

What women want

**Tackling gender inequalities in
unpaid care and the workplace**
March 2022

centre for
**progressive
policy**



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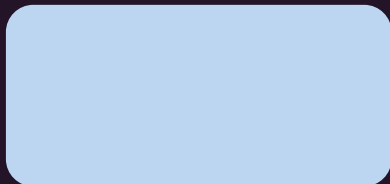
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Executive summary



Gender inequalities continue to manifest in the workplace. The causes are many and complex, rooted in entrenched economic, social, and cultural disparities which have a pernicious impact on women. While progress has been made, there remain significant barriers that women face in the labour market. This report investigates one of the most prominent causes of gender inequalities in work, which is the unequal division of unpaid care for both children and adults. This report forms part of the Centre for Progressive Policy's (CPP) Women in the Labour Market Programme.

Who cares?

Unpaid care can have a hugely detrimental impact on labour market outcomes for women. Juggling unpaid care responsibilities with paid work is challenging and has played an important role in women taking on relatively more lower paid, part-time work than men. New survey evidence commissioned by the Centre for Progressive Policy (CPP) finds that while similar proportions of women and men provide unpaid care, women do so with much greater intensity than men.

- Almost half (47%) of working-aged women have provided regular unpaid care for a child in the last 6 months. On average, women spend 45 hours per week looking after a child.
- Two in five (40%) working-aged men have provided regular unpaid care for a child in the last 6 months. On average, men spend 22 hours a week looking after a child.
- Over two in five (22%) working-aged women and one in four men (25%) provided regular unpaid care for an adult who was either sick, disabled or elderly in the last 6 months. Men provided 17 hours of unpaid care for adults each week on average, while women provided 20 hours on average.
- Women spend almost 450 million hours per week providing childcare (or 23.2bn hours) worth an estimated £382bn per annum.
- Women spend over 90 hours per week providing care to an adult (or 4.7bn hours) worth an estimated £50bn per annum.
- Men spend 186 million hours per week providing childcare (or 9.7bn hours per year) worth an estimated £160bn per annum.
- Men spend 87 million hours per week providing care for an adult (or 4.5bn hours per year) worth an estimated 48bn per annum.

What are the impacts of providing unpaid care on work?

Unpaid care has significant opportunity costs which have disproportionately impacted the participation of women in the labour market. New CPP survey evidence finds:

- One in four (26%) women who provided regular unpaid care for a child in the last 6 months reported that they had reduced their hours at work.
- One in five women (20%) who provided regular unpaid care to a child for the last 6 months reported they had been prevented from working more hours despite wanting to work more.
- One in five (20%) women who provided regular unpaid care for an adult in the last 6 months reported having to reduce their hours at work.
- Almost one in five (17%) women who care for an adult said they had been prevented from taking on more hours despite wanting to work more.
- It is estimated that 5 million women would be willing to work more if they had access to flexible work.
- If women could work the hours they wanted with the support of flexible working arrangements it is estimated this would generate £28.4bn in earnings for women and £60.8bn in wider productivity gains.

These figures demonstrate that millions of women are being denied the opportunity to participate in the labour market to the extent they would like, because of unpaid care responsibilities. Addressing the unfair distribution of unpaid care and ensuring that the labour market can better accommodate the demands of unpaid care could significantly help improve the access of women to the labour market boosting earnings and economic output.

What do women want?

New evidence helps identify the ways in which women feel they can be better supported managing care responsibilities while simultaneously participating in the labour market. There is a strong public appetite for a more interventionist approach. When asked to rank those institutions and individuals they felt were most responsible for supporting those with caring responsibilities to take on paid work, it was found that:

- 71% of working-aged women included the government in their top three options, with 40% ranking it their first.
- 59% of working-aged women included partners in their top three options, while 53% included friends and family.
- 55% of working-aged women included employers in their top three options.

It is critical that care policy evolves to meet the needs of women and does not simply place greater expectations on individuals and families to provide increasing amounts of unpaid care without appropriate support. A more proactive stance is required from both the government and employers, expanding access to affordable care and creating a flexible working environment. The recommendations in this report aim to support those who have unpaid caring responsibilities both in the workplace and at home.¹

1 See Appendix one for a full list of policies recommended by the CPP Women in the Labour Market programme.

Working for women

Wide-ranging action is necessary to meet the needs and expectations of women whose unpaid care adversely impacts their labour market outcomes:

1

Adapting workplaces to help those providing unpaid care manage dual responsibilities

Creating a default of flexible working on all new job adverts posted on major job websites and signposting the availability of flexibility to potential applicants. This should sit alongside a national target to ensure that 70% of non-emergency roles are advertised as flexible by 2025.

Expanding access to training and development for management and leadership teams to help them understand how to positively respond to flexible working requests and foster a culture where flexible working is normalised.

2

Expanding access to formal care that reflects the needs of those providing unpaid care

Previous CPP research in this series focused on expanding access to childcare and the likely impacts of the government's adult social care reforms on the ability to meet demand across the country. Our work has demonstrated the critical importance of accessible professional childcare and adult social care. The first report in this series made recommendations to expand the government's existing free childcare offer in terms of age and time.

3

Distributing unpaid care responsibilities more fairly within the household

While not the focus of this report, several principles are established for reforming parental leave, to change the incentives which leave women taking on the majority of unpaid care responsibilities. These include preserving existing maternity rights, offering an adequate, non-transferable leave offer to fathers and co-parents and boosting the level of statutory pay.



Introduction



Across the world, the burden of unpaid care work has disproportionately fallen on the shoulders of women. Not only do inequities in the division of unpaid care serve as an indicator of gender inequality, they also have significant ramifications for the social and economic participation of women in wider society.² Further gender inequalities manifest in response to the unfair distribution of unpaid care work.

In the UK the uneven distribution of unpaid care is contributing to persistent gender inequalities. This is despite higher levels of labour market participation among women here compared to other advanced economies. For those providing unpaid care, there is an opportunity cost that limits the time they have available to participate in the formal labour market and negatively impacts their earnings potential.³ As a consequence, women are far more likely to be in part-time work than men, facing potentially lower pay and more precarious working conditions.

Both women and wider society are economically harmed by the enduring inequalities that arise due to unpaid care. The barriers to participation that it creates deprives the economy of the skills and contribution that women would otherwise bring to the labour market. It has been estimated that the “underutilisation of women’s skills costs the UK economy between 1.3% and 2% of GDP every year”.⁴

The potential for economic gains from increasing the availability of women to participate more fully in the workforce through better access to childcare has previously been quantified by the CPP as £10.9bn in increased earnings each year. This work drew on the results of a bespoke survey which revealed substantial underemployment among mothers.⁵ It is clear there are significant economic gains to be made from reducing the amount of unpaid care that women provide, and supporting women to take a greater control over their working lives.

This report builds on CPP’s first Women in the Labour Market report, which looked at formal alternatives to unpaid childcare, exploring how best to support all those women who provide care for children or adults while also working. Drawing on a new survey, this report documents the scale and division of unpaid care responsibilities between women and men today, the mechanisms through which labour market outcomes are impacted for women and the priorities for policies to enable women to take more control over their working lives.

