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T20 POLICY BRIEF

Task Force 01

FIGHTING INEQUALITIES, POVERTY, AND HUNGER

Pathways To Comprehensive Care and Support Systems: Translating G20 Commitments into Action

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Abstract

Care underpins our world, enabling individuals to lead meaningful lives and societies and economies to flourish. However, care work remains undervalued, underinvested in, and gendered. G20 leaders have recognised the centrality of care in multiple declarations over the last decade, yet underinvestment, insufficient coordination, and policy gaps persist. This policy brief outlines recommendations aimed at valuing care as a fundamental pillar for building resilient societies and achieving sustainable development by translating G20 commitments into action. These recommendations include building comprehensive care and support systems, addressing care needs to advance gender equality, guaranteeing care workers' rights, transforming societies through quality care services, and leveraging G20 leadership to achieve these goals. Adopting these proposals will propel G20 commitments by placing care at the centre to promote human rights, shared prosperity, and gender justice. By leading this agenda, G20 countries stand to achieve a triple win: fostering thriving societies, sustainable environments, and robust economies.

Diagnosis

Care underpins our world, enabling individuals to lead meaningful lives and societies and economies to thrive. It encompasses diverse paid and unpaid activities that societies depend on for the development, maintenance, and flourishing of human health, wellbeing and capabilities.

Nonetheless, care work remains undervalued, underinvested in, and gendered. Unpaid care work often falls on households, with women and girls disproportionately responsible - especially those at the bottom of the economic pyramid. The reliance on household resources in the absence of quality public care systems is a key driver of gender and socioeconomic inequalities. This can also impact the quality of care and support provided to children, older persons, and persons with disabilities. Meanwhile, paid care and domestic work is one of the most feminised and informal sectors of the economy¹, being characterised by poor working conditions and inadequate or ill-enforced labour standards.

Gender-transformative, disability-inclusive, and age-sensitive care and support systems (CSS) are essential to address inequalities and drive just, equitable, and sustainable economies. G20 leaders have started to acknowledge the relevance of care in multiple declarations over the last decade. However, the statements have been limited in scope and commitment. Care-related declarations have predominantly emphasised four dimensions:

- Women's economic empowerment: the G20 acknowledged care's critical role in promoting women's economic participation and reaching the 2014 Brisbane

¹ Laura Addati et al., 'Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work'.

goal of a 25% reduction in the gender labour force participation gap by 2025, alongside a more equitable distribution of unpaid work.

- Access to quality healthcare: the COVID-19 pandemic amplified the importance of healthcare policies within G20 commitments.
- Early childhood development: the 2018 G20 Early Childhood Initiative highlighted how investing in the early years, including quality childcare, can address inequalities and foster the potential of younger generations.
- Care workers: recognising their precarious working conditions, the G20 has pledged to ensure care workers' protection, decent work, skill development, recognition, and collective representation.
- Despite these promises, progress has been sluggish with limited investment, insufficient coordination, and policy gaps. Following previous G20 commitments², four areas require particular focus:
- Limited systemic perspective: current references to care primarily focus on specific policies, instrumentalise care as a means to economic goals, or subsume it within social protection systems. This fragmentation overlooks care's intrinsic value for wellbeing and its central role in delivering sustainable development.
- Lack of gender-transformative approach: while acknowledging the unequal gender distribution of care, G20 declarations lack concrete measures to transform social norms. Existing commitments ignore men's involvement and

² For more details, please read: <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/who-cares-10-year-analysis-g20-care-commitments>.

fail to consider informal work, which is particularly prevalent in the Global South.

- Population gaps: while early childhood has received attention, the distinct care and support needs of older persons and persons with disabilities remain largely overlooked within the G20 framework.
- Missing intersectionality: G20 commitments lack consideration on how socioeconomic and political processes disproportionately impact some populations, including marginalised and lower-income groups.

