

ERF Policy Brief

Time Use, Unpaid Care Work, and Women's Employment in Jordan

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In a nutshell

- A new time-use module in the JLMPS 2025 makes it possible to examine how women and men in Jordan allocate time between unpaid care work and employment-related activities.
- Nearly 79% of women aged 15–64 participate daily in unpaid care work, compared to 40% of men.
- Women of working age spend an average of 4 hours per day on unpaid care work, compared to only 1.1 hours for men, meaning that women devote approximately three and a half times more time to unpaid care than men.
- Marriage and family formation substantially intensify women's care burden: married women spend roughly four times the amount of time spent by married men on unpaid care.
- For married working women, especially wage workers, the total amount of time spent in paid and unpaid work is higher than any of their male or female counterpart, highlighting the issue of the 'double burden', where working women are expected to juggle both their professional and care duties.

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1. Introduction

Gender disparities in time allocation are a central feature of gender inequality in Jordan, constraining women's participation in economic and social life despite their rising educational attainment. Drawing on the Jordan Labor Market Panel Survey (JLMPS) 2025 (OAMDI, 2026; Krafft et al., 2026), this policy brief summarizes evidence from Boustati and Hesham (2026) on women's and men's time spent on unpaid care work and employment-related activities and discusses the implied policy recommendations. The analysis relies on the newly integrated time-use module, which uses a time-diary approach to record all activities undertaken over a 24-hour period, including both primary and secondary activities, in 15-minute intervals, following the 2016 International Classification of Time-Use Statistics (ICATUS).

2. Participation in unpaid care

Women are far more likely than men to engage in unpaid care work on a daily basis. Among individuals aged 15–64, 79 percent of women participate in unpaid care activities, compared to 40 percent of men, yielding a women-to-men's participation ratio of roughly 2:1. The gap is larger for direct care activities, such as childcare and eldercare, where women's participation exceeds men's by a ratio of 2.7:1, compared to 2.3:1 for indirect care activities such as cooking and cleaning. Participation gaps emerge early and persist across the life course. The largest differences are observed between ages 20 and 39, when women are more than twice as likely as men to engage in daily care, reflecting family formation and childrearing stages.

3. Stark gender gaps in daily hours

Looking at average daily hours, gender disparities are wide. Women aged 15–64 spend on average 4 hours per day on unpaid care work, compared to just 1.1 hours for men. This corresponds to a women-to-men ratio of approximately 3.6:1, meaning that for every hour men spend on unpaid care, women spend more than three and a half.

In contrast, men spend more time in employment-related activities. On average, men devote 3.8 hours per day to paid work, compared to 0.9 hours for women. The women-to-men's ratio in employment time is therefore only 0.2:1, indicating that men spend roughly six hours in paid work for every hour spent by women. Beyond care and employment, men also spend more time than

women on rest, leisure, culture, and self-maintenance activities. This reinforces the overall imbalance in daily workloads and highlights the cumulative time pressure faced by women.

Gendered time-use patterns appear well before adulthood. Among children aged 10–14, girls spend an average of 0.5 hours per day on unpaid care, compared to 0.3 hours for boys, a ratio of approximately 1.7:1. While boys and girls spend similar amounts of time on employment-related activities, girls devote slightly more time to learning (7 hours per day, compared to 6.5 hours for boys), whereas boys spend more time on rest and leisure. These early disparities mirror adult patterns and suggest that gender norms around care responsibilities are formed at young ages.

