



Addressing the unequal care burden to help women access decent work in the Philippines

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Key messages

- Legislative support for women has been met with poor implementation – the gender and development budgets of agencies are underutilized, policies lack gender-responsiveness, and women are under-represented in institutions of collective representation.
 - **Champions of gender and development must be capacitated and empowered to foster gender-responsive policies and programs that should be actively enforced and monitored.**
- Traditional gender roles long-ingrained in Filipino culture continue to disproportionately place the burden of care work on women.
 - **Awareness of the potential benefits of co-parenting in the family needs to be raised to break these gender norms and create a better balance of sharing household work between men and women.**
- Public childcare facilities are stretched thin in the face of great demand for daycare services, leaving mothers to take up the slack rather than going into productive work.
 - **Public childcare facilities must be expanded by creating incentives for people to accumulate skills relevant to childcare and increasing the budget for childcare facilities within local governments.**
- Technology is an equalizer for men and women in terms of work opportunities.
 - **Awareness needs to be raised regarding government ICT training programs targeted at women to increase uptake.**

Childcare and household duties prevent many women from accessing decent jobs

Women are disproportionately disadvantaged when it comes to labor supply decisions due to the need to balance productive and household care work, limiting their access to decent work. Gender Equality and Decent Work & Economic Growth are two Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined by the United Nations that are critical for promoting labor force participation, women's empowerment, and overall societal development.

While progress has been made to expand opportunities for women to enter the labor force in the Philippines, a variety of context-specific barriers to decent work remain. Analyzing the Philippine labor market from 2017-21 (see **Methodology**, p.2), a team of local PEP researchers showed that women's labor force participation rate (56%) is persistently and significantly lower than that of men (80%).

The team found that women's labor force participation is hindered as the responsibility of childcare and household care duties are particularly demanding for women. Indeed, women are more likely to work unpaid in family businesses or not be looking for work due to household and family duties.

The project team also found that women receive lower pay compared to men in the same occupations. However, on average, the share of working women in higher-paying jobs is greater than the share of working men in these positions. This may be because women are more likely to have completed a tertiary education degree. The economic sectors that offer the highest incidence of decent work for women are Utilities, Construction, Wholesale and Retail Trade, Financial and Insurance, Administrative Support, Professional and Scientific, and Education. The sectors with the lowest incidence are Agriculture, Mining, and Manufacturing.

Decent work for women as a foundation for sustainable development

It is imperative that more women break free from the cycle of constrained economic productivity. Empowering women and advancing gender equality are foundational principles across all dimensions of development. Inclusivity must not be underestimated, particularly in the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Through their analysis, the research team identified four key concerns and obstacles to women's participation in the labor force, and particularly decent work. Importantly, the team also identified policy options that can help address these obstacles.



Methodology

This brief draws upon evidence generated through a PEP-supported study that examined key trends, factors, and implications related to women's labor participation in the Philippines. The project team investigated context-specific barriers that hamper women from accessing decent work* and opportunities. They utilized both quantitative data from the national labor force surveys for 2017-2021 and qualitative data from interviews conducted with key informants.

The key informants included women working in formal and informal sectors, representatives of government agencies, local government facilities, as well as gender experts. The team used this data to identify actionable policy solutions to increase women's access to decent work in the Philippines.

** Building on the ILO (1999) definition, this study defines decent work for the Philippines as permanent full-time employment (minimum of 40 hours/week) paid at least the minimum wage.*

Four key obstacles to decent work for women and how to address them

1) Shortcomings in executing legal measures for the protection of women.

The execution, oversight, and assessment of laws intended to protect women are insufficient to achieve the aims of the laws. The primary challenge pertains to the practical application of laws intended to safeguard the rights of women in the workforce. Interviews with key informants revealed that the ways companies address and resolve gender-related matters are heavily **influenced by their organizational culture and values, rather than the legal frameworks in place**. According to the interviews, some organizations occasionally fail to adequately educate their employees about labor laws and workers' rights.

