



THE CARE ECONOMY IN PALESTINE:

TOWARDS RECOGNIZING, REDUCING AND REDISTRIBUTING UNPAID CARE WORK

In a nutshell:

- In Palestine, women do less paid and decent work, more unpaid care and domestic work.
- On average, women do seven times more unpaid care work than men.
- Employed, married women spend more total hours working (paid and unpaid) than employed, married men.
- When women work for pay, its mostly in care occupations, which account for nearly half of all female jobs.
- Unlike in the government sector and UNRWA, labour protection and social security schemes are lax or lacking in the private sector.
- Half as many women as men in private-sector care jobs earn the minimum wage.
- Care policies and services in Palestine do not sufficiently cover childcare needs, raising the urgent need for their expansion.

Key questions:

- What is the scope of unpaid care work in Palestine and how does it vary by gender, marital status, and other demographic and socioeconomic characteristics?
- What is the size of the paid care sector and to what extent does it provide decent jobs?
- What are policies to reduce and redistribute unpaid care work?
- How can decent employment in the paid care sector be ensured and expanded?

This policy brief analyses women’s participation in Palestine’s paid and unpaid care economy, and its policy implications. It is based on a recent study on the care economy in the Arab States (Economic Research Forum & UN Women, forthcoming).

Women do less paid work, more unpaid care and domestic work

Similar to other countries in the Arab States, female labour force participation in the State of Palestine is low, stalling at around 20 per cent over the past decade (PCBS 2018). This stands in stark contrast to high participation rates for men, of around 82 per cent. A UN Women report documenting attitudes and perceptions towards gender roles in Palestine reveals that 80 per cent of men and 60 per cent of women agree that women’s most important role is taking care of the home (Promundo & UN Women 2017). It may thus come as no surprise that women do the lion’s share of unpaid care and domestic work.

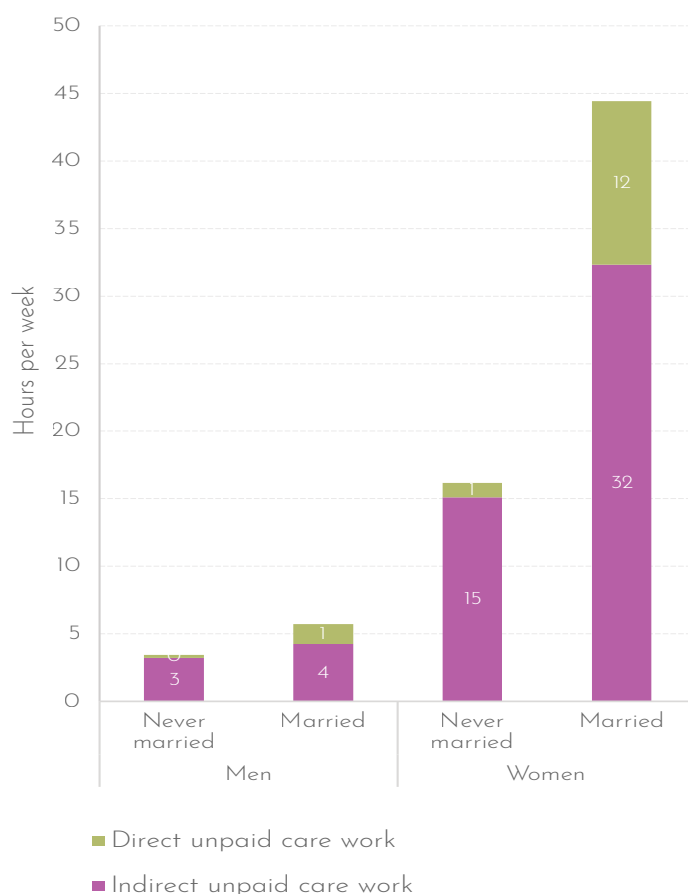
Women do seven times more unpaid care work than men in Palestine

A time-use survey conducted by the Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in 2012–13 collected data on individuals’ time allocation following a daily time record. The data revealed that, on average, Palestinians spend close to 20 hours a week on unpaid care work. But time use varies considerably by gender. Women spend about 35 hours on unpaid care work versus only 5 hours for men – roughly seven times as much. A similar gender gap holds for unpaid childcare and indirect unpaid care. Palestinians allocate relatively little time to elder care as this age group makes up a small fraction of the population (4.4 per cent). Rather, the bulk of time in direct care is spent caring for children.