This report outlines several hard-hitting policy reforms. The aims of these policies are twofold; firstly, to adapt the labour market so that it better accommodates unpaid carers. The second is to transform the incentives that entrench gender inequalities in the home and to encourage men in society to take on a more active role in providing care. Alongside previous recommendations in this series on expanding access to childcare, this policy package will help address the longstanding gender inequalities in the provision of unpaid care which have put women at a disadvantage in the workforce.

The report is structured as follows:

- 1 Who cares?:** the role of women in the provision of unpaid care in the UK and the scale of existing gender divisions.
- 2 Unpaid care and the labour market:** analysis of existing data and new bespoke polling identifies the ways in which women’s labour market prospects are impacted by the disproportionate provision of unpaid care for both children and adults.
- 3 What women want:** how the barriers to labour market participation could be overcome, based on the voices of women captured through our survey data.
- 4 Working for women:** a series of recommendations that will help to redress the uneven distribution of unpaid care.

2 Dhar, D. (2020) *Women’s unpaid care work has been unmeasured and undervalued for too long*. King’s College London. Available at: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/womens-unpaid-care-work-has-been-unmeasured-and-undervalued-for-too-long>

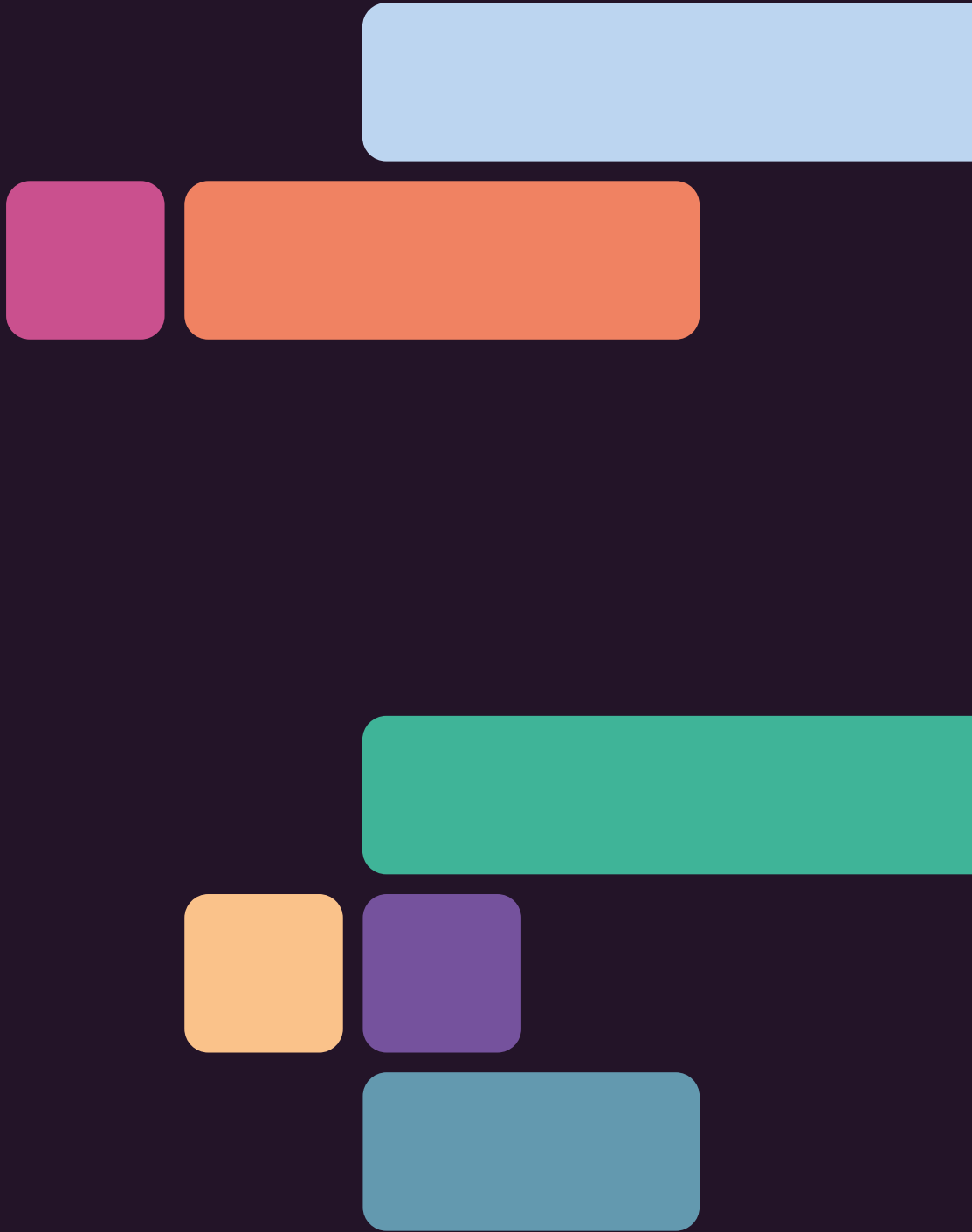
3 Neitzert, E. (2020) *Spirals of inequality: How unpaid care is at the heart of gender inequalities*. Women’s Budget Group [WBG]. Available at: <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Accompanying-paper-FINAL.pdf>

4 *The Women and Equalities Select Committee (2016) Gender Pay Gap*. UK Parliament. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmwomeq/584/58402.htm>

5 Hochlaf, D. and Franklin, F. (2021) *Women in the Labour Market: Boosting mothers’ employment and earnings through accessible childcare*. Centre for Progressive Policy [CPP]. Available at: <https://www.progressive-policy.net/publications/women-in-the-labour-market-2>

Who cares?

1



This report focuses on two major elements of unpaid care in the UK:

- 1 **Childcare:** a dependent child demands a significant amount of attention, and the birth of a child is linked to widening employment gaps between men and women. Not only does the provision of unpaid care carry an opportunity cost for women that reduces their potential hours in the formal labour market, but absences from the workplace to accommodate childcare responsibilities can adversely affect progression and development.⁶
- 2 **Adults with care needs:** demographic pressures are mounting in the UK and alongside the widespread prevalence of chronic health conditions, the demand for adult social care continues to greatly outstrip the supply of formal care.⁷ Many with care needs rely on informal care arrangements for support. This can have wide-ranging implications for the working lives of those providing unpaid care. In 2018, it was estimated that almost a million adults had given up paid work to care for friends and relatives.⁸ Provision of care for adults can also come at the same time as unpaid caring responsibilities for children or grandchildren, so called ‘sandwich carers’.

Addressing the unequal distribution of unpaid care is imperative to promote gender equality within society and to fully benefit from the economic potential of women in the labour market

The provision of unpaid care plays a pivotal role within the economy. Unpaid care has long been recognised as an “indispensable factor” that contributes towards the wellbeing of individuals, their families, and wider communities.⁹ Various definitions and understandings of unpaid care exist, but it can be broadly understood as the provision of services provided within the household for the benefit of other members, which are unremunerated and require the expenditure of mental or physical effort that could otherwise be paid for.¹⁰ Society relies on the provision of unpaid care to protect and enhance the wellbeing of every person, especially children and those who are vulnerable and rely on external support.

Women have historically shouldered more of the responsibility for unpaid care. Gender inequalities are often deep rooted and reflect entrenched social, economic, and cultural norms. The inequities in the distribution of unpaid care are widely seen as an infringement on women’s rights and a barrier to the economic empowerment of women.¹¹ Addressing the unequal distribution of unpaid care is imperative to promote gender equality within society and to fully benefit from the economic potential of women in the labour market.