Additionally, lockdowns and mobility restrictions within communities during the COVID-19 pandemic meant that various programs and initiatives were not implemented by government agencies (Philippine Commission on Women, 2021). This resulted in **agencies at different levels under-utilizing their Gender and Development (GAD) budgets**¹. Indeed, of the 292 agencies that submitted annual GAD reports, only 20% met the mandatory 5% minimum allocation for their GAD budget (Philippine Commission on Women, 2021).

1. The GAD budget policy was introduced in 1995. It requires all local government departments and agencies to allocate a minimum of 5% of total annual budget for gender programs.

Recommendation: Empower advocates for Gender and Development through a collaborative tripartite partnership involving the government, employers, and employees.

Champions for gender-responsive policies are needed. These could be organizations of collective representation, for example, collective bargaining agreements, unions, committees, or GAD focal persons. To make these champions more visible and strengthen their roles, **local governments should recognize them in public gatherings** and consider their suggestions or solicit feedback from them on a regular basis.

These champions would then ensure that the marginalized are heard, sustainable programs are successfully implemented, laws are enforced, gender-related targets are met, and resources are efficiently and effectively enhance the well-being of the intended beneficiaries.

Designated government agencies should intensify a structured, clear, and inclusive approach involving public hearings to examine the allocation and expenditure of the national GAD budget.

This method should actively involve stakeholders at every tier, including the active participation of representatives from the private and public sectors.

Throughout 2023, the Philippine Commission on Women organized a series of public hearings and capacity-building initiatives concerning the proposed GAD budget for the upcoming year. This endeavour should continue as it is critical for promoting transparency among stakeholders at various levels, while facilitating the effective utilization of the budget.

This would entail:

- **applying a gender lens in policymaking**, such as but not limited to: capacitating lawmakers and government workers to develop gender-responsive programs and policies, and
- **improving collaboration among government agencies and private organizations dedicated to safeguarding workers' welfare.**



2) Traditional gender roles and societal norms continue to act as the greatest impediments to women's access to decent work.

Results from both the quantitative and qualitative approaches revealed that women are expected to shoulder the burden of care work on top of productive work more often than men. Marriage does not necessarily limit women's access to decent work but having children without a carer within the household decreases the likelihood that the mother will access decent work.

A large proportion of the women surveyed cited "tending to family duties" as the main reason they are not actively looking for work. This is placed upon them by gender roles ingrained in Philippine culture and society, which is still perceived to be greatly patriarchal. "Bringing in the money is the man's job" and "caring for children, the elderly, cooking, cleaning, budgeting is a woman's job" roughly summarize the gender expectations set by societal norms. Women are often pressured into these roles by their parents, and the so-called "social gaze". The project team also found that institutions such as religion and the basic education system are believed to perpetuate these stereotypes.

Results from the 2021 National Household Care Survey (Oxfam Pilipinas, 2022) show that men dedicated more time for paid employment, whereas women allocated their time to a combination of paid and unpaid tasks. Women also dedicated significantly more hours to care work than men (6.5 hours daily for women vs 3.48 hours for men). However, the survey also revealed that women do not encourage men to partake in care work, and that they seem to be satisfied about this distribution of tasks.

➤ **Recommendation:** Establish awareness campaigns aimed at challenging the cultural norms that perpetuate traditional gender roles.

International and domestic agencies have started advocating for this kind of initiative; the Philippine Commission on Women and Philippine Institute for Development Studies, as well as international initiatives such as Investing in Women, are actively launching campaigns on women empowerment, challenging gender norms and raising the value and visibility of unpaid care work, while capacitating institutions on gender mainstreaming.

Philippine society's collective psyche must **acknowledge and integrate the potential marital benefits of having both partners equally engaged in both domestic and paid work.**

SDG 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) focuses on acknowledging and understanding the significance of unpaid care work and encouraging shared domestic responsibilities. To fulfill this SDG, the Philippine **government should monitor unpaid care work by devising and organizing a broader range of initiatives and programs.** This effort should involve a diverse set of stakeholders.