Employed, married women spend more total hours working than employed, married men

Further analysis reveals differences between married and never-married women. The gap in labour force participation between married and unmarried women is substantial – 21 versus 47 per cent, respectively (PCBS 2018a) – which is partly related to the role of unpaid care expectations of the former.

FIGURE 1. WEEKLY TIME SPENT IN UNPAID CARE WORK (HOURS PER WEEK) AMONG MEN AND WOMEN, AGE 15–64, 2012/2013, PALESTINE



Source: Author’s calculations based on PCBS Time-Use Survey of 2012/2013.

And while time spent on unpaid care varies among women by demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, marital status is the most influencing factor.

Married women spend 44 hours a week on unpaid care work – 28 hours more than never-married women, as illustrated in Figure 1. While a marital-status gap is also documented for men, the time difference is much smaller (two and a half hours).

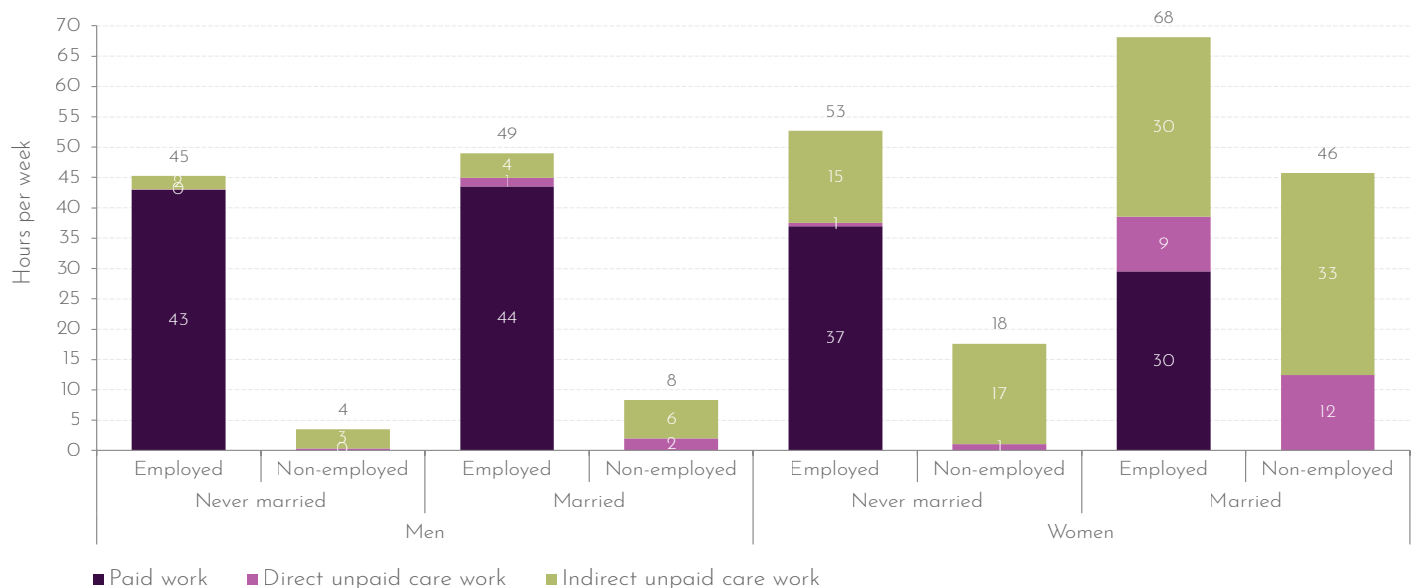
Employment adds another dimension to gender differences in the time spent on paid and unpaid work, revealing substantial imbalances. When considering time spent on unpaid care between employed versus non-employed, married and never-married women and men, Figure 2 reveals that married and employed women spend nearly 20 more hours in total work (caring for the household and earning a living) than married and employed men.

This gap also holds true for the never-married, but to a lesser extent (eight hours difference).

