

Task Force 01

FIGHTING INEQUALITIES, POVERTY, AND HUNGER

Advancing Gender Equality in Global Health: A Way Forward Through the G20 Care Economy Framework

Viola Savy Dsouza, PhD Scholar, Department of Health Information, Prasanna School of Public Health, Manipal Academy of Higher Education (India)

Jestina Rachel Kurian, PhD Scholar, Department of Data Science, Prasanna School of Public Health, Manipal Academy of Higher Education (India)

Erin Watson, Adjunct Research Fellow, Griffith Asia Institute, Griffith University (Australia)

Sanjay Pattanshetty, Head - Department of Global Health Governance, Prasanna School of Public Health, Manipal Academy of Higher Education (India) and External PhD Candidate, Care and Public Health Research Institute (CAPHRI), Maastricht University (The Netherlands)



TF01

Abstract

Global health challenges are exacerbated through gender inequalities and are associated with the care burden on women. In 2023, UN Women and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimated that women perform more than three times unpaid care work than men. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that over 5 billion people rely on women for health and other care services. The care economy, significantly staffed by women in sectors like aged care, childcare, and nursing, faces a critical issue: these workers often lack equivalent access to care services for themselves and their own families. Addressing this imbalance is essential, ensuring women can both contribute to and benefit from care provisions at home. Attaining these objectives requires the establishment of a social, economic and policy milieu that acknowledges and addresses the constraints and demands imposed on women by their engagement in care work. The G20 is uniquely positioned to address this challenge, given ageing demographics in many G20 countries and the increased demand for both aged care, disability care, and childcare services. This policy brief underlines three key policy objectives that G20 countries should promote under a Care Policy Framework. Firstly, addressing the informality of the care sector, particularly in countries where care workers are often misclassified as domestic workers by the Domestic Workers Convention C189 forcing exclusion from their national labour regulations. Secondly, committing to review of labour laws, specifically those excluding domestic and platform care workers from social protection and designing policy and legislative interventions that capture this gap in labour laws. Thirdly, creating a supportive policy environment for market-driven solutions in care work that lead to strong social protections outcomes for workers. Gender-focused care economic strategies, can contribute to a resilient and equitable global health framework,

resulting in better health outcomes across populations. The brief asserts that reinforcing the care economy is a strategic imperative to improve global health and promoting gender equality and justice.

Keywords: Care Economy, G20 Care Economy Framework, G20, Gender Equality, Global Health.

Diagnosis of the Issue

Gender inequalities exacerbate global health challenges, placing a disproportionate care burden on women. The World Health Organization (WHO) highlights the crucial role women play in care, with their efforts supporting over 5 billion people (World Health Organization 2024). In 2023, a joint study by UN Women and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) found that women undertake over three times more unpaid care work than men. This imbalance not only hinders women's economic participation but also exacerbates disparities. Addressing gender inequality, promoting women's health, empowerment, participation, and recognizing the burden and value of care work can lead to increased participation of women in various sectors, positively impacting economic and social development as measured by the Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme 2024). Empowerment beyond acquiring power over resources and agency begins with expanding conceptualisation of women empowerment within the frame of their lived experience, social and relational roles including care work. Rendering invisible the disproportionate care burden on women in contemporary labour policy will have serious implications for women's health, wellbeing, and development (Chopra 2019). Persistent advocacy, policy reforms, education, and cultural shifts are crucial for achieving lasting gender equality and human development. This brief explores the care economy's pivotal role in promoting economic growth and gender equity.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the indispensable yet often unpaid, underpaid, or undervalued role of care work, with women contributing over 70% of caregiving hours and performing more than 75% of unpaid care work, exacerbating gender inequalities (Garijo 2020). Despite the global care economy's potential to create 150 million jobs by

2030, care work's economic contribution, valued at \$648 billion annually in the United States alone, remains underrecognized (Barnes and Ramanarayanan 2022). The ILO Care Work Report indicates that the care workforce accounts for 11.5% of global employment, suggesting that increased investment in the care economy could generate 475 million jobs by 2030. Paying minimum wage to unpaid caregivers could add nearly \$11 trillion annually to the global economy, acknowledging care's significant, yet overlooked, economic potential. Additionally, 647 million unpaid caregivers worldwide, mainly women, cannot seek employment due to caregiving duties, and their numbers are rising in response to care crisis (International Labour Organization 2018; Oxfam International 2021).

