Chapter 11
Caring for a Life-Enhancing Economy

Liliana Harding

When we feel deeply, we reason profoundly.

Mary Wollstonecraft.

Abstract This chapter proposes feminist economics as a foundational framework for regenerative economic transformation. It highlights the issue of marginalising unpaid care work, social reproduction, and ecological concerns in economics. Starting with social provisioning, the chapter redefines economic value, emphasising human wellbeing. It challenges the GDP growth-centric definition of progress. It considers alternative measures based on time-use surveys and happiness indicators, highlighting the potential of the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) capturing income, adjusted for ecological costs and measures of societal progress. The chapter also interrogates the gendered dynamics of the economics profession, highlighting structural barriers to women's representation in the UK case, and the implications for inclusive policy design. Uruguay's National Integrated Care System is then used to demonstrate how feminist principles can be operationalised within national policy frameworks. Ultimately, the chapter offers a critical lens for designing an economy that prioritises wellbeing, care, and sustainability.

Keywords Unpaid care work · Genuine progress indicator · Time-use surveys · Inclusive economics · Wellbeing economy · Economic transformation

Abbreviations

BVCA	British Private Equity & Venture Capital Association
CfE	Curriculum for Excellence—Scotland's national curriculum framework
GDP	Gross Domestic Product—a measure of a country's economic output

L. Harding (✉)
University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK
e-mail: Liliana.harding@uea.ac.uk

© The Author(s) 2027

I. P. Kuenkel (ed.), *Transforming Economies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-33944-7_11

GPI	Genuine Progress Indicator—an alternative to GDP that includes social and environmental factors
HDI	Human Development Index—a composite index including life expectancy, education, and income
IOP	Institute of Physics—UK organisation promoting physics education and research
ISEW	Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare—precursor to the GPI
JEL	Journal of Economic Literature—classification system for economics research
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONS	Office for National Statistics—UK's national statistical institute
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals—global goals set by the UN to achieve a better and more sustainable future
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
UN	United Nations—an international organization promoting peace and cooperation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme—UN agency focused on global development

11.1 Introduction

What if the economy were designed not just to grow, but to care—for people, communities, and the planet? This chapter explores how feminist economics can provide a blueprint to reimagine an economy that puts wellbeing, care, and sustainability at its core.

It begins by challenging the limits of traditional economic thinking and explores the framework of feminist economic research as a values driven alternative. It notes in this sense that a caring economy has always been essential in shaping and regenerating economic potential, highlighting the need to put unpaid care—along with environmental stewardship—to the forefront of economics.

To evaluate progress, we then explore existing measures of what truly matters in a life-enhancing economy, reviewing alternative wellbeing indicators. Thereby, care and unpaid work require alternative methods of estimation to capture their true economic value along with other economic indicators. Time-use surveys allow, in this sense to capture the distribution of human effort and estimate its economic values.

We also examine who gets to shape economic knowledge, focusing on the underrepresentation of women's voices in the field. By acknowledging feminist economists as essential agents driving economic transformation from within the system, we evaluate existing barriers and progress in the formation of economists. Beyond acknowledging existing stereotypes, we use the case of the UK and gender representation from education to professional economists. This illustrates the long path to be followed for a successful, inclusive economics, where balanced gender representation can shape the life-enhancing economy.

Finally, we turn to real-world caring economies, focussed on policies and practices supporting life and wellbeing around the world. The case of Uruguay's national care system is used to illustrate how the priorities of feminist economics can be put into practice, within integrated national systems.

11.2 The Invisible Hands of Life-Enhancing Economies

The global economy is at a critical junction, where traditional economic models, constructed upon assumptions of rational actors and efficient markets, have demonstrated their inadequacy in addressing persistent inequalities, environmental degradation, and social fragmentation. As societies grapple with these interconnected crises, feminist economics emerges as a transformative analytical framework that reimagines economic futures by centring human wellbeing, recognising the full spectrum of productive activity, and challenging the hierarchies that have historically shaped economic discourse.

Feminist economics extends beyond simply incorporating women into existing economic models. The goal is not to develop a separate economics for women, but instead to proceed towards a fundamental reconceptualisation of how societies understand value, work, and prosperity (Strober, 2017). The feminist approach recognises that the economy is not a mechanistic system, but rather a complex, human-created system, embedded within social relationships, power structures, and ecological systems.

While open to traditional, analytical economic frameworks, and quantitative methods, most feminist economists prefer a broader approach, with ethical value consideration. Central to feminist research is the concept of 'social provisioning' (Power, 2004), which reconnects the economic discourse with its etymological roots. Economics, as derived from the Greek word 'oikonomia', would imply that we are looking into 'managing a household', as a unit of wellbeing within a wider economic context. In practice, mainstream economics has drifted far away from household concerns, and even from the economy and the realities with which most of us associate it. Therein lies the critique of feminist economists when concerned with the current subject approach or abstraction, rather than the mathematical or quantitative tools that dominate economic research. As economics defines itself primarily by its methodological tools, rather than by what these should be expected to explain, i.e. the economy, there is justified disillusion with the current economic system or with its capacity to enhance wellbeing for all.