3) Inadequate resources for childcare

The availability of childcare services is another significant factor that influences women's ability to secure decent and meaningful employment.

In the Philippines, the legislation mandates that children aged five years and older commence their formal K-12 education in kindergarten. As for younger children, although not legally obligated, they are often enrolled in early childhood education programs, including daycare centres, preschools, or alternative approaches (Ulep et al, 2023). However, while daycare centres are generally available in local government units (LGUs), the facilities often lack human resources and supplies.

Interviews with barangay daycare workers revealed that they are met with very high pupil-teacher ratios due to the lack of available workers (who are underpaid), the lack of supplies to accommodate more children, and the high utilization rate, especially amongst lower income households.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) stated that there was a total of 56,400 daycare centres in the country in 2022, but not all LGUs have established their centres (Ulep et al, 2023). The decentralized nature of the local government affects the provision of daycare services both in terms of the quality and number of facilities, as daycare centres are less available in lower income municipalities than in higher income ones (Ulep et al, 2023).

4) Gender inequality is noticeable in terms of accessing ICT for productive purposes.

The Philippine's constrained digital infrastructure has led to a digital gap, resulting in unequal access to internet-based services. Despite having commendable programs, the Department of Information and Communication Technology (DICT) has the lowest budget utilization rate among government agencies (Department of Budget and Management, 2023).

There is a marked digital division between the educated middle class residing in urban areas and rural populations (UNESCAP, 2019). Traditional Filipino families, particularly in rural regions, maintain a strong patriarchal structure. In these settings, information and communications technology (ICT), as well as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields in general, are often seen as more suitable for male family members in terms of productive endeavors (UNESCAP, 2019).

Consequently, ICT education is likely to be more accessible to Filipino males (UN ESCAP, 2019). As per the data presented by the DICT, only 30 percent of the students enrolled in IT programs at colleges are female (Doctolero, 2023). This is despite the government implementing various DICT programs for women, including training almost 94,000 women in 2022 through short course capacity development programs.



Recommendation: Advocate for sustainable childcare investments that offer inclusive support to all children and parents, with a particular focus on mothers, regardless of their social backgrounds and economic standing.

Childcare services at the barangay level should be expanded. This includes **increasing the supply and facilities of daycare services by LGUs, as well as increasing the number of teachers and daycare workers.** To do so will require increasing the budget for capital and operating expenses.

Fortunately, the **Magna Carta for Daycare Workers or House Bill 6883** aimed at empowering daycare workers by improving remuneration and benefits is being pushed by members of Congress. The proposed bill aims to improve the social and economic welfare of daycare workers. These workers play a crucial role in providing preschool education and social development services to children.

There is also a need to educate parents, caregivers, daycare workers and early childhood educators about the significance of early childhood through community outreach initiatives and awareness campaigns, while simultaneously increasing access to high-quality early learning programs. By raising awareness about early childhood care and its long-term benefits, the community and local government will give more value to childcare services.

➤ **Recommendation:** Conduct awareness campaigns of DICT trainings for girls and women and implement sustainable initiatives to improve access to high-quality employment opportunities.

Technology is an equalizer in terms of work opportunities for men and women. Despite accounts that they add stress for women, work-from-home arrangements enable women to engage in employment, while allowing them to save on various costs. Hence, **training programs offered by the Department of Information and Communications Technology can empower women to work in an increasingly digital environment.** Implementing awareness campaigns could raise the visibility of these training programs and give women the nudge they need to pursue their dreams of being engaged in productive work.

Current programs—such as Digital Innovation for Women Advancement (DIWA) that aim to increase the involvement of Filipino women in ICT through scholarships and mentoring—highlight the importance of implementing sustainable initiatives related to DICT programs for women. Supporting such programs will help improve the women's skills that will expand access to high quality employment opportunities.



Conclusion

While there is room for further improvement in addressing women's issues, the Philippines remains as a remarkable country for women.

The Philippines should continue to cultivate opportunities for women to dream and shape the future without unjust constraints in pursuit of a prosperous and secure society.

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