



Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA)

Research Report on the

**Implementation Research on Gender Mainstreaming Policy from
UCDW and Intersectionality Perspectives in Selected
Government Sectors**

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September 2025

Addis Ababa

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Acronyms

CEDAW	Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
E/TUS	Ethiopian /Time Use Survey
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GGI	Gender Gap Index
GM	Gender Mainstreaming
GMG	Gender Mainstreaming Guideline
GTP	Growth and Transformation Plan
HGER	Homegrown Economic Reform
IDRC	International Development Research Center
ILO	International Labor Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
MoWSA	Ministry of Women and Social Affairs
NP- GEWE	National Policy for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment
NEWA	Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PIR	Policy Implementation Research
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TYDP	Ten-Year Development Plan
UCDW	Unpaid Care and Domestic Work
UN/DP	United Nations/Development Program
VAW	Violence against Women

Executive Summary

The Ethiopian government has made commendable progress in promoting gender equality, particularly since the adoption of the national gender mainstreaming policy/guideline in 2010. However, significant challenges remain, particularly in addressing the burdens of Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW) on women and girls. On average, Ethiopian women dedicate 13 hours daily to UCDW - resulting in severe *time and economic poverty* that restricts their access to education, workforce participation, and public life. Addressing UCDW is thus critical for driving systemic change and achieving gender equality.

In response to these challenges, the Network of Ethiopian Women Associations (NEWA), in partnership with the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA) and with the financial support of the International Development and Research Center (IDRC), launched a pilot project titled: “Coupling Unpaid Care and Domestic Work with a Local Development Agenda for an Improved Care System in Ethiopia.”

This project seeks to promote the recognition of UCDW as a national development issue, revise the National Gender Mainstreaming Guideline to explicitly incorporate UCDW and intersectionality, and strengthen policy coherence across key sectors. Accordingly, the project called for an assessment and potential revision of existing national and sectoral GM guidelines, alongside the development of new frameworks where gaps are identified.

A core component of this project was an assessment of the implementation and practices of the national gender mainstreaming (GM) manual and the inclusion of UCDW and intersectionality in Ethiopia’s national and sectoral gender mainstreaming guidelines, focusing on five pro-poor ministries: the Ministries of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA), Health (MoH), Education (MoE), Labor and Skills (MoLS), and Water and Energy (MoWE). To understand whether and to what extent UCDW and intersectionality have been discussed in the gender mainstreaming manuals and their implementation, including the strengths/achievements and gaps during the implementation years. The research mainly employed a desk review in which the national and sectoral gender mainstreaming guidelines, of each of these ministries, were studied to see if and how they address UCDW and whether or not attention is given to the perspective of intersectionality. The desk review also covered broader literature on concepts and practices of UCDW and intersectionality. In addition to the desk review, interviews were conducted with key informants in all of the target ministries.

The implementation research reveals that while the ministries demonstrate an awareness of gender inequalities and disproportionate burden on UCDW, this awareness is not systematically translated into policy. UCDW is absent as a standalone theme across all guidelines; where it is indirectly referenced, concrete strategies for its recognition, reduction, and redistribution are notably lacking. Similarly, intersectionality, the framework for understanding the overlapping identities like gender, disability, and rurality, compounds disadvantage, is not systematically integrated. This results in insufficient data disaggregation and inadequate tailored policy solutions for the most marginalized groups.

The research also uncovered several systemic implementation gaps, including weak structural support for caregivers, inadequate data collection, and minimal investment in public services and infrastructure needed to alleviate the burden of UCDW. These challenges are compounded by persistent discriminatory social norms, insufficient stakeholder collaboration, and resource limitations.

To address the identified gaps, the study proposes evidence-based policy recommendations structured around the "5Rs" framework—Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute, Reward, and Represent care work – adapted to the Ethiopian context.

Key strategic actions include:

- **Recognize** - Legal recognition and measurement of UCDW's economic value;
- **Reduce** – Investment in time-saving infrastructure and affordable care services to lessen women's burdens;
- **Redistribute** - Redistributing care work between men and women, as well as between families and the state;
- **Reward** – Integrating UCDW compensation into social protection of public employment schemes.
- **Represent** - Ensuring the inclusion and voice of caregivers in decision-making.

Ultimately, successfully mainstreaming UCDW and intersectionality requires revising the national and sectoral gender mainstreaming guidelines, strengthening accountability mechanisms led by MoWSA, and fostering robust inter-ministerial collaboration to create a cohesive and impactful national care system.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Ethiopian government has demonstrated a strong commitment to promoting gender equality through various legal and policy reforms. These include the Constitution, the National Policy on Ethiopian Women (1993), and the adoption of the National Gender Mainstreaming Guideline in 2010. The government's commitment is also expressed in transforming the institutional arrangement for gender and women's issues from a section to the Ministerial level through Proclamation No. 1263/2021, which stipulated the Definition of Powers and Duties of the Executive Organs. This proclamation established the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs by merging the Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. The government is also currently working to ratify the draft National Policy on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (NP-GEWE). High-level representation, including the President of the Supreme Court, Head of the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), and 50% of female Cabinet positions since 2018, underscores these efforts, earning Ethiopia recognition as one of the top five most-improved nations in the 2019 Gender Gap Index (African Development Bank Group 2024).

Despite this progress, a major challenge remains in addressing the root cause of inequality: the systematic non-recognition and underinvestment in UCDW. This burden of domestic and care work disproportionately affects women and girls; on average, Ethiopian women spend 13 hours daily on such tasks, leading to economic and time poverty by limiting their opportunities in education, better work, and public life (IDRC 2024). These inequalities are compounded by biased social norms and misconceptions about gender mainstreaming which have resulted in unclear responsibilities, a lack of accountability, and weak implementation across sectors. These and other structural factors further inhibit the realization of women's rights, particularly when viewed through the lens of intersectionality. Addressing these challenges requires stronger policies that include UCDW in national accounts, align with global commitments like the SDGs, and ensure adequate investment in public services and infrastructure to reduce the burden on women.

In this regard, the Network of Ethiopian Women Associations (NEWA) recognizes the importance of revitalizing gender mainstreaming strategies, focusing on UCDW and an intersectional approach to tackle these barriers and create more effective implementation. As a result, NEWA, with financial support from the International Development and Research Center (IDRC), initiated a project titled

“Coupling Unpaid Care and Domestic Work with a Local Development Agenda for an Improved Care System in Ethiopia”. The project aims to:

- Encourage policymakers to recognize and invest in UCDW within the national care system,
- Revise gender mainstreaming guidelines (GMG) and policies to be more UCDW-responsive,
- Highlight the economic and social value of UCDW in national agendas and budgeting, and
- Enhance GM practices through intersectionality and the 5Rs framework for UCDW.

The MoWSA, as a co-owner of the project and a technical committee, chaired by the Ministry comprising the four target pro-poor Ministries, CSOs, and INGOs, is established to oversee the research actions.

This report presents the findings of the study “Implementation Research on Gender Mainstreaming Policy from UCDW and Intersectionality Perspectives in selected Government Sectors,” which was jointly initiated by NEWA and the MoWSA, with the financial support of IDRC and conducted by EQUAL Consulting.

1.2 The Context

1.2.1 Legal Frameworks and International Conventions

The National Policy on Women (1993) was a landmark document that established a comprehensive framework to address gender disparities and promote women's rights. It aimed to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and emphasized the importance of women's participation in all spheres of life—economic, political, and social. It recognized the critical need for comprehensive strategies to empower women through education, healthcare, and economic opportunities (FDRE, 1993). The policy laid the groundwork for subsequent gender-focused initiatives and can be taken as an instrument in reshaping societal attitudes toward women and their roles within the community.

The FDRE Constitution (1995) further solidified this commitment. Article 35 explicitly protects women's rights, including the right to full equality and participation in political, economic, and social activities. This constitutional guarantee serves as a crucial foundation for subsequent laws and policies aimed at promoting gender equality. By enshrining these rights, the Constitution has established a legal basis for challenging discrimination and advancing women's status in society.

Significant advancements in the legal status of women were made with the enactment of the Revised Family Law (2000). This law aimed to ensure equal rights within marriage and family settings, addressing critical issues such as marriageable age, consent, and divorce. It explicitly prohibits harmful practices such as child marriage and emphasizes the importance of mutual consent in marital relationships. It provides legal protection against domestic violence and promotes shared responsibilities between spouses. The Revised Family Law plays a vital role in advancing gender equality and reflects an understanding that family dynamics are essential to achieving broader societal change.

The Revised Criminal Code (2000), introduced several provisions aimed at protecting women from violence and discrimination. It criminalizes acts of gender-based violence, including rape and sexual harassment, and establishes penalties for offenders. This legal framework not only aims to deter such crimes but also seeks to provide justice for victims, thereby contributing to a safer environment for women in Ethiopia (FDRE, 2000). The introduction of these legal protections marks a critical step in addressing gender-based violence, which has historically undermined women's rights and safety.

