

A POLICY BRIEF TO MAKE UCDW INCLUSIVE:

Based on the Implementation
Research on Gender
Mainstreaming Guidelines from
UCDW and Intersectionality
Perspectives in Selected
Government Ministries

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INTRODUCTION

The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that over 16 billion hours of unpaid care work are performed daily. If compensated at minimum wage, this work would account for about 9 percent of the global GDP, or roughly US\$11 trillion annually. Most of this work is carried out by women and girls, who, on average, undertake three times as many unpaid care tasks as men and boys worldwide. In some regions, particularly in developing countries, this gap can be as high as seven times greater (ILO, 2018). Acknowledging this disparity, Target 5.4 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) on gender equality explicitly calls for the recognition and valuation of unpaid care work through improved public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibilities within households (UN, 2025).

Despite this growing consensus, substantial gaps still exist in policy development, resource allocation and investment, program implementation and coordination, and data collection regarding the care economy.

ETHIOPIAN CONTEXT

In Ethiopia, Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW) constitutes a critical, yet deeply gendered and systematically undervalued component of the national economy and social norms. Women and girls disproportionately shoulder the responsibility of caregiving and household tasks – such as cooking, cleaning, fetching water, and caring for children and the elderly – often at the expense of their education, employment, and public participation. The study by the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA) and the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA) revealed that the estimated annual wage value of UCDW ranges from 20,007,315,781.87 USD to 26,854,310,054.38 USD, representing between 16.8% and 22.6% of Ethiopia's 2022 GDP (NEWA, 2024). Despite the immense economic significance, UCDW remains excluded from formal GDP calculations and is invisible in policy discourse. This invisibility perpetuates gender inequalities in labor market participation, income, and access to social protection. UN Women affirms that without addressing the gendered nature of care work, Ethiopia risks exacerbating existing inequities and missing opportunities for inclusive growth and gender-responsive development (UN Women, 2021).

The policy brief outlines key findings and recommendations to inform policy measures, as shown below.

KEY FINDINGS

1 Acknowledgement Without Action: The national and sectoral guidelines of the five selected pro-poor ministries (MoWSA, MoH, MoE, MoLS, and MoWE) assert that, within their respective mandates, they have taken steps to mitigate gender inequalities and acknowledge the disproportionate burden of UCDW on women and girls. They cite UCDW as a constraint on women's education (MoE), a barrier to women's employment (MoLS), and a driver for infrastructure needs aimed at reducing women's burdens (MoWE). However, despite these acknowledgments and institutional efforts, UCDW is not directly or systematically addressed as a thematic issue. The absence of explicit strategies leaves its profound economic and social impacts largely unrecognized and unaddressed.

2 Lack of Intersectional Approach: The guidelines acknowledge gender issues and disproportionate burden on women and girls, but they do not adopt a systematic intersectional framework which analyzes how different social identities—such as gender, class, race, age, and migration status—interact to shape people's experiences of providing and receiving care. Critical factors such as rurality, disability, ethnic background, and economic status are neither systematically disaggregated in data nor integrated into policy design.¹ This omission prevents targeted support for the most marginalized groups of women, who often experience the most intense UCDW burdens.

3 Weak Institutionalization and Resourcing: Although some ministries have established executive-level structures to support gender mainstreaming, significant challenges persist in ensuring meaningful representation of women's issues within institutional management and strategic focus. These challenges include: lack of adequate representation in management bodies, insufficient budgeting and resources, awareness gaps among staff about UCDW and intersectionality, and weak stakeholder collaboration. Consequently, existing tangible interventions—such as childcare services, flexible working conditions (working from home, job sharing), and infrastructural investments—remain underdeveloped or entirely missing.

¹ See for example <http://ngis.gov.et/>, which is a national gender information system. This database has to yet generate and display data on UCDW.

This policy brief presents insights from the “Implementation Research on Gender Mainstreaming Policy from UCDW and Intersectionality Perspectives in Selected Government Sectors,” conducted in 2024-25 by NEWA and the MoWSA. The pilot targeted the five pro-poor ministries: the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labor and Skills, and the Ministry of Water and Energy.

The findings are based on the evidence generated from a desk review of the national and sectoral gender mainstreaming guidelines, an analysis of broader literature on UCDW and intersectionality, and several interviews with experts or heads of Women and Social Affairs Mainstreaming Implementation units within the target ministries.

