

Task Force 01

FIGHTING INEQUALITIES, POVERTY, AND HUNGER

Reducing Women's Vulnerabilities in the Care Economy: Recommendations from the Caribbean

Shelene Gomes, 2023-2024 Visiting Scholar in Residence, University of Cape Town (South Africa) / Lecturer, The University of the West Indies (Trinidad and Tobago)

Bephyer Parey, Junior Research Fellow, Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies, The University of the West Indies (Trinidad and Tobago)



TF01

Abstract

Our policy brief highlights potential areas for policy making to reduce women's vulnerabilities in the G20 countries. Drawing from empirical quantitative and qualitative research into social care, migration, and violence against women and girls, we present prospects for enhancing social equality and equity in the care economy. Focussing on the care of older persons, these macro- and micro-level studies yielded insights into the circumstances of providing care and the policy gaps. We present scenarios from the multicultural Caribbean where there is a high reliance on family and community care within a migration context to illustrate the wider consequences of undervaluing care work. While care providers typically come from within families, this practice increases the burden on women. Our recommendations include implementing flexible work hours in the public sector for professional women with care responsibilities; and the strengthening of social protections in the form of care grants for older persons with immigrant relatives.

Keywords: Ageing, Feminist Economics, Migration, Multicultural Societies, Social Care, Social Reproduction, Social Protections

Diagnosis of the Issue

This policy brief addresses the undervaluing of care work, a policy decision which has considerable economic, financial and psychosocial implications for care providers, families, and states. We present the need to value care work more highly as a priority for G20 countries. Scenarios on the care of older persons from the Caribbean are presented to illustrate the wider consequences of undervaluing care work.

Around the world care work is important. With rising rates of ageing more people are engaging in waged and unwaged care work. A 2023 G20 policy brief has noted women do three times more unwaged care work than men globally (Mitali et al. 2023). There are also significant differences within the G20 (Santos 2024). There is a pressing policy need to value this labour, creating the conditions to reduce inequality, mitigate human capital loss, and enhance well-being in line with the G20 agenda. In the Caribbean, these rates of ageing are higher than the global average, signalling that the Caribbean can provide lessons about care policies and best practices (UNDESA 2017). Worldwide, ageing challenges are compounded by health and safety concerns, migration, and climate crises.

Waged and unwaged care work is essential to the functioning of states and societies. This is especially so as there is a reliance on family and community care, also referred to as ageing-in-place, in the Caribbean (Parey 2022). When care providers come from within families, this practice increases the burden on women. While the normative idea of care as a duty is prevalent in the Caribbean, care is also viewed as (i) a cost to carers and relatives, (ii) labour where there is a disruption to personal, family, social, and work aspects of life, and (iii) a financial burden, as illustrated in Figure 1 (Parey 2023).

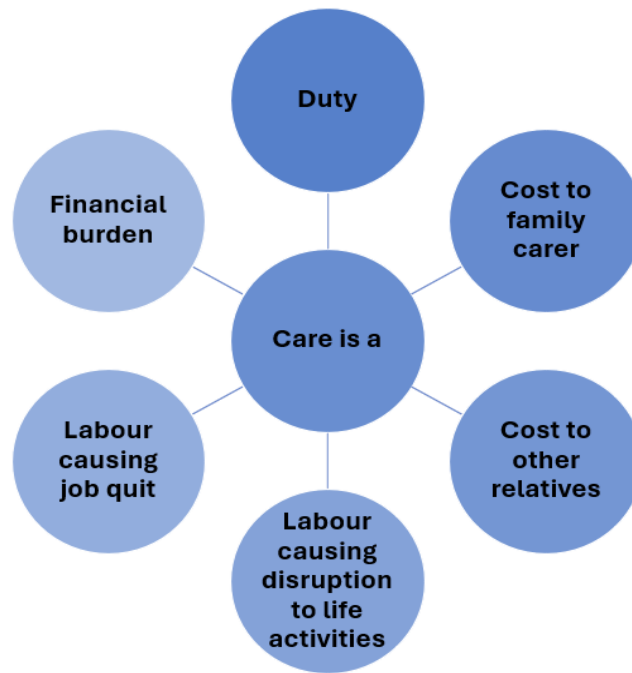


FIGURE 1. Care interconnections from the Caribbean. Source: Authors.

Without understanding these contemporary social dynamics and the historical antecedents, valuing care work and eliminating the unequal division of labour will be unlikely. In the Caribbean for example, women’s vulnerabilities in the care economy are situated within labour histories of colonial immigration and postcolonial emigration where women engaged in both reproductive and productive work. G20 countries in Africa, Latin America, South Asia, and the Pacific share similar histories. To value care work, it is necessary to recognise the political economy of the family, how care responsibilities are allocated within multicultural societies generally, and within migrant populations specifically.