Ethiopia's commitment to gender equality is further reflected in its adherence to several international conventions. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the United Nations in 1979, serves as a crucial benchmark for evaluating gender equality efforts globally. Ethiopia ratified CEDAW in 1981, pledging to eliminate discrimination against women and ensure their full participation in all aspects of life (UN, 1979). This international commitment underlines the importance of aligning national laws with global standards for women's rights.

Furthermore, Ethiopia's alignment with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted in 1995, reinforces its national policies and provides a roadmap for future improvements (UN Women, 1995). By committing to these international standards, Ethiopia demonstrates its dedication to fostering an environment where women's rights are respected and upheld.

In conclusion, Ethiopia's legal frameworks—including the National Policy on Women, the FDRE Constitution, the Revised Family Law, and the Criminal Code—represent significant advancements in promoting gender equality, international commitments such as CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration. However, ongoing challenges remain in effectively implementing and enforcing these policies.

1.2.2 Economic Policy Framework

Over the past two decades, Ethiopia has made considerable strides in economic development and poverty reduction, with a notable emphasis on enhancing women's economic participation. The Growth and Transformation Plans (GTP I: 2010/11–2014/15 and GTP II: 2015/16–2019/20) oversaw impressive average GDP growth of 9.2%, with real GDP surging from Birr 828 billion in the 2009/10 fiscal year to Birr 1.99 trillion by the 2019/20 fiscal year. This expansion was largely driven by public sector-led infrastructure developments and supported by sound fiscal policies and strategic priorities, particularly in agricultural development, which is crucial in enhancing food security and empowering women, who are often the backbone of rural economies. Nevertheless, persistent challenges included high inflation, poor domestic revenue generation, and a heavy reliance on debt and aid.

Succeeding the GTPs, Ethiopia launched its Ten-Year Development Plan (TYDP), which aims to pave the way for prosperity from 2021 to 2029/30. This plan acknowledges macroeconomic imbalances, high inflation, significant government debt, and a persistent trade imbalance that strains foreign currency reserves. Central to the TYDP is the Homegrown Economic Reform (HGER), which focuses on sustaining rapid growth while ensuring macroeconomic stability. This includes reducing debt and creating employment opportunities, particularly for women, who face barriers to full economic participation. The HGER aims to achieve these goals through a combination of macroeconomic, sectoral, and structural reforms tailored to enhance inclusivity.

Moreover, the TYDP emphasizes development through climate resilience, reinforced by the Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategy (LT-LEDS), launched in 2021. This strategy recognizes the critical role women play in environmental stewardship and sustainable practices, further integrating gender considerations into Ethiopia's economic framework.

To consolidate gender mainstreaming efforts in planning, Ethiopia's Executive Organs Proclamation (2010) mandates all governmental bodies to integrate gender concerns into their powers and responsibilities. Specifically, the Ministry of Planning and Development was tasked with ensuring that the perspectives, needs, and priorities of women, children, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable segments are systematically considered and addressed in all policies, programs, and projects.

This implementation research aims to review the process of applying the national Gender Mainstreaming Guideline and selected sectoral guidelines to specifically determine how they address UCDW and if they consider intersectionality in their approaches.

1.3 Objectives of the Implementation Research

1.3.1 General Objective

The overall purpose of this implementation research is to evaluate the national and sectoral Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines from the perspectives of UCDW and intersectionality, better inform effective institutionalization and scaling of these approaches within pro-poor government ministries.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are to:

- Assess the recognition of UCDW within the national and selected sectoral Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines, and from the perspective of intersectionality,
- Investigate the implementation of UCDW-related policies and practical enablement efforts within the selected pro-poor ministries,
- Propose actionable recommendations to institutionalize or revitalize gender mainstreaming efforts and redress the barriers to gender equality and women's empowerment from the perspective of UCDW.
- Inform decision-makers about policy gaps in current gender mainstreaming practices related to UCDW.
- Build interest and commitment among decision-makers in increasing investments for better recognition, reduction, and redistribution of UCDW.

2. Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Framework

The following concepts are central to this study and require operational definitions: Gender Mainstreaming (GM), Intersectionality, Unpaid Care and Domestic Work, and Policy Implementation Research (PIR). Each of these will be discussed in turn below.

2.1.1 Gender Mainstreaming (GM)

Gender Mainstreaming (GM) is a policy concept rooted in the acknowledgment that gender equality is fundamental to achieving inclusive and sustainable development. GM is a systematic approach to integrating gender perspectives into all stages of policy-making, planning, and implementation. This ensures that both women and men benefit equally from development outcomes, taking into account priorities of both genders (UN-WOMEN, undated: 12). The adoption of mainstreaming as the primary global approach to advancing gender equality was unequivocally endorsed through the Platform for Action at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

Key principles of GM include (see, for example, UN 2013; UN-WOMEN 2022:12):

- *Recognition of gender differences:* Acknowledging that men and women have different experiences, needs, and priorities due to societal roles and expectations.
- *Integration into policies and programs:* Embedding gender considerations into all policies, programs, and projects, rather than treating women's issues separately.
- *Institutionalization:* Establishing appropriate institutional frameworks to sustain GM activities.
- *Inclusive participation:* Ensuring that both women and men participate equally in decision-making processes at all levels.
- *Accountability:* Holding institutions and organizations responsible for the impacts of their actions on gender equality.
- *Capacity building:* Providing policymakers and practitioners with training and resources needed to understand and address gender issues effectively.

As UNDP (2013:5) states, “gender mainstreaming is not an end in itself, but a means to an end.” Successful integration requires strategic planning, sufficient resources, and a committed team to convert policy promises into tangible outcomes and real impact. GM is a dynamic and evolving concept that demands ongoing commitment and adaptation to foster genuine gender equality.

2.1.2 Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW)

The concept of UCDW encompasses essential activities, such as cooking, cleaning, child-rearing, elderly care, and managing household tasks, that are often performed without financial compensation. These tasks are critical for the well-being of families and communities. They ensure,

for example, that basic needs are met, children are nurtured, and the elderly and individuals with disabilities receive necessary care. Yet, they are frequently undervalued and overlooked in economic analyses and policy-making (Folbre 2018; ILO, 2018).

Although UCDWs are not accounted for in traditional economic metrics such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), they have significant economic value. Researchers have estimated that if compensated at market rates, UCDW could be valued at up to \$10 trillion annually, representing 13% of global GDP (McKinsey Global Institute 2015). Locally, a recent study revealed that UCDW contributes about 16.8 to 22.6 % of the Ethiopian GDP based on the Ethiopian Time Use Survey (ETUS) of 2013, and the 2022 Ethiopian Urban Employment Unemployment Survey (NEWA, 2025).

One of the most striking characteristics of UCDW is its gendered nature. Women and girls disproportionately bear this burden, performing globally three times more unpaid care work than men (UN Women, 2020). This unequal distribution perpetuates gender inequalities and limits women's participation in the paid labor market, education, health, leisure, and personal well-being.

Addressing UCDW requires comprehensive policy actions built on the “3Rs”:

1. **Recognition and Valuation:** governments and organizations must recognize and value these tasks through policies that promote gender equality and support caregivers.
2. **Reduction of Burden:** Investing in care infrastructure by expanding access to affordable childcare, eldercare, and healthcare services can reduce the burden on unpaid caregivers and allow them to participate in paid employment.
3. **Redistribution of Responsibility:** Promoting gender equality through policies that encourage the fair sharing of care responsibilities between men and women, such as parental leave and flexible work arrangements, can help decrease gender disparities.

Additionally, improving data collection by enhancing the measurement and reporting of unpaid care work in national statistics can help policymakers understand its impact and develop effective solutions. Furthermore, raising public awareness through targeted campaigns and educational programs can challenge discriminatory social norms and stereotypes that undervalue unpaid care work and foster more equitable distribution of responsibilities.

2.1.3 Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an essential sociological framework, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, that explores how various social and political identities and vulnerabilities intersect to create unique experiences of discrimination and privilege. It highlights the interconnectedness of power systems and amplifies the voices of marginalized individuals facing multiple layers of oppression. (Deckha 2008; Cooper 2016; Downing 2018). Intersectionality calls for policies to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to gender equality, considering diverse factors like race, class, ethnicity, and disability.

Key considerations for an intersectional approach include:

- *Substantive Policy Aspects:* Developing policies that address the specific, combined needs of individuals facing multiple forms of discrimination.
- *Inclusive Policy-Making:* Actively involving marginalized groups in the policy process to ensure that their voices and unique challenges are heard.
- *Data and analysis:* Promoting the Collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data that also accounts for other social identities (e.g., race, class, and disability) to understand the full impact of policies and programs.
- *Capacity building:* Providing training to policymakers and practitioners to help them understand and effectively address the complex ways in which different forms of discrimination intersect.