This chapter builds on existing literature by using a new survey commissioned by CPP¹² to identify the extent to which the UK economy relies on women providing unpaid care.

6 Dias, M. Elming, W. and Joyce, R. (2016) *Gender wage gap grows year on year after childbirth as mothers in low-hours jobs see no wage progression*. Institute for Fiscal Studies [IFS]. Available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/8429>

7 Scobie, S. (2018) *Unpaid carers: informal yet integral*. Nuffield Trust. Available at: <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/news-item/unpaid-carers-informal-yet-integral>

8 Hayes, L. (2018) *The crisis in social care is connected to the gendered inadequacy of labour law*. LSE. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/gender-in-social-care-and-labour-law>

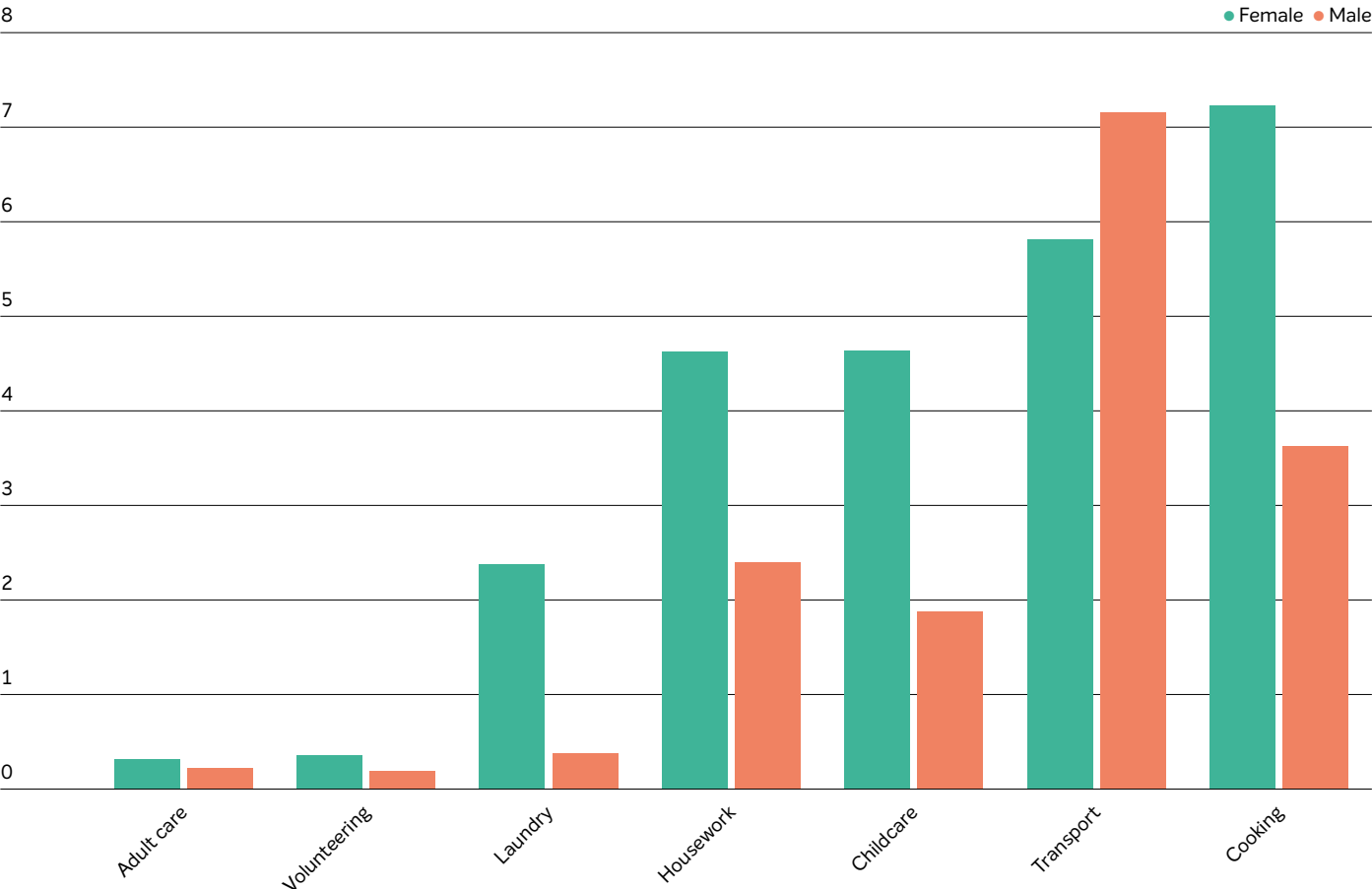
9 Ferrant, G. Pesando, L. and Nowacka, K. (2014) *Unpaid care work: the missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes*. OECD Development Centre. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/Unpaid_care_work.pdf

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 On behalf of CPP, Yonder conducted an online survey of 2,002 UK adults of working age (16–64) between 3rd to 7th March 2022. Quotas and weights were employed to ensure the sample was demographically representative of the UK adult population. Yonder is a founding member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.

Chart 1: Average hours of unpaid work done per week by category and gender (ONS), UK, 2015¹³



Gender divisions in unpaid care

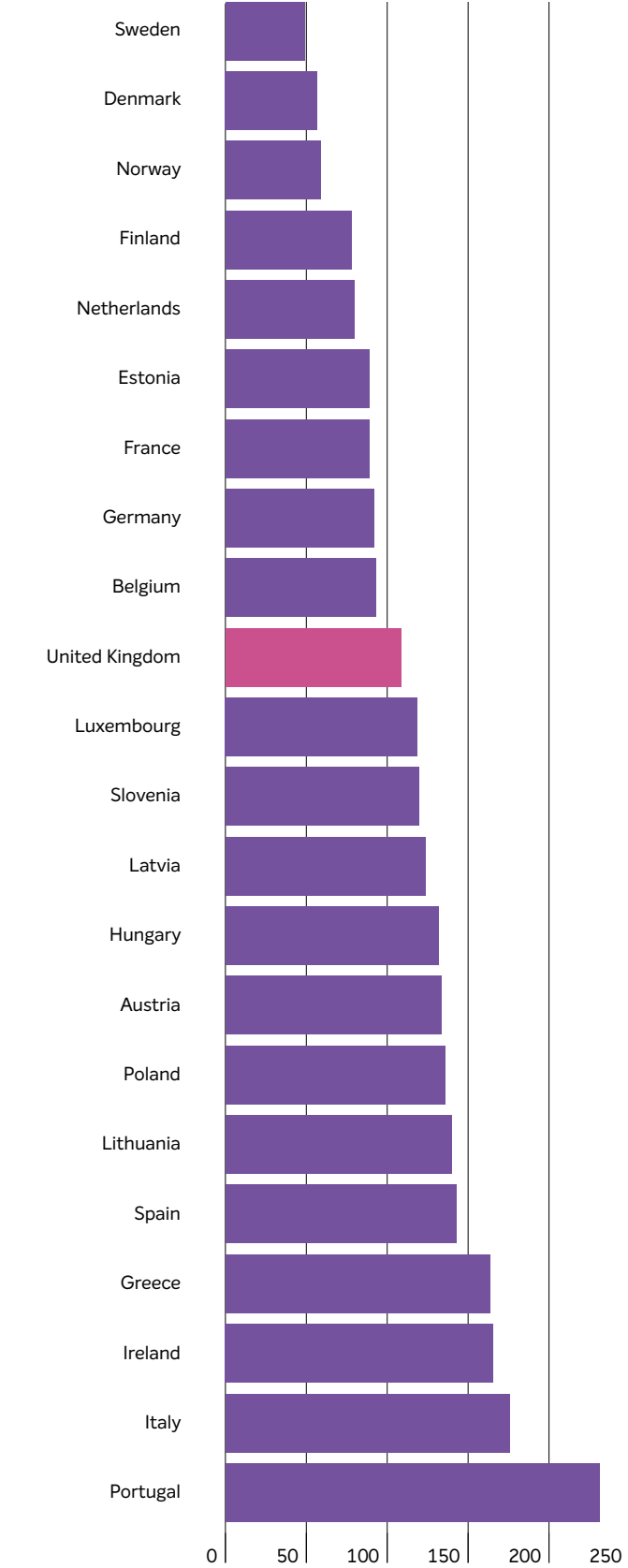
Measuring the scale of unpaid care and subsequent gender divisions has proven challenging in the past. Despite directly contributing to living standards within households, unpaid care (and unpaid work more broadly) is not included in national account measurements such as GDP. Nevertheless, this remains an essential task to understand the scale of the contribution, adapt policy appropriately¹⁴ and assess the implications for those households reliant, often on women, for its provision.