Care policies and services in Palestine do not sufficiently cover childcare needs

Palestine is a young nation, such that the share of individuals younger than 30 years old in 2017 was 68 per cent, with a median age of 27. The total dependency ratio is 74, which is mainly due to a high child dependency ratio of 67, versus 7 for the old-age dependency ratio. This helps explain the time Palestinians spend on unpaid care, in which little time is allocated to care for the elderly as opposed to children. This is one indication of the need to expand care services, such as kindergartens and nurseries, mainly for young children.

FIGURE 2. WEEKLY TIME SPENT IN UNPAID CARE WORK AMONG MEN AND WOMEN, AGE 15-64, BY MARITAL STATUS AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS, 2012/2013, PALESTINE



Source: Author's calculations based on the PCBS Time-Use Survey of 2012/2013 and the Palestine LFS 2013.

Yet Palestine lacks universal access to early childhood care and education (ECCE), especially for children age 3 and under. A new Education Law ratified in 2017 extended mandatory formal education to cover kindergarten for a maximum of two years prior to elementary school. But according to the 2017 Population Census (PCBS 2018b), only 54 per cent of children aged 3–5 were enrolled in kindergarten. Within this group, the enrolment rate increases by age, rising from 15 per cent among 3-year-olds, to 67 and 79 per cent, respectively, for 4- and 5-year-olds. Enrolment data on younger children are not available, but similar to the first group, it is expected to be low. The low enrolment rate, mainly for the younger age group, represents a main obstacle to reducing time-use imbalances, as married and employed women spend substantially more hours earning a living and caring for the family.

When women work for pay, it is mostly in care roles

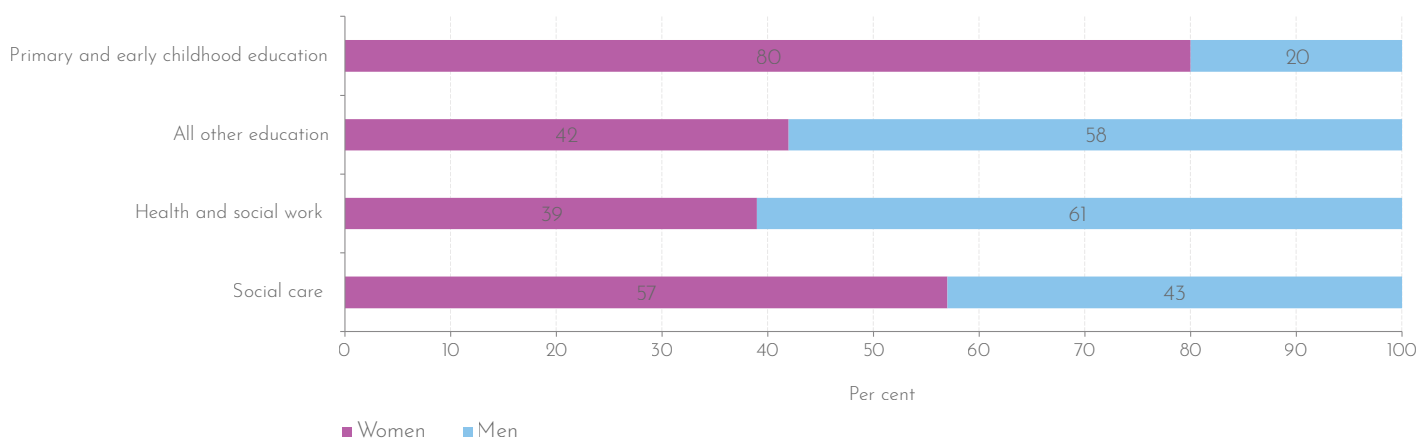
The paid care sector is an important source of employment for women in Palestine. The sector

employs about 15 per cent of total workers and half of all employed women. Not surprisingly, women are overrepresented among paid care workers (around 57 per cent of the total). Across occupations, as shown in Figure 3, the majority of early childhood educators (80 per cent) and social care workers (57 per cent) are women. Meanwhile, men are well represented in all government-paid care occupations – especially health and social work, where they make up more than half. The Government hires half of all paid care workers (mostly educators and health-care workers), followed by the private sector, the UNRWA and NGOs, respectively.