The G20 holds immense power to shape and elevate the global care agenda. In the era of poly-crises, with converging challenges leading to amplified negative effects on societies and economies, business-as-usual is no longer a viable option.

Building care societies³ offers a renewed paradigm with the sustainability of life at its core, attending to the needs of individuals, communities, and the planet for shared prosperity. The G20 has much to gain from building upon existing care promises, translating them into concrete policies, and catalysing large-scale investments in CSS.

³ ECLAC, ‘The Care Society: A Horizon for Sustainable Recovery with Gender Equality’.

Recommendations

Building comprehensive and inclusive CSS

Care includes diverse forms of undervalued, invisibilised labour that make life possible and allow individuals to realise their maximum potential and wellbeing. An unequal social organisation of care limits women's autonomy while failing to provide quality, accessible, and sufficient nurturing care for those who require it. These inequalities are exacerbated among vulnerable groups, who face increased care responsibilities and have less access to corresponding services.

Care societies can succeed by recognising the interdependence of all living beings and putting people at the centre, ultimately driving economic growth. To reach this horizon, states must:

- Implement comprehensive CSS⁴ that provide services, programs, and infrastructure through a whole-of-government approach. These must involve inter-institutional coordination, social dialogue, and civil society participation, as well as espouse goals of gender equality, disability inclusion, human rights, and sustainable development.
- Consider the diverse needs of those who provide and receive care, according to gender, age, race, socio-economic condition, disability, and migration status, among others.

⁴ Julio Bango and Patricia Cossani, 'Towards the Construction of Comprehensive Care Systems in Latin America and the Caribbean. Elements for Implementation'.

- Address care as a cross-cutting issue that intersects with other policy areas, including climate change, migration, ageing, and technology.

Addressing care to advance gender equality

Just over half of G20 countries with available data are on track to reach the 2014 Brisbane goal by 2025⁵. Despite the progress, the gender labour participation gap remains at over 15% on average, and the uneven distribution of unpaid work remains an obstacle to improving women's economic outcomes and equality.

To adopt a gender-transformative approach, G20 leaders must place care at the centre of efforts to advance women's economic empowerment and:

- Advance family-friendly policies that support gender-equitable economic outcomes, fairer distribution of unpaid work, and enable nurturing care, including paid parental and family leave, breastfeeding breaks, flexible working conditions, pensions, and other benefits and services.
- Implement the G20 Roadmap Towards and Beyond the Brisbane Target⁶, including public tracking of indicators.
- Promote a co-responsible model of care that recognizes, reduces, and redistributes care work by promoting equality between men and women,

⁵ ILO and OECD, 'Women at Work in G20 Countries: Progress and Policy Action in 2022'.

⁶ G20 Italy, 'G20 Roadmap Towards and Beyond the Brisbane Target: More, Better and Equally Paid Jobs for Women'.

disrupting gender norms, and encouraging men and boys to take active roles in the care economy.

Guaranteeing care workers' rights

Care workers represent 11.5% of total global employment, with women comprising most of this workforce⁷. Despite their critical role in sustaining economies and communities, they often face precarious conditions, low wages, lack of training, and limited collective representation.

To ensure that care workers access decent working conditions, G20 countries should:

- Ratify and implement ILO Conventions 190 (eliminating violence in the world of work) and 189 (ensuring decent work for domestic workers).
- Advance fair labour policies that guarantee decent wages, working conditions, and social protections for care and domestic workers, including community and grassroots care workers.
- Support and recognize the vital role of unpaid caregivers by providing respite care services, support systems, and financial assistance.
- Offer training programs, professional development, and formalisation opportunities for care workers to enhance their skills, knowledge, and wellbeing, ultimately improving care quality.
- Encourage social dialogue between governments, employers, trade unions, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders to develop and implement these policies.

⁷ Laura Addati et al., 'Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work'.

Transforming societies through quality care

(1) Early childhood

In 2018, the G20 Initiative for Early Childhood Development highlighted the importance of investing in the early years to reduce inequality and drive sustainable development⁸, recognising the “necessity for quality and inclusive childcare services”.