4. Time-use by socio-demographic characteristics

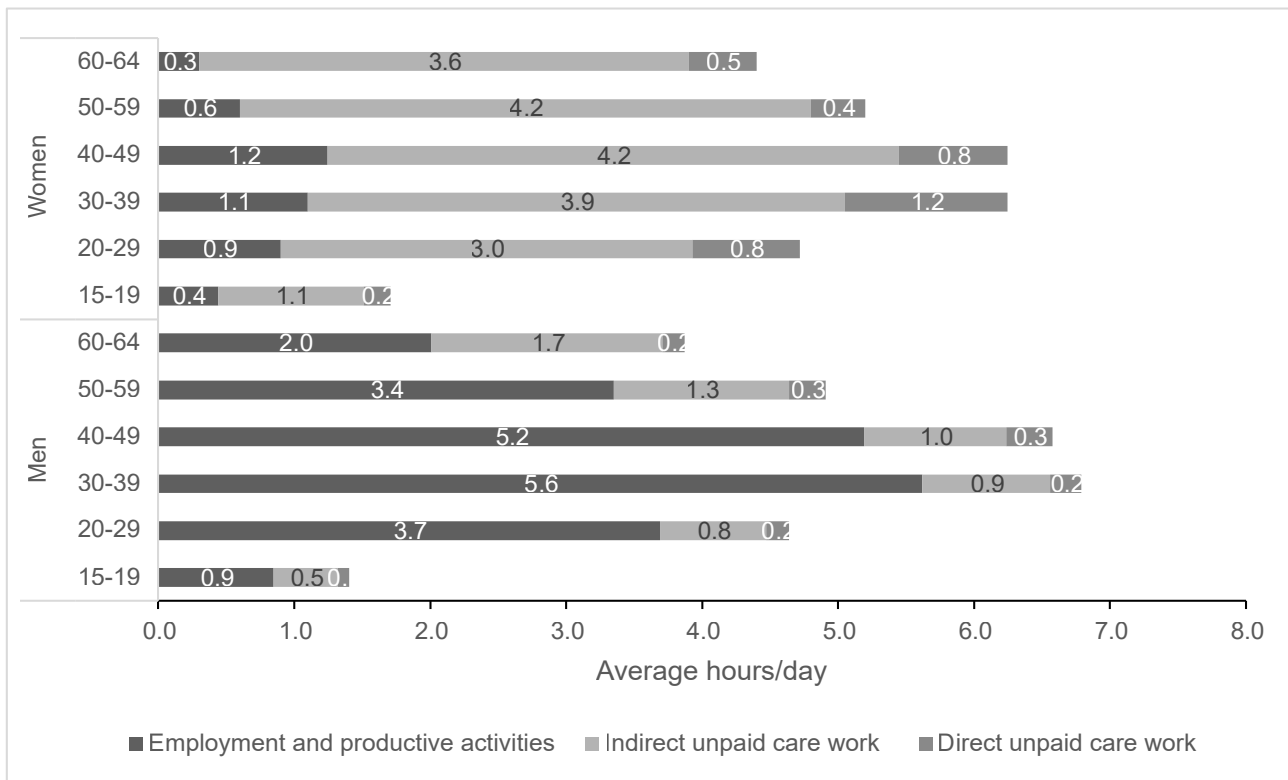
Among adults, women's unpaid care time increases sharply after their 20s, nearly quadrupling, and peaks during their 30s and 40s, when women spend more than 5 hours per day on unpaid care work (Figure 1). These same age groups correspond to women's highest engagement in paid work, at around 1.1 to 1.2 hours per day, illustrating a pronounced double burden during mid-life. Men display a different life-cycle pattern. Their employment time peaks in their 30s, reaching an average of 5.6 hours per day, while their unpaid care time remains low until later in life, increasing modestly to about two hours per day in their 60s. As a result, the gender gap in unpaid care is largest during the 20s and 30s, when women spend roughly four hours on care for every hour spent by men.

Marital status plays a central role in shaping time use (Figure 2). Never-married women spend the least time on unpaid care, averaging about two hours per day. Marriage is associated with a sharp increase, with married women devoting approximately 5.5 hours per day to unpaid care. Although care time declines somewhat among divorced and widowed women, it remains higher than among never-married women. For men, marriage is associated with higher employment time, around five hours per day, rather than increased care. Widowed and divorced men spend more time on unpaid care than married men, with divorced men allocating more time to direct care and widowers more to indirect care.