Despite issues around measurement, enough evidence has been collated to demonstrate that women perform a disproportionate amount of unpaid care in the UK. Previous analysis shows that women perform up to 2.5 times more childcare than men on average, and 1.4 times more adult social care. They also do more across a range of other domestic tasks, including laundry, cooking, and cleaning, which are often performed as part of wider care responsibilities.¹⁵ Past research from the ONS estimates that women carry out 60% more unpaid work on average than men, a significant proportion of the disparity being attributed to unpaid care.

The burden of unpaid labour falls disproportionately to women.

¹³ Source: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/womenshouldtheresponsibilityofunpaidwork/2016-11-10>
¹⁴ Office for National Statistics [ONS] (2016) *Changes in the value and division of unpaid care work in the UK: 2000 to 2015*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/satelliteaccounts/articles/changesinthevalueanddivisionofunpaidcareworkintheuk/2000to2015>
¹⁵ Source: ONS (2016) *Women shoulder the responsibility of 'unpaid work'*.

Chart 2: Difference between minutes spent by men and women on unpaid work each day on average, ages 15–64, (OECD) latest available years¹⁶



When looking at the distribution of unpaid work as a whole (which includes caring), the UK is distinctly average by comparison to other developed countries. The OECD’s broad measurement of unpaid work suggests that UK women aged between 15 and 64 spend on average 249 minutes a day on unpaid work tasks, compared to just 140 minutes among men in the same age group. The UK performs better than many Southern and Eastern European countries but falls far behind several Northern European nations. This suggests there is substantial room for improvement if the UK is to lead on gender equality.

The UK falls behind many of its peers when it comes to the gendered division of unpaid work.

16 Source: <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54757>

Box 1: Could the pandemic and its aftermath worsen gender equality in unpaid care?

Evidence suggests that demand for unpaid care rose in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, which in part, reflects the various ways in which the labour market and broader society had been upended by the measures implemented to reduce the spread of Covid-19. School closures saw both mothers and fathers increase the amount of time spent providing childcare through the first lockdown. However, despite fathers nearly doubling the amount of time spent on childcare during this period, mothers still performed more unpaid care within the household, with analysis suggesting that two fewer hours a day were spent doing paid work compared to fathers, while two additional hours were spent providing unpaid childcare and housework.¹⁷

Despite fathers nearly doubling the amount of time spent on childcare during this period, mothers still performed more unpaid care

Additional unpaid care responsibilities that women have faced during the pandemic are reflective of existing gender inequalities in the workplace. Women in the labour market were disproportionately impacted at the start of the first lockdown, due to their concentration in industries and sectors that were most negatively affected. During the first lockdown, mothers were not only more likely to have been furloughed but were also 1.5 times more likely to have lost or quit their jobs compared to fathers.¹⁸ Notably, mothers who stopped paid work during the first lockdown would provide twice as much unpaid childcare and housework compared to their partners. In the reverse situation, parents would split unpaid childcare responsibilities evenly.¹⁹

2x

Mothers who stopped paid work during the first lockdown would provide twice as much unpaid childcare and housework compared to their partners

While the pandemic has highlighted the importance of childcare (as explored in our first report in this series), it also raised public awareness of inadequacies in adult social care which will likely escalate in the future. The social care sector in the UK already faces a sizable vacancy rate of 8.2%, more than double the highest recorded vacancy rate of 4.4% for the economy as a whole. The sector is faced with a shortage of 105,000 workers, and due to population ageing and the widespread prevalence of chronic conditions, it is expected that 627,000 additional care staff will be required by 2030/31.²⁰ Without sufficient resource to provide professional care, either many in need will go without support, or more likely, demand for unpaid care will rise, with significant implications for family care givers and their labour market prospects.

627,000

Additional adult social care staff expected to be required by 2030/31

17 Andrew, A. et al. (2020) *How are mothers and fathers balancing work and family under lockdown?* Institute for Fiscal Studies [IFS]. Available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/14860>

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Kumar, C. and Dempster, H. (2021) *Staffing shortages in the UK's care sector: a sign of things to come*. Overseas Development Institute [ODI]. Available at: <https://odi.org/en/insights/staffing-shortages-in-the-uks-care-sector-a-sign-of-things-to-come>

New CPP survey findings show that while a similar proportion of women and men provide some form of unpaid care, the intensity of the care provided is significantly higher for women. 47% of working-aged women and 40% of working-aged men reported that they have provided regular, unpaid care for a child in the past 6 months. The provision of adult care is more equally shared, with 22% of working-aged women and 25% of working-aged men reporting providing care to an adult who was either sick, disabled or elderly in the past 6 months. When it comes to the hours of unpaid care provision, the average amount of time spent per week providing unpaid care for a child was 45 hours among women, and 22 hours among men. The gap is smaller between those who reported providing unpaid care with women providing 20 hours of unpaid care on average compared to 17 hours among men.

The provision of unpaid childcare amounts to a significant economic value for the UK economy. Based on the new CPP survey, we estimate that the aggregate amount of time women spend providing childcare each week amounts to 446 million hours (or 23.2bn hours per annum). In contrast men provide an estimated 186 million hours of childcare per week (or almost 9.7bn hours per annum). The total value of unpaid childcare amounts to £541bn per annum, with women contributing just over 71% of the full amount, or £382bn.

The gender divisions in the provision of adult care are not as stark, but still represent a significant contribution among women. Based on the CPP survey, it is estimated that the aggregate time women spend providing care to an adult each week amounts to 90 million hours (or 4.7bn hours per annum) while men provide 87 million hours of care for an adult each week (or just over 4.5bn hours per annum). The value of unpaid adult care in the UK amounts to £98bn per annum, with women contributing 51% of the full amount, or £50 billion each year. These values indicate the importance and value of unpaid care in the UK economy. (See the appendix online for our calculations).

