

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



STATE OF THE WORLD'S FATHERS

**TIME FOR ACTION**

Men Care

## STATE OF THE WORLD'S FATHERS: TIME FOR ACTION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A MenCare Advocacy Publication

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**ABOUT MENCARE:** MenCare is a global campaign to promote men's and boys' involvement as equitable, nonviolent caregivers. With activities in more than 40 countries, MenCare partners carry out advocacy initiatives, research, and programming to engage men in positive parenting, in equitable caregiving, in violence prevention, and in maternal, newborn, and child health. The campaign is co-coordinated by Promundo and Sonke Gender Justice, with Save the Children and MenEngage Alliance serving as Steering Committee members. For more information about the campaign and its partners, visit MenCare at: [men-care.org](http://men-care.org)

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of any of its affiliated organizations.

**ABOUT STATE OF THE WORLD'S FATHERS:** *State of the World's Fathers: Time for Action* is the second *State of the World's Fathers* report, following the first-ever edition published in 2015. The 2017 report was produced by Promundo on behalf of MenCare. It joins a growing set of related country- and region-focused reports on men's involvement as caregivers around the world. The 2015 *State of the World's Fathers* report, available in multiple languages, and regional and country reports in the same series, are available at: [sowf.men-care.org](http://sowf.men-care.org)

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**Caregiving and unpaid care work are at the heart of any discussion of the state of the world's fathers, and at the heart of gender inequality.** For all the attention paid to unpaid care work, however, in no country in the world do men's contributions to unpaid care work equal women's.

**At the same time, looking back to the first *State of the World's Fathers* report released in 2015, there are examples from around the world affirming that *change is possible*. Many men want to be more involved in the lives of their children.** Even in countries where men's involvement in care work is limited, recent research found that half or more of the men surveyed said that they spent too little time with their children due to their job.<sup>1</sup> In the United States, one survey found that 46 percent of fathers said they were not spending enough time with their children, compared with 23 percent of mothers.<sup>2</sup> Recent data released in *State of America's Fathers* showed that the majority of men and women alike, across all age categories, disagreed with the outdated notion that "it is best if men work and women take care of the home and children."<sup>3</sup>

**This report affirms that change – from the individual to the policy level – is happening.** Significant obstacles notwithstanding, evidence, experience, and insight affirm that radical, transformational change in the division of unpaid care is achievable at a global level. Social norms, policies, and practices can be changed to encourage men and boys to do more unpaid care. In interviews carried out around the world with dozens of men who had taken on traditionally female-dominated caregiving roles, researchers found that unexpected life circumstances – situations that presented no alternative but to adopt a radical new way of being – had provided the impetus for the men's transformed attitudes and new household or professional roles.<sup>4</sup> These men rose to a tremendous life challenge and emerged thriving in unexpected and more gender-equitable ways. Their experiences

show that men and boys can be influenced to do their share of the care work; their stories do not come from an idealized, impossible world. The *State of the World's Fathers* 2017 report, accordingly, urges mothers and fathers, caregivers of all kinds, communities of all sizes, and countries of all income levels to follow their lead.

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## The priority areas for action of *State of the World's Fathers* 2017 include:

- **All individuals, regardless of gender, must be encouraged to see themselves as both caregivers *and* financial providers – and be supported in both of these roles.**

Achieving equality in unpaid care is not simply a matter of convincing individual men to step up, although this is one important element. The unequal distribution of care work is rooted in history and in how boys and girls are raised, and is perpetuated at the systemic level. Who undertakes the care work, and whether men and boys contribute their share, is determined by multiple overlapping factors. Three major factors continue to impede more equitable caregiving: (1) *social norms* and gender socialization that reinforce the idea that caregiving is “women’s work”; (2) *economic and workplace realities* and norms that drive household decision-making and maintain a traditional division of labor at home and at work; and (3) *laws and policies* that reinforce the idea that caregiving is women’s work.

- **Paid leave, equally shared between mothers and fathers (or in other co-caregiver arrangements), is essential to achieving an equitable distribution of caregiving.**

The foremost policy recommendation that this report offers for the realization of gender-equal caregiving is that governments (and failing that, employers, corporations, and others in the private sector) provide paid, non-transferable, job-protected parental leave for mothers and fathers, in accordance with the best standards of such policies. Leave should be guaranteed for all caregivers, of all genders, in equal duration, adequately paid, and non-transferable. Anything less reinforces gender inequality, perpetuates women's lesser participation in the paid labor force, impedes women's career advancement relative to men's, and reduces men's opportunity to be caregivers. Parental leave – when it is paid, equal, and non-transferable – is one of the few policies for which data show success in shifting norms around men's caregiving and promoting equality, particularly when it is embedded within broader strategies to reduce and redistribute care work.