Intersectionality remains a powerful tool for practitioners and scholars working toward social and political equality by providing a detailed view of how different oppressions intersect and affect individuals (Deckha 2008; Cooper 2016; Downing 2018). The global community has consistently supported agreements that tackle new challenges in promoting the human rights of specific groups (such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families), as well as addressing particular abuses (like torture, racial discrimination, and enforced disappearances). The provisions within each agreement also offer more ways to explore different overlapping identities (Darwazeh undated).

This research adopts an intersectional approach to thoroughly understand the position of the UCDW within gender mainstreaming policies in Ethiopia, focusing on specific cases selected for detailed analysis to explore how different intersecting factors affect the implementation and effectiveness of gender equality initiatives in the Ethiopian context.

2.1.4 Policy Implementation Research (PIR)

Policy Implementation Research (PIR) focuses on understanding how policies are executed and put into practice, as well as the factors that influence their success or failure. It involves studying the processes, strategies, and outcomes of implementing public policies to ensure they achieve their intended goals (Theodoulou and Kofinis 2004).

Various theories and models are deployed to study policy implementation, including the top-down, bottom-up, and inter-organizational approaches, and the role of policy networks. This study employs a top-down PIR approach, also known as forward mapping. Top-down theories propose that policy implementation begins with a decision made by the central government. This approach examines policy formulation and execution by considering the objectives of the primary policymakers and tracing the path of policy design and *implementation* down to the lowest-level executors (Birkland, 2015). This approach will be used to examine how GMGs in the five target ministries have been implemented within their respective institutions, and the mandates for which they have formulated the guidelines. Specific assessment indicators for research implementation are provided under the methodology section below.

2.2 A Brief Overview of Global Context

International grey literature widely recognizes that UCDW is a critical component of global economies and societies worldwide, disproportionately impacting women and girls due to deeply ingrained social norms and gender inequalities (Hanna et al 2023; Hernando, 2022; Ibnouf 2019). Intersectionality adds a necessary dimension of understanding how UCDW uniquely affects different groups based on factors like class, race, disability, and age (Britannica 2025). The United Nations (UN) emphasizes that integrating intersectionality into UCDW policies is key to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality (UNDP, 2020).

International Case Studies and Policy Frameworks

UCDW is increasingly getting globally recognized, with different countries adopting varied strategies:

- **Sweden:** the government emphasizes equal distribution of unpaid housework and care work, reserving 90 days of parental leave for each parent (Swedish Gender Equality Agency 2024). Despite these reforms, women still disproportionately shoulder caregiving, an imbalance exacerbated for single, low-income women, highlighting the need for robust intersectional social security measures.
- **Canada:** Adopts a feminist and intersectional approach, integrating UCDW into its policies through the 5Rs framework (Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute, Reward, Represent). By applying Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+), Canada addresses the unique challenges faced by diverse groups, such as indigenous and immigrant women, ensuring policies are inclusive and supportive of marginalized communities (Government of Canada 2023).

The African Context and Ethiopia's Position

Many African countries are beginning to recognize the significance of UCDW, but the explicit integration of intersectionality remains limited. Policies often fail to account for the diverse experiences of women, particularly those in rural areas, ethnic minorities, or marginalized groups.

These groups face compounded challenges:

- **Rural women:** Experience amplified burdens due to inadequate infrastructure and limited access to resources.
- **Vulnerable Groups:** Women with disabilities or those in conflict zones experience unique, often extreme, care burdens that are rarely addressed in policy discussions (Bala & Roets, 2022).

Although advocacy efforts are emerging, resource constraints and entrenched cultural norms hinder the development of comprehensive intersectional approaches. Policymakers across the continent are urged to reassess economic empowerment strategies rural women, shifting the focus toward systemic transformations rather than merely emphasizing participation in existing markets.

In this context:

- **Ethiopia:** UCDW is critical to the social and economic landscape but remains undervalued, contributing to ongoing gender inequality. Essential tasks such as childcare, eldercare, and domestic chores are largely unrecognized in monetary terms, contributing to ongoing gender inequality. Initiatives by organizations like NEWA aim to equip women's organizations with tools to advocate for gender equality. However, challenges persist due to deep-rooted cultural norms and inadequate policy frameworks (Fetene & Haile, 2023).

Ethiopia's efforts in policy integration are still nascent, lacking the comprehensive measures seen in countries like South Africa, which has established more significant policies supported by robust social welfare systems (Global Journal of Human-Social Science, 2025).

- **Infrastructure:** Ethiopia's particularly inadequate rural infrastructure exacerbates the burdens of UCDW compared to countries like Ghana, which have made more significant investments in rural infrastructure (Bala & Roets, 2022).
- **Policy Advancement:** While some countries like Uganda and Rwanda are starting to address intersectionality and demonstrate strong governmental commitment to gender-responsive policies, Ethiopia has yet to fully incorporate intersectionality into its policy frameworks, often overlooking the specific needs of marginalized groups.

In summary, while Ethiopia shares common challenges with other African countries regarding UCDW, its policy integration is lagging. Its progress emphasizes women's participation in existing markets without addressing the systemic, structural barriers to economic empowerment.

Lessons and Way Forward

Ethiopia can draw valuable lessons from international experiences by:

1. **Adopting Holistic Frameworks:** Utilizing the 5Rs framework (like Canada) to move beyond basic recognition and actively address the reduction, redistribution, rewarding, and representation of care work.
2. **Prioritizing Intersectional Investment:** Implementing targeted, intersectional measures, such as investing in inclusive childcare policies (like Canada) and increasing investments in rural infrastructure (like Ghana).
3. **Institutionalizing Care:** Learning from successful practices, such as the establishment of accessible childcare centers within governmental ministries, could serve as a practical solution to alleviate the UCDW burden and enable greater female workforce participation.

Drawing on these international best practices and adapting them to the Ethiopian context will enhance the effectiveness of policies aimed at promoting gender equality and empowering women. This process requires sustained effort from governmental bodies, informed by the continued advocacy and research provided by organizations like the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA).

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

This implementation research employed a qualitative approach, utilizing both secondary and primary data collection methods. Secondary data is collected through desk reviews, analyzing relevant national and sectoral Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines, and reviewing literature on UCDW and intersectionality within a broader context. Primary data was gathered through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with 12 senior and technical staff from the targeted ministries to substantiate the desk review. Additionally, consultative meetings were held with the project's technical committee to gather in-depth insights into the experiences and perspectives of those involved in implementing UCDW.

3.2 Data Analysis

Data collected through desk reviews and KIIs were first transcribed, translated, and then subjected to thematic analysis. The Data were summarized based on the study's objectives and the established indicators for assessing policy implementation. The results of this analysis inform the findings, conclusions, and recommendations presented in this report.

3.3 Scope of the Research

As previously mentioned, this implementation research focused on examining the implementation of national and sectoral gender mainstreaming guidelines within the five pro-poor government ministries: the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, which serves both as a co-owner of the project and a target of study, along with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Water and Energy, the Ministry of Labor and Skills, and the Ministry of Education. The pilot study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of GMG implementation through the lens of UCDW and intersectionality. The findings are intended to inform efforts to scale up the initiative by involving additional stakeholders and expanding UCDW-responsive GMGs.

The study addresses two core implementation queries:

1. Assessment of guidelines: To what extent are UCDW and intersectionality reflected in the existing GMGs/manuals of the selected ministries?
2. Implementation in practice: How is UCDW implemented in practice, irrespective of its direct policy recognition?

To assess implementation, the study evaluated the following indicators:

- a) ***Structural and institutional setup***: Probing organizational structures and institutional practices that influence the implementation of GMG from the perspective of UCDW and intersectionality.
- b) ***Budget and planning***: Evaluating allocation of resources and effectiveness of financial planning related to UCDW, by reviewing the gender mainstreaming directorate reports and plans from the past year.
- c) ***Implementation strategies***: Considering strategies to improve policy execution, including constituency building, securing necessary resources, stakeholder analysis, and designing accountability systems.
- d) ***Determinants of implementation***: Examined key factors affecting policy implementation, such as political support, resource allocation, stakeholder involvement, administrative capacity, and the clarity of policy goals.
- e) ***Challenges and barriers***: Focusing on common policy execution hindrances, including bureaucratic resistance, lack of political will, insufficient funding, and poor coordination among implementing agencies.
- f) ***Evaluation and monitoring***: Assessing policy implementation effectiveness through M&E mechanisms to identify areas for improvement and ensure accountability.