International migration also continues to G20 countries, across G20 member states, and externally from G20 countries. In 2020, the year of the coronavirus pandemic, “7 to 7.5 million new temporary and permanent migrants entered G20 countries” (OECD, IOM & UNHCR 2021). Well-documented examples of migration across the G20 countries

include: from Mexico to the USA, India to Australia, and Turkey to Germany. G20 countries can therefore draw lessons from the Caribbean regarding the convergence of migration and care.

Caribbean work and migratory patterns have had lingering effects on social care. The family provided support in an unfair market society. Within contemporary multicultural Caribbean societies, family support encompasses expectations of caring for older persons through direct in-person labour (i.e. proximate care) or sending cash remittances from work abroad. Following the easing of COVID-19 related lockdowns, in 2022 global remittances increased by 8% amounting to US\$647billion especially to low- and middle-income developing countries (World Bank 2023).

Concurrently, the professionalisation of women has entailed migration for highly skilled work. There have been significant positive developments toward gender parity and equality globally. In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), “in 1990 only 44 percent of women participated in the labor force. In 2014 this ratio increased to 54 percent, close to levels seen in the United States and EM Asia” (Novta and Chen Wong 2017). Despite these significant gains, parity is not equality. There have not been corresponding changes to expectations and valuing of care work. There are considerable personal and professional opportunity costs to undervalued care work that also arise because the state is withdrawing social protections. State-introduced and market-determined reductions adversely effect public health care funding for example, thereby widening inequalities.

There are also implications for larger transnational social networks with effects on national and regional instability, gender inequity, and gender-based violence (GBV). There is a cost to women care providers who de-prioritise careers. Less economically



stable women are more vulnerable to forms of GBV in particular, economic violence (UN Women 2014; Chase and Gomes 2022). There is a wider cost to the state and regional blocs that results from GBV. In 2021, violence against women (VAW) “in the European Union amounted to EUR 289 billion” (European Institute for Gender Equality 2021). Worldwide, in the year 2016 alone, the UN estimated that the global cost of VAW was US\$1.5 trillion (CARE International 2018).

Recommendations

Against this backdrop, we propose 6 policy recommendations to reduce women's vulnerabilities in G20 member states. Concurrent with existing social programmes and social protections, we recommend enhancing policies to keep women in professions while they care for ageing relatives.

1. Implement flexible work hours in the public sector for professional women with care responsibilities.

At the nexus of migration and ageing-in-place, families, especially women, continue to be integral in caring for older persons. "Women change jobs, decline promotions, reduce hours at work, and draw upon savings to provide care for ageing relatives" (Gomes, Mungal and Gomes 2024). When women de-prioritise their careers to undertake these care labours (i) there is a social cost; (ii) women's rights are jeopardised; (iii) the state loses sources of tax revenue from potential earnings. Research in the Caribbean indicates that working women with care responsibilities prefer flexi-time and/or work-from-home options (Parey 2022, 2023).

2. Include 20 hour work weeks reduced from 40 hour work weeks for women public sector workers with care responsibilities for older persons.

Keeping professional women in formal employment facilitates skill retention, capacity building and institutional strengthening, particularly in G20 countries with comparatively

high emigration rates such as Mexico, South Africa and Turkey. This policy helps to preserve state capacity. Reduced work weeks also enable women who choose to perform care work to maintain an income without jeopardising the well-being of older relatives.

3. Strengthen social protections in the form of care grants for professional women with older relatives to hire trained care workers.

This recommendation encourages migrant professional women in particular to remain in formal employment in destination countries, rather than returning to countries of origin to provide the proximate care for ageing relatives. This policy also provides trained care workers for older persons with relatives who refuse to engage in care work or older persons with disabilities (OPWD) who have specific care needs. Concurrently, family members refuse to engage in care work. Women who previously performed care work for ageing relatives are now prioritising self-care, especially women who themselves are experiencing declining health, as depicted in Figure 2 (Parey 2022).