The founders of economics have indeed grounded classical economic thought on the principle of increasing the availability of goods and services *to satisfy human needs or wants*. Wellbeing, as an ultimate objective, was to be achieved through the mechanism of market interaction; but as a tool itself, the market would leave space for further intervention. Adam Smith (1801), for example, calls for the public provision of education, thus acknowledging the role and significance of human capabilities that are created through effort and intervention outside the market. Rather than

appearing out of nowhere, humans and their capacity to be economic agents are indeed the result of care provided in families and communities alike. From the beginning of economics, within *The Wealth of Nations,* Smith also notes that while markets lead to general wellbeing through the pursuit of self-interest, this is only beneficial if said pursuit is not damaging to others. Lately, the focus on life-enhancing economies or wellbeing has lost ground to the priority given by economists to markets, and their efficient operation, rather than considering these as one means to an end. Yet, in today's economy, dominated by environmental damage and vast inequalities, along with persistent hierarchies and patriarchal power structures, pursuing individual interest without care for others proves destructive to both current and future generations.

That further leads us to emphasise caring—for humans and the natural environment alike, within a wellbeing economy. Feminist economists posit the role of care and caring work as fundamental for economic progress, by showing it as fundamental to the creation of human capabilities. For economic systems to exist and continue, a prerequisite is the reproduction of labour, followed by the persistent endeavour of those with direct care responsibilities in society and supporting human development.

Thus, a feminist economy is essentially a caring economy, made up by individuals and communities who care for each other and their environment, without impeding others' freedom to flourish or gain through exchange within the market. Social reproduction is fundamental for humans to strive. In this sense, a feminist economy is a complete economy, starting with care and extending to social care. Prosperity therein is defined by wellbeing, along with a stable and sustainable economic and natural environment.

Neoclassical economics assumes that individuals are driven by their separate utilities and gain from the expression of free choice. Markets recognise and remunerate effort—which is expressed through either entrepreneurship or labour—at a price. Yet, while accepting fair rewards, a caring economy and independence cannot coexist with selfishness. Where choices are linked through care with those of others, so are the outcomes for the economy at large. At the same time, the provision of a lot of human effort goes unpaid. The associated goods and services that it generates are not mediated by the market, yet are fundamental for human societies, indifferent of the economic systems they create. Care work, while fundamental in shaping human capabilities, also has a direct contribution to economic outcomes, which are nevertheless distributed on the basis of prevailing power structures. Feminist economics is thus calling for both care and power to be part of economic analysis and is in a unique position to promote the inclusion of care and unpaid work within a life-supporting economic system.

In sum, while the traditional economics paradigm presents itself as objective and value-neutral, feminist economists have consistently demonstrated that this supposed neutrality masks deeply embedded biases (e.g. Ferber & Nelson, 2003). The mainstream discipline's focus on market transactions, monetary exchange, and individual optimisation reflects values and priorities that have historically excluded and marginalised women's economic contributions and alienated those expressing an interest in

alternative views. Moreover, the artificial separation between the productive market economy and the reproductive sphere and care work, household production, or community building has rendered invisible the enormous amount of unpaid labour—predominantly performed by women. In turn, feminist economics stresses relational interdependence and ethical values over individualistic goals and prioritises the development of an inclusive and sustainable economy, directed towards human wellbeing.

By centring care, sustainability, and equity, feminist economics provides a comprehensive roadmap for economic transformation. To measure progress, it is redefining economic value, as well as reconsidering economic indicators that better capture wellbeing. In challenging the dominant paradigm that equates economic success with gross domestic product (GDP) and growth, feminists propose instead a framework that captures wellbeing with a human dimension, including care and ecological sustainability (Warring, 1999).

Central to feminist economic transformation is also a redefinition of what constitutes valuable work. The current system recognises only market-mediated activities as economically significant, ignoring the vast ecosystem of care that makes all other economic activity possible. Feminist economists propose a more inclusive framework that acknowledges several categories of previously invisible work. Care work represents the economic foundation upon which all other activities rest. The daily work of caring for children, elderly family members, and communities forms the bedrock upon which all market activity depends. These life-enhancing activities are the real 'invisible hand' that makes economies work. Without such care infrastructure, workers could not participate in the formal economy. Yet, this work remains largely invisible in economic analysis, if that relies on the traditional exchange value.

Subsistence and household production represent another category of valuable work often excluded from formal economic accounting. Much of the world's population engages in subsistence activities, food production, and household manufacturing that falls outside formal market structures, in spite of its economic value.

Community and social reproduction encompass the work of further social networks, cultural practices, and community institutions. They all generate significant economic value not captured through market valuation. Last but not least, environmental stewardship, including the labour of maintaining and protecting natural resources and ecosystems, represents economic value that links to sustainability and represents a different dimension of a caring, fundamental in a life-sustaining economy.

The next section considers alternative indicators of wellbeing and progress, capable to guide policy towards economic transformation.

11.3 Measuring the Life-Enhancing Economy

A caring economy also needs to be able to measure progress in achieving its goals. For all the controversies about its content, GDP has done a good job in allowing for comparison of material wellbeing across countries to date. Yet, it has become more

and more clear that it omits essential elements supporting a regenerative economy, or general wellbeing in the societies which the economy should serve. Another often cited shortcoming of GDP growth as a measure of progress is its blindness to environmental degradation. This leads to aberrations such as the accounting of cleaning up operations of disastrous economic outcomes—like oil spillages, as adding to economic growth (see, for example, Taleghani & Tyagi, 2017). At the same time, GDP growth might go hand in hand with growing inequalities or damage to social cohesion. In the process, what currently counts as economic progress can be detrimental to both current and future generations. Ultimately, 'economic growth' is calling for new, alternative measures of progress, including environmental and social sustainability.

