

# **FROGEE POLICY BRIEF 4**

## **Insights from Georgia**

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COVID-19 and the Distribution of Household Work  
Between Men and Women in Georgia

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# Abstract

## COVID-19 and the Distribution of Household Work Between Men and Women in Georgia

According to recent surveys, Georgia is characterized by both a high level of women's involvement in unpaid care work and considerable gender inequality in this area. This inequality has a substantial negative effect on women's participation in the labour market, their ability to take up full-time work, as well as their wages. Our policy brief details evidence of this impact and discusses how COVID-19 has changed the gender balance in time-use in Georgia. Lastly, we provide a list of country-specific policy recommendations to address the root causes of the unequal distribution in unpaid household work.



## COVID-19 and the Distribution of Household Work Between Men and Women in Georgia

Unpaid household work is an essential type of economic activity that is important for maintaining the well-being of families. Cooking, cleaning, shopping, paying bills, making small or large repairs around the house, assisting and caring for children and the elderly – all of these tasks are an essential part of the daily life and make us healthier, happier, more productive. Unfortunately, because these activities are not marketed and do not carry a price tag, their value is not reflected in the country's GDP, although the effect of this work certainly contributes to individual and social welfare. Additionally, there is a common perception of them being "non-work", or a somehow inferior type of work. The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated prolonged lockdowns have changed our lives and perceptions in many important ways. In particular, during this time people became more acutely aware of the importance of this "hidden" side of economic life. According to some estimates, if unpaid household work were compensated at market rates, it would account for 9% of the global GDP (OECD, 2019). In some countries this

share is even higher: 23% in France and New Zealand, 33% in China, and 14% in South Africa (Ferrant and Thim, 2019).

From the economic perspective this work is not "free", and the cost of performing these tasks on a daily basis can be measured by the value of forgone options: i.e. hours not spent on paid market work, leisure, or education. Thus, the question of *who inside a family performs* these time-consuming tasks is of high importance and has significant consequences for the distribution of individual welfare.

### Inequality in the unpaid care work distribution in Georgia

Georgia is characterized by both a high level of women's involvement in unpaid care work and a high level of gender inequality in this area. In fact, according to ISET Policy Institute's forthcoming Gender Equality Index for FSU countries, in 2019 Georgia ranked last among 14 analysed countries in the "Time" domain of the Index (ISET-PI Gender Equality Index, 2021).

Time-use surveys provide useful insights about the amount of time both men and women devote to household unpaid work. Unfortunately, as of now these surveys are not available in Georgia. However, data collection has already started in September 2020, and the findings are expected to become available by the end of 2021 (UN Women, 2020).

To fill in this gap and estimate gender differences in the amount of time devoted to unpaid work in households, researchers have so far relied on qualitative and quantitative studies (UN Women, 2018, 2020). Such studies typically collect self-reported average weekly time spent on different

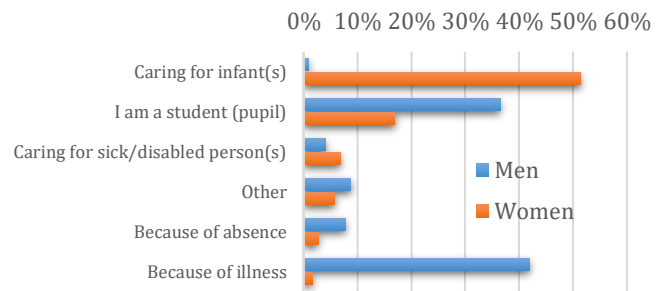


household-related activities. According to the pre-pandemic survey, women in Georgia reported spending 45 hours a week on unpaid care activities (UN Women, 2018). Moreover, employed women reported spending 42 hours per week on unpaid care, while unemployed women spent 47 hours. This clearly points to the existence of a “double burden”: employed women in Georgia spend on average 6 hours per day on household-related work. In contrast, employed men spend approximately 2.3 hours a day on household tasks, and non-employed men spend even less.