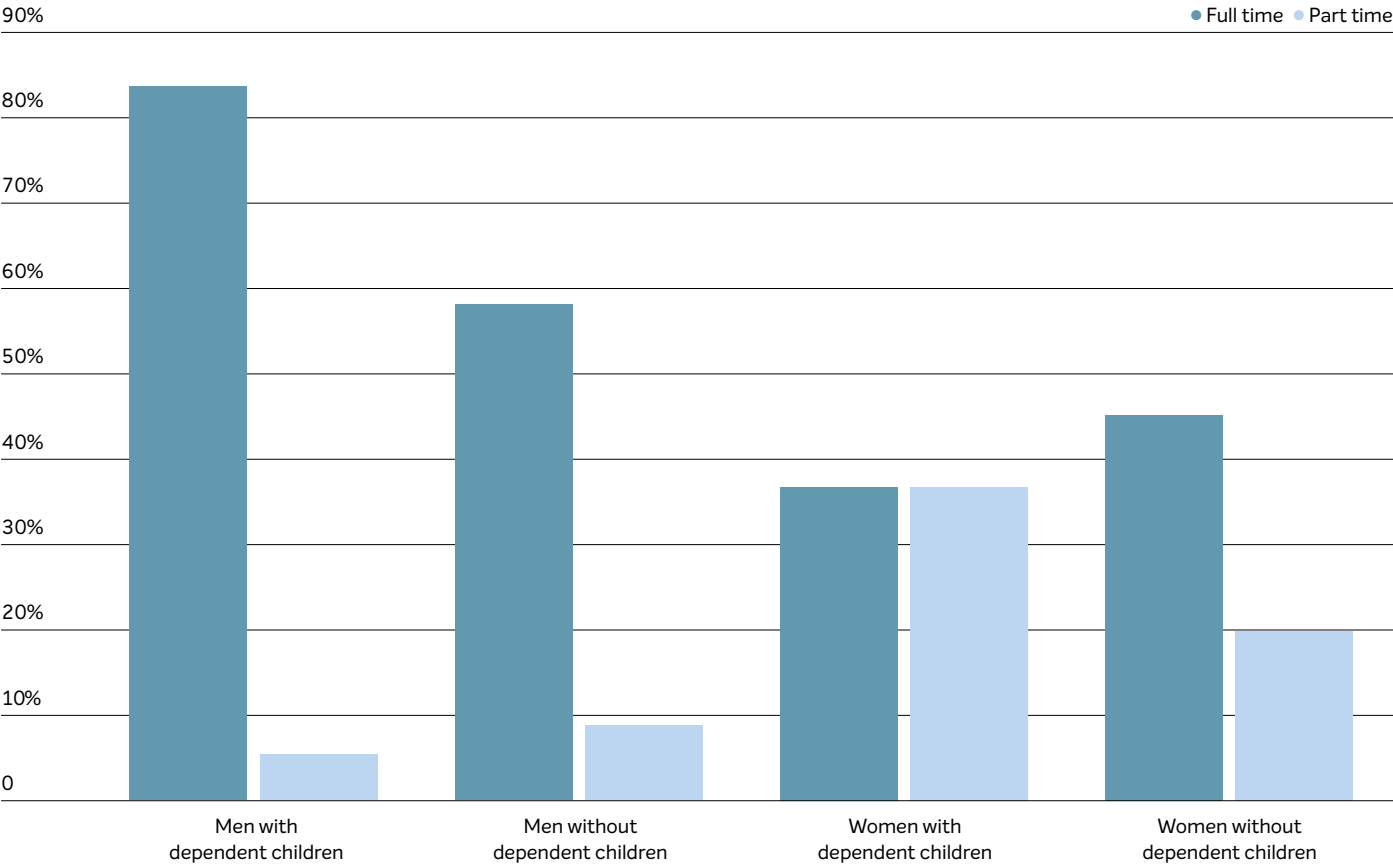
Demand for unpaid care is clearly a reflection of challenges across society. Inequalities in the division of care within the home are deep-rooted and reflective of distorted incentives and cultural biases. Workplaces can struggle to adapt to accommodate for the unpaid care responsibilities of women contributing to underemployment and early exit from the workforce. The professional care sector – whether childcare or adult social care – has struggled with resourcing, lacking the capacity to meet existing demand. These factors have contributed to an environment where predominantly women are left to provide unpaid care, often experiencing adverse consequences in the labour market as a result.

Unpaid care and its labour market impacts

2



Chart 3: Employment rates by type, gender, and dependent children, July–September 2020 (ONS)²¹



Unequal access to the labour market has manifested in various gender inequalities in the workplace, including pay, employment, and pension gaps. Diminished opportunities impede the ability of women who provide care to achieve their potential in the labour market, which in turn reduces the pool of labour and skills available to employers and suppresses demand across the economy. In short, both women and wider society are adversely affected by the unequal gender divisions in the provision of unpaid care.

According to the CPP survey conducted for this report, just under half (47%) of women aged 16 to 64 have provided some form of unpaid care for a child in the last 6 months, while 1 in 5 (22%) women in this age group have provided some form of unpaid care to an adult during the same time period. Among those providing childcare, 66% said the provision of care had an impact on their work, while among those providing care for an adult, 59% said the provision of care had an impact on their work. Respondents cited a range of ways in which care had impacted their work, including a reduction in hours, turning down potential job opportunities, and leaving the workforce entirely.

More women in part-time work

Women are significantly more likely to be in part-time employment compared to men, which is driven by unpaid care demands in the household. The most recent ONS data suggests that the full-time employment rate for women was just 45.8% compared to 66.8% for men, while the part-time employment rates were 19.6% and 7.7% respectively. However, these gaps were substantially larger for those with dependent children. Full-time employment rates were highest among men with dependent children at 84.3%, more than twice as high the full-time employment rate for women with dependent children which was 36.2%. In contrast, women with dependent children had the highest rates of part-time employment at 37.1%, compared to just 5.4% and 8.7% for men with and without dependent children respectively.

Full-time employment rates are significantly lower for women with dependent children than men.

21 Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/familiesandthelabourmarketuk2020>



The new CPP survey underlines the point that working desired or full-time paid hours is made harder by unpaid care demands. Of women who reported providing some form of unpaid care for a child over the last 6 months, 26% said that they had reduced their hours, while 20% said they had been prevented from taking on more hours despite wanting to work more. 11% of women said that they were unable to work because of providing unpaid care for a child. Similar figures were reported among those providing unpaid care for an adult, with 20% of women who provided unpaid care for an adult reporting they had reduced their hours, 17% reporting being unable to take on more hours than they would like and 12% turning down new job opportunities. Unpaid care exerts a huge amount of pressure on those who provide it, and it has helped to contribute to significantly higher rates of part-time employment and underemployment among women, helping to perpetuate gender inequalities in pay and progression.

Motherhood and the gender pay gap

The birth of the first child marks a key point where earnings increasingly diverge between men and women, with women more likely to spend time absent from the labour force or in part-time work to accommodate unpaid care responsibilities. The immediate impact of childbirth is a significant impact upon earnings, with an estimated 80% of first-time mothers experiencing a fall in earnings.²²

It is estimated that long-term earnings for mothers are 45% lower compared to what they would have potentially earned had they not had children.²³ In short, having children and taking on unpaid care responsibilities has a long-lasting impact on the earnings of women.

