

# How to Invest in the Care Economy: A Primer





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Cai Cai, Chief of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section with ESCAP, led the research team comprising Channe Lindstrøm Oguzhan, Social Affairs Officer with ESCAP, and Deepta Chopra, Research Fellow and Meenakshi Krishnan, Research Officer from IDS. The report was authored by Deepta Chopra and Meenakshi Krishnan.

Karen Emmons edited the report, and Daniel Feary designed the publication.

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## Introduction

This primer is designed to support policymakers and government officials in their efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality and empowerment of women in their countries. It lays out the basic concepts relating to what is called the “care economy” — the sum total of all paid and unpaid care work. It highlights the implications of a lopsided and gendered division of labour in unpaid care and domestic work. This strengthens the case for governments to invest in the care economy by addressing four care policy categories — care infrastructure, care-related social protection, care services and employment-related care. The primer includes the normative principles and levers of change that will help policymakers and practitioners to create a policy ecosystem that values care work and promotes women’s empowerment.



## Section 1

# Sustainable Development Goals and the care agenda



At the turn of the millennium, in September 2000, world leaders agreed on the United Nations Millennium Declaration, with the aim of ending extreme poverty. They adopted eight international development goals, called the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to be achieved by 2015. Among the eight was the goal on promoting gender equality and empowerment of women. By 2015, progress towards the MDGs had been uneven, with some targets being met while others were missed. As a result, a 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted. It envisions a transformation of the world by prioritizing the development of people, the planet, peace and prosperity through global partnerships. The blueprint sets out 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 targets and specific indicators to be achieved by 2030 through national policies, regional collaboration, and global action.

SDG 5 articulates the goal to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Box 1 refers to the various targets under this SDG aimed at ending violence and discrimination against women and girls in all forms everywhere while promoting their effective and equal participation in social, political and economic life.

SDG 5.4 pertains especially to the care agenda and underlines the importance of recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work. This work is largely performed by women and girls the world over (ILO, 2018). SDG 5.4 calls for appropriate investments in care infrastructure, social protection systems and public services as a way of promoting shared responsibility for this essential work among the four pillars of society — the State, markets, households and communities. This requires a redistribution of existing patterns of care work, from women to men and from households to the State, markets and communities.

By laying out arguments on why investing in the care economy is crucial and in suggesting pathways and entry points for the next steps, this primer adds to the impetus for building back better and achieving the SDGs through a gender-equitable and greener recovery.



Rahela Begum is a rickshaw puller in Dhaka. She has been doing this for the past three years. Her husband left her to marry another woman. She has two daughters and a son. © UN Women Bangladesh, 2019

#### **BOX 1 Targets for SDG 5 on achieving gender equality and empowerment of women and girls**

- 5.1** End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
- 5.2** Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation
- 5.3** Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation
- 5.4** Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate
- 5.5** Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

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