In this sense, the United Nations' (UN) sustainable development goals (SDGs) and related indexes have gone a long way towards accounting for wellbeing and comparative progress at the global level, even if the data availability might vary. Where the related measurements translate into national policies and steps towards international co-ordination, they represent a significant step forward. Yet, as the UN Sustainable Development Goals Report (UN, 2025) notes that, while renewable energy is now the fastest-growing source of power worldwide, the rise in greenhouse gas emissions continues unabated. Meanwhile, responsible consumption and production—captured as the total amount of raw materials extracted to meet final consumption demands worldwide—has reached 100 billion tonnes in 2024, up from 93 billion in 2020. In spite of calls for rapidly expanding technologies to help with implementing a circular economy, e-waste itself is rising, with only 22% of electronic waste being properly recycled in 2024. In sum, while the call for global sustainable economies with measurable goals is right, and national plans are being drafted, these plans are plagued by slow implementation and limited progress.

Another aspect of life-enhancing economic development relates to gender equality. While measuring women's representation in parliaments, executive positions, or employment disparities, the SDG 5 indexes also highlight the disproportionate unpaid work undertaken by women around the world. Progress here is also slow, with 47% of the UN countries still restricting women from performing the same jobs as men. Furthermore, women face barriers to enter employment due to the disproportionate burden of care and domestic work. (UN, 2025) Beyond that, measures capturing unpaid work can inform national budgetary allocations, and are included in 'satellite national accounts' (see as well Floro, 2021 or van Stavaren, 2021). While varying in availability and the capacity of implementation, the time-use surveys undertaken by governments to collect such data give a picture of the global 'care economy' and capture trends and progress towards equity. Currently, there is information available on the average number of hours spent on unpaid domestic and unpaid care work for 92 countries, allowing for further disaggregation by gender.

Specific research commissioned by the UNDP (Folbre, 2015) estimates that if unpaid care work were consistently included in national accounting systems, this would amount to between 20% and 50% of national income, or a third of global GDP. For an overview of the gender split of unpaid work with comparable data,

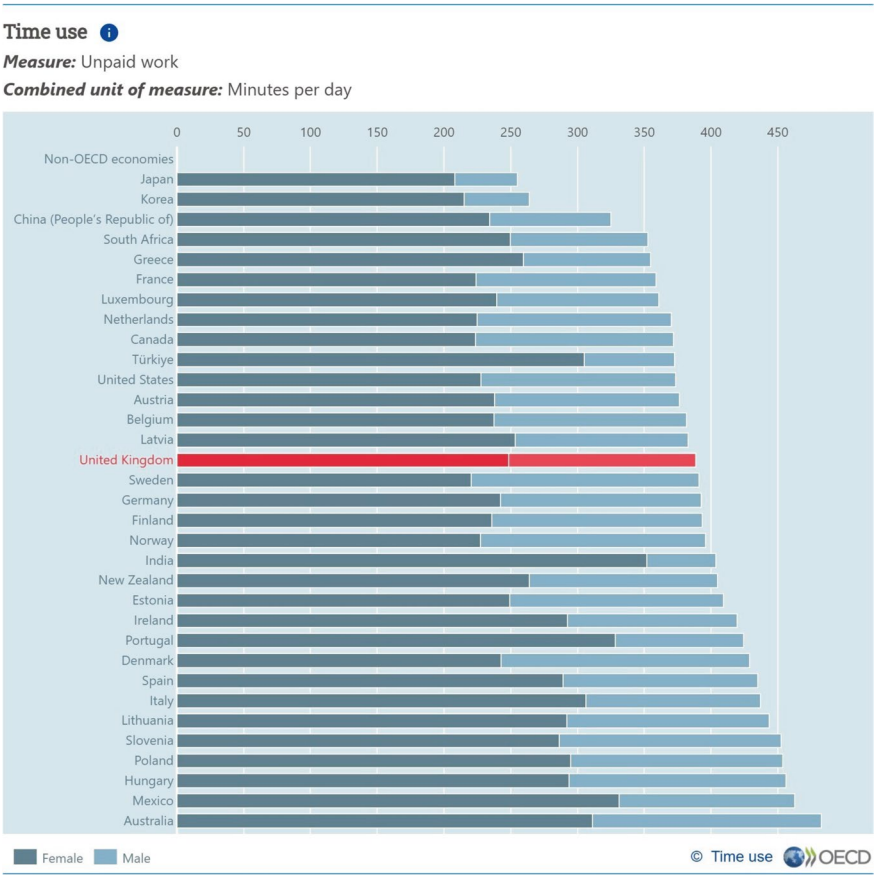


Fig. 11.1 Unpaid work, average hours in OECDs. (Source: OECD (2022) Time use survey)

Figs. 11.1, 11.2 and 11.3 extracts time-use survey data from a number of advanced economies. Figure 11.1 summarises variation in unpaid work hours across OECD countries, with added highlights for the example of the UK in Figs. 11.2 and 11.3.

What these figures show is that in all countries, including those with the highest gender equality, such as in the case of Northern Europe, women allocate a higher share of their time to unpaid work. For example, according to the OECD, the daily UK average for unpaid hours stands at 195 min, with women spending 78% more time each day for unpaid work compared to men (based on a ratio of 248:140 min of unpaid work for females versus males).

Unpaid work encompasses a broad spectrum of non-remunerated activities that sustain households and communities. It includes routine housework, shopping, caregiving for household members (children and adults), as well as care provided to non-household members. It then extends to volunteering, travel related to household responsibilities, and other forms of unpaid labour that are often overlooked in conventional economic accounting.