²² Vagni, G and Breen, R (2021). *Earnings and Income Penalties for Motherhood: Estimates for British Women Using the Individual Synthetic Control Method*. University College London [UCL].

²³ Ibid.

Early retirement

The arrival of children is not the only time in a person's life that they may have to provide unpaid care. Older adults in the labour market may find themselves providing unpaid care to grandchildren and demand to provide care for adults is an escalating concern.

Women over 50 in the workforce have been found to have had their careers heavily impacted by unpaid adult care. The impacts are reflected in both hours worked and choosing to opt out of the labour market entirely. Among women in their 50s, those who took on unpaid care responsibilities were more likely to leave paid work altogether than reduce hours, with evidence suggesting those in lower socio-economic groups were more likely to leave work.²⁴

Our CPP survey sheds new light on this issue. It was reported, among women who had provided regular care for an adult, that 8% had been unable to work, with 8% leaving the workforce and 3% retiring earlier than they planned. It is estimated that (18%) of working-aged women who provide care for an adult have been unable to participate in the labour market due to their care responsibilities, representing a loss of just over 830,000 workers.

830,000

**Estimated number of working-aged women
unable to participate in the labour market due
to care responsibilities**

The cost of care

Through reducing time spent in work, unpaid care is a cause of lower earnings, leaving women more likely to be in poverty or dependent on social security. As women earn less, they are less likely to save, hindering their ability to accumulate wealth over the course of their working life, resulting in a substantial pension gap between men and women, which manifests as excess poverty in retirement. The prevalence of unpaid care and gendered assumptions around its provision trickle through to the formal care sector, leaving it undervalued, diminishing investment, and subduing the wages of workforces predominantly composed of women.²⁵

Alleviating the pressures of unpaid care responsibilities could generate significant gains for women. According to our survey, when women who provided some form of care were asked how they would respond to their employer offering flexible arrangements that met their care needs, 45% said they would be able to take on more hours, while 20% said they would be able to take on a new role. 14% said they would be able to take on a different job, potentially suggesting that new opportunities could become available.

Improving access to the workforce would greatly enhance earnings for women. From the survey, it is estimated that almost 5 million women would be willing to take on more hours if flexible working arrangements were introduced. Responses indicate that women who would want to take on more hours would be willing to work for up to 9 additional hours each week. From this, we estimate that expanding flexible work arrangements could lead to women increasing their earnings by just under £28.4bn per annum. It would also mean a boost to overall economic output by potentially up to £60.8bn per annum. (See the appendix online for our calculations).

£60.8bn

**Estimated potential overall economic output
boost per year if women were given the chance
to work more flexible hours**

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Neitzert, E. (2020) *Spirals of inequality: How unpaid care is at the heart of gender inequalities*. Women's Budget Group [WBG]. Available at: <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Accompanying-paper-FINAL.pdf>

Response and responsibility

3



There is much that can be done to alleviate the pressures of unpaid care on women. Existing evidence and the new CPP survey provide valuable insights into the supporting mechanisms needed for people who are trying to juggle work and care.

Based on our analysis of the problem and new survey data, the key areas in which unpaid carers would like to be supported include:

- Reducing demand for unpaid care through professional alternatives (e.g. childcare, adult social care);
- Supporting those who provide unpaid care while in work (e.g. through greater flexibility); and
- Redistributing unpaid care responsibilities more fairly within the household (e.g. partners or friends).

Professional alternatives to unpaid care

As previous CPP work has set out, high costs, staff shortages, and provision that does not reflect the demands of paid employment has left a substantial proportion of mothers in the UK struggling to access suitable childcare arrangements.²⁶ The social care sector suffers similarly, where chronic understaffing and lack of funding has left the sector in England turning down thousands of people each week who have requested formal social care support.²⁷ Pressures have been exacerbated in both sectors during the pandemic.

The new CPP survey shows that there is strong appetite among women for a more interventionist approach to support those providing unpaid care into work. The survey indicates that 40% of women ranked more government support, in the form of state funded care provision, as most responsible for helping those with unpaid care needs who want to take on additional hours of paid work. 71% of women included it within their top three institutions or individuals with most responsibility. In contrast, only 18% of women reported that it was the individual unpaid care provider with most responsibility, with 32% of women listing the individual in their top three options. This is testament to the crucial role of government in tackling inequalities in the provision of unpaid care and ensuring that a resilient, affordable professional care sector is accessible for women with care responsibilities.

Supporting those who provide unpaid care while in work

The combination of unpaid care and work is a reality for many, with an estimated 38% of women aged 16–64 both in work and providing regular unpaid care according to CPP survey evidence. Flexible work is recognised as a tool in supporting people with care responsibilities in work. In 2003, the UK government introduced a policy of Right to Request, to allow parents and certain care providers the opportunity to request flexible work from their employer. A government consultation is currently underway looking to expand the right to flexible work.²⁸ Meanwhile, working from home became significantly more common during the pandemic, with an estimated 46.6% of people in employment doing at least some work from home during April 2020, as opposed to just 5% of the workforce who reported mainly working from home in 2019.²⁹

According to the new CPP survey, women consider flexibility³⁰ offered by employers as a key lever for change in supporting unpaid work. 55% of women included employers in their top three most responsible institutions or individuals in supporting those with unpaid care responsibilities into work. Three in ten (30%) women who provided regular unpaid care said their employer offered inadequate or no flexibility. One in twenty (6%) women who provide unpaid care regularly said that they had made a request for flexible working, in line with existing legislation, but were turned down, with challenges for reorganising work and inability to amend work schedules cited as the most common reason. It is clear that while many women do enjoy the benefits of flexibility and employer support, a significant minority are still denied flexible working opportunities that could otherwise help them accommodate unpaid care responsibilities without impacting their paid work.

26 Hochlaf, D. and Franklin, B (2021) *Women in the labour market: Boosting mothers' employment and earnings through accessible childcare*. Centre for Progressive Policy [CPP]. Available at: <https://www.progressive-policy.net/downloads/files/Cpp-report-women-in-the-labour-market-Oct-2021-2.pdf>

27 Age UK (2021) *1.4 million requests for care from older people turned down since the PM promised to "fix care, once and for all."* Available at: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-press/articles/2021/1.4-million-requests-for-care-from-older-people-turned-down-since-the-pm-promised-to-fix-care-once-and-for-all>

28 More details on the consultation can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/making-flexible-working-the-default>

29 Hobbs, A. (2021) *The impact of remote and flexible working arrangements*. UK Parliament Horizon Scanning. Available at: <https://post.parliament.uk/the-impact-of-remote-and-flexible-working-arrangements>

30 Flexibility was left to the interpretation of the respondent, however further questions on what flexibility would be most beneficial set out options based on the government's description of the various types of flexible options. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/flexible-working/types-of-flexible-working>

Distributing unpaid care responsibilities more fairly within the household

Public attitudes towards historic gender roles that have placed greater responsibility on women to provide care are changing, but the progress towards a fairer distribution of unpaid labour at home has been slow. Evidence from the British Social Attitudes survey has shown a substantial decline in public support for the “traditional division of gender roles within the home and the workplace”, driven heavily by the significant increase of women joining the labour force.³¹ However, despite the shift in public attitudes, women still provide a disproportionate amount of unpaid care in the home. Tackling gender inequalities in the home requires proactive policy that supports families at the very beginning, through incentives that make distributing care fairly within the household a viable option.

