity by fuelling gender gaps in employment and wages. It also leaves women and girls time-poor, unable to meet their basic needs or to participate in social and political activities. For example, in Bolivia, 42% of women say that care work is the biggest obstacle to their political participation.<sup>51</sup>

**BOX 3**  
**TIME POVERTY  
IN INDIA: 'I HAVE  
NO TIME, NOT  
EVEN TO DIE'**

Buchhu Devi gets up at 3am to cook, clean and prepare breakfast and lunch for her family. There is a well nearby, but as a Dalit from the lowest caste she is not allowed to use it, and instead has to travel 3 km to collect water. She does this three times a day. She says she works at a road construction site from 8am till 5pm, and then has to perform her evening household duties of fetching water and fuel wood, washing, cooking, cleaning the house, and helping her children with their studies. Her day ends at midnight. If she fails to fetch wood the family cannot eat, and she is often beaten up for this by her husband. She says, 'I have no time, not even time to die for they will all curse... Who will look after them and bring money to the family when I'm gone?'

Source: D. Dutta (2019). 'No Work is Easy! Notes from the Field on Unpaid Care Work for Women' in Mind the Gap: The State of Employment in India 2019. Oxfam India. <https://www.oxfamindia.org/Mind-Gap-State-of-Employment-in-India>

Even though it lays the foundation for a thriving society, unpaid and underpaid care work is fundamentally invisible. It both perpetuates and is perpetuated by economic and gender inequality. Care work is radically undervalued and taken for granted by governments and businesses. It is often treated as 'non-work', with spending on it treated as a cost rather than an investment, leading to care being rendered invisible in measures of economic progress and policy agendas.

## The looming care crisis

The world is facing a care crisis due to the impacts of an ageing population, cuts to public services and social protection systems, and the effects of climate change – threatening to make it worse and increase the burden on care workers.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has estimated that there will be an extra 100 million older people and an additional 100 million children aged 6 to 14 years needing care by 2030.<sup>52</sup> Elderly people will need more acute and long-term care as they age<sup>53</sup> from healthcare systems that are ill-prepared to support them.<sup>54</sup>

**FIGURE 6: THE LOOMING CARE CRISIS**



Rather than ramping up social programmes and spending to invest in care and tackle inequality, countries are increasing taxation on poor people, reducing public spending and privatizing education and health, often following the advice of financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Oxfam recently showed how IMF programmes using this approach in Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan have negatively impacted women, threatening to increase inequality.<sup>55</sup> Governments continue to rely on VAT, despite the fact that this is a regressive tax that hits the poor hardest<sup>56</sup> and evidence that it places a disproportionate burden on women carers.<sup>57</sup>

Government cuts are also putting pressure on women's organizations. In Brazil in 2017, cuts to public spending contributed to a reduction of 66% in federal funding in the budget initially allocated in 2017 to women's rights programmes that promote gender equality.<sup>58</sup>

Climate breakdown is already placing a greater burden on women. It is estimated that by 2025, up to 2.4 billion people will be living in areas without enough water, meaning women and girls will be forced to walk further and further to find it.<sup>59</sup> Climate change will also reduce the amount of food produced and will increase sickness, which will place further stress and time demands on women and girls, who will be expected to provide the increased work needed to cope, committing ever more hours in their days.

**CLIMATE CHANGE WILL REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF FOOD PRODUCED AND INCREASE SICKNESS, PLACING FURTHER STRESS AND TIME DEMANDS ON WOMEN AND GIRLS.**



Lucas Aldana is a farmer who lives with his wife and children in Caparrosa, Guatemala. The family grows a variety of crops, but harvests have been affected by the lack of rainfall. Photo: Pablo Tosco/Oxfam Intermón (2019)



## A FAIRER WORLD IS POSSIBLE

Governments around the world can, and must, build a human economy that is feminist and benefits the 99%, not only the 1%. This world would be one where everyone has secure jobs paying decent wages, where nobody lives in fear of the cost of falling sick, and where every child has the chance to fulfil their potential. In this world, our economy would thrive within the limits of our planet, handing a better world to every new generation.

Both the dramatic level of economic inequality and the looming care crisis can be tackled, but it will require concerted efforts and bold policy decisions to mend the damage done and to build economic systems that care for all citizens. Building national care systems with the full participation of civil society, and in particular women's rights groups, is a fundamental step in this direction. Further actions to redistribute care work should be part of a comprehensive approach of redistributive policies in order to close the gap between rich and poor, such as progressive taxation, free public services and social protection systems, and policies to limit the influence of corporations and the super-rich.

Feminist economics and gender equality are fundamental to a human economy; and a core part of this new, fairer, human economy is to fully address the role of unpaid and underpaid care work. Only by fundamentally changing the way that this work is done and how it is valued can we build a more equal world.