Investing in the care workforce is imperative to address challenges and enhance gender-equitable distribution of care work. Such investments can boost household earnings, improve working conditions, and promote family-friendly workplaces through flexible leave policies, supporting parents in the workforce. Policies need to confront harmful social norms by valuing care as a public good and adopting an investment-oriented approach (Baller and Hakspiel 2023). The Global Alliance for Care, spearheaded by the National Institute of Women of Mexico and UN Women, has redefined the care economy narrative, placing it at the heart of sustainable and equitable COVID-19 recovery efforts and global economic recovery (UN Women 2023).

In the light of societal transformation driven by digitalization and pandemic disruption, acknowledging men's shared caregiving roles is also worth noting. Caregivers dedicate substantial time to various tasks, from household chores to intimate care, illustrating the multifaceted nature of caregiving roles. Men, despite being less represented, are increasingly involved in caregiving, contributing not only to physical care but also to



crucial decision-making aspects (Lopez–Anuarbe and Kohli 2019). Supporting both men and women in caregiving roles through policies and programs, including flexible work policies and financial aid, is essential for advancing gender equity and acknowledging the value of all contributions to care work (Stall, Shah, and Bhushan 2023). In this context, it is imperative for the G20 nations to come up with the implementable care economy framework.

Recommendations

This brief emphasizes the need for G20 countries to take proactive steps towards formalizing the care sector, enhancing labour laws, and fostering a supportive policy environment for market-driven solutions. The following recommendations are grounded in the recognition of the significant burden of care work on women and the potential for greater economic productivity and gender equity through investment in both the paid and unpaid care workforce.

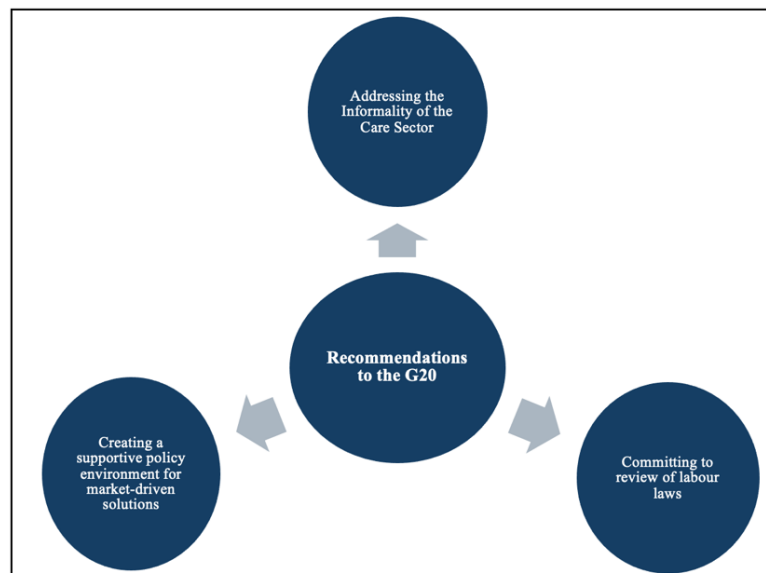


FIGURE 1. Recommendations to the G20

Addressing the Informality of the Care Sector: The recommendation advocates for the formalization of the care sector to ensure care workers are recognized under national labour laws, rather than misclassified as domestic workers which often excludes them from protections. The informal care sector, a substantial but often invisible part of the global economy, lacks formal contracts, protection from exploitation, and social benefits. Formalizing this sector can yield economic gains, such as enhanced productivity, job

creation, and better living standards for workers and their families (International Labour Organization 2024; de Laiglesia 2017). Advocacy continues for the protection of domestic workers under Convention C189 to secure their rights and prevent exploitation, but misclassification often blocks their access to these safeguards (International Labour Organization 2021). By implementing policies that formalize the care sector, governments can ensure that care workers are not only recognized as essential contributors to the economy but also afforded the same rights and protections as other workers.