The objective of this policy brief is to inform policymakers about critical gaps in current gender mainstreaming practices related to UCDW and to galvanize commitment toward investing in recognition, reduction, and redistribution of UCDW in Ethiopia.

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Outdated Policy Frameworks: The national guideline is outdated, and sectoral guidelines have gone and are in a prolonged revision process, which hinders the effective integration of emerging gender issues. The lack of comprehensive and up-to-date frameworks has resulted in no direct and systematic recognition of UCDW and intersectionality, thus limiting responsiveness to new challenges.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The 5Rs framework—Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute, Reward, and Represent—is a globally endorsed strategy for addressing unpaid care and domestic work (UCDW). These principles can be meaningfully adopted, but they require careful contextualization to reflect local socio-cultural norms, resource constraints, and institutional capacities. Tailoring the 5Rs approach to Ethiopia offers an opportunity to shift UCDW from being perceived as a personal burden to being treated as a public policy agenda.

1 ADOPT A 5RS FRAMEWORK FOR UCDW

Recognize: Formally acknowledge the economic and social value of UCDW by updating national and sectoral guidelines. Integrate UCDW into national accounts, budgetary processes, and policy frameworks to ensure it is measured and valued.

Reduce: Invest in time-saving infrastructure and public services—such as rural electrification, improved water access, and childcare facilities. These investments directly reduce the time burden of caregiving and facilitate increased participation of women in education and the labor market.

Redistribute: Develop and promote policies that ensure a more equitable sharing of care responsibilities within households, communities, and the government. This includes introducing or strengthening flexible work arrangements, incentivized paternity leave, and community-based support systems.

Revalue: Lead a paradigm shift in how society perceives unpaid care work. It emphasizes the need to acknowledge the true economic, social, and cultural contributions of care work, challenging longstanding biases that undervalue these essential activities. Government and non-governmental organizations shall collaborate on targeted interventions to advance the revaluation of UCDW, ensuring its recognition as a vital economic and social contribution.

Reinvest: Directly allocate significant public and private resources toward strengthening the care economy. This includes investing in quality, accessible childcare and healthcare services. Such reinvestment alleviates the disproportionate burden on caregivers and unlocks greater economic participation.

2 INTEGRATE INTERSECTIONALITY INTO POLICY AND DATA SYSTEMS

- Systematically integrate intersectional analysis into all revised guidelines by mandating the routine disaggregation of data by gender, age, geography, disability, and socioeconomic status.
- Actively involve marginalized and diverse groups in the policy formulation process to ensure that tailored interventions address their compounded disadvantages.

3 STRENGTHEN INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION

- Allocate sufficient budgets and build institutional capacity for implementing the 5Rs framework through targeted training programs on UCDW and intersectionality.
- Strengthen and formalize inter-ministerial collaboration, specifically for the recognition, planning, and implementation of UCDW and intersectionality-related elements.
- Foster multi-stakeholder partnerships with civil society organizations and donor agencies to share best practices and mobilize the necessary resources.

4 IMPLEMENT ROBUST MONITORING AND EVALUATION MECHANISMS

- Develop and implement a comprehensive M&E framework with specific, disaggregated indicators to track progress on UCDW and intersectionality.
- Establish transparent accountability mechanisms, including public reporting and accessible grievance redressal systems, to enforce labor protections and recognize the value of care work.
- Institutionalize the conduct of Time-Use Surveys and monitor policy to generate concrete evidence for refining interventions.

5 ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND COMPREHENSIVE POLICY REVISIONS

- Mandate the systematic embedding of UCDW and intersectional considerations into all national guideline revisions to ensure that policy frameworks are fully responsive to the complexities of gender inequality.
- Support the drafting of new, inclusive guideline that addresses the needs, asks, and interests of all marginalized groups within the women's group, such as rural women, women with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged caregivers.

6 FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

- Integrate intersectional analysis into the policy framework to address multiple layers of disadvantage. This requires disaggregating data by social categories, ensuring participation of underrepresented groups in policy-making, and developing targeted strategies for vulnerable subpopulations, such as impoverished, rural, young women and girls, and women with disabilities.
- Enhance and rebuild monitoring and evaluation systems using specific indicators to measure progress in incorporating UCDW into gender mainstreaming initiatives and funding decisions.
- Strengthen the enforcement of the monitoring and accountability mandates of the MoWSA, alongside the reporting responsibilities of sector Ministries.
- Ensure strong institutionalization, inter-ministerial accountability, and collaboration to develop and implement cohesive and impactful policies for addressing UCDW and intersectionality.