These patterns generate the widest gender gaps among married individuals, where women spend around four hours on unpaid care for every hour spent by men.

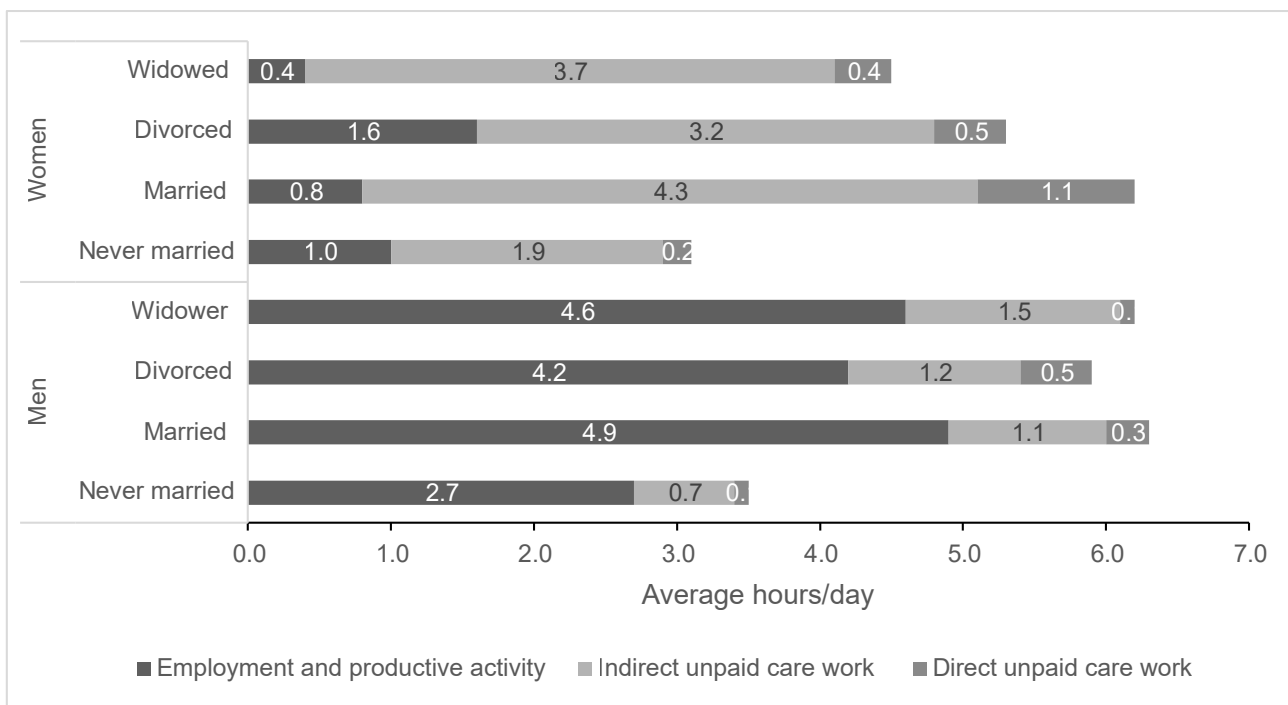


Figure 1. Time use (average hours per day) by type of activity, sex and age group, working age population (ages 15-64)



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025 time-use module.

Figure 2. Time use (average hours per day) by type of activity, sex and marital status, working age population (ages 15-64)



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025 time-use module.



The smallest care gap is observed among divorced individuals, with a ratio of about 2.2:1.

Furthermore, higher educational attainment is associated with greater engagement in paid work for both women and men, yet it does not alleviate women’s unpaid care burden. On the contrary, highly educated women devote more time to unpaid care, especially direct care, than less educated women, leading to the widest gender gaps in unpaid care, reaching a ratio of 4.3 to 1 among those with post-secondary education. Regional disparities also occur: across all regions, women remain disproportionately concentrated in unpaid care work, while men continue to dominate paid employment, a pattern that is particularly pronounced in the Middle region.