3.4 Limitations

This research naturally has some limitations that are worth acknowledging. First, the study was restricted to reviewing GMG in place since the 2010 national manual, as many current sectoral guidelines are actively being revised or developed across all ministries, limiting desk review to older documents. Second, accessing relevant planning and budgeting documents was difficult. Documentation was often disorganized, and frequent changes in sectoral structures made it even harder to retrieve necessary materials, impacting the depth of budgeting review.

4. Findings

4.1 The National Gender Mainstreaming Guideline: Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA)

4.1.1 Overview: Institutional Frameworks and Mandate

The Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA) of Ethiopia has undergone significant transformations since its establishment in 1995, reflecting Ethiopia's evolving commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. Initially tasked with addressing women's issues and promoting social welfare, the Ministry's early focus (1995-2000) was on developing foundational policies and programs to improve women's rights and social services, including initiatives to combat gender-based violence and enhance women's participation in various sectors.

A period of substantial institutional strengthening occurred between 2000 and 2010, with the establishment of regional offices to provide localized support for women's issues.

A pivotal moment came with the launch of the National Action Plan for Gender Equality in 2010, which provided a comprehensive framework for integrating gender considerations into national development plans. The first national gender mainstreaming guideline was also launched and later adopted by all sectors. Following this, the Ministry expanded its mandate to broader social affairs from 2010 to 2015, addressing vulnerable populations, such as children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. This shift aimed to promote more inclusive social policies.

Between 2015 and 2020, the Ministry revised its policies and manuals to align with international commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Its focus evolved to emphasize intersectionality and the specific needs of marginalized groups. Notably, the Ministry was known as the Ministry of Women and Children, then the Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth, before resuming its current name in 2021 as the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs.

The latest restructuring in 2021 was designed to enhance its effectiveness in advocating for women's rights and social welfare. Current efforts focus on implementing gender-responsive policies and addressing emerging challenges, such as the impacts of conflict and displacement on women and children. Throughout its history, MoWSA has continuously adapted its strategies to meet society's evolving needs, maintaining its central role in promoting gender equality and social justice in Ethiopia.

4.1.2 UCDW and Intersectionality in the National Gender Mainstreaming Guideline

The National Gender Mainstreaming Guideline acknowledges the disproportionate burden of household and caregiving responsibilities on women, particularly in discussions regarding women's economic situations and barriers to participation (see, e.g., pp. 19, 53, 55-56). However, UCDW is not explicitly highlighted as a distinct thematic priority within the strategic framework. This omission limits the framework's ability to address a fundamental barrier to women's full societal participation, and risks excluding UCDW from subsequent development plans, financing, and budgeting.

Furthermore, the guideline offers minimal actionable strategies to alleviate UCDW burdens. It lacks provisions for childcare facilities, social protection measures, or equitable redistribution of caregiving responsibilities within households. Although the document emphasizes women's empowerment and economic inclusion (e.g., pp. 55-56; 59; 65-66), it fails to connect this with discussions on resource allocation, labor policies, and organizational strategies. For instance, when addressing barriers to women's economic participation, the guideline does not analyze how UCDW responsibilities impede access to formal employment or entrepreneurial opportunities.

From an intersectionality perspective, the guideline recognizes gender disparities but does not adopt a comprehensive approach to address overlapping identities—such as rural women, women with disabilities, and those from marginalized ethnic groups. While there are references to the challenges faced by specific groups, these are not sufficiently integrated into the strategies or indicators. The analysis also lacks critical examination of power dynamics. By predominantly treating gender as a binary issue, the guideline fails to explore how factors like disability, geography, and other identity markers compound to create distinct experiences of for different groups of women.

Moreover, the implementation and monitoring components of the guideline are inadequate for addressing intersectionality. The proposed indicators and monitoring tools do not mandate data disaggregation beyond gender, nor do they set specific targets for marginalized subgroups. This limits the ability to evaluate the differential results and impacts of policies and perpetuates the inequalities the guideline aims to address.

In summary, while the MoWSA guideline makes important strides in recognizing gender issues, its failure to explicitly address UCDW and adopt a robust intersectional framework significantly hinders its potential to foster genuine gender equality.

4.1.3 Strengths and Limitations of the National Guideline

As detailed in the previous section, the National Gender Mainstreaming Guideline exhibits both strengths and weaknesses in its approach to UCDW and intersectionality. A notable strength is its recognition of the disproportionate caregiving burden on women and its focus on women's economic empowerment and barriers to participation. This acknowledgment is a crucial step in identifying significant obstacles to gender equality in the workforce and public life.

However, a primary limitation is that UCDW is not treated as a distinct thematic issue, which significantly undermines its effectiveness. The oversight results in a lack of actionable strategies to alleviate caregiving burdens, such as the integration of childcare support systems or equitable redistribution of caregiving responsibilities within households. These omissions extend to discussions on resource allocation and labor policies, where UCDW is largely absent, preventing the guidelines from fully addressing the root causes of women's economic disenfranchisement.

Regarding intersectionality, the guideline's acknowledgement of some marginalized groups, such as women with disabilities, is a positive feature. Yet, it lacks a comprehensive intersectional approach. The framework fails to adequately analyze how overlapping identities or interests shape diverse experiences of inequality. This gap is exacerbated by insufficient monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress for specific subgroups, ultimately limiting the guideline's effectiveness in alleviating intersectional inequalities.

4.1.4 Implementation of National Gender Mainstreaming Guideline

The previous section analyzed the extent to which the National Guideline statutorily recognizes UCDW and intersectionality. This section assesses the implementation of these concepts.

MoWSA has established an Executive-level Directorate for inclusive implementation, tasked with advancing gender equality and social inclusion within the ministry's initiatives. This directorate is represented on the Ministry's executive management team, indicating that these issues are prioritized at the highest levels of decision-making.

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy framework developed by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs in 2010 represents a potential, albeit indirect, step toward addressing UCDW. The ECCE, emphasizes that investment in children's nutrition, health care, and education from prenatal to age seven. While this holistic

approach, developed through a consultative process, underscores the social benefits of improved childcare, it lacks an explicit depiction of UCDW as a structural issue (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2010).

Regarding planning and budgeting, the mainstreaming sector continues to face budgetary limitations. Although there is consideration of a gender-responsive budgeting system, its practice remains limited and has not yet been institutionalized across all Ministries.

4.2 Sectoral Gender Mainstreaming Guideline- the Ministry of Education (MoE)

4.2.1 Overview: institutionalization efforts and coverage

The Ministry of Education (MoE) developed its Gender Mainstreaming Guideline to integrate gender equality across all levels of the education and training sector in Ethiopia. This document is an updated version, succeeding the second iteration of the Ministry's guideline, which was released in 2014, and builds upon the original manual formulated in 2004. The initial guideline established a foundational approach to gender equality for Regional Education Bureaus, teacher training institutions, and schools, predating the national manual.

The revised guideline serves as a comprehensive national framework adaptable to regional and local contexts in the education sector. It is divided into two main sections: the first provides an overview of gender mainstreaming within the education sector, and the second offers concrete implementation guidance in mainstreaming gender. This includes general and sub-sector-specific checklists that help stakeholders assess progress in gender mainstreaming and identify areas for further action.¹ In line with the guideline, the Ministry reviewed the Gender Strategy of the Education and Training Sector in 2017. This strategy has been developed to align with national priorities outlined in the second Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP-2) and the Fifth Education Sector Development Program (ESDP), as well as the global agenda for gender equality in education. Gender mainstreaming is viewed as essential for ensuring equitable and inclusive educational opportunities. It defines gender equality as ensuring girls and women have equal access to education, improved learning outcomes, and opportunities for skills development, ultimately empowering them to participate in the teaching profession and assume leadership roles within the education system. The strategy also addresses the socio-economic and technological demands that require enhanced skills for women's productivity and competitiveness in the labor market. It

¹ GENDER MAINSTREAMING GUIDELINES FOR THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR FEBRUARY 2014

specifically highlights the critical need for girls and young women to gain technical, vocational, and life skills training for domestic and international employment.²

4.2.2 UCDW and Intersectionality in the Guideline

The Guideline acknowledges gender inequalities in educational access and participation, but does not explicitly address UCDW as a core thematic issue. While it indirectly recognizes the impact of domestic responsibilities on educational opportunities, particularly for women and girls, it stops short of providing a comprehensive analysis. For example, the document highlights that girls' engagement in care and household tasks, such as fetching water or caring for siblings, is a barrier to accessing early childhood and pre-primary education (e.g., pp 8-9; 12; 14; 35). This omission limits the strategy's effectiveness in addressing the root causes of gender inequality in education.

Furthermore, the guideline identifies economic and socio-cultural challenges that disproportionately affect rural girls, and notes how domestic labor undermines their opportunities for schooling, retention, and successful completion; it lacks actionable steps to redistribute these domestic work and care responsibilities or alleviate the burden on girls. Concrete interventions, such as childcare services or flexible learning approaches, are absent, which could significantly enhance girls' participation in education by reducing their caregiving load. Without such systemic measures, the guideline fails to adequately address the barriers hindering girls from pursuing their education.