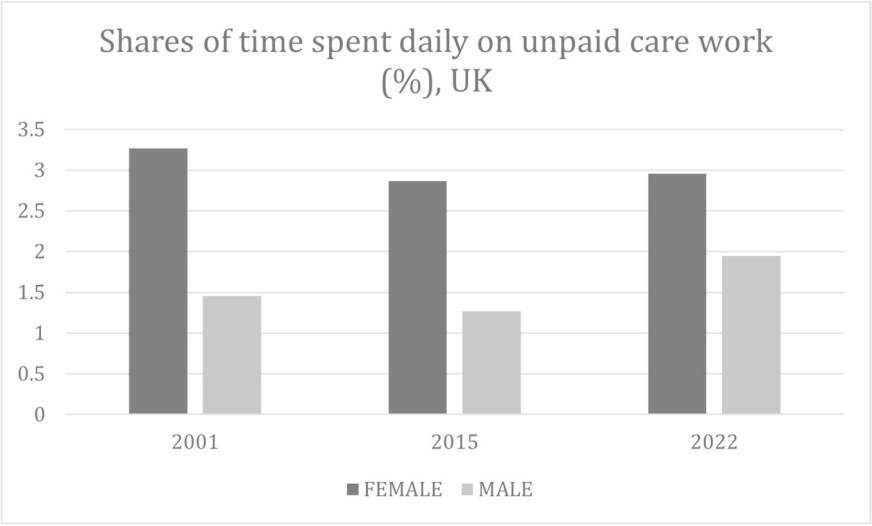


Fig. 11.2 UK Unpaid care work distribution by gender. (Source: ONS, Time-Use Survey)

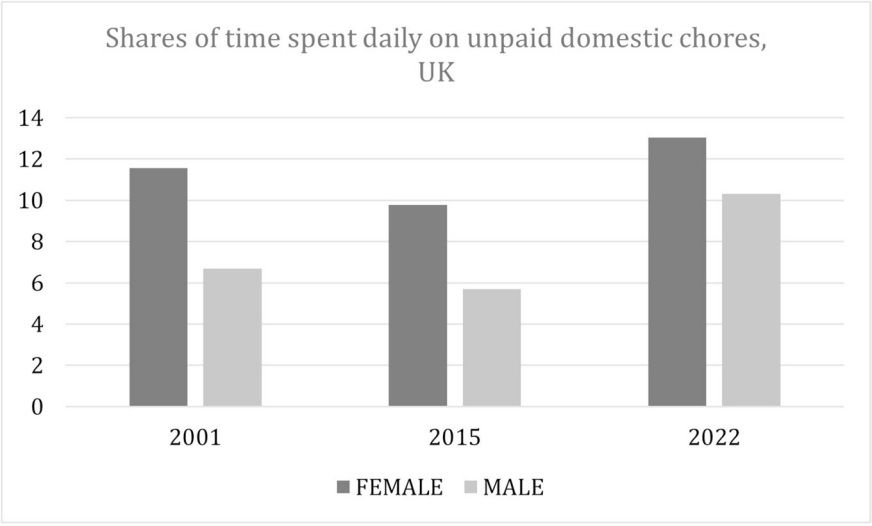


Fig. 11.3 UK Unpaid domestic work distribution, by gender. (Source: ONS, Time-Use Survey)

Figures 11.2 and 11.3 record the distribution of unpaid work by care and domestic chores in the UK, drawing on three sets of time-use survey data collected by the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS). The figures are again highlighting how men and women are spending unremunerated work time differently, with women's share higher than men's in all instances. The gender gap is nevertheless diminishing over time for both care and domestic unpaid work, even though both men and

women appear to have increased the time dedicated to domestic work more recently, in 2022.

Beyond working hours, a series of alternative measures have been developed at the international level, capturing progress. Some measure subjective wellbeing along with income (e.g. the World Happiness Indicators), or human capabilities as fundamental to economic progress (e.g. the Human Development Index (HDI)). The advantage of these measures is that they are focussed on alternative wellbeing indicators and are comparable across the years. They have drawn critique, nevertheless as they include subjective measures. Furthermore, they marginalise essential dimensions of progress towards sustainability, which are nevertheless essential for life-sustaining economies.

The HDI can be seen as part of a broader movement towards more life-enhancing, human-centred economic indicators. The HDI, compiled annually by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), combines indicators of life expectancy, education, and Gross National Income per capita to produce a composite measure of human development. Grounded in the capabilities approach developed by Amartya Sen and Mahbub ul-Haq, the HDI shifts the focus from purely economic metrics to what people are able to be and do in their lives (e.g. van Stavaren, 2021). While it does not explicitly account for care work or gendered inequalities, its multidimensional structure aligns with feminist critiques of GDP-centric development.

To understand why some countries report higher levels of happiness than others, Helliwell et al. (2025) use a Cantril Ladder designed to capture how people evaluate their lives on a subjective scale from 0 to 10.[1] *The World Happiness Report 2025* further underscores the transformative power of care and prosocial behaviour in shaping individual and collective wellbeing. From a gender perspective, this emphasis is particularly significant, as it validates the centrality of care work in sustaining societal happiness. The association of higher pro-social behaviour post-pandemic with improved mental health and social trust highlights the need for policy frameworks that support caregiving but also redistribute care responsibilities more equitably. The World Happiness Report offers empirical support for a life-enhancing economic transformation that places care, connection, and gender equity at the heart of life-sustaining systems.