5. Time-use by household and family dynamics

Women’s unpaid care burden is also affected by household characteristics. Women with children under six spend more than six hours per day on unpaid care, nearly two hours of which are devoted to direct care, with total care time declining as children grow older (Figure 3). Women’s unpaid care time also rises steadily with household dependency ratios, increasing from 3.4 hours per day in households without dependents to around six hours per day when the dependency ratio

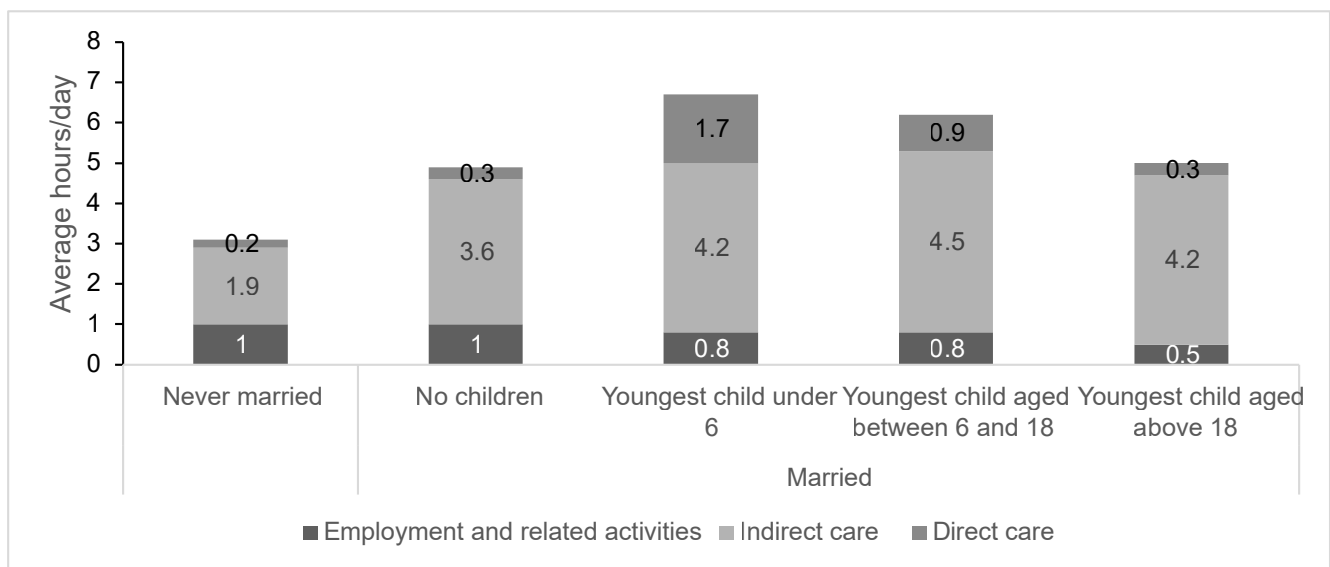
exceeds 1.5 dependents per working age adult. Men’s care time remains largely unchanged and their paid work increases from 3.4 hours per day with no dependents to 5.1 hours per day when the dependency ratio exceeds 1.5.

Household wealth further relates to time allocation (Figure 4): women in poorer households spend more time on unpaid care (4.3 hours per day in the poorest quintile) than those in richer households (3.8 hours), while their time in paid employment nearly doubles as wealth increases, from 0.6 to 1.2 hours per day.

6. Time use and employment

Employed women consistently spend more time on unpaid care work than employed men (Figure 5). Marital status amplifies these inequalities, with ever-married women carrying the heaviest care burden, spending almost triple the care time of their unmarried peers. Type of employment also matters; ever-married women in wage jobs log the highest total working hours when combining paid and unpaid work, while their non-waged counterparts spend more time on care than on employment. Sector differences (Figure 6) further highlight why government jobs are attractive to women: they involve less paid work time, which women reallocate to care.