- **The goal of full equality in unpaid care work will be constrained as long as families face extreme economic hardship, or lack access to necessary income supports and subsidized childcare.**

High-quality care for children and other family members is fundamental. The drive for more equality in caregiving is directly linked to calls for fair wages, for improved working

conditions, for job training, for decent work, and for other effective poverty-alleviation efforts, especially on the part of the state. Economic justice and equality form the essential bedrock of a high-functioning society, and they are integral to the kinds of equal caregiving situations called for in this report. At the same time, even well-meaning poverty-alleviation strategies, such as cash transfers or welfare payments, can perpetuate the idea that caregiving is inherently a female role by offering funds only to single mothers, or only to mothers. Recent studies have affirmed that cash transfer programs can help children equally as well, regardless of the gender of the parent who receives the transfer.

- **Effective parent training that includes men can achieve multiple powerful objectives.**

New research demonstrates that engaging men in parent-training initiatives not only reduces multiple forms of violence, but also increases fathers' involvement in childcare and expands overall gender equality in participating families.<sup>5</sup> Although such parent-training programs targeting or including fathers have been shown to be effective, the reach of these programs is very limited. It is time to think bigger. It is time to move beyond one-off programs engaging a few hundred or a few thousand parents and fathers at a time. Child and family health and well-being demand that best-practice family supports, including parent training that engages fathers, be widely available. Beyond the health sector, adult literacy programs, home visitation programs for new mothers, and refugee and immigrant services may afford further opportunities to reach and engage fathers.

## **Above all, it is *time for action*.**

It is time to think bigger, to commit to bold action, and to set ambitious goals. *State of the World's Fathers: Time for Action* calls on every country to set a national goal of men and boys doing half of the unpaid care work, and for a global goal of men and boys doing fully 50 percent of the unpaid care work. International organizations and commissions, women's rights advocates, and women themselves have spoken out for decades on the harmful effects of the unjust distribution of unpaid care work. It is estimated that at the current rate of global progress, it will take 75 years to achieve equality in this work. It is clear that change is moving too slowly. The time for action is now.



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# Action Plan

- ACTION 1.1:** *At the international level, set goals, strategies, indicators, and budget commitments around the achievement of true equality between men and women in unpaid care work.*
- ACTION 1.2:** *Systematically measure men's and women's time use, including time spent on unpaid care work.*
- ACTION 1.3:** *At the national level, create and implement broad action plans to promote men and boys' equal sharing of unpaid care work.*
- ACTION 1.4:** *Build these strategies and action plans into public systems and institutions (such as the health sector) that can enable and promote men and boys' equal participation in caregiving.*
- ACTION 2.1:** *Teach all children to see the value of care work from an early age, and to see that care work is the responsibility of all, regardless of their gender.*
- ACTION 2.2:** *Provide training in which fathers recognize and challenge traditional attitudes, learn about gender-equitable parenting, and build skills involved in unpaid care work.*
- ACTION 2.3:** *Recruit more men into caregiving and other health, education, administration, and literacy (HEAL) professions.*
- ACTION 2.4:** *Train health sector and other social services staff to engage men as equal caregiving partners.*
- ACTION 2.5:** *Use income-support and social-security programs to promote men's greater involvement in unpaid care work.*
- ACTION 2.6:** *Implement policies and practices that support individuals' unpaid care work as well as their paid work.*
- ACTION 3.1:** *Offer equal, paid, non-transferable parental leave for all parents.*

# REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> El-Feki, S., Heilman, B., & Barker, G. (2017). *Understanding masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey - Middle East and North Africa*. Cairo & Washington, DC: UN Women & Promundo-US.

<sup>2</sup> Parker, K. & Wang, W. (2013, March 14). *Modern parenthood: Roles of moms and dads converge as they balance work and family*. Retrieved 2017, May 22 from: <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/03/14/modern-parenthood-roles-of-moms-and-dads-converge-as-they-balance-work-and-family/>

<sup>3</sup> Heilman, B., Cole, G., Matos, K., Hassink, A., Mincy, R., & Barker, G. (2016). *State of America's fathers: A MenCare advocacy publication*. Washington, DC: Promundo-US.

<sup>4</sup> Barker, G., Greene, M. E., Nascimento, M., Segundo, M., Ricardo, C., Taylor, A., ... Kato, J. (2012). *Men who care study: A multi-country qualitative study of men in non-traditional caregiving roles*. Washington, DC & Rio de Janeiro: Promundo & International Center for Research on Women.

<sup>5</sup> Institute for Reproductive Health. (2016). *A synthesis of father-centered parenting interventions to prevent violence*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University.



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