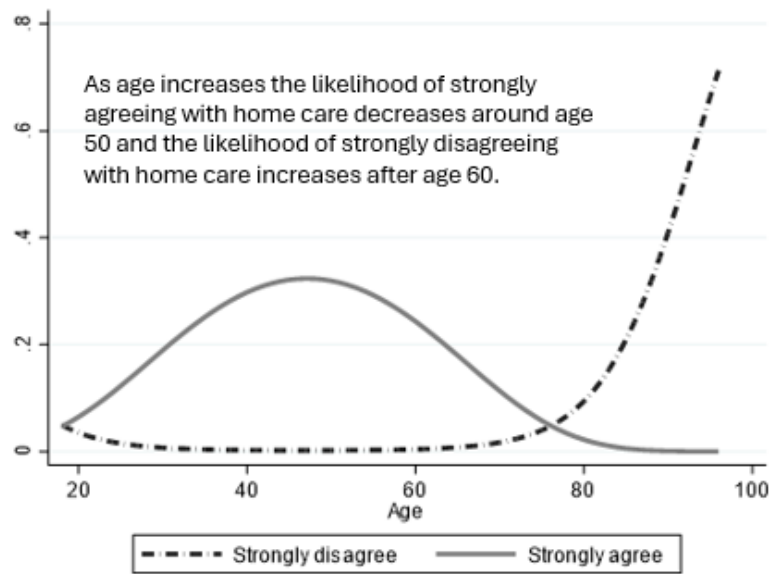


FIGURE 2. Impact of age on attitudes to home-based care. Source: Parey 2022a.

4. Encourage the professionalisation and rewarding of care work and subsidise training for care providers.

These measures can signal how (i) care work is skilled work and (ii) how essential it is to societal well-being. This approach includes ensuring caregivers receive training, liveable wages, benefits, career advancement opportunities, health insurance, and paid leave. Notably, women are more likely to experience care as a disruption to their life activities than men, especially when women have limited education and are living with relatives in need of care (Parey 2023). This practice points to the undervaluing of care work as unskilled work, whether performed voluntarily by relatives as unwaged work or by waged care workers.

Encouraging the professionalisation of care work starts from the pre-primary school level to tertiary education to raise awareness of the care economy's importance, the need to respect and reward care work, and the vulnerabilities faced by women and girls in this sector. Rewarding care work means “not only in purely financial and material terms, but also in terms of social attitudes and broader institutional support that would provide broader appreciation of its importance and simultaneously focus on improving the quality of care and easing the difficulties of such care work” (Ghosh 2022). In the Caribbean country of Trinidad and Tobago for example, while 68% of the population reported a willingness to provide care, only 42% were available to provide care and 31% had the skills (Parey 2023). Given the increasing prevalence of multiple chronic illnesses and disability among the older population, more specialised training is needed to meet the care demands, specifically regarding geriatric nursing, administering medication and nutritious eating habits (Ibid. For South Africa, see Moore 2024).

5. Invest in more robust community-based care systems to reduce the reliance on women's unpaid caregiving.

Reliance on home and family-based care, with limited good quality community care options, places a disproportionate burden on women relatives as care providers. This burden is exacerbated when there is a prevailing mistrust toward care homes for the aged (Parey 2022). Adopting the ageing-in-place model, while centring the rights of older persons, escalates a demand for family-provided care. Family members are also disinclined to care for relatives who have poor temperament or with whom they have volatile relationships (Ibid). These interpersonal and intra-familial conflicts point to the

difficulties of family-based care. This situation thereby emphasises the importance of the state to centre caring for the ageing population and not solely families to take on these care responsibilities. Diverging views, attitudes, and family dynamics lead to strained or hostile caregiving environments. To alleviate this strain on women and address potential neglect or abuse of older persons, we propose governments develop and strengthen comprehensive community-based care ecosystems. This recommendation involves investing in professional home-based services, day care, and residential care facilities for older persons, respite care, and other community-centric support mechanisms. Such alternatives ease the burden on women while ensuring high quality, dignified care tailored to the needs and preferences of ageing populations. Robust public community care-based systems enable women to maintain careers and livelihoods without compromising the well-being of older relatives.

6. Tailor national care policies for culturally-specific and ethnic-based patterns of care for older persons.

Given the shift from institutional care to ageing-in-place in and migration to G20 countries, we recommend tailoring national policies to recognise culturally-specific expectations and ethnic-based patterns of care among immigrant populations. Such policies institutionalise the provision of high quality care for older persons. Studies from the multicultural Caribbean country of Trinidad and Tobago reveal disparities in care approaches within African- and Asian-descended families of varied religious backgrounds such as, the expectations for wives, daughters or daughters-in-law to care for older relatives at home (Gomes, Mungal and Gomes 2024). Reducing women's



vulnerabilities in the care economy means firstly, recognising these cultural norms and secondly, encouraging women to remain in the workforce.