Figure 3. Women’s time use (average hours per day) by type of activity and age of children, working-age population (ages 15-64)

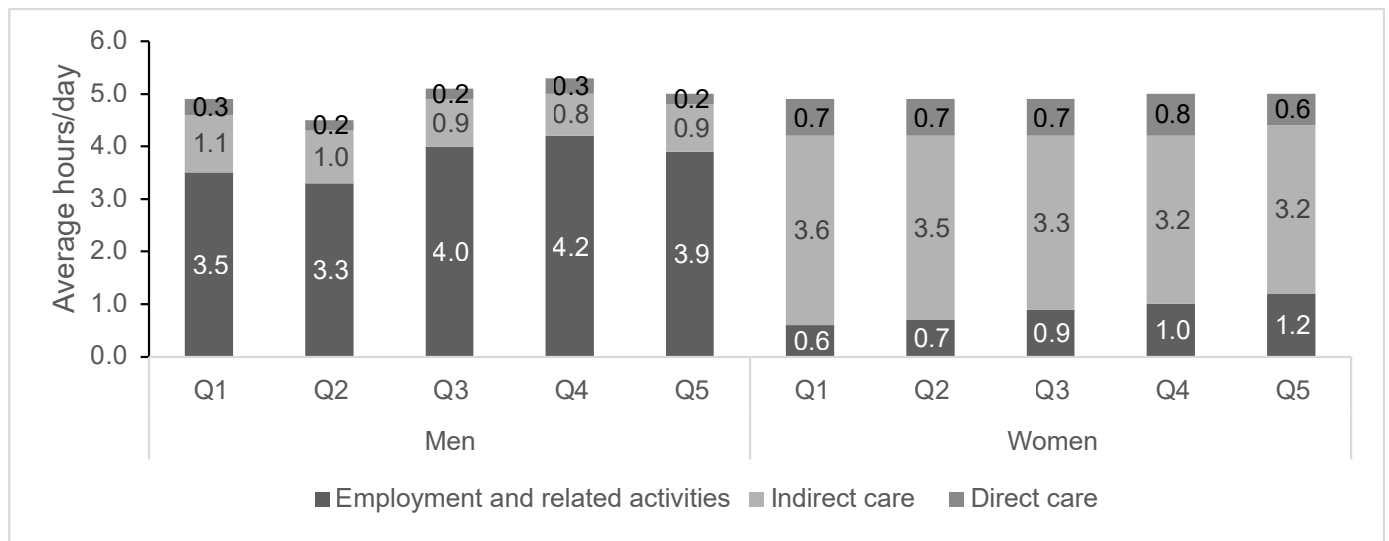


Source: Authors’ calculations based on JLMPS 2025 time-use module.

Note: The analysis is restricted to biological children of the woman who are currently living in the same household.

