

ADVANCING THE CARE ECONOMY

A W20 agenda for stronger economies, shared responsibility, and dignity across the life course

WHY THIS MATTERS

Care is a human right, a shared societal responsibility, and essential economic and social infrastructure. Every economy and society depends on people being able to give and receive quality care and support for children, older persons, persons with disabilities and others who need support across the life course.



Yet care remains undervalued and unequally distributed.

Women and girls continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid care, limiting their time for paid work, education, entrepreneurship, public life and rest/recreation. At the same time, many paid care workers face low pay, insecure employment and inadequate protections. Transforming care requires redistributing these responsibilities between women and men and across households, governments, communities and other actors.

Strong care systems support people across the life course.

Affordable childcare helps parents work, while long-term care for older persons and rights-based support services for persons with disabilities promote dignity, autonomy, independent living, choice and participation, while reducing over-reliance on unpaid care. Paid leave and social protection help people balance work and care, and investing in a skilled, fairly paid care workforce creates jobs and improves access to quality care.

Investment in care is both a social imperative and a smart economic strategy.

It advances rights and well-being while expanding the tax base, boosting labor force participation, creating decent jobs, and generating long-term economic and social returns.

Investing in care expands women's economic opportunities, supports decent work and strengthens households, communities and economies, while advancing the right of all people to give and receive care and support with dignity.

THE CHALLENGE

Commitment has outpaced implementation and financing. Since 2015, the W20 and G20 have increasingly recognized care as a policy priority, but access, financing and implementation remain uneven. Four gaps persist: **underinvestment; high levels of unpaid care; weak data; and inadequate pay, protection and recognition for care workers.**

Closing these gaps requires moving from care models that rely disproportionately on women, households and undervalued workers toward comprehensive care and support systems grounded in rights, shared responsibility, universal access, decent work and public accountability.

Care must be understood across the life course. As populations age, long-term care must become a shared societal responsibility, more equitably distributed across women, men, households and communities.

GLOBAL SNAPSHOT

G20 care policies have advanced, but **coverage and financial support remain uneven.**

5 of 19 G20 countries have no childcare policy gap; the rest average a 4-year gap.

15 of 19 G20 countries have a statutory long-term care system.

2.24x more time spent on unpaid care work by women than men, across the G20.

Only 6 of 19 G20 countries offer paid long-term care leave.

13 of 19 G20 countries offer 14+ weeks of maternity leave; 4 offer no paternity leave.

0.06%-3.66% of GDP: range of G20 public spending on early childhood and long-term care, with significant data gaps.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS



Building on the 5R framework – Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute, Reward and Represent – the W20 calls for action to transform how care is valued, financed, provided and shared across society.

1. INCREASE INVESTMENT IN CARE SYSTEMS. Increase investment in comprehensive care and support systems to 10% of national income by 2030, integrating education, health and social services through sustained public investment and fiscal policy, with governments retaining responsibility for ensuring universal access, affordability, quality, equity and decent work across all models of provision, supported by technology that improves efficiency.

Result: Care investment pays off: every \$1 invested in closing childcare gaps can generate \$3.76 in GDP, while expanded investment in care can help create up to 299 million jobs by 2035.

2. REDUCE AND REDISTRIBUTE UNPAID CARE. Reduce the unpaid care gap by 35% by 2035 through government policies, including i) paid parental leave, affordable quality childcare and early education, measures that redistribute care more equitably across society, and ii) statutory long-term care systems for older persons and rights-based support services for persons with disabilities that promote autonomy, independent living, choice and participation.

Result: Reducing and redistributing unpaid care can reduce women's time poverty and help raise women's employment by more than 10 percentage points, unlocking greater economic opportunity, well-being and gender equality.

3. RECOGNIZE CARE WORK THROUGH BETTER DATA. Systematically collect and analyze comparable, disaggregated data - including regular time-use surveys - to measure the contribution of paid and unpaid care to economies and societal well-being and track inequalities in how care is distributed across gender, income, age, disability and other relevant dimensions.

Result: Regular time-use and care data make unpaid and paid care visible in economic and social decision-making, help identify inequalities in how care is distributed, and enable better-targeted public investment. Estimates suggest that unpaid care alone can represent the equivalent of 10% to 39% of GDP when properly measured.

4. REWARD AND REPRESENT PAID CARE WORK. Protect the dignity of paid care workers by adopting and implementing international labor standards and national policies that ensure fair pay, decent working conditions, skills development, inclusive social protection, collective representation, and protection from violence and harassment. Ensure meaningful participation of care workers and care recipients in designing and evaluating care policies.

Result: Better pay, working conditions, skills and representation strengthen the care workforce, improve workforce retention and contribute to higher-quality, more continuous and sustainable care and support.

Together, these actions put the 5R framework into practice – enabling everyone to give and receive care with dignity.

PROMISING APPROACHES

Mexico – Recognizing unpaid care. Mexico's national statistics system measures unpaid household and care work through a satellite account using time-use data. In 2024, unpaid household and care work was valued at 23.9% of GDP, demonstrating the scale of economic activity often left invisible in traditional economic measures.

Australia – Rewarding and representing paid care work. Australia combined wage increases for aged-care workers with minimum care-time requirements and measures to strengthen worker representation, demonstrating how workforce policy and quality of care can be addressed together.

Japan – Redistributing long-term care. Japan's national long-term care insurance system shifted eldercare from individual families to a social insurance model, expanding formal care while reducing reliance on unpaid family caregivers.

The W20 Care Economy full report, in the **W20 Guidebook for Policymakers**, presents additional Recommendations, each accompanied by measurable targets, implementation metrics, and illustrative case studies to support adaptation and implementation across diverse national contexts.