With an estimated 40% of the world’s children below primary school age in need of childcare services, quality childcare offers a vital lever to advance outcomes for children, improve women’s economic empowerment, and reduce inequality while stimulating economic growth by creating jobs, improving production, and increasing tax revenue⁹.

G20 countries must revitalise the 2018 commitment to early childhood, implementing concrete actions to strengthen childcare systems by:

- Expanding access to quality, affordable and inclusive childcare services.
- Developing strong quality assurance systems that meet the needs of children, women, and the childcare workforce so the multi-generational benefits of childcare can be achieved.

⁸ G20 Argentina, ‘G20 Initiative for Early Childhood Development. Building Human Capital to Break the Cycle of Poverty and Inequality’.

⁹ Devercelli and Beaton-Day, ‘Better Jobs and Brighter Futures: Investing in Childcare to Build Human Capital’.

(2) Older persons

By 2050, over two billion people will be aged 60 or above¹⁰. However, care for older persons is prone to labour shortages and quality compromises due to its labour-intensive nature, low retention, skills gaps and limited opportunities. In the Global North, public benefits and services for long-term care are often insufficient, complementing a formal workforce with out-of-pocket payments and unpaid family support. In the Global South, care primarily depends on unpaid family care. Most spending on long-term care goes to residential facilities rather than community-based options, hindering older persons' autonomy and independence¹¹.

Past G20 commitments have focused primarily on healthcare aspects of eldercare, whereas holistic long-term care systems are needed that:

- Offer diverse care and support options for older persons beyond healthcare, ensuring gender- and age-sensitive responses.
- Recognize older persons' role as caregivers within families, providing essential support to their spouses and children. Eldercare policies should acknowledge this contribution while addressing older persons' own care needs and wellbeing.

¹⁰ UN DESA, 'World Population Ageing 2017'.

¹¹ OECD, 'Spending on Long-Term Care'.

(3) *People with disabilities*

An estimated 1.3 billion people, 16% of the global population, experience significant disability¹², which can affect their social, political, and economic inclusion. In the Global South, a dearth of support services for people with disabilities exists, while in the Global North, services tend to be medicalized and segregated. The inaccessibility and exclusion from general services, such as education, heighten their care and support needs. Households with a member with disability are more likely to experience poverty¹³. Caregivers with disabilities also face compounded difficulties¹⁴. The G20 governments are urged to:

- Expand care and support benefits and services for people with disabilities and their families, including cash transfers, assistive technology, personal assistance, transportation, and extended parental leave.
- Enhance data collection by ensuring disability assessments accurately measure care and support needs and that time-use and care surveys are disaggregated by disability.
- Actively involve persons with disabilities and their representative organisations in designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating CSS.

¹² WHO, *Global Report on Health Equity for Persons with Disabilities*.

¹³ Vásquez Encalada and Pereira, ‘Autonomía: un desafío regional. Construyendo sistemas de apoyos para la vida en comunidad de las personas con discapacidad en América Latina y el Caribe’.

¹⁴ OHCHR, ‘Good Practices of Support Systems Enabling Community Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities.’

Leveraging G20 leadership for action on care and support

While advancing comprehensive CSS requires action at the national level, the G20 as a collective can play a vital role in ensuring progress by undertaking the following initiatives:

- Acknowledge comprehensive CSS as crucial components of inclusive and sustainable development.
- Pledge to increase investments in CSS, ensuring that sufficient fiscal space is created to support these strategic policies.
- Develop and disseminate data, indicators, and evidence, highlighting care's socioeconomic contributions beyond GDP measures, to foster accountability and track progress, ensuring that CSS are prioritised and effectively managed.
- Building on the G20 Roadmap Towards and Beyond the Brisbane Goal and the G20 Initiative for Early Childhood Development, develop a five-year action plan for governments, with concrete goals, strategies, milestones, and metrics to advance CSS across member countries.
- Promote spaces for peer learning, knowledge sharing, and coordination through various G20 engagement and working groups, integrating care discussions across different sectors and avoiding the reduction of care topics to gender-related discussions.