In terms of intersectionality, the guideline recognizes diverse marginalized groups, including women, youth, persons with disabilities, and indigenous communities. However, its analysis remains shallow, as it fails to examine how overlapping identities—such as being rural, female, disabled, or economically disadvantaged—exacerbate barriers to education. While the emphasis on gender-disaggregated data collection is a positive step, the strategy lacks a framework for collecting and analyzing data across multiple social markers, such as age, ethnicity, and disability. This limitation restricts its ability to assess the compounded effects of intersectional disadvantages, ultimately diminishing the strategy's potential impact.

Moreover, while the strategy mentions affirmative actions and scholarships for marginalized groups, it does not provide detailed mechanisms to support individuals with intersectional identities and interests. For instance, references to women with disabilities are not backed sufficient targeted interventions to ensure their accessibility and equity in education. The strategy advocates

² Gender Strategy for education and Training Sector 2017.

for stakeholder involvement but does not specifically call for the inclusion of the most marginalized voices, such as rural women and girls with disabilities, in decision-making processes, risking interventions that do not adequately reflect the lived experiences of those most affected by gender inequality in education.

4.2.3 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Guideline

The MoE's guideline demonstrates notable strengths and weaknesses concerning UCDW and intersectionality. A key strength is its identification of caregiving responsibilities as barriers to girls' education. By recognizing the economic and socio-cultural challenges that disproportionately affect girls, the guideline highlights a critical issue that hinders educational access. Additionally, it acknowledges marginalized groups, including indigenous communities, and emphasizes the importance of gender-disaggregated data collection. This focus is essential for understanding the specific challenges faced by different demographics within the educational landscape.

However, the manual falls short in proposing actionable solutions to address the identified barriers. It lacks concrete interventions, such as subsidized childcare or flexible learning approaches, that could help alleviate the caregiving burden linked to education. This absence of systematic solutions limits the manual's effectiveness in promoting gender equality in educational settings.

Furthermore, its analysis of intersectionality is shallow, failing to fully explore the compounded barriers faced by subgroups rural girls and women with disabilities. While it acknowledges the existence of marginalized identities, it does not provide mechanisms to track or analyze intersectional inequalities. This oversight undermines the manual's potential to address the specific needs of those who experience multiple layers of disadvantage, ultimately limiting its capacity to promote truly inclusive educational practices.

4.2.4 Implementation of the Guideline in the MoE

Since 2018, the MoE has established a dedicated directorate to lead gender mainstreaming, director sitting on the management council to ensure gender considerations are integrated into high-level decisions. This structural integration highlights the Ministry's commitment to prioritizing gender issues at all levels of governance.

A significant initiative for UCDW is the establishment of a daycare facility within the Ministry to support staff members with caregiving responsibilities. This initiative sets a precedent for creating

supportive environments for employees for a better work-life balance. Furthermore, the Ministry has made strides in extending this support to educational institutions by initiating the establishment of daycare facilities in universities and selected schools. This effort reflects a proactive approach to addressing the barriers that caregiving responsibilities pose for both students and staff, thereby promoting greater participation in education.

More importantly, the Ministry is currently revising its gender mainstreaming guideline into a broader inclusion manual to encompass a wider range of marginalized groups and intersectional issues. This revision is a critical step in ensuring that the guideline remain relevant and effective in promoting inclusivity across the education sector.

In terms of budgeting and planning, there is a concerted effort to make these processes gender-responsive and gender-sensitive; however, budgetary constraints often force planned activities to be categorized as “general” rather than gender-specific. This limitation underscores the need for increased financial resources to support targeted gender initiatives.

Additionally, the Ministry is committed to capacity-building efforts, offering training programs for various stakeholders at different levels to enhance understanding and implementation of gender mainstreaming principles, equipping educators and administrators with the necessary skills to foster an inclusive educational environment.

In summary, the MoE’s implementation of gender mainstreaming demonstrates a structured proactive approach, with significant initiatives aimed at supporting both staff and students. While challenges related to budgeting and targeted activities persist, the ongoing revisions to the inclusion manual and capacity-building efforts reflect a commitment to advancing gender equality in education.

4.3 Sectoral Gender Mainstreaming Guideline - Ministry of Health (MoH)

4.3.1 Overview: Institutionalization and Strategic Shift

The Ministry of Health revised its gender mainstreaming guideline for the third time in 2021, following the initial versions from 2013, to address evolving national and international gender issues. By updating the Guideline, the Ministry tried to ensure that health policies and practices remain relevant and effectively address the current challenges and dynamics surrounding gender equality in the health sector.

This revision was necessitated by three critical shifts. First, the strategic transition from Health Sector Development Planning (HSDP) to the Health Sector Transformational Plan (HSTP), which emphasizes equitable service delivery and access to health services based on community needs. This approach better addresses the needs of vulnerable populations, including women, children, youth, and persons with disabilities. Second, the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) alongside new national legislations—such as the Financial Administration Proclamation No. 970/2016, the Federal Civil Servants Proclamation No. 1064/2017, and the Labor Proclamation No. 1156/2019—demands a more focused and aligned approach to gender mainstreaming within health policies and programs. Third, the implementation of gender assessment tools, including the gender equality scorecard and gender-responsive assessment scale, provides essential frameworks for evaluating programs and policies, ensuring that gender considerations are effectively integrated into health sector initiatives. Overall, the review aimed to update the gender mainstreaming manual to reflect these strategic shifts, ensuring that health services are more equitable and responsive to the needs of all segments of society.

4.3.2 UCDW and Intersectionality in the Health Sector

The guideline of the MoH acknowledges gender disparities in health, particularly in reproductive and caregiving roles, but like the other manuals, it fails to explicitly highlight UCDW as a thematic area within health policies. While the document discusses women's roles in the household, it misses the crucial link between unpaid care and domestic responsibilities and the impact on women's access to healthcare, leisure time, and workforce participation. Hence, the guideline lacks concrete interventions UCDW as a structural barrier that perpetuates health inequities.

The indirect treatment of UCDW, through references to women's reproductive responsibilities and caregiving roles, leaves significant gaps in practical strategies to alleviate this burden. The absence of actionable policies, such as childcare support, equitable redistribution of household labor, or adjustments to health infrastructure, undermines the potential for recognizing UCDW within the gender mainstreaming process. Without these strategies, the guideline is not expected to provide a comprehensive approach to the challenges faced by women in balancing their caregiving and access to health services.

From an intersectionality perspective, the guideline focus primarily on gender and health, also acknowledging health disparities across different groups of women, but still does not adequately incorporate how intersecting identities—such as rural/urban status, socioeconomic background,

ethnicity, and disability—compound vulnerabilities. For instance, the dual burden of UCDW and limited healthcare access for rural women remains underrepresented.

While the guideline emphasizes the importance of sex-disaggregated data, it does not call for disaggregation by other social factors such as age, location, or socioeconomic status. This limitation restricts the ability to analyze how intersectional inequalities shape health outcomes effectively. Although the guideline touches on the need for equitable health service delivery, it overlooks tailored interventions that consider the intersecting axes of disadvantage. For example, women from low-income backgrounds face compounded challenges due to their economic status, caregiving responsibilities, and geographic location, yet these complexities are not sufficiently explored.

In addition, the guideline does not envisage specific frameworks to evaluate the intersectional impacts of health policies, which limits the potential for bringing meaningful change for diverse groups. By not having envisaged how to address these gaps, the guidelines not only limit their effectiveness in promoting health equity but also risk perpetuating existing disparities among the most vulnerable populations. Addressing UCDW and adopting a robust intersectional framework are essential for fostering genuine health equity and improving outcomes for all women.

4.3.3 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Sectoral Guideline

The MoH's guideline demonstrates strengths in acknowledging gender disparities in health and caregiving roles, particularly with a focus on reproductive health issues. This recognition is crucial, as it highlights the specific challenges women face in relation to accessing health outcomes. Additionally, the Ministry stresses the importance of gender-disaggregated data in health, which is essential for understanding and addressing the unique health needs of different populations. Furthermore, the ministry's commitment to equitable health services indicates a foundational understanding of the need for inclusivity in healthcare delivery.

However, the guideline exhibits significant limitations. There is minimal focus on UCDW as a structural health issue and a consequent lack of concrete strategies to address caregiving burdens, such as the provision of childcare support or equitable redistribution of household labor. This mismatch limits the ministry's ability to fully address how UCDW impacts women's workforce participation and overall health outcomes. Moreover, while the guideline acknowledges gender disparities, it does not adequately consider how intersecting disadvantages—such as those faced by rural women who bear caregiving burdens—amplify health inequalities.