Labour protections and social security are lax or lacking, particularly in the private sector

Social security is a key consideration for many who opt to work in the better-covered public sector than the private sector. A Social Security Law for private-sector workers was ratified in September 2016, providing a legal framework for the first private-sector social security system.

FIGURE 3. WOMEN'S SHARE OF EMPLOYMENT IN PAID CARE SECTORS, 2017



Source: Author's calculations based on the 2017 PCBS Population Census.

The law is based on a cost-sharing principle between employer and employees, covering safety, retirement and maternity insurance. The period of maternity leave under the law would have increased to 12 weeks. However, the State of Palestine halted the implementation of the law after months of civil protests, during which a wide spectrum of workers raised reservations regarding employees' contributions, maturity time for workers to receive the benefits, and the terms of benefits to legal heirs, among other issues.

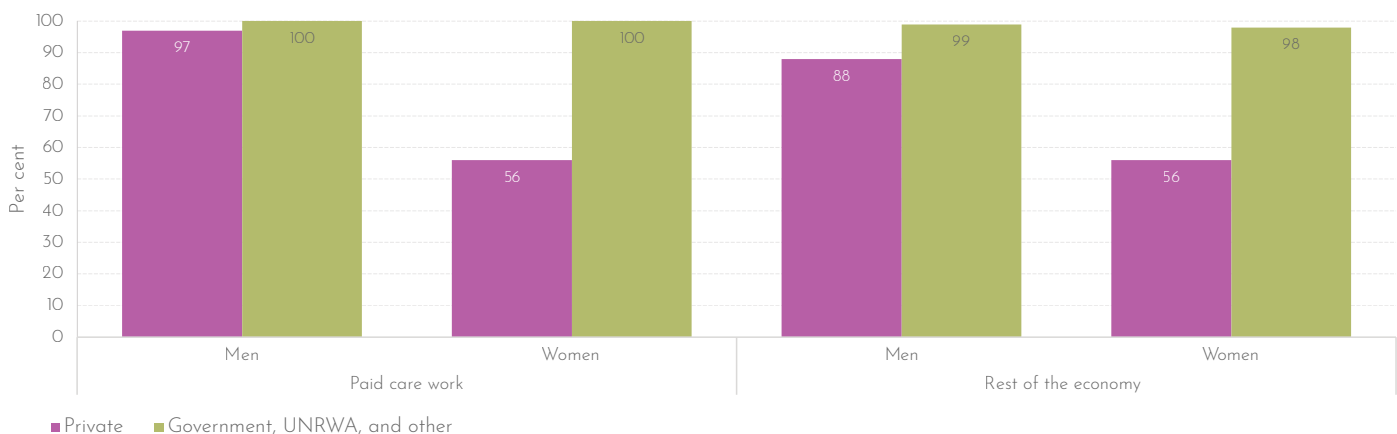
For working women, formality is another important consideration, as it means receiving retirement/severance payment, annual paid leave, paid sick leave and maternity leave for women. Palestinian Labour Law No. 7 covers paid leave, including maternity leave of 10 weeks. Data from the PCBS's Population Census of 2017 show that while most paid care workers (85 per cent) in Palestine are formal, formality is lowest in the private sector (70 per cent). However, there is considerable variation in the private sector, where formality is lowest among childcare and personal care workers – professions dominated by women. Again, closer

examination reveals gender gaps – as 79 per cent of men in private-sector care occupations were formally employed, versus just 65 per cent of women.

Only half as many women as men in private-sector care jobs are earning the minimum wage

Analysis of compliance with minimum wage regulations reveals that all workers in the public sector earn above minimum wage. Nonetheless, there are major gendered pay gaps in the private sector – where 97 per cent of men care workers in the West Bank earned the minimum wage, or higher, in 2017, compared to just 56 per cent of women. The reason is likely related to excess labour supply, with the number of job applicants far exceeding vacancies, which reduces wage bargaining power to the benefit of employers. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) of 2018 shows that unemployment rate among women in the West Bank, where the minimum wage is eventually applied, is 30 per cent relative to 14 per cent for men.

FIGURE 4. MINIMUM WAGE SHARE IN THE PAID CARE SECTOR AND NON-CARE SECTORS, 2017, WEST BANK



Source: Author's calculations from the PCBS LFS of 2018.