Warring (1999) proposed incremental reforms, such as using time-use surveys, developing satellite accounts, and adopting alternative indicators like the Genuine

[1] To further detail the association of happiness with the dimension of care along with other socio-economic variables a regression is run to determine the impact of factors including GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom to make life choices, generosity, and perceptions of corruption. For example, GDP per capita is log-transformed to reflect diminishing returns to income. Social support is gauged by whether individuals have someone to rely on in times of need. Healthy life expectancy captures the average number of years people live in good health. Freedom is assessed by satisfaction with personal autonomy, while generosity is measured through recent charitable behaviour. Finally, perceptions of corruption reflect trust in public and private institutions. Though these variables do not directly determine a country's happiness score, they are used to statistically explain the variation in life evaluations across nations, offering insight into the social, economic, and institutional conditions that support wellbeing.

Progress Indicator (GPI), which we will discuss in more detail below. She notes that while data for more complex indicators are harder to collect and compare across different constituencies, technical feasibility should not override ethical responsibility. Even if hard to compare across countries or constituencies, empirical studies using alternative measures such as the GPI have revealed a significant divergence between GDP and genuine progress across time, and especially after the mid-1970s. From this time on, it appears that rising inequality and environmental costs began to offset the benefits of economic growth (Kubiszewski et al., 2013).

The Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) is a measure that includes both personal consumption, and wellbeing in a local context—along with a care and sustainability dimension (see Van Staveren, 2021 or Berik, 2020). The GPI is calculated by adjusting consumption expenditures, to reflect broader social and ecological factors—some representing additions and others representing deductions relative to GDP. A simplified representation of the indicator is summarised by the following formula:

$$GPI = \text{Personal Consumption} \pm \text{Adjustments for Income Distribution} + \text{Value of Unpaid Work} \pm \text{Costs of Environmental Degradation, Crime, Resource Depletion, and Social Disintegration}$$

This formulation highlights GPI's capacity to account for both the positive contributions and the hidden costs of economic activity, offering a more comprehensive measure of societal wellbeing than GDP.

The measure was first proposed by Daly and Cobb (1989) as the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW) and was extended later, following feminist interventions. It highlights how environmental degradation and social inequality are interconnected and must be addressed together to measure progress. Berik (2018) further emphasises the possibility of disaggregating some of the index components to capture wellbeing by gender. While comprehensive and able to capture the life-enhancing aspects of the economy emphasised by feminists, the shortcomings of the indicator remain the possibility of interpretation of how the values are compiled, with data collection complex and not amenable to cross-country comparisons. Yet, it has been calculated by various countries around the world, and by individual states in the United States—as in the case of Maryland (see maryland.gov n.d.). Where available and informing policy at the local or national level, it can be very useful in monitoring change. Ultimately, we can argue that alternative measures such as the GPI promote economic transformation where it matters, documenting progress towards a life-enhancing economy.

11.4 Women Economists as the Agents of Economic Change

The previous sections introduced a point of departure to understand the way in which feminist economics is framed, as well as considering measures that feminists support to guide life-enhancing economies. As agents of change, we question how

feminist economists are formed and how we might be able to make economics a more inclusive profession, with women's voices at the forefront. A feminist future of the profession is also determined by the characteristics of those working in or studying economics, and women have indeed been marginalised in the profession. As such, this section discusses the way in which women might be given new pathways into the economics profession, enhancing their potential to shape the discipline and the real economy towards the wellbeing of all. Yet, we also need to stress that in the pursuit of life-enhancing economic transformation, anyone who cares about the issues highlighted thus far is welcome to the community of feminist economic thinkers, independent of gender.

As recent as 2022, Edith Kuiper (2022) observes in the preface to her book 'A Herstory of Economics' that research into the 'invisible women economic writers and economists' cost her an academic job. The reason given is that this is not considered 'core to the field'. It resonates with me, where peers at economic conferences have labelled heterodox approaches to macroeconomics as 'the death of economics'.[2] Instead, Blekker and Braunstein (2022) make a strong argument about how feminist economics can inform and transform macroeconomic models and policy. Thus, achieving inclusiveness or gender balance does not only mean closing pay gaps. These do have a nasty tendency to persist, despite significant recent progress, at least in developed economies (Goldin, 2021). Economists have to accept alternative views and methodologies, with narrative guiding collective stewardship towards life-supporting economies (Kuenkel, 2026). Ultimately, for feminist economics and economists, it means that their methodology and concerns are becoming part of the current 'mainstream' economics and guide economic transformation going forward.

But progress towards a life-enhancing economics also means parity of representation in the academic field of economics, complementing the private and public employment of women economists. Equal representation would lead to both a more equitable distribution of resources and, importantly, to more inclusive economic policies, with feminist values in mind. An initial overview of the areas in which female economists have published more frequently, and for which they have been publicly recognised, reveals that women tend to conduct research more often in topics related to collective wellbeing. The highest share of women in top economic publications is within the area of health, education, and welfare (Hengel & Moon, 2021).

A persistent issue in economics is the low female representation in academia, including amongst those studying economics. For example, a lot of effort has been made in recent times to promote STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) as an inclusive area of study and work. While economics falls outside these areas and related efforts, the voices and perspectives that are being promoted in the field are limited. The percentage of students in higher education opting for an

[2] Feminist economics has been first recognised by the Journal of Economic Literature (JEL) classification system of economics since 1997.

undergraduate degree in economics is a mere 27%. That goes along with the 26% of the UK academic economists who are women, according to a report commissioned by the Royal Economic Society (Bateman et al., 2021). While most students in higher education are now female, for economics, the low shares of applicants accepted to economics degrees have not budged from similar levels a decade earlier (Dawson, 2023).