The absence of targeted interventions for diverse groups significantly undermines the guideline's effectiveness in promoting health equity. Additionally, minimal effort is made to incorporate intersectional voices in health policy formulation and evaluation. This oversight restricts the potential for developing comprehensive solutions that address the complexities of women's health issues. Overall, while the guideline recognizes the important aspects of gender and health, its shortcomings regarding UCDW and intersectionality highlight the need for a more integrated approach to effectively tackle health disparities among diverse populations.

4.3.4 Implementation of the Guideline from UCDW and Intersectionality Perspectives

The Ministry of Health, similar to the other ministries, is revising its existing Gender Mainstreaming Manual into Women and Social Affairs Mainstreaming Implementation. The rationale for such revision, according to the informant, is to align the Ministry's Mandate provided under Proclamation No 1263/2021 "Definition of Powers and Duties of the Executive Organs Proclamation". The current structure organizes women's and social affairs at the executive-level office. The office, the third tier in the organizational hierarchy (Minister, State Minister, and Chief Executive), is divided into two teams: the Team Leader for Women and Children Inclusion and Team Leader for Social Affairs. There are a total of eleven experts all in all under the two team leaders.

The MoH acknowledges collaboration with government organizations, including the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Education. Besides, informants acknowledged collaboration with NGOs and CSOs, such as NEWA, Engender Health, AMREF, and UNFPA.

Informants consistently highlighted budget and human resource constraints (with only eleven expert-level personnel). While donor funding provides some resources, it often limits the Ministry's ability to focus on self-identified priorities. Crucially, there are no explicit structures, budget, or projects aligned with UCDW and intersectionality as guiding and frameworks, despite informants arguing that these concepts are implicitly addressed in their current activities.

Interview results indicate a persistent capacity gap across the MoH. needs include training on fundamental concepts like gender, how gender norms affect health, gender mainstreaming, and the operational meaning of UCDW and intersectionality. While previous training efforts have occurred, it is observed that interventions must target not only at the lower-level experts but also decision-makers to ensure genuine policy change.

4.4 Sectoral Gender Mainstreaming Guideline - Ministry of Labor and Skills (MoLS)

4.4.1 Overview: Institutionalization of gender in Labor and Employment

The Ministry of Labour and Skills was established under the Proclamation No. 1263/2022 to oversee national job creation, skills development, and labor concerns. Since the adoption of the 1995 Constitution of Ethiopia, the Ministry has undergone significant institutional changes, previously operating under the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs. The Ministry, among others, envisages promoting gender equality and integrating gender mainstreaming into its policies and programs to enhance women's rights in the workforce.

The predecessor, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA), initiated the establishment of specific gender policies designed to integrate gender considerations into the labor and employment practices. These policies emphasized the necessity for equal employment opportunities and highlighted the importance of women's participation across various economic sectors (Social Affairs, 2006). By the mid-2000s, the Ministry had adopted a comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategy that guided the embedding of gender perspectives in the labor policies, programs, and projects, ensuring that gender considerations were integrated into all aspects of labor and skills development.

Capacity building became a key focus for the Ministry as it implemented training programs to enhance staff and stakeholder understanding of gender issues. These initiatives emphasized the importance of gender-sensitive labor practices and the effective implementation of gender mainstreaming guidelines (Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 2010). The Ministry also collaborated with CSOs and international partners to promote gender equality within the labor market, facilitating the sharing of best practices and developing initiatives for women's economic empowerment (Ethiopian Women's Federation, 2012).

In more recent years, the Ministry established monitoring mechanisms to evaluate the implementation of its gender mainstreaming guideline. This includes collecting sex-disaggregated data to assess the impact of labor policies on women and identify areas needing further intervention (Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 2015). Furthermore, the Ministry has increasingly prioritized initiatives that promote women's economic empowerment, such as vocational training programs tailored to equip women with the skills necessary for successful participation in the workforce (Osman 2017).

Following its evolution into MoLS, the Ministry has acknowledged the impact of unpaid care work on women's economic participation. It has consequently begun integrating strategies to alleviate caregiving burdens, thereby facilitating women's entry into formal employment. This more nuanced approach is further evidenced in a new draft guideline that recognizes the role of intersectionality—specifically how factors like ethnicity, rural versus urban status, and disability can compound challenges women face in the workforce. This strategic shift aimed at developing more inclusive policies that address the diverse needs of all women (Ministry of Labor and Skills, 2021).

Overall, the trajectory of the Ministry—now MoLS—since the 1995 Constitution reflects a substantial commitment to institutionalizing gender mainstreaming and promoting women's rights within the labor market. While significant progress is evident, persistent challenges necessitate continued efforts to fully implement gender mainstreaming guidelines and effectively address the multifaceted barriers to women's workforce participation.

4.4.2 Implementation of UCDW and Intersectionality

As a new ministry established in 2022, the Ministry of Labor and Skills has inherited its predecessor's gender mainstreaming guideline and is currently developing a new draft, the Women and Social Affairs Mainstreaming Guideline. The existing guideline, however, contains significant gaps in addressing UCDW and intersectionality, which are critical for understanding and tackling the challenges women face in the workforce.

First, UCDW is not prominently addressed as a standalone issue. While the guideline references challenges faced by women and caregivers, they largely overlook the disproportionate burden of domestic work on women. This oversight is particularly evident in the sections on technical and vocational training and workplace strategies, which lack emphasis on structural support mechanisms for unpaid caregiving responsibilities, such as the establishment of childcare centers or the implementation of family-friendly policies. Although the impact of UCDW on labor participation, training accessibility, and decision-making power is implied, it is not addressed adequately through actionable measures or practical solutions. Consequently, the guidelines offer no clear provisions to alleviate or redistribute unpaid caregiving responsibilities among household and community members, resulting in persistent structural barriers to women's economic, social, and professional empowerment.

In terms of intersectionality, the guidelines acknowledge marginalized groups—such as women, youth, persons with disabilities, and the elderly—but they do not fully embrace intersectionality as a guiding framework. For instance, the guidelines fail to explore how overlapping identities—such

as those of rural women with disabilities or economically disadvantaged caregivers—amplify disadvantages. The absence of data disaggregation further limits insights into the intersectional challenges. While diverse needs are occasionally mentioned, there is a notable absence of targeted support mechanisms for specific subgroups experiencing compounded marginalization, such as ethnic minorities, single mothers, or rural caregivers.

Additionally, the guidelines lack mechanisms to monitor and evaluate progress on intersectional equity. Policies address gender inequalities broadly without investigating how multiple axes of identity impact outcomes. Although the manual outlines barriers faced by vulnerable populations, it lacks comprehensive strategies to address systemic and overlapping disadvantages. For example, while technical education and workplace safety guidelines focus on gender broadly, they neglect detailed analyses of intersectionality.

In summary, the gender mainstreaming guideline of the Ministry of Labor and Skills requires a more robust approach to UCDW and intersectionality. Addressing these areas is essential for developing effective policies that empower women and promote equity in the labor market.

4.4.3 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Guideline

The draft gender mainstreaming guideline demonstrates some strengths, particularly in acknowledging the caregiving challenges women face. The guideline recognizes how UCDW indirectly affects labor participation and decision-making, highlighting the critical role that caregiving responsibilities play in shaping women's experiences in the workforce. This acknowledgment is an important step toward understanding the broader implications of gender roles in labor dynamics.

However, significant weaknesses persist. UCDW is not adequately treated as a standalone issue, and there is minimal emphasis on structural supports necessary to alleviate the burdens of caregiving, such as the establishment of childcare centers or the implementation of family-friendly policies. Moreover, the guidelines lack clear provisions for redistributing caregiving responsibilities among household and community members, which is essential for reducing the disproportionate impact of domestic work on women.

The guideline mentions challenges faced by marginalized groups, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities. However, they do not fully embrace intersectionality as a guiding framework. The absence of a comprehensive approach to intersectionality means that compounded disadvantages, such as those experienced by rural women with disabilities, are not adequately

addressed. Furthermore, the limited data disaggregation hinders the understanding of how multiple identities intersect and affect individuals' experiences. The guidelines also lack tailored support mechanisms for specific marginalized groups, which are crucial for effectively addressing their unique challenges.

Overall, while the guidelines offer valuable insights into caregiving and the challenges faced by women, a more nuanced approach to UCDW and intersectionality is required. Addressing these gaps is essential for fostering a more equitable labor environment that recognizes and supports the diverse needs of all individuals within the workforce.