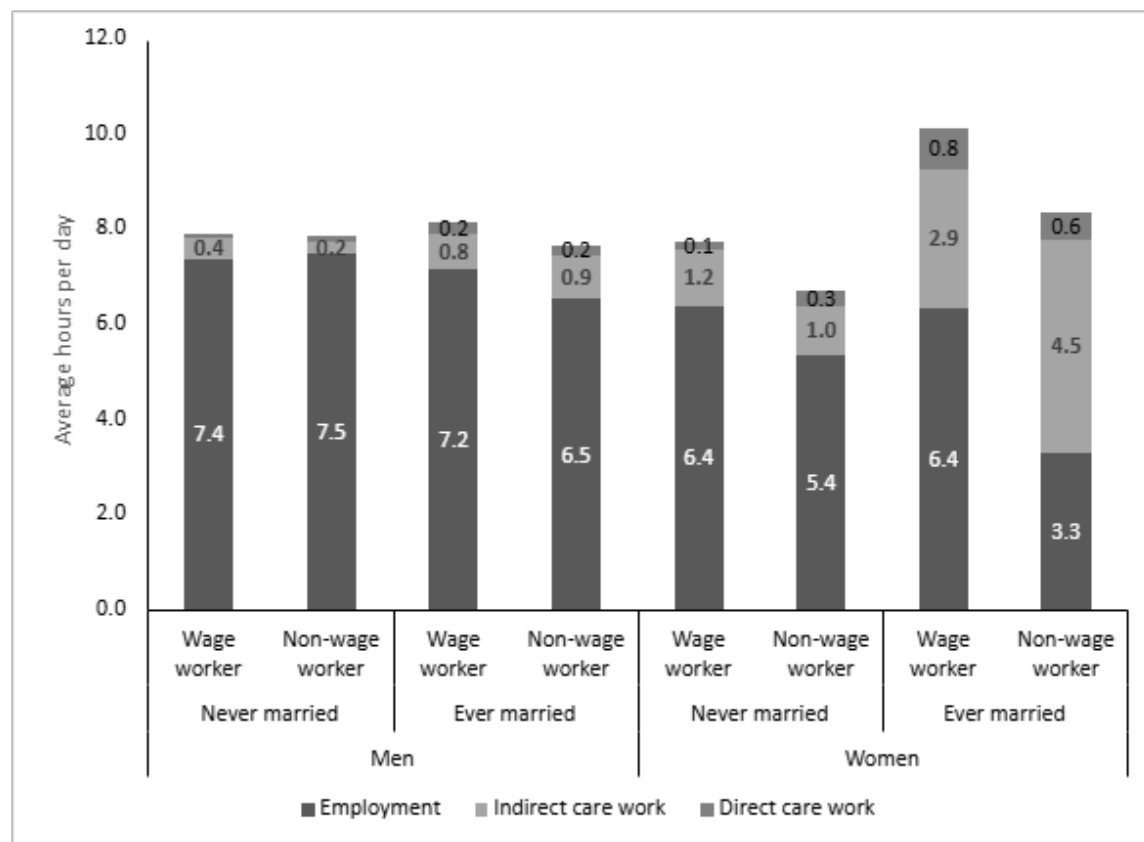


Figure 4. Time use (average hours per day) by type of activity, sex and wealth quintile, working-age population (ages 15-64)



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025 time-use module.

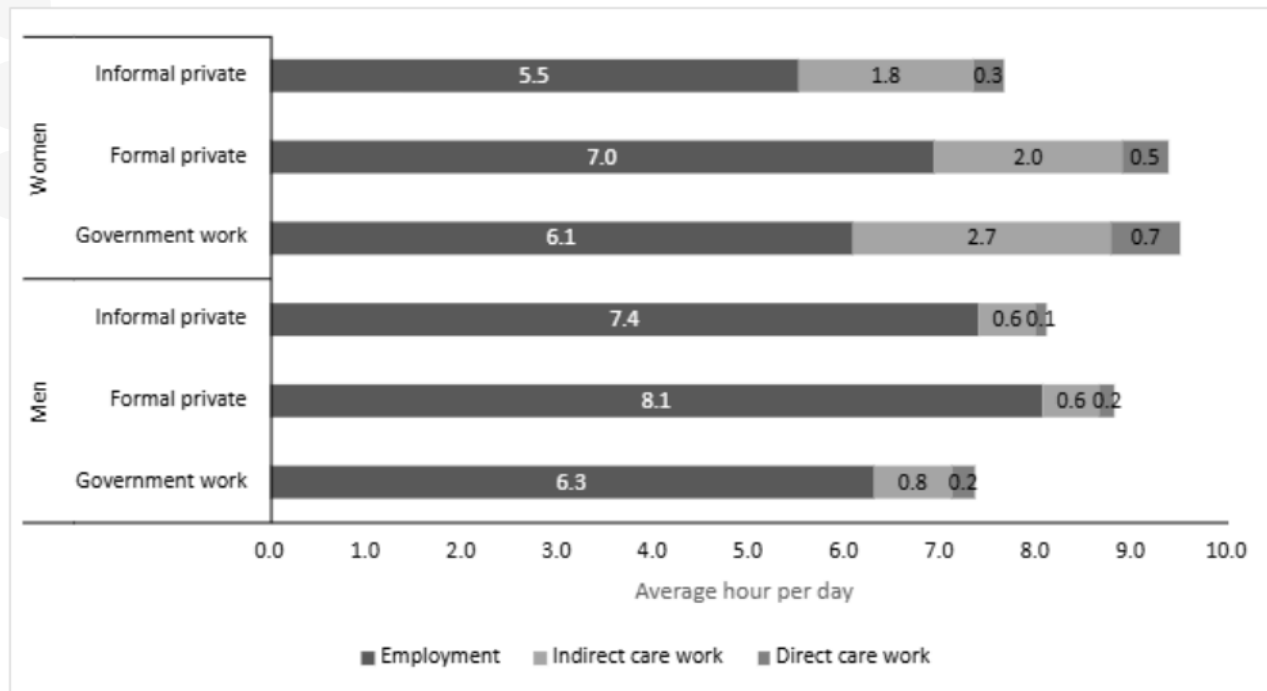
Figure 5. Time use (average hours per day) by type of activity, sex, type of employment, and marital status, employed adults (ages 15-64)