Scenario of outcomes

Meeting G20 commitments by putting care at the centre is fundamentally a matter of human rights, shared prosperity, and gender justice, which can simultaneously foster equitable growth. Care, in its myriad forms -nurturance, assistance, support, connections, shelter, and others- is a pillar for our society while enabling all productive endeavours¹⁵. By embracing this agenda, G20 countries stand to achieve a triple win: fostering thriving and equal societies, sustainable environments, and robust economies.

Recognizing, reducing, and redistributing care work is pivotal in granting women and all caregivers access to economic and educational opportunities, improving health outcomes, and enabling self-care and leisure. Entrenched social norms perpetuate the invisibility of care and its unequal gender distribution, roadblocking care policy reforms¹⁶. Implementing comprehensive CSS is crucial in transforming these norms and advancing gender equality. Moreover, rewarding and representing paid care workers can promote decent work, offering professionalisation, social security, and adequate income.

Improving conditions for caregivers and care workers would also result in better quality care, which can enhance outcomes for children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and all populations requiring care and support. Ageing populations coupled

¹⁵ ‘Care 20’ collaborative initiative, ‘The International Day of Care and Support: An Opportunity to Acknowledge and Bolster Care’s Power to Foster Inclusive Development’.

¹⁶ Gender in Latin America Working Group, ‘The Care Economy in the New Social Contract’.

with falling fertility rates are likely to increase unmet care needs, while the number of family members able to tend to these needs decreases. Although AI and technology can assist, they cannot fully replace care and support. Investments in CSS are vital to ensuring older persons' wellbeing, for young children to receive the nurturing care they require to grow up healthy, happy, and safe, and to promote individuals with disabilities' autonomy and participation in society.

Prioritising care in policy is also a means for addressing health, economic, political, social and environmental challenges. Environmental and care crises have a common root: neglecting the care for people, communities, and the planet. Climate change generates loss of life and economic damages¹⁷, while threatening care provision¹⁸. Yet care is also a solution: it comprises women-led community labour to reduce emissions, maintain natural resources such as water, and preserve biodiversity. Sustaining, redistributing and de-gendering these practices is key to creating resilient societies capable of confronting climate-related threats.

Recognizing the centrality and cross-cutting nature of care means that CSS cannot hinge on available budgets or political will alone. To achieve financial and political sustainability, caring societies must be enshrined in normative frameworks, supported by public funds, and bolstered by expanded fiscal space to provide long-term infrastructure, programs, and services.

¹⁷ Newman and Noy, 'The Global Costs of Extreme Weather That Are Attributable to Climate Change'.

¹⁸ Laura Aguilar, 'The Climate-Care Nexus'.

Financing such comprehensive and wide-ranging measures may elicit concern, especially among policymakers in the Global South. Spending on care reform, however, is an investment in societal wellbeing and gender equality, bringing positive outcomes for countries along with economic growth. Investing in universal childcare and long-term care services could create up to 299 million jobs globally by 2035, 78% of which will be held by women, and increase tax revenue¹⁹. Beyond these quantifiable returns on investment, there is the invaluable contribution of care to nurture, preserve, and restore human capabilities.

Amidst unprecedented global challenges, G20 leaders have an opportunity to champion a transformative agenda by prioritising care. The G20 can lead by example, translating existing and new commitments into comprehensive care policies and investments in care systems that will reduce inequalities, drive economic growth, and promote social cohesion. Through this bold but necessary action to put care at the heart of policy agendas, G20 countries can pave the way for a more just, equitable, and sustainable future for all.

¹⁹ Laura Addati, Umberto Cattaneo, and Emanuela Pozzan, ‘Care at Work’.



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