4.4.4 Implementation of the Guideline from the UCDW and Intersectionality Perspective

Structurally, similar to other ministries selected for this study, the Women and Social Affairs Mainstreaming Implementation office in MoLS is organized at the Executive Office level—the fourth tier in the organogram after the Minister, the state minister, and the Chief Executive Officer. Similar to other Ministries, the office is organized into two departments: Women and Children Mainstreaming Implementation and Social Affairs Mainstreaming Implementation. All in all, it is staffed by six experts and team leader-level personnel—a number which interviewees reported is far from adequate. Inadequate budgeting is also a common problem, not only for this office but also for other work units.

Besides, interview results indicate that women's and social affairs issues receive less attention than other ministerial priorities. The frequent use of the term "symbol" by some interviewees suggests that the Ministry's commitment to women and social affairs is often more performative than substantive, particularly when measured against the resources and attention dedicated to high-priority work units, such as job creation.

4.5 Sectoral Gender Mainstreaming Guideline - Ministry of Water and Energy (MoWE)

4.5.1 Overview

The Ministry of Water and Energy (MoWE) has undergone significant restructuring as a Ministry, and to strengthen gender mainstreaming and acknowledge the importance of UCDW. This process began with the development of a legal framework to integrate gender considerations into water and energy policies, recognizing women's vital roles in these sectors.

A crucial step was the establishment of dedicated gender units in the early 2000s. These units were tasked with integrating women's voices and needs into water and energy projects, fostering an inclusive environment that acknowledged women's contributions to resource management.

By the mid-2000s, the Ministry developed a gender mainstreaming guideline to address gender disparities in access to water and energy. These guidelines emphasized the involvement of women in decision-making processes related to water resource management and energy production, recognizing their dual roles as caregivers and managers. Following a restructuring in 2021, the Ministry is now revising its approach to mainstreaming women's and social affairs implementation and drafting a new manual.

The Ministry's policies have increasingly recognized UCDW, with strategies aimed at understanding how women's unpaid labor in domestic water collection and energy management affects their economic participation and overall well-being. The Ministry sought to alleviate the burdens of UCDW by promoting technologies that reduce the time women spend collecting water.

Additionally, the Ministry implemented capacity-building initiatives to equip women with the technical skills necessary to engage in the water and energy sectors, aiming to empower them and fully participate in traditionally male-dominated areas.

Collaboration with civil society organizations and international development partners further strengthened the Ministry's efforts to promote gender equity in the water and energy sectors. These partnerships have facilitated the sharing of best practices and the development of targeted interventions for women and marginalized groups.

In recent years, the Ministry has established monitoring and evaluation frameworks, including the collection of sex-disaggregated data to assess the differential impact of policies on women and men and to ensure UCDW is considered in program assessments.

Furthermore, the Ministry has worked to integrate gender considerations into national water and energy policies, aligning with broader national development goals that emphasize gender equality and sustainable development.

Overall, MoWE's restructuring demonstrates a growing commitment to gender mainstreaming, particularly through the lens of UCDW. While significant progress has been made in recognizing women's roles and addressing gender disparities, ongoing efforts are essential to fully integrate these perspectives into all aspects of water and energy policy and practice. Continued emphasis on

gender-sensitive approaches is crucial for achieving equitable access and participation in these vital sectors (Ministry of Water and Energy, 2021).

4.5.2 UCDW and Intersectionality in the Guideline

The MoWE's guideline has significant gaps in addressing UCDW. The manual fails to treat UCDW as a critical consideration, particularly concerning the link between gender and water at large and access to water and caregiving responsibilities. For example, while the importance of water access is acknowledged, the specific burdens associated with tasks such as fetching water—predominantly performed by women and girls are not adequately emphasized. There is also limited focus on how improved water infrastructure could alleviate the burden of unpaid caregiving by reducing the time and effort that women and children spend collecting water from distant sources.

Moreover, the policies and strategies outlined neglect community-based measures that could significantly decrease caregiving labor at the household level. There is insufficient acknowledgment of the link between water accessibility and health-related caregiving tasks, such as sanitation, food preparation, and childcare. This oversight perpetuates structural barriers that hinder women's participation in economic and social activities. Without practical measures or action plans to ensure equitable access to water resources and to redistribute caregiving roles, UCDW remains largely invisible in policy development.

In terms of intersectionality, the guidelines reference vulnerable groups, including rural communities and marginalized populations, but do not explicitly focus on how overlapping disadvantages—such as being a woman in water scarce rural areas—intensify caregiving burdens. While the water policies aim to improve access broadly, they lack tailored interventions for subgroups low-income households, single mothers, or families with members with disabilities, where caregiving demands are significantly higher.

Furthermore, the manual offers minimal mechanisms to monitor or address disparities in water access their impact unpaid caregiving workloads among various groups. The absence of data disaggregated by gender, age, and economic background makes it challenging to assess inequities or inform inclusive policy adjustments. While the manual identifies infrastructural and logistical barriers to water access, it does not comprehensively explore their compounding effects on caregivers or marginalized population. Although broader systemic challenges, such as rural-urban disparities, are acknowledged, their intersectional impacts remain insufficiently examined. Overall, addressing these gaps is essential for creating effective policies that recognize and support the diverse needs of caregivers, particularly women.

4.5.3 Strengths and Limitations of the Guideline

The Ministry of Water and Energy's guideline exhibits both strengths and weaknesses regarding Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW) and intersectionality. A key strength is their effective highlighting of general water access issues, establishing a foundation for recognizing indirect links to caregiving. The acknowledgement of time spent fetching water is a crucial first step in understanding the broader implications of water access on women's daily lives. The guidelines also demonstrate an awareness of the diverse affected populations by mentioning challenges faced by marginalized groups, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities, indicating issues.

However, it has significant weaknesses. They fall short of explicitly addressing UCDW, missing critical links between water access and various caregiving burdens such as sanitation, food preparation, and childcare. There is a notable absence of community-based measures aimed at reducing caregiving labor plans to ensure equitable water access and redistribute caregiving roles, thereby perpetuating the invisibility of UCDW in policy development.

From an intersectionality perspective, the guideline does not fully embrace this framework. While they reference challenges faced by marginalized groups, they fail to adequately address the compounded disadvantages experienced by individuals, such as rural women with disabilities. The limited data disaggregation further restricts understanding of how various identities intersect and impact experiences of water access and caregiving. Moreover, the absence of tailored support mechanisms for specific subgroups limits the guideline's effectiveness in addressing unique, heightened challenges.

In summary, while the guidelines provide a foundational understanding of water access issues related to caregiving, it requires a more comprehensive approach to effectively integrate UCDW and intersectionality. Enhancing these aspects is crucial for developing inclusive policies that support the diverse needs of all caregivers.

4.5.4 Implementation from the UCDW and Intersectionality Perspective

Similar to the MoWSA, the gender mainstreaming section in the MoWE is at the executive office level. However, the lower-level structure remains incomplete, with no dedicated work units organized. The office is staffed by only four experts and one executive. They also have three workers, for the daycare services within the Ministry's compound, which serves fifteen children at the time of the fieldwork. According to interviewees, the Ministry's structure is fixed, preventing the creation of new working units or hiring of additional employees. Budget constraint for this specific work unit is also cited as a significant challenge.

Informants acknowledged receiving several trainings provide by donor-funded projects, such as those by Care Ethiopia and the MoWSA, on topics like childcare, gender mainstreaming. Yet, they acknowledged needs for further training on gender mainstreaming for women and men workers. Informants also indicated that while the issues of UCDW and intersectionality are so far implicit in the ministry, they need training to deepen the understanding.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The findings of this study show that all the gender mainstreaming guidelines and literature evaluated, and the insights from interview participants, consistently recognize the unequal burden of Unpaid Care and Domestic Work carried by women in Ethiopia. This recognition spans across different sectors, highlighting a shared understanding of the structural gender inequalities inherent in the allocation of household labor.

- The national and sectoral gender mainstreaming guidelines, formulated and implemented by the five pro-poor ministries, the target of the pilot project, reflect an implicit engagement with the principles of UCDW and intersectionality. These concepts emerge through scattered references to social vulnerability, gender needs, and recognition of time poverty among women from diverse backgrounds. However, the treatment of these themes lacks a clear, purposeful framing of women's concerns through UCDW and intersectionality; there is little evidence of deliberate integration based on these frameworks. Furthermore, the disjointed approach does not leverage the transformative potential of UCDW and intersectionality as tools for analyzing structural inequalities. Consequently, potential starting points for inclusive policy innovation remain underutilized, obscured within technical language and procedural checklists.
- The guidelines also feature various concrete interventions that implicitly reflect an awareness of challenges associated with UCDW and intersectionality. Each of the five pro-poor ministries has asserted that, within their respective mandates, they have taken steps to mitigate gender inequalities. These include expanding rural infrastructure to facilitate girls' access to education, delivering low-cost health services tailored to vulnerable populations, implementing job creation initiatives targeting women and marginalized groups, and establishing daycare centers as a symbolic gesture of institutional commitment to easing the care burdens shouldered by women. While these interventions suggest a practical orientation toward reducing systemic inequalities, they often lack explicit conceptual framing and remain detached from a coherent strategy rooted in international UCDW and the intersectionality paradigms. The study identified established institutional structures—such as gender departments, directorates, focal persons with senior positions, and interdepartmental and inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms—designed to mainstream gender concerns into planning and implementation processes. While the presence of such structures signifies a degree of institutional commitment, their functionality and influence vary considerably. In many cases, these entities remain under-

resourced or lack sufficient authority to meaningfully influence sectoral priorities. Although some budgetary support was reportedly available—sourced either from government/ the ministries' allocations or donor partners' contributions—informants seldom articulated in quantifiable terms, making it difficult to assess their sufficiency or track their impact. Consequently, while the architectural framework for gender mainstreaming exists, its operational effectiveness is often constrained by limited financial and institutional capacity, marginal positioning within bureaucratic hierarchies of some ministries, and the absence of sustained political will.