There are various avenues to explain persistent gender disparities in the study of the subject. Firstly, there is a stereotype that deters female students from entering the field, driven by the image of those who are successful in the profession. Coincidentally, some 27% of 'investment professionals' are reported to be women in 2025 by the British Private Equity & Venture Capital Association (BVCA, 2025). This is the same as the proportion of female undergraduates in economics degrees cited by the Royal Economic Society.

In the public sector and the private financial sector overall, the gender balance looks more promising than in academic economics. The World Economic Forum (2025) records female shares by broad economic sectors around the world. The financial sector has a share of almost 45% female employment, albeit with most women in the sector concentrated in retail banking or administrative roles. Comparatively, health and care are predominantly female, with a share of 60% in total employment of the sector worldwide.

Stereotypes and choices of careers are shaped early on in life. A recent report by Discover Economics (2025) in the UK found that only one in seventeen girls chooses A-level (pre-university) economics, against one in six boys choosing the subject at A-level. These imbalances have long-term implications for representation in higher education, academia, and the financial sector going forward, too. The driving factors in the UK include the lack of role models, apparent misconceptions about what economics involves, perceptions of economics as abstract or maths-heavy, but also the curriculum and the culture around the subject. In essence, where the curriculum focuses heavily on technical models without connecting to real-world issues, it alienates, especially girls. The latter seem to be more motivated by the social impact of their subject study, as well as preferring interdisciplinary thinking, arguably lacking in economics and the curriculum. In terms of the 'subject culture', the economics classroom appears competitive and individualistic, which does not appeal to all students. Ultimately, girls may be disproportionately discouraged by peer dynamics and the lack of encouragement from teachers and advisors.

As anyone trying to encourage more females taking up the subject at university, including through the exemplification of role models, current issues, or introduction to feminist economics thinking to A-level students and teachers, the difficulty to change the peer dynamics goes deeper. There is a call for wider acknowledgement of equal opportunities and autonomous subject choice earlier on in the education cycle.

Along with subject stereotypes, the issues have been widely discussed along with disparities experienced in STEM subjects. Examples of partnerships between the government and researchers to promote inclusiveness in education are also related to initiatives promoted by the Institute of Physics (Institute of Physics, 2017)

across the UK. Indeed, physics is the other subject in the UK with even lower uptake by female students than economics, and similar barriers might be at play.

Learning from earlier recommendations in STEM, economics could benefit from promoting inclusive messaging across departments and encouraging school-wide support for diverse subject choices. Teacher training could also improve the educators' perspective of what economics can and, hopefully, does address, increasing their confidence in tackling questions related to life-sustaining economies or adopting feminist perspectives. The Institute of Physics (IOP) has stressed in the past the importance of introducing physics earlier in the curriculum to build confidence and interest before subject choices are made. This very much applies to economics, too. A life-supporting narrative can be more easily integrated into citizenship or similar lessons at earlier stages of education, and demystify the subject and its potential for transformation, beyond broadening access.

Discover Economics (2025) acknowledges the need to deal with stereotypes, as well as to increase awareness of the subject matter. It also cites the subject alignment with human wellbeing. Yet, this is clearly not true in terms of what the overall subject currently conveys. The marginality of life-enhancing topics within the wider economics curriculum remains the norm. We might deal less with misperception than with underrepresentation.

Most students of economics are coming to the subject with reference to real-world issues. They are interested in questions of wellbeing and hope to design ways to address inequality, poverty, crisis, or environmental concerns. There is scope to emphasise these aspects in the curriculum, before beating stereotypes. Moreover, there is the question of pedagogical practice. Feminist pedagogy also has a lot to tell us about better ways to bring the subject closer to the interests of future economists. Aerni and McGoldrick (1999) have highlighted the advantages of a feminist pedagogical approach. This calls for attention to student diversity and learning styles, as well as to the need for an interdisciplinary approach in economic analysis. Such pedagogies are now slowly taking shape in inclusive pedagogy guidelines set at the university level, but inter-disciplinarity in higher education only finds a safe haven in US liberal arts-style colleges and remains alien to UK academia.

The local socio-economic environment is also seen as conducive to educational and life choices. In UK academia, females are especially under-represented in economics among UK nationals—accounting for both students and staff (Bateman et al., 2021). In a broader study on educational segregation and gender equality across nations, Bagues and Zinovyeva (2025) have also signalled a 'gender-equality paradox' that might be at play in this case. Thereby, more gender-equal and affluent societies often exhibit greater gender segregation in education and career choices, especially in fields like STEM. This paradox challenges the assumption that increasing gender equality should naturally lead to more balanced representation across fields. The focus of Bagues and Zinovyeva (2025) on childhood experiences draws on the socialisation dimension and finds segregated childhood friendships as a powerful driver of later choices. It stresses parental behaviour in affluent countries and families as influential in terms of gendered activities' selection. While this is

interpreted as encouraging self-expression, it obscures the *adaptive preferences* of feminist critiques,[3] which ultimately result in gender segregation in careers.