**BOTH THE DRAMATIC LEVEL OF ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND THE LOOMING CARE CRISIS CAN BE TACKLED, BUT IT WILL REQUIRE CONCERTED EFFORTS AND BOLD POLICY DECISIONS TO MEND THE DAMAGE DONE AND TO BUILD ECONOMIC SYSTEMS THAT CARE FOR ALL CITIZENS.**

For decades, feminist economists, civil society and care advocates have been proposing a set of solutions to radically reprioritize care: the transformative '4Rs' framework. These principles must be taken into account:



**Recognize** unpaid and poorly paid care work, which is done primarily by women and girls, as a type of work or production that has real value.



**Reduce** the total number of hours spent on unpaid care tasks through better access to affordable and quality time-saving devices and care-supporting infrastructure.



**Redistribute** unpaid care work more fairly within the household and simultaneously shift the responsibility of unpaid care work to the state and the private sector.



**Represent** the most marginalized caregivers and ensure that they have a voice in the design and delivery of policies, services and systems that affect their lives.

Change is possible. From Engna Legna Besdet bringing together Ethiopian domestic workers in Lebanon, to the Domestic Workers Rising campaign in South Africa, women are demanding change and claiming their rights. And governments are starting to listen. Uruguay's groundbreaking national integrated care enshrines the right to care and be cared for, as well as care workers' rights, and New Zealand introduced a celebrated wellbeing budget in 2019. But more action is needed.

## FIGURE 7: MOVEMENTS FOR CHANGE, STORIES OF HOPE



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Oxfam is proposing the following six actions to help realize the rights of carers and to start closing the gap between unpaid and underpaid care workers and the wealthy elite, who have profited most from their labour.

**1 Invest in national care systems to address the disproportionate responsibility for care work done by women and girls:** Governments must invest in cross-governmental national care systems, in addition to investing in and transforming existing public services and infrastructure. National care systems must include the provision of universal access to safe water, sanitation and domestic energy systems, and investments to deliver universal childcare, eldercare and care for people with disabilities. These should also include access to quality healthcare and education, as well as the provision of universal social protection, such as pensions and child benefits. As part of national care systems governments must ensure a minimum of 14 weeks of paid maternity leave and the progressive realization of one year of paid parental leave, including a phase of use-it-or-lose-it paternity leave.

**2 End extreme wealth to end extreme poverty:** Extreme wealth is a sign of a failing economic system.<sup>60</sup> Governments must take steps to radically reduce the gap between the rich and the rest of society and prioritize the wellbeing of all citizens over unsustainable growth and profit, to avoid a world that caters only to a privileged few and consigns millions of people to poverty. Governments must take bold and decisive steps by taxing wealth and high incomes and cracking down on loopholes and the inadequate global tax rules that allow rich corporations and individuals to escape their tax responsibilities.

**3 Legislate to protect the rights of all carers and secure living wages for paid care workers:** As part of their national care systems, governments must ensure that legal, economic and labour market policies are in place to protect the rights of all carers and paid care workers, in both formal and informal sectors, and monitor their implementation. This must include ratifying ILO Convention 189 on the protection of domestic workers and policy to ensure that all care workers are paid a living wage, and working towards the elimination of gender wage gaps.

**4 Ensure that carers have influence on decision-making processes:** Governments must facilitate the participation of unpaid carers and care workers in policy-making fora and processes at all levels, and invest resources into collecting comprehensive data that can better inform policy making and evaluate the impact of policies on carers. This should be alongside consulting women's rights actors, feminist economists and civil society experts on care issues, and increased funding for women's organizations and movements working to enable their participation in decision-making processes. These measures are important building blocks of national care systems.

**GOVERNMENTS  
MUST ENSURE THAT  
LEGAL, ECONOMIC  
AND LABOUR MARKET  
POLICIES ARE IN  
PLACE TO PROTECT  
THE RIGHTS OF ALL  
CARERS AND PAID  
CARE WORKERS.**

**5 Challenge harmful norms and sexist beliefs:** Harmful norms and sexist beliefs that see care work as the responsibility of women and girls lead to an unequal gendered distribution of care work and perpetuate economic and gender inequality. As part of the national care systems, governments need to invest resources to challenge these harmful norms and sexist beliefs, including through advertising, public communication and legislation. Further, men need to step up to equally fulfill their responsibilities on care work to address the disproportionate amount of care done by women within households and communities.

**6 Value care in business policies and practices:** Businesses must recognize the value of care work and sustain the wellbeing of workers. Further, they should support the redistribution of care through the provision of benefits and services such as crèches and childcare vouchers and ensure living wages for care providers.<sup>61</sup> Companies and business should assume their responsibility for contributing to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by paying their fair share of taxes, implementing family-friendly employment practices such as flexible working hours and paid leave, and using progressive advertising and public communication to challenge the gendered distribution of care work.

**BUSINESSES MUST  
RECOGNIZE THE  
VALUE OF CARE  
WORK AND SUSTAIN  
THE WELLBEING  
OF WORKERS.**

Ayan on her way to fetch water from a well. She lives in a camp for internally displaced people in Garadag, Somaliland. Because of prolonged drought in the region, the family lost their herding livelihood and struggle to find food and water. Photo: Petterik Wiggers/Oxfam (2017)



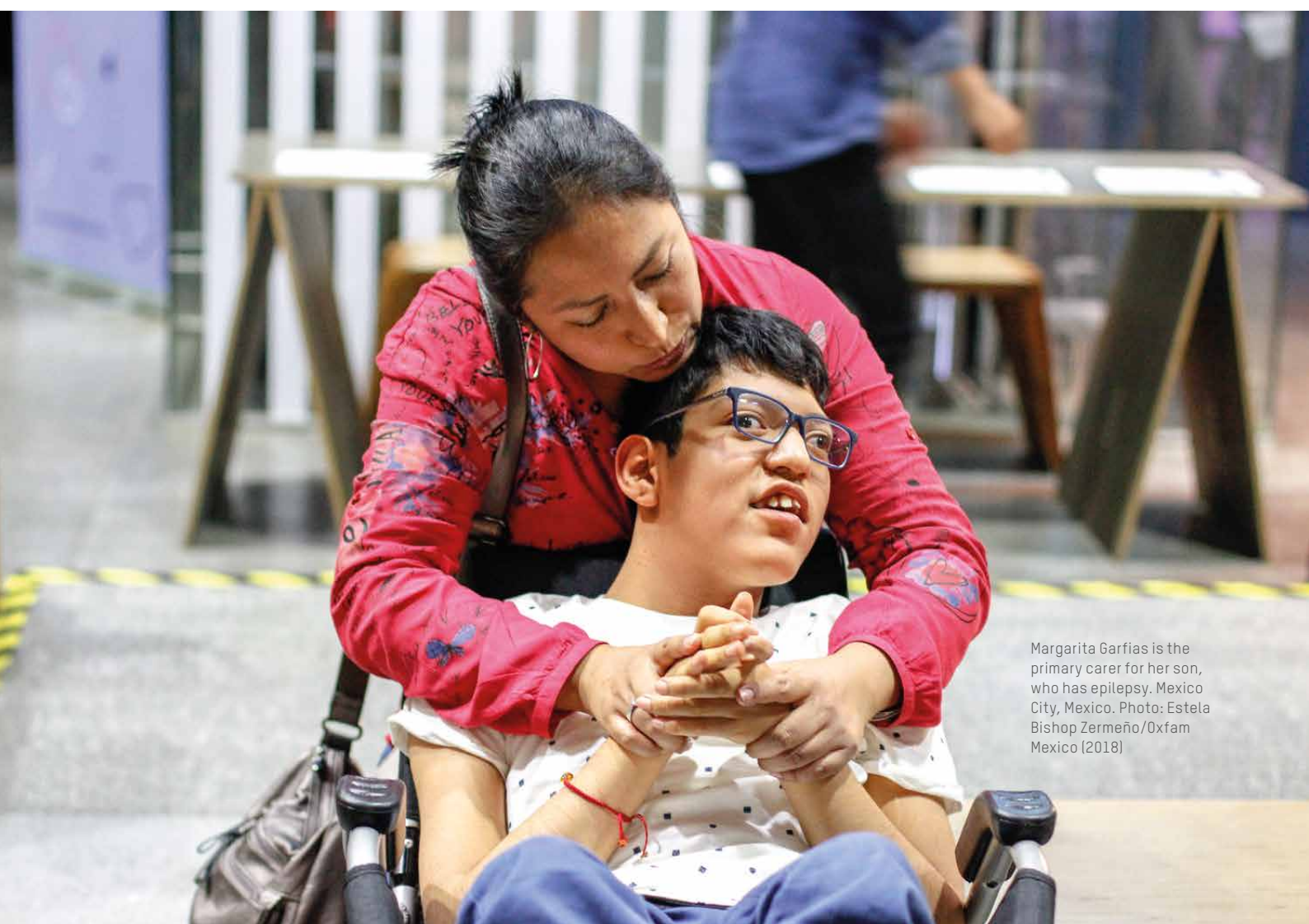
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Margarita Garfias is the primary carer for her son, who has epilepsy. Mexico City, Mexico. Photo: Estela Bishop Zermeno/Oxfam Mexico (2018)

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