Scenario of Outcomes

With demographic changes and the reduction of social protections that accompany austerity measures, the state transfers older persons' care to individuals, families, and communities. Our recommendations centre state investment into the care economy at regional, national, community and household levels. The recognition and rewarding of care work as valuable is integral to the functioning of G20 economies and societies. It is not enough to encourage men to undertake care work, whether waged or unwaged. There are systemic vulnerabilities that our recommendations attempt to address.

Recommendations 1 and 2 present professional women who choose to care for older relatives with the choice to adopt flexible schedules. For instance, “in the United States alone, when forced to decide between caring for their families and paid work—some 3 million women left the paid workforce in 2020” (Barnes and Ramanarayanan 2022). These two Recommendations enable women to remain in the workforce with full or partial salaries, rather than exiting professional work entirely.

Recommendations 3, 4, 5 and 6 recognise that ageing-in-place comes with benefits and challenges. This is especially the case when cultural expectations about who should care for older persons fall on women as care providers. Migration contexts add complexity if women/daughters have migrated for professional opportunities, as depicted in Figure 3. Rewarding care work while keeping women in professional work, bolstering community care-based systems and investing in public health are interconnected issues within the care economy and cultural contexts.

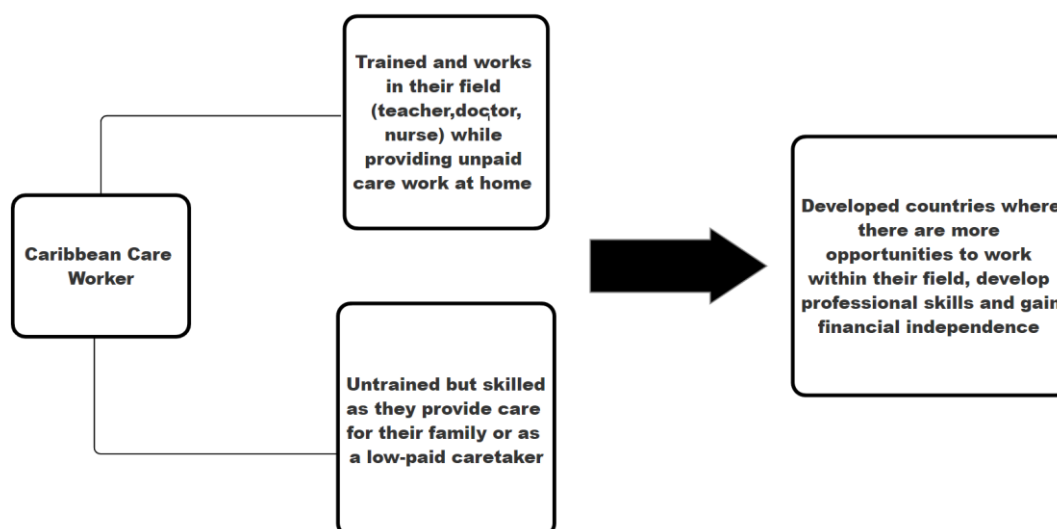


FIGURE 3. Women as carers and professional migrants. Source: International Office for Migration (IOM) Regional Office for Central, North America and the Caribbean (n.d).

Regarding Recommendation 3 specifically, because highly skilled workers and their ageing relatives can afford better quality care, choosing to go to private hospitals for treatments such as cancer radiation therapy has run-off effects of further widening the gap between the quality of publicly subsidised and private health care (Gomes, Mungal and Gopeesingh 2022). Relatedly, as noted in Recommendation 5, disability occurrences and multiple chronic illnesses increase with age, requiring more specialised and expensive treatment. Less willingness to pay taxes to subsidise public health care facilities leads to worsening quality of care. Recommendation 4 reiterates the importance of rewarding care work and the potential for economic growth. Care work is “the fastest-growing sector of work in the world— projected to add 150 million jobs by 2030” (Barnes and Ramanarayanan 2022).

Without adequate structures to support the provision of care, there is a cost to the state, communities, families, and individuals when women voluntarily and compulsorily undertake care work. It is not a mystery on how to reduce women’s vulnerabilities in the care economy. The political will is necessary to do so.

Valuing care work and reducing women’s vulnerabilities globally are urgent priorities. We emphasise the importance of maintaining these targets in SDG 5 Promoting Gender Equality, especially Target 5.1 to “End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere” and Target 5.4, “Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate” (UN SDGs). Our recommendations likewise support SDG 10 Reducing Inequalities, Target 10.4 to “Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality” in crafting post-SDG targets, particularly as the world has not achieved gender equality by 2023 (Ibid). These goals align with the aim of reducing inequalities of the T20 Task Force 1.