These findings make the case for early intervention and measures allowing children to go beyond the adopted social norms in activity and friendship group formation. But to conclude our discussion on how to encourage economists and their perspective beyond curriculum development and peer environment, inclusive economics needs to start its outreach by including society and those shaping future generations. For economists, this would mean showcasing how the subject contributes to wellbeing for real people, beyond encouraging the broader initiatives to support career choices.[4]

11.5 From the Making of Feminist Economics to Real-World Life-Supporting Economies

Feminist economics and the life-enhancing economy perspective are deeply synergistic frameworks. On a simplistic account, they both reject GDP as an adequate measure of progress, advocating instead for indicators that capture wellbeing, sustainability, and social cohesion. Feminist economists emphasise social provisioning as the fundamental purpose of economic activity and promote intersectional justice that addresses multiple forms of inequality and oppression (Benería et al., 2015). They prioritise sustainability and ecological health as fundamental to long-term prosperity and support an inclusive economy.

Feminist economic transformation also recognises care as essential economic infrastructure rather than a private responsibility or market commodity. Such a shift requires significant policy innovations, including universal care systems, care income and recognition, and redistribution of care responsibilities.[5] Universal care

[3] Essentially, children's choices are not autonomous and translate into later preferences reflecting adaptation to socially curated norms rather than autonomy.

[4] A feminist economic lens reveals that true transformation requires a reconfiguration of the social environments in which preferences are formed. Promising policy examples include gender-inclusive early education programmes in Sweden and Canada, curriculum reforms to remove bias in Finland and Scotland, mixed-gender extracurriculars in the UK or Netherlands, parental engagement campaigns in Nordic countries, and teacher training initiatives across Europe (OECD, 2022).

For example, The Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) framework emphasises values of inclusion, equality, and respect, and provides flexibility for schools to integrate gender-sensitive content across subject areas. Gender equality is emphasised in health and wellbeing, social studies, and citizenship education. Together, these elements form part of a broader strategy to disrupt gender stereotypes early, promote mixed-gender interaction, and build a foundation for gender-equitable educational and social outcomes (Education Scotland n.d.). Such interventions shift the focus from individual autonomy to collective responsibility, aligning with relationally grounded economic transformation.

[5] UN Women (2022) summarises the 5R or 3R principles of care, emphasising the need to recognise, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care.

systems represent comprehensive investments in care infrastructure, similar to how societies have invested in transportation, communication, and energy infrastructure. Feminist economics advocates for a comprehensive care infrastructure, including universal childcare, elder care, and support for caregivers. Redistributed care responsibilities require moving beyond the expectation that care is primarily women's responsibility through cultural shifts, policy support for shared caregiving, and workplace transformations that accommodate care responsibilities.

Several initiatives around the world demonstrate the practical application of these principles. New Zealand has pioneered national budgeting that prioritises wellbeing outcomes over purely economic metrics, incorporating mental health, child poverty reduction, and environmental sustainability into fiscal planning. (New Zealand Treasury, 2023). In another part of the world, South Africa's Community Work Programme (South African Government n.d.) illustrates how ubuntu-inspired economic initiatives can embody feminist principles of care, equity, and participation, demonstrating alternatives to individualistic market approaches. In yet another example and continent, Uruguay's National Integrated Care System represents perhaps the most comprehensive example of feminist economic principles implemented at the level of a national care system.

11.5.1 Uruguay's National Integrated Care System: A Case Study of Feminist Economic Practice

Uruguay provides a good example of feminist economic principles based on a caring economy, through its pioneering National Integrated Care System (see Salvador, 2019). The system represents a fundamental shift in understanding care, moving from a private family responsibility to a public right and shared social responsibility, while recognising the work and needs of carers alike.

The Uruguayan model demonstrates several key feminist economic principles in practice. It makes care work visible and valuable by creating formal care jobs with decent wages and training opportunities, and transforming unpaid care work into recognised economic activity. The system addresses gendered care responsibilities by providing childcare centres, after-school programmes, care services for elderly and disabled people, and support for family caregivers, enabling both women and men to participate in the formal economy while ensuring care needs are met. The system adopts an intersectional perspective by addressing the needs of different groups and ultimately recognising how care responsibilities particularly affect women from lower-income households.

Ultimately, the care infrastructure in Uruguay has enabled greater women's labour force participation—while creating decent jobs in the care sector and thus achieving economic progress by all measures.

11.6 Conclusion: A Step Closer to the Caring Economy

The path towards feminist economic transformation is not easy, but it represents a good avenue for creating economic systems that serve human flourishing and ecological sustainability. Feminist economics offers both a powerful critique of existing economic systems and a transformative vision for what economies could become. By centring care, interdependence, and sustainability, it redefines the purpose of economic life from the pursuit of growth for its own sake to the support of conditions that enable all people to thrive.

The tools and frameworks developed by feminist economists—from time-use surveys and satellite accounts to alternative indicators like the GPI—have already begun to reshape national statistics and inform gender-responsive policymaking. The vision of a life-enhancing economy is being enacted in diverse contexts, from Uruguay's comprehensive care system to refocussing economic education and efforts to attract more women into the profession.

Ultimately, economic transformation requires both policy reform and cultural change, including immediate change in economic thinking and practice and long-term visions for systemic change, with progress translated into real lives and communities. It demands that societies challenge not only specific economic policies, but the fundamental assumptions about value, work, and human wellbeing that underlie economic systems. The economy is not a natural force beyond our control. It is a human creation that can be recreated according to real people's fundamental values and in connection with natural and regenerative systems. Feminist economics provides both a critique of the current system and vision for alternatives. The challenge now is to translate these ideas into action and build economies that truly enhance life for all beings, while caring for fellow humans and our planet.

References

Aerni, A. L., & McGoldrick, K. (1999). *Valuing us all: Feminist pedagogy and economics*. University of Michigan Press.