Reviewing Labour Laws: A comprehensive review of labour laws is essential to identify and address gaps that exclude domestic and platform care workers from social protection. The revision should aim to design policy and legislative interventions that ensure these workers are included in national labour regulations, thereby providing them with the same rights and protections as other workers. The critical role of domestic and platform care workers in the global economy is often overlooked, leading to their exclusion from national labour regulations and social protections. A review of labour laws is necessary to rectify this situation and ensure that these workers are recognized as essential contributors to the economy. The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) highlights the underpayment and poverty rates among domestic workers, which are significantly higher compared to other workers. Domestic workers, who are predominantly women and often from racial and ethnic minority groups, are paid less and are more likely to live in poverty. This underpays and overlooks the value of their labour, contributing to broader economic and social inequalities (Economy Policy Institute 2022). Digitally Enabled Care Work exists at the intersection between care and digital economies, offering enhanced opportunities for decent work through flexibility, autonomy, and protections (Tinonin et

al. 2023). However, existing international and national policies lack the necessary regulatory framework to address its evolving needs. With care economy functioning on a continuum from formal to informal, accurately accounting for work profiles poses a significant challenge, mirrored in the complexity of the digitally enabled care economy. A critical first step to providing domestic workers with the same protections as other workers is passing a National Domestic Workers Bill of Rights (Congress.gov 2021). This legislation would extend and strengthen core workplace protections, ensuring that domestic and platform care workers are included in national labour regulations and social protections. This includes protections such as a minimum wage, overtime pay, and health insurance coverage, which are currently lacking for many domestic workers. In short, the fundamental principles guiding this recommendation include ensuring rights and protections for roles within the care economy, enhancing professional standards, and reducing vulnerability.

Creating a Supportive Policy Environment for Market-Driven Solutions in Care Work: Implementing policies that promote the development of social protections for care workers, ensuring that these solutions lead to improved working conditions and fair compensation for care workers. The core principles driving this recommendation involve establishing a sustainable and financially viable market for caregiving services, as well as implementing employment models that prioritize awareness of care responsibilities. These models are multifaceted, encompassing working conditions that consider the caregiving roles of workers and the development and deployment of care services based on the needs of both care recipients and providers. The necessity of a supportive policy environment for market-driven solutions in care work is underscored by the unique challenges faced by care workers, who often operate in informal sectors with limited

access to social protections. “Communities in Action: Pathways to Health Equity” highlights the importance of policies to support community solutions, drawing upon lessons from civil rights movements and other advocacy efforts. These policies, when applied to the care sector, can lead to changes in structural inequities, policies, and practices that perpetuate disparities (Weinstein et al. 2017). The civil rights approach, which includes federal and state laws and policies, can be instrumental in promoting equal access to resources and prohibiting discrimination based on various factors, including income, gender, and disability (Elliott, Utyasheva, and Zack 2009). This approach is not synonymous with litigation but rather with voluntary compliance and enforcement of equal justice laws and policies, which can achieve equal justice goals, including health equity. Fostering policies that encourage market-driven care work and align with civil rights can ensure care workers are acknowledged as economic assets. Such policies would formalize the care sector, correctly navigate the care work continuum, and develop social protections, leading to better working conditions and fair pay, thus addressing the informal sector's challenges (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2019).

Scenario of the Outcomes

Scenario 1

Consider an Employment Guarantee Act for social security that ensures 100 days of paid employment annually for rural households attracting participation from women such as MNREGA (Chopra 2019). In this scenario the act is envisioned to include care work and makes provisions for flexibilities and provisions recognizing different needs, abilities and burden on pregnant and lactating mothers or care givers with domestic responsibilities with gender sensitive approach. Additionally, the program can include care work as a recognized economic activity under the act empowering millions of care workers in G20 countries. Implementing recommendations 1 and 2 through the above scenario has been discussed in terms of key outcomes, advantages, contraindications and trade off in Table 1 and Table 2 .

Recommendation 1: Through the formalization of the informal care sector, society not only addresses the challenges faced by care workers but also establishes a more inclusive, regulated, and respected care industry that aligns with the evolving needs of the care economy. The principle underlying this recommendation is formalisation of care sector. (Table 1).