New CPP survey evidence suggests that a majority of women think that partners, family and friends have an important role to play in supporting those with care responsibilities. 59% of women included partners, while 53% included friends and family in their top three institutions or individuals who they considered responsible for supporting those who provided unpaid care to take on additional hours of paid work. While this suggests women do expect help in the home, this should be part of a more holistic approach, alongside support from both government and employers. This contrasts with the current government approach, which is based on care at home as the priority option.³²

In sum, the survey suggests that the majority of women and men want a more proactive approach from the state in providing care and employers in providing flexibility to help ease the challenge of unpaid care while working, regardless of whether or not they have unpaid care responsibilities. The preferences of women who work and care and the subsequent policy issues outlined in this chapter help provide an understanding of the types of reforms which must be taken in order to achieve greater gender equality both in the home and the workplace.

31 Park, A., Bryson, C., Clery, E., Curtice, J. and Phillips, M. (eds.) (2013), *British Social Attitudes: the 30th Report*, London: NatCen Social Research. Available at: https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/38457/bsa30_gender_roles_final.pdf

32 As reference by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care during his speech to the Conservative Party Conference in 2021. Available at: <https://www.conservatives.com/news/2021/sajid-javid-s-speech-to-conservative-party-conference>



Working for women



Gender inequalities in the workplace are driven by the division of unpaid care, with women having to sacrifice both earnings and opportunities for progression. CPP's first report in this series set out the opportunities of expanding the formal childcare sector to support unpaid carers in the workforce. This final chapter considers the policy interventions needed to fairly distribute unpaid care within households as well as the measures employers can take to support those who are juggling work and care. The prize is not only the improved financial circumstances of women, but also the strengthening of the wider economy.

Flexible workplaces

Flexible working opportunities are a popular measure to help alleviate some of the pressures associated with maintaining employment alongside unpaid care responsibilities. Flexibility can take many forms. In their 2021 flexible work survey, Timewise defined flexibility as any job which offers one or more of: part-time, homeworking, flexible start and finish times, flexible shift patterns, remote working, term-time, or job-share. Previous research has suggested that as many as 9 in 10 employees want greater flexibility in the workplace.³³ The new CPP survey also identifies a significant contingent of both women and men with unpaid care responsibilities who identify flexible work as something that could help them manage their care responsibilities.

Job adverts typically fail to advertise flexibility as a part of a role, even when it may be viable. According to Timewise, only 22% of "quality jobs" are advertised as flexible, despite the fact that 60% of workers end up with flexible working arrangements within their role.³⁴ Evidence from Randomised Control Trials shows that job adverts which explicitly reference the offer of flexibility are associated with an increase in applicants, with any mention increasing the likelihood of women shortlisting the potential job. Crucially, the research found that prompts during the design of the job advert encourage employers to make specific reference to flexibility.³⁵ This should form the basis of policy reform to encourage flexible working to become the default.

We recommend that the government mandates the largest job advertising sites to include prompts for flexibility and sets a national target of 70% of non-emergency service job adverts to include references to specific forms of flexible working by 2025.

Any job advertising site that hosts at least 20,000 job adverts per year would be compelled to include options for flexibility as a prompt during the design stage of the job adverts. The prompt would automatically put the job down as flexible, and the employer would need to either opt out or confirm which flexible options are available. The options would include specific references to the various forms flexible working can take. Given that over 60% of roles are already estimated to provide some form of flexibility, this will simply make it clearer from the start, elevating flexible work to a default position for many new job opportunities. Working with the largest firms that advertise jobs, the government will also be able to establish a guide to good practice that smaller and emerging companies can seek to emulate. This measure would be a practical, inexpensive step towards making flexible work the default option, which will expand potential opportunities for women providing unpaid care.

However, while steps can be taken to ensure new jobs are better designed for accommodating flexible arrangements, there remains a challenge in some workplaces to foster and build the culture that encourages greater flexibility. Employees currently do have a right to request a flexible working arrangement, but only after they have been in a job for six months and they are limited to one request every 12 months.³⁶ These arbitrary time restrictions can make it difficult for employees to broach the subject of flexible working and make appropriate requests.

We recommend that the right to request flexible working should be made available for employees on the first day they start a job and that the limitation on requests should be reduced to every 6 months.

The introduction of the right to request flexible working from day one expands this right to every worker and could help tackle the stigma and culture which often precludes workers from pursuing a flexible arrangement that would otherwise be beneficial to them.

However, the right to request is not the same as a right to accept. While many organisations do adopt flexible working practices, there is still evidence that some managers, especially those with less experience with flexible working, are weary of the practice. Concerns have been voiced about resentment within teams and the impact that it may have on supply chains, as well as a broader lack of support from those in more senior positions.³⁷ This helps contribute to a culture and working environment where management is unable to encourage or accommodate flexible working requests.

33 <https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Timewise-Flexible-Jobs-Index-2021.pdf>

34 Government Equalities Office (2019) *Encouraging employers to advertise jobs as flexible*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/966407/Encouraging_employers_to_advertise_jobs_as_flexible.pdf

35 Ibid.

36 Hodson, C. (2021) *Could the right to request flexible working become a day one right?* CIPD. Available at: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/news-views/news-articles/flexible-working-day-one-right-consultation#gref>

37 The Institute of Leadership and Management (2016) *Flexible working: goodbye nine to five*. Available at: <https://www.institutelm.com/static/uploaded/d1421b01-a629-4ff7-afef87c1d40e98a0.pdf>

Managers and leadership teams need certain skills to be able to promote a flexible working environment. Managers need a mixture of communication and planning skills so that they can promote flexibility while also understanding how flexibility can fit in with broader organisational goals. It is also important to improve the versatility of management so that they can operate within changing working environments where they are not constantly physically interacting with staff.³⁸ These skills require careful development but are essential to ensure that the UK labour market is able to transition to one where flexible working is more commonplace.

We recommend that the UK government supports greater uptake of training aimed at preparing management staff to design and implement measures to promote flexibility.

Various providers offer training to help managers better understand the benefits of flexible working and how to promote it within their organisations. Improving access to such training would help overcome internal business cultures which can be apprehensive towards flexible work requests. The ways in which government encourages and incentivises the uptake of such training programmes should include:

- Ensuring that public sector management roles require training on how to deliver flexible workplaces.
- Using the procurement process to consider the extent to which competing firms offer flexible working arrangements and encouraging applying firms to invest in management training.
- Developing grants to be made available to private sector firms that would help subsidise access to appropriate management training to increase flexible working arrangements.

This ambitious approach would help develop the skills that management teams require to respond more positively to flexible working requests and to create the necessary culture to ensure flexible working becomes more normalised and inclusive in the future. This would also generate significant gains for business. It has been found that flexible working can help improve the retention of valued staff and long-term productivity improvements, expand the available talent pool and promote diversity within organisations.³⁹ This policy package would help set UK business on the road to realising these potential gains.