Bagues, M., & Zinovyeva, N. (2025). Gender segregation in childhood friendships and the gender-equality paradox (RFBerlin Discussion Paper No. 38/25). RFBerlin. https://www.rfberlin.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/25038.pdf

Bateman, V., Gamage, D. K., Hengel, E., & Liu, X. (2021). *The gender imbalance in UK economics: Silver Anniversary Women's Committee Report*. Royal Economic Society. https://res.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/res_assets/assets/575c241a-fbff-4ef4-97e7066fcb7597e0/women-in-academic-economics-report-FINAL.pdf

BCVA. (2025). Diversity in UK private equity and venture capital 2025 report.

Beneria, L., Berik, G., & Floro, M. (2015). *Gender, development and globalization: Economics as if all people mattered* (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203107935

Berik, G. (2018). To measure and to narrate: Paths toward a sustainable future. *Feminist Economics, 24*(3), 136–159.

Berik, G. (2020). Measuring what matters and guiding policy: An evaluation of the Genuine Progress Indicator. *International Labour Review, 159*(1), 71–94.

Blekker, R. A., & Braunstein, E. (2022). Feminist perspectives on care and macroeconomic modelling: Introduction to the special issue. *Feminist Economics, 28*(3), 1–22.
Daly, H., & Cobb, J. (1989). *For the common good: Redirecting the economy toward community, the environment, and a sustainable future*. Beacon Press.
Dawson, P. (2023). *Recent trends in UK economics education: A-level and university applications and acceptances*. The Economics Network. https://doi.org/10.53593/n3582a.
DiscoverEconomics. (2025). *Tackling the gender gap in who studies economics in the UK*. https://www.discovereconomics.co.uk/post/tackling-the-gender-gap-in-who-studies-economics-in-the-uk.
Education Scotland. (n.d.). Improving gender balance and equalities 3–18. https://education.gov.scot/resources/improving-gender-balance-and-equalities-3-18/
Ferber, M. A., & Nelson, J. A. (Eds.). (2003). *Feminist economics today: Beyond economic man*. University of Chicago Press.
Floro, M. S. (2021). In G. Berik & E. Kongar (Eds.), *Time allocation and time-use surveys* (pp. 148–156). The Routledge Handbook of Feminist Economics.
Folbre, N. (2015). *Valuing non-market work*. United Nations Development Programme. https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/folbrehdr2015final.pdf.
Goldin, C. (2021). *Career and family: Women's century-long journey toward equity*. Princeton University Press.
Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R., Sachs, J. D., De Neve, J.-E., Wang, S., & Wang, H. (2025). *World Happiness Report 2025*. Wellbeing Research Centre, University of Oxford. https://worldhappiness.report
Hengel, E., & Moon, E. (2021). Gender and quality at top economics journals. *Royal Economic Society*. https://res.org.uk/mediabriefing/gender-and-quality-at-top-economic-journals
Institute of Physics. (2017). *Improving gender balance: Reflections on the impact of interventions in schools*. https://www.iop.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/IGB-reflections-intervention.pdf.
Kubiszewski, I., Costanza, R., Franco, C., Lawn, P., Talberth, J., Jackson, T., & Aylmer, C. (2013). Beyond GDP: Measuring and achieving global genuine progress. *Ecological Economics, 93*, 57–68.
Kuenkel, I. P. (2026). *Women, power and the economy: Collective feminist practice can transform the world*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003508885
Kuiper, E. (2022). *A herstory of economics*. Polity Press.
Mariland.gov. (n.d.). Maryland Genuine Progress Indicator. https://dnr.maryland.gov/mdgpi/Pages/default.aspx
New Zealand Treasury. (2023). *Wellbeing Budget 2023: Support today, building tomorrow*. https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/wellbeing-budget/wellbeing-budget-2023-support-today-building-tomorrow.
OECD. (2022). *Gender stereotypes in education: Policies and practices to address gender stereotyping across OECD education systems* (OECD Education Working Paper No. 271). Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. https://doi.org/10.1787/4f4b7f2e-en
Power, M. (2004). Social provisioning as a starting point for feminist economics. *Feminist Economics, 10*(3), 3–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/1354570042000267608
Salvador, S. (2019). *The National Integrated Care System in Uruguay: An opportunity for the economic empowerment of women*. UN Women Uruguay. https://lac.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Americas/Documentos/Publicaciones/2019/10/SNIC%20web%20INGLES.pdf
Smith, A. (1801). *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations* (4th ed.). J. Decker.
South African Government. (n.d.) Community Work Programme. https://www.gov.za/CommunityWorkProgramme
Strober, M. (2017). *Sharing the work: What my family and career taught me about breaking through (a nd holding the door open for others)*. MIT Press.
Taleghani, N. D., & Tyagi, M. (2017). Impacts of major offshore oil spill incidents on petroleum industry and regional economy. *Journal of Energy Resources Technology, 139*(2). https://doi.org/10.1115/1.4035426

UN. (2025). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025*. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2025

UN Women. (2022). *A toolkit on paid and unpaid care work: From 3Rs to 5Rs*. UN Women. https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/A-toolkit-on-paid-and-unpaid-care-work-en.pdf

Van Staveren, I. (2021). In G. Berik & E. Kongar (Eds.), *Measurement of well-being* (pp. 157–166). The Routledge Handbook of Feminist Economics.

Warring, M. (1999). *Counting for nothing: What men value and what women are worth* (2nd ed.). University of Toronto Press.

World Economic Forum. (2025). Global Gender Gap Report 2025. https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2025/digest/

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