Principle	Key Outcome	Advantages	Contraindication	Trade-off
Formalized Care Sector	Policies lead to formalisation, establishing clear classifications within national labour regulations	Contributes to job creation and the development of a regulated care industry with social justice for care economy work	The policy must not inadvertently reinforce the notion that only formal employment is valuable, overlooking the crucial role of unpaid caregiving in society	Fostering public support and building acceptance through awareness campaign and behaviour change initiatives may be required to overcome resistance to the policy either by employers or cultural factors. To ensure the sustainability of care services, extensive cost management strategies are essential.

TABLE 1. Recommendation 1

Recommendation 2: Through a thoughtful and inclusive review of labour laws, society acknowledges the vital role of domestic and platform care workers and takes decisive steps to rectify historical exclusions, ensuring that they are afforded the dignity, rights, and protections they rightfully deserve. The principles underlying this recommendation are rights and protections for care economy roles, enhanced professionalization, and reduced vulnerability (Table 2).

Principles	Key Outcome	Advantages	Contraindication	Trade-off
Rights and Protections for economy roles	Prioritisation, visibility, and support to unpaid care work, including monitoring and evaluation of gender sensitive provisions	Reducing gender disparities in the workforce and acknowledging impact and importance of care activities	Inefficient implementation may result in mismanagement, fraud, and the inability to achieve the desired outcomes	Require additional resources and efforts, including collaboration with civil organisations
Enhanced Professionalisation	Recognising care work as a legitimate economic activity, enabling empowerment framed by care economy roles and ensuring cognitive transformation	Care workers may gain access to social security benefits, such as health insurance, maternity leave, and pensions and address social inequalities	Lack of proper training and skill development may lead to suboptimal care work rendered	Sufficient monitoring and quality standards will need to be developed. Requires ongoing resources and expertise, which may not always be readily available or affordable
Reduced Vulnerability	Access to social protections provides care workers with economic stability, offering financial security during illness, maternity, or retirement	Positive impact on care workers (particularly women) health, well-being and time through support and aid	Expanding the scope of MNREGA to include care economy activities may demand more resources, planning and inter-sectorality	Sector-specific regulations will be required to address unique challenges, fostering a supportive environment for domestic and platform care workers as well as informal workers with care roles

TABLE 2. Recommendation 2

Scenario 2: Adapting a theory of change model for sustaining market driven solutions for care economy gains. The adaptive framework to foster the changes to the market should have four components: bring focus to opportunity within care sector, identify the needs and viable solutions, reflect assumptions and risks in implementing market driven solution or policy intervention, engage stakeholders and actors. Implementing recommendation 3 using the components given above have been discussed in table 3.

Recommendation 3: By embracing a supportive policy environment for market-driven solutions in care work, society not only addresses the challenges within the care economy but also creates a resilient and adaptive framework that fosters sustainable growth and inclusivity in the caregiving sector. The principles underlying this recommendation are creating a sustainable and profitable market for caregiving services and adoption of care aware employment models. Care aware employment models are two pronged; Working conditions aware of care roles of workers and development and deployment of care services in response to needs of care recipients and providers.

Principles	Key Outcome	Advantages	Contraindication	Trade-off
Creating a sustainable and profitable market for caregiving services	Identification and investment in technologies, training programs or service models that enhance the quality, accessibility, or efficiency of caregiving	Additional to innovation and opportunity for care givers, it helps improve the quality of care and enhances the professionalism of the caregiving workforce	A market-driven approach may result in the fragmentation of care services, with providers focusing on profitable niches. This can hinder the development of comprehensive and integrated care solutions	Requires quality and regulatory frameworks, standards, and oversight to ensure that market driven solutions prioritize the well-being of care recipients and care givers over short term profitability
Adoption of care aware employment models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Supporting and encouraging working conditions that recognise and accommodate care roles. b) Appropriate and diverse caregiving services, can help address the needs of caregivers and care recipients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Workers with care roles and responsibility get adequate support at their workplace. (e.g: creches or childcare services in vulnerable communities). b) Development of innovative flexible on demand models for care service sector 	Failure to have inclusive market driven employment model across formal and informal sector may leave vulnerable or economically disadvantaged populations to face barriers to accessing essential caregiving support further driving inequities	High turnover, inadequate wages, and lack of job satisfaction can contribute less stable care sector and lower quality outcomes further limiting goals of care economy