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025 time-use module.



Figure 6. Time use (average hours per day) by type of activity, sex, and sector, employed adults (ages 15-64)



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025 time-use module.

7. Policy implications: addressing gender norms and the unequal distribution of care

Flexible work arrangements: an underutilized lever?

As discussed above, the evidence from the JLMPS 2025 data suggests that flexible or less demanding work options for women reduce their overall working time, but this happens because women scale back their paid employment rather than their unpaid care responsibilities. Although such arrangements may ease part of the double burden, they also reinforce women's position as the main caregiver and a secondary earner. Some studies suggest that wider use of flexible work in the private sector could encourage men to spend more time with their families and children (for example, Chung and Lippe 2018; Pabilonia and Vernon 2021; Chung and Booker 2023). The early evidence in this paper does not point in that direction, but further analysis is needed to understand this dynamic more fully.

The central role of gender norms in shaping time use

The persistence of large gender gaps in unpaid care time across all socio-economic groups, including among highly educated women, highlights the central role of prevailing gender norms in shaping time

allocation within households. Without a fundamental shift in these norms, flexible work arrangements and other labor-market interventions are unlikely to enable women to meaningfully reallocate time from unpaid care to paid employment. Efforts to promote gender equality should therefore be complemented by awareness-raising and educational initiatives that emphasize the shared responsibility of household and caregiving tasks between women and men. Such initiatives are critical for challenging traditional gender roles and fostering more equitable attitudes toward care, particularly among younger generations (IMAGES and UN Women, 2017; Atallah and Hesham, 2024). Recent evidence from Jordan suggests that support for broader gender equality and for men's participation in domestic and care work has weakened over time (Alkawasbeh & Istaitieh, 2026). These findings underscore the importance of interventions that engage both women and men in challenging provider and caregiving norms and promoting more equitable household relations from an early age.

In fact, a report published in 2021 by the OECD highlights that the issue is closely tied to how masculinity is socially defined. Challenging the perception that "real masculinity" is associated with avoiding unpaid care and domestic work is essential. Instead, public discourse and awareness efforts should emphasize that household responsibilities are shared duties rather than tasks assigned to a specific gender. Promoting more



inclusive and equitable definitions of masculinity may encourage men to participate more actively in unpaid care work without perceiving it as a threat to their social image. In this regard, interventions targeting younger generations are particularly important, as early socialization plays a key role in shaping attitudes, norms, and mindsets around gender roles and the division of household labor.

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