

# EMERGING PRIORITIES IN THE CARE SECTOR: OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIA'S G20 PRESIDENCY



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## Emerging priorities in the care sector: Opportunities for India's G20 Presidency

Various challenges around care work have come to the forefront in the context of framing the women-led development agenda at the G20. The major issues that need utmost priority to be highlighted during India's G20 presidency are discussed in this short brief.<sup>1</sup>

Care work –paid and unpaid – plays a significant role in the wellbeing and functioning of economies and societies. A large part of this work is primarily borne by women across the world; it is guided by existing social norms and is a continuing consequence of the gendered division of labour. It has often been considered one of the primary barriers to accessing labour markets by women globally.

Evidence has amply shown that attending to care responsibilities is detrimental to women's income-earning capacities and building women's economic agency. Globally, women spend about two to ten times more time on unpaid care work than men.<sup>2</sup>



***In India, over 80 per cent women participated in “unpaid domestic services for household members”, spending, on an average, 299 minutes a day compared to 26 per cent men spending 97 minutes a day on average (TUS 2019).***



The survey also found that women spend twice as much time as men do on unpaid caregiving activities. Furthermore, around 41 per cent of women in rural areas and 48 per cent in urban areas, reported “childcare/personal commitments in home making” as the reason for not working or not even looking for work (PLFS 2021-22).

The staggeringly low levels of female labour force participation in India have been a longstanding area of concern. In 1990, while the global female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) was just over 50 per cent, the corresponding figure for India was 30 per cent (ILO estimate). With significant transitions in the global economic paradigm, women's participation in the economy was expected to improve. However, the positive trends in economic growth across the world did not translate into better and improved opportunities for women. On the contrary, the global FLFPR largely remained stagnant from the 1990s to 2010 and dropped to 46 per cent over the last decade. For India, FLFPR stood at 23 per cent in 2019-20.

Given the stark unevenness of care work performed by women in India, which clearly impacts their abilities to join the labourforce, it is imperative that policy attention be driven towards addressing the impact of care work on women's potential to access paid work. India's G20 presidency is an opportunity to shape and influence the agenda of the nations involved to take substantive action targeting the ever-increasing demand for care work.

In this context, Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE) along with Institute for Human Development (IHD) organised a Roundtable discussion on “Integrating care work into India's G20 priorities” at the Indian Society of Labour Economics conference. Some key insights that emerged during the Roundtable are discussed below.

<sup>1</sup> This brief is prepared by Sona Mitra and Sruthi Kutty. It is based on the insights that emerged from the Roundtable organised by Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE) and Institute for Human Development (IHD) on “Women's Economic Empowerment: Integrating Care Work