- Repeated restructuring of the ministries, including mergers and divisions, is believed to contribute to disrupting the implementation of gender mainstreaming and gender equality, and women's empowerment, and redressing the barriers, mainly UCDW. The restructuring might also have compromised institutional memory, eroded the gained experiences, and missed opportunities to effectively position UCDW and intersectionality as a core national agenda.
- The national gender mainstreaming guideline, implemented by the MoWSA, with a mandate to hold sector ministries accountable, appears not to be fully executed. This might have resulted in missed corrective actions that should be taken to make UCDW a national agenda, undermining the ministerial collaboration for joint actions necessary to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.
- The ongoing revision or the formulation of the national gender mainstreaming guideline or the inclusive [women's and social affairs implementation policy](#) presents a critical opportunity. The subsequent plans and strategies have to clearly and purposefully integrate intersectionality to address the needs of rural women and girls, persons with disability, and other marginalized groups of the rural community. Strengthening partnerships and collaborations with local CSOs/ NGOs in policy processes is crucial in the fight against discriminatory social norms. Ultimately, this research concludes that accelerated efforts are needed to couple UCDW and intersectionality as a national agenda to redress the systemic barriers of gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Gender inequality and the disproportionate burdens of the UCDW and overlapping interests and identity will not be resolved by policy actions alone. The deep-rooted, longstanding discriminatory social norms and patriarchal systems require coordinated efforts and investment from all stakeholders to be unlearned.—an area that currently receives insufficient attention.

5.2 Recommendations

This research confirms that UCDW and intersectionality are not directly addressed as gender equality frameworks in the national and sectoral gender mainstreaming guidelines. Therefore, the following recommendations adopt the internationally recognized "5R" framework proposed by UNWOMEN (2022): Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute, Reward, and Represent. These recommendations will address issues spanning from recognizing UCDW at the legal/policy levels to proper implementation.

5.2.1. *Recognize*

Formally recognize UCDW as a major pillar to enhance gender equality and women's empowerment, and acknowledge its economic and social value, which is crucial for family well-being, community cohesion, and the national economy, which yet remains excluded from national accounts and policy considerations. Policies need to be reviewed in light of UCDW and intersectionality.

- **Policy Revision:** Revise or formulate a comprehensive national Gender Mainstreaming guideline that explicitly addresses the barriers/hindrances of gender equality and women's empowerment, including UCDW/GBV/VAW/Gs, and discriminatory social norms.
- **Legal and Economic Recognition:** Legally recognize the economic value of UCDW at the household, community, and national levels. Measure its monetary contribution by embedding time-use modules in national surveys and conducting regular time-use surveys within households.
- **Integrate Intersectionality:** Develop gender mainstreaming plans and strategies that explicitly address intersecting interests or identities (age, disability, rurality, and ethnicity) and include UCDW in organizational strategies, budgets, and monitoring tools to ensure that it is adequately prioritized.
- **Gender Audits:** Conduct national or institutional gender audits and power analyses to comprehend the status of women and gender disparities, and inform policy actions.
- **Data Collection:** Periodically conduct time-use surveys and collect employment data disaggregated by sex, age, and location (rural/urban).

5.2.2. *Reduce*

Alleviate the heavy and constraining burdens of UCDW on women and girls. To realize this, the following are suggested:

- **Investment in infrastructure:** Invest in time-saving infrastructure and technology, such as rural electrification and improved access to water, which have been proven to reduce domestic labor time and increase female employment (Ilahi and Grimard, 2000; Dinkelman, 2011).
- **Expand Care Services:** Expand access to public childcare and preschool education, including through longer school days, to free up women's time for economic participation.
- **Promote Family-Friendly Work Policies:** Implement family-friendly work policies, including flexible hours and tele/homeworking, and provide public subsidies for maternity leave that meet ILO standards (14 weeks). Introduce "use it or lose it" paternity leave to incentivize shared care responsibilities.
- **Reform Fiscal Policy:** Design equitable fiscal policies to avoid secondary earners in married couples, typically women, being taxed more heavily than single individuals, discouraging female labor force participation. For instance, in Japan, female labor force participation would increase by almost 13% if there were high-tax incentives to share market work (which ultimately reflects unpaid care work) between spouses.

5.2.3. *Redistribute*

Foster a more equitable sharing of care between men and women, as well as between families and the State.

- **Expand care services:** Increase the provision of quality, affordable public and private care services for children and the elderly. This expansion is essential for working mothers, mirroring successful models like the NGO Mobile Crèches in India, which provide childcare services for women employed on public works and construction sites.

Equally important is ensuring the quality of childcare services, training caregivers, material and space of the center, and access to public transport for mothers and guardians to bring their children to the center.

- **Systemic and actionable measures and steps to redistribute UCDW**, such as concrete interventions of childcare, linking services with WASH, and a flexible learning approach, are crucial.
- **Challenge Social Norms:** Implement targeted interventions to tackle entrenched social norms and gender stereotypes that ‘de-feminize’ caregiving and prevent men from assuming equal caring responsibilities. Strategies should aim to shape new gender norms by increasing male involvement in care, as demonstrated by successful programs like Zimbabwe’s “Africare’s Male Empowerment Project,” which focuses on increasing male involvement in home-based care services given to rural people living with HIV /AIDS. This requires adopting a care lens across all areas of public policy. Promote the transformed culture of the Awramba Community (*የአውራምባ ማህበረሰብ*) in Ethiopia as a local and proven experience.

5.2.4. *Reward*

Ensure that care work—especially when it transitions from unpaid to paid labor—is fairly compensated and socially protected.

- **Decent Work for Paid Carers:** Provide decent wages and benefits for paid care workers.
- **Ensure Inclusive Social Protection:** Mandate the extension of comprehensive social protection (like pensions, health insurance, and maternity leave) to informal and domestic workers
- **Professionalize Care Work:** Promote training and professionalization to enhance the status and mobility of care workers.
- **Affirmative Action:** Integrate affirmative actions and scholarships to marginalized groups into the education and training guidelines of the MoE, and workplace and vocational strategies of the MoLS.

Rewarding care work is not just about money—it’s also about dignity, recognition, and rights.

5.2.5. *Represent*

Ensure that care workers—especially women in informal or domestic roles—have a voice in decision-making.

- **Promote Women’s Leadership:** Promote and ensure women are in leadership and decision-making positions within care-related sectors, policy-making bodies, and advocacy spaces.

- **Amplify Voices:** Ensure women-led organizations, networks, activists, and caregivers participate in policy dialogues, collective bargaining, and governance structures.
- **Support Organization of Carers:** Facilitate the organization and unionization of care workers.
- **Address intersectional barriers:** Actively remove that exclude migrant, rural, or marginalized care workers from representation.

5.2.6. *Further Recommendations*

- **Integrate Intersectionality:** Adopt a robust intersectional framework that utilizes disaggregated data across social categories, ensures participation of underrepresented groups in policy-making, and develops targeted strategies for vulnerable sub-populations.
- **Capacity Building:** Inform and provide training to policy-makers and program implementers on UCDW and intersectionality.
- **Strengthen M&E:** Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms with specific indicators to track progress on integrating UCDW into gender mainstreaming, inclusion efforts, and financing decisions.
- **Revitalize Accountability:** Reinforce the MoWSA's mandate to monitor and hold sector ministries accountable, fostering inter-ministerial collaboration to create cohesive policy impact.
- **Evaluate Restructuring:** Assess the recent elevation of gender mainstreaming departments from a desk to the executive levels to ensure that the merger of themes and issues of women, disability, youth, girls, and the elderly does not compromise the specific interests of any disadvantaged group.
- **Leverage Best Practices:** the Awramba intentional community in Amhara Regional State, which exemplifies equitable gender roles, should be studied for potential scaling to enhance gender equality and women's empowerment.

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