The extent of job opportunities is only one factor to explain the gender wage gap. Thus, more research is warranted to explore other social and economic determinants.

More generally, low compliance with minimum wage regulations in the West Bank can be attributed to a lack of government enforcement (Fallah 2014 and 2016). In particular, the Ministry of Labour (MoL) has lacked sufficient human capital and logistical capacity to ensure high compliance rates and has not applied stringent penalties for violations. Inspectors often issue a warning and only use sanctions as the last option. Furthermore, the fine (USD \$70 to \$100 per employee paid below the minimum wage) is insufficient to deter non-compliance.

The analysis confirms that although most of those employed in the paid care sector enjoy some employment rights, coverage must be expanded in the private sector, particularly to address low pay among women. Such assessments of the quality of working conditions in paid care occupations are vital, both to ensure the quality of services as well as the well-being of women workers.

Recommendations

Enhance labour law compliance

In light of the report's findings of weak compliance by employers with the minimum wage, mainly for women employed in the private sector, a key recommendation to enhance compliance is for MoL to strictly implement sanctions as mandated by the labour law. It is also vital to increase the cost of sanctions, raising fines to a level that would eventually deter non-compliance. Some estimates suggest an optimal fine would be 2,400 shekels (USD 700) per employee (Fallah 2014).

In parallel, a dialogue should be reinitiated with private sector representatives to remind employers that they must comply with minimum-wage rules. MoL should also cooperate closely with civil society organizations and labour unions to raise awareness about fair pay and mobilize the local community to denounce minimum wage violations. It is also crucial to raise employees' awareness regarding their rights, including minimum wage, and encourage them to file complaints against non-complying employers. Nevertheless, many unempowered employees, particularly women, may choose not to do so for fear of retaliation and potential job loss. To address this, the Government could issue a decree obliging employers to pay salaries via cheques/bank deposits and grant MoL inspectors access to firms' payroll records. This would allow for direct spotting of non-compliance.

Improve working conditions and benefits

Expanding coverage of work benefits – including maternity leave, severance pay, paid vacation and health coverage – is vital to attract and retain women in the labour market and ensure a high quality of service in the paid care sector. This is particularly important given women's overrepresentation in this sector. To ensure widespread coverage of social security benefits, one option would be to widely enforce sanctions on non-compliance with employment formality, as stipulated in Palestinian labour law. Such an intervention could come at a cost; however, as less productive firms might reduce employment as a strategy to minimize the cost of providing employee benefits.

Since full-fledged law enforcement could have unintended consequences, another potential solution to this concern is to adopt a social

security scheme in which the cost of mandated benefits is mutually shared between employers and employees. To this end, revisiting Palestine's frozen 2016 social security law and successfully renegotiating the labour relations terms and financial contributions could pave the way for wider approval and eventual effective implementation.

Redistribute the responsibility for unpaid care work by expanding ECCE and parental leave

Reducing the time that women spend on unpaid care is vital to expand their opportunities to enter the labour market. To this end, the Government should mobilize resources to enforce the newly ratified education law to make kindergarten education universal. Furthermore, since the market has failed to expand nursery services, as few young children are enrolled in nurseries, the Government should intervene to establish more public nurseries or provide financial incentives to the private sector and NGOs to deliver these services. Given the fiscal challenges facing the Palestinian Government, different provision models and financing options, in collaboration with the private sector, should be explored.

Ultimately, redistributing the responsibility of unpaid care work between women and men is key. To this end, paternity leave is commonly used in several countries. Such a policy might be ineffective in Palestine in the short-term, given the deeply rooted gendered division of labour. However, paternity leave could be effective in the long run, if coupled with awareness-raising on gender equality.

Raise awareness regarding gender equality

Increasing awareness is key to confronting entrenched social norms and attitudes about gender roles. As such, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and MoL can cooperate with civil society organizations, businesswomen's associations and international institutions such as UN Women. Together, they can organize public awareness campaigns and introduce capacity-building initiatives to promote gender equality and encourage a more gender-balanced redistribution of the responsibility of unpaid care work.

Awareness-raising should also target younger generations, introducing gender equality in curricula at various educational levels. These efforts can capitalize on positive attitudes that have recently surfaced in Palestinian society. Greater awareness-raising could further sway men towards gender equality.

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About the research

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