TABLE 3. Recommendation 3



References

- Baller, Silja, and Julia Hakspiel. 2023. "Building a Care Economy: 4 Leaders on Why Investing Today Will Create a Virtuous Cycle of Prosperity." World Economic Forum. October 10, 2023. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/10/experts-examine-how-developing-better-care-systems-can-close-gender-gaps/>.
- Barnes, Sarah B., and Deekshita Ramanarayanan. 2022. "Global Health & Gender Policy Brief: The Global Care Economy." Global Health & Gender Policy Brief: The Global Care Economy. April 2022. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/global-health-gender-policy-brief-global-care-economy#:~:text=It%20is%20also%20the%20fastest,underpaid%2C%20and%20for%20undervalued.>
- Chopra, Deepta. 2019. "Taking Care into Account: Leveraging India's MGNREGA for Women's Empowerment." *Development and Change* 50 (6): 1687–1716. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12535>.
- Congress.gov. 2021. "National Domestic Workers Bill of Rights." July 29, 2021. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4826/text>.
- Economy Policy Institute. 2022. "Domestic Workers Are Underpaid and More Likely to Live in Poverty." November 22, 2022. <https://www.epi.org/press/domestic-workers-are-underpaid-and-more-likely-to-live-in-poverty/>.
- Elliott, Richard, Leah Utyasheva, and Elisse Zack. 2009. "HIV, Disability and Discrimination: Making the Links in International and Domestic Human Rights Law." *Journal of the International AIDS Society* 12 (1): 29–29. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1758-2652-12-29>.

Garijo, Belen. 2020. “COVID-19 Highlights How Caregiving Fuels Gender Inequality.” World Economic Forum. April 24, 2020.

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/covid-19-highlights-how-caregiving-fuels-gender-inequality/>.

International Labour Organization. 2018. “Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work.” June 28, 2018.

https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_633135/lang--en/index.htm.

International Labour Organization. 2021. “Making Decent Work a Reality for Domestic Workers.” <https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/making-decent-work-reality-domestic-workers-progress-and-prospects-ten>.

International Labour Organization. 2024. “Informal Economy.”

<https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/dw4sd/themes/informal-economy/lang--en/index.htm#:~:text=Informality%20is%20addressed%20directly%20in,medium%2D sized%20enterprises%20including%20through>.

Laiglesia, Juan R. de. 2017. “Policy Pathways for Addressing Informality.” OECD Development Centre. October 18, 2017. <https://oecd-development-matters.org/2017/10/18/policy-pathways-for-addressing-informality/>.

Lopez–Anuarbe, Monika, and Priya Kohli. 2019. “Understanding Male Caregivers’ Emotional, Financial, and Physical Burden in the United States.” *Healthcare* 7 (2): 72. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare7020072>.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. 2019. *Enabling Women’s Economic Empowerment New Approaches to Unpaid Care Work in Developing Countries*. OECD. <https://doi.org/10.1787/ec90d1b1-en>.

Oxfam International. 2021. “COVID-19 Cost Women Globally over \$800 Billion in Lost Income in One Year.” April 29, 2021. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/covid-19-cost-women-globally-over-800-billion-lost-income-one-year>.

Stall, Nathan M., Nirav R. Shah, and Devika Bhushan. 2023. “Unpaid Family Caregiving—The Next Frontier of Gender Equity in a Postpandemic Future.” *JAMA Health Forum* 4 (6): e231310. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamahealthforum.2023.1310>.

Tinonin, Cecilia, Katja Freiwald, Erin Watson, Amy Baum, and Feroza Sanjana. 2023. “Pathways towards Decent Work in the Digitally Enabled Care Economy in Southeast Asia.” https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/exec-summary-digitally-enabled-care-economy-i_zoya-khanday.pdf.

UN Women. 2023. “Global Alliance for Care Leads Changes in the Care Economy.” September 19, 2023. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2023/09/global-alliance-for-care-leads-changes-in-the-care-economy>.

United Nations Development Programme. 2024. “Gender Inequality Index (GII).” <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>.

Weinstein, James N., Amy Geller, Yamrot Negussie, and Alina Baciu, eds. 2017. *Communities in Action*. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/24624>.

World Health Organization. 2024. “Value Gender and Equity in the Global Health Workforce.” <https://www.who.int/activities/value-gender-and-equity-in-the-global-health-workforce>.



Let's **rethink** the world