Acknowledgements

Research funding was granted by The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. We would like to thank Christopher Ali for his research assistance.



References

Barnes, Sarah B. and Deekshita Ramanarayanan. MHI Policy Brief. “The Global Care Economy.” No. 1, April 2022. Global Health & Gender Policy Brief. Wilson Center. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/global-health-gender-policy-brief-global-care-economy>.

CARE International. “Counting the Cost: The Price Society Pays for Violence Against Women.” 2018, 3. <https://www.care-international.org/resources/counting-cost-price-society-pays-violence-against-women>.

Chase, Vasantha, and Shelene Gomes. *Measuring the Economic Costs of Violence Against Women and Girls Facilitator’s Guide*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2022. <https://thecommonwealth.org/economic-costs-violence-women-girls>.

European Institute for Gender Equality. “The costs of gender-based violence in the European Union.” 2021. https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/costs-of-gender-based-violence?language_content_entity=en.

Ghosh, Jayatri. “Recognising and rewarding care work: the role of public policies.” Foundation for European Progressive Studies, 2022. <https://feps-europe.eu/publication/recognising-and-rewarding-care-work-the-role-of-public-policies/>.

Gomes, Shelene, Antonia Mungal, and Maria Gomes. “Labors of Love: Returnee Women’s Care-Motivated Migration.” In *Race, Class and Nationalism in the 21st Century Caribbean*, edited by Scott Timcke and Shelene Gomes, 100-119. Athens, GA.: University of Georgia Press, 2024 (forthcoming).

Gomes, Shelene, Antonia Mungal, and Krystal Gopeesingh. “Social Reproduction in Precarious Times: A Youth Perspective from Trinidad and Tobago.” *NEOS* 14, no. 2

(2022). <https://acyig.americananthro.org/neosvol14iss2fall22/gomes-mungal-and-gopeesingh/>.

International Organization for Migration. “Empowering Caribbean Women Through Migration.” UN IOM, no date, <https://rosanjose.iom.int/en/blogs/empowering-caribbean-women-through-migration#:~:text=In%20other%20professions%20such%20as,stage%20of%20the%20migration%20process.>

Moore, Elena. “Brief: Older Persons, Care Needs & Social Grants in South Africa.” University of Cape Town, 2024. Report. <https://doi.org/10.25375/uct.25195757.v1>.

Nikore, Mitali et al. “Leveraging Care Economy Investments to Unlock Economic Development and Foster Women’s Economic Empowerment in G20 Economies.” *T20 Policy Brief*, June 2023. <https://t20ind.org/research/leveraging-care-economy-investments-to-unlock-economic-development/>.

Novta, Natalia, and Joyce Chen Wong. “Women at Work in Latin America and the Caribbean.” *International Monetary Fund Working Paper* WP/17/34, 2017. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2017/02/14/Women-at-Work-in-Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean-44662>.

OECD, IOM, UNHCR. “Annual International Migration and Forced Displacement Trends and Policies Report to the G20.” 2021. <https://www.oecd.org/els/mig/OECD-ILO-IOM-UNHCR-2021-migration-report-to-the-G20.pdf>.

Parey, Bephyer. “Measurement, Associated Factors, and Gender Implications of Care Views Toward Older Persons with Disabilities: The Case of Trinidad.” *Ageing International* 48 (2023): 501-525.

Parey, Bephyer. “Potential of Carers to Meet Care Needs among Older Adults with Disabilities in Trinidad.” *International Journal of Care and Caring* 8, no. 1 (2023): 26-46.

Parey, Bephyer. “Wellbeing Among Older Persons with Disabilities in Trinidad.” *Health and Social Care in the Community* 30, no. 4 (2022): 1101-1111.

Parey, Bephyer. “Attitudes towards Home-care of Older Persons with Disabilities: The Case of Trinidad.” *Journal of Family Issues* 43, no. 6 (2022): 1601-1616.

Santos, Camila. “Gender equality and politics of care: Why it matters for G20 and the world?” March 28, 2024. <https://www.g20.rio/articles/gender-equality-and-politics-of-care-why-it-matters-for-g20-and-the-world>.

UN Women. “End Violence Against Women.” 2014. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/end-violence-against-women/2014/poverty>.

UNDESA. Sustainable Development Goals. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/>.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. World Population Ageing Report. 2017. https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/files/documents/2020/May/un_2017_worldpopulationageing_report.pdf.

World Bank Group. “Remittances Remain Resilient but Are Slowing.” *Migration and Development Brief* 38, June 2023. https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/publication-doc/migration_and_development_brief_38_june_2023_0.pdf.



Let's **rethink** the world