Parental leave

The existing shared parental leave offer in England has failed to encourage men to take leave following the birth of a child. A statutory payment set at a maximum of £151.97 per week (or 90% of average weekly earnings, whichever is lower) can be a significant shock to incomes. It is also a “transferable leave” policy, meaning that for fathers or other co-parents to take parental leave, the mother must exchange a part of their transferable maternity leave entitlement. This has contributed to relatively low uptake of the scheme by partners.⁴⁰

A combination of low-pay and transferable rights has diminished the capacity of the parental leave system to encourage a fairer distribution of unpaid care. For many full-time workers, a payment of just over £150 a week is substantially below their working earnings and can result in a significant shock to living standards for those taking leave. The opportunity cost is greatest for the highest earner in the household, which can make it financially less viable for care to be distributed more fairly between parents. Guaranteeing both a decent income and dedicated leave for each parent (non-transferrable leave) would help transform the incentives to encourage partners to take on a more active role in providing care following the birth of a child.

Many organisations have rightly sought to draw attention to the need for reforming the existing parental leave system in England and the UK as a whole. However, disagreements exist over the extent to which transferable leave, which is a core feature of existing shared parental leave legislation, should be maintained as well as the level of pay that parental leave should be set at. Table 1 displays recommendations from some of the most prominent advocates of reform.

38 Ibid.

39 Unison (2014) *Flexible working: making it work*. Available at: <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2014/09/On-line-Catalogue225422.pdf>

40 Maternity Action (2021) *Shared drive failure: why we need to scrap Shared Parental Leave and replace it with a more equitable system of maternity and parental leave*. Available at: <https://maternityaction.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Shared-Parental-Leave-briefing-May-2021.pdf>

Table 1: Parental leave proposed reforms

	Maternity	Paternity	Shared parental leave	Pay
England (current rules) ⁴¹	52 weeks (2 weeks compulsory, 50 weeks non-compulsory and shareable with father or partner)	2 weeks (non-compulsory)	50 weeks (maternity leave that is transferable to the father or partner of the mother)	<p>Maternity leave: first 6 weeks at 90% of a mother's average weekly earnings, next 33 weeks paid at £151.97 a week or 90% of average weekly earnings whichever is lower, remaining 12 weeks unpaid</p> <p>Paternity leave: £151.97 a week or 90% of the parent's average weekly earnings, whichever is lower</p> <p>Shared Parental Leave: £151.97 a week or 90% of the parent's average weekly earnings, whichever is lower</p>
Fabian Society and the Centre for Social Justice ⁴²	14 weeks (6 compulsory, 8 weeks non-compulsory)	12 weeks (2 weeks compulsory, 10 weeks non-compulsory)	60 weeks	<p>Compulsory leave paid at 90% of average weekly earnings of parent, or 100% of National Living Wage, whichever is higher</p> <p>Non-compulsory leave paid at £344 a week</p>
The Trade Union Congress	<p>Mandatory maternity leave: 14 weeks</p> <p>Optional maternity leave: non-transferable 38 weeks</p>	<p>Mandatory paternity leave: 6 weeks</p> <p>Optional paternity leave: non-transferable 46 weeks</p>	Shared parental leave integrated into the maternity and paternity offer	14 weeks for both paid at 90% of earnings, remaining 38 weeks paid at the real living wage
Maternity Action ⁴³	6 months of non-transferable maternity leave reserved for the mother	At least 2 weeks of non-transferable paternity leave available to be taken at or soon after the time of birth	<p>6 months of non-transferable, paid parental leave for each parent</p> <p>Mothers would have a combined paid leave entitlement of up to 52 weeks, while fathers and other second parents would have a total paid leave entitlement of up to 28 weeks</p> <p>Leave could be taken simultaneously or separately meaning a total of 18 months maximum leave if taken consecutively</p>	Leave to be paid with at least parity with the minimum wage

41 Fabian Society and Centre for Social Justice (2021). *Early Years Commission: A cross party-manifesto*. Available at: <https://fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Early-Years-Commission-Cross-Party-Manifesto.pdf>

42 Ibid.

43 Maternity Action (2021) *Shared drive failure: Why we need to scrap Shared Parental Leave and replace it with a more equitable system of maternity and parental leave*. Available at: <https://maternityaction.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Shared-Parental-Leave-briefing-May-2021.pdf>

Principles for reform of parental leave

In the context of the above proposals, we set out some core principles for reform to strengthen and enhance parental leave so that the division of unpaid labour in the first year of a child's life is more equal between parents.

Improving statutory pay

As featured in every recommendation detailed, it is imperative that the statutory maternity, paternity, and shared parental pay is increased. Establishing higher rates of statutory pay will reduce the opportunity cost for both men and women taking leave and guarantee a minimum level of income security.

Guaranteeing non-transferable leave

The system of transferable parental leave which currently exists has failed to encourage greater uptake of leave by partners. Not only does it add a layer of bureaucracy which can make it more complicated to exchange leave between two parents who do not share the same workplace, it also poses a separate, relative opportunity cost based on the earnings of each parent. In cases where men earn more, this means that it is relatively more expensive for them to take a day of leave, compared to women. Having a distinct entitlement, which is independent of one another would mean fathers and other co-parents could take leave without additional pressures.

Sufficient time for non-transferable leave

The amount of additional time that both parents should receive, should be set at a sufficient length for them to play a sustained role sharing and providing care during the first year of a child's life. It is important that this time is relatively flexible within this period (i.e. you can take the leave at any point not just in the first three months) to allow parents to distribute care and paid work responsibilities more fairly and in line with their needs.

Preserving existing maternity rights

Existing maternity rights are imperative for the health and wellbeing of the mother following birth. Any efforts to help broaden the uptake of shared parental leave and encourage fathers and other co-parents to play a more active role providing care, should not diminish the existing rights of women, and instead look to provide families with greater freedom to distribute care that reflects their own personal needs.



Appendices



Appendix one: all policies recommended by the CPP Women in the Labour Market programme

Policy area	Policy recommendation
Expanding access to formal care	The existing childcare funding formula should be replaced with an audit system conducted by local authorities to more accurately determine the cost of hourly, subsidised care.
	The number of available hours for free childcare for three to four-year-olds should rise from 570 hours per year to 720 hours per year, expanding the 15 hours per week allowance to cover 48 weeks.
	The establishment of a central government fund to invest in after-school activities and holiday clubs for children in school.
	The creation of a What Works Network for childcare, with a focus on investigating good practice and supporting the creation of more childcare places.
Expanding access to childcare	A new organisation, Skills for Childcare, should be established with a remit to monitor the state of the childcare workforce and coordinate action to support staff development.
Improving flexible working conditions	The right to request a flexible working arrangement should be a day one right, with the possibility of trials made available, in line with best practice. The limitation on requests should also be reduced to 6 months.
	The UK government should use various means to increase the uptake of management training aimed at helping foster a culture and practice of flexible working.
	Large job searching websites should be mandated to include flexible working as a default option when designing job adverts and that the government should set a national target of 70% of new job adverts highlighting flexibility by 2025.
Distributing care more fairly in the home	A series of high-level principles for reforming existing parental leave, built on preserving and enhancing existing maternity rights, offering non-transferable leave for fathers and co-parents, and boosting the rate of statutory pay.



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