### Implications for labour market outcomes among women

Due to the high burden of household responsibilities, women in Georgia are forced to work part time instead of full time much more often than men. For this reason, they are also more likely not to participate in the labour force, especially in their reproductive years. Georgia’s 2019 labour force survey provides some insights into this issue. In particular, 22% of part-time working women (who account for about 14% of employed women) list childcare and elderly care responsibilities as the reason for part-time employment (for comparison it is 1.4% of men). Moreover, these factors are given as the reason for not being able to start work by 58% of women, while the corresponding number for men is only 5% (see Figure 1).

*Figure 1. Why were you not ready to start working? Difference between men and women in Georgia*



*Source:* Geostat Labour Force Survey, 2019 and authors’ calculations.

Even if they do engage in full-time and/or high responsibility work, women in Georgia get paid substantially less than men. In the Euro Area the “raw” gender pay gap (unadjusted for education and other characteristics) is around 15% (Eurostat, 2021), while in Georgia the corresponding gap is 17.7% (UN Women, 2018). Adjusting for qualifications, personal characteristics and for selectivity bias (the fact that better educated women are the ones who tend to enter the labour market), there still remains a 12% “unexplained” difference in wages between men and women. This gap is capturing the effect of discrimination or unobserved characteristics on the labour market (UN Women, 2018). For the EU-28, the unexplained part of the gender pay gap is estimated to be roughly similar, at 11.5% (Eurostat, 2018).

### How did COVID-19 change the time-use gender balance in Georgia?

According to the 2020 survey (UN Women, 2020) COVID-19 increased the burden of unpaid care work for both sexes, but more so for women. For example, a higher share of women as compared to men reported spending more time on cleaning (35% of women and 24% of men), cooking (31% of women and 25% of men), or caring for children (61% of women vs. 44% of men). Notably, both men and women reported spending more time on at least one of these tasks (57% of women and 61%



of men). The domestic workload particularly increased for households with children due to school and kindergarten closures.

Unfortunately, the survey did not assess how the amount of time spent on unpaid care work increased for men vs. women. However, 31% of women reported a decrease in their leisure time, while the same was reported by only 23% of men. At the same time, a higher percentage of men than women increased their leisure time during the lockdown (30% of men vs. 21% of women). On the other hand, there were no significant gender differences when it came to the number of paid hours worked (for salaried employees). These findings may suggest that during the COVID pandemic, the “double burden” has affected women more heavily than men.

### Policy recommendations

In order to address the roots of the problem associated with gender differences in unpaid work in the long-term, a policy study by McKinsey Global Institute suggests that policy interventions should ensure the recognition of unpaid work, reduce its amount, and redistribute it between men and women (Madgavkar et al., 2020). In the Georgian context there are some recommendations which could be adopted within this framework.

First, the financing of professional childcare services should be supported publicly. On the one hand, this intervention will enable many women to take up employment and, on the other hand, this will create job opportunities through paid care work. Such policies have been adopted in a high number of EU countries and are particularly common in Scandinavia, with generous subsidies

to public childcare and resources made available for families to afford private childcare services.

Moreover, it is crucial to invest in family-friendly policies which promote work-life balance for both men and women. In Georgia this can be achieved through adjustments to maternity and parental leave legislation. The Georgian legislation is well positioned to protect working mothers in the areas of breastfeeding, non-discrimination and health protection in the workplace. However, it falls behind the ILO standards and EU guidelines in some crucial provisions. In particular, maternity benefits for private sector employees are insufficient to support them and the child for the duration of the maternity leave. When calculated in monthly terms, existing compensation barely equals to the subsistence minimum for an average consumer (ISET Policy Institute, UN Women unpublished report, 2021). By increasing maternity benefits, policy makers will not only address the problem of inadequate compensation for employed women, but will increase the likelihood of women’s labour force participation.

In addition, a paid paternity leave does not exist at all in Georgia, and fathers do not have any financial incentives to take up parental leave. The introduction of paid parental and paternity leave for fathers will encourage male participation in childcare, and could thus promote a long-term change in attitudes towards the division of childcare between partners. It is also likely to positively affect the division of paid employment and unpaid care and housework within Georgian households (Huerta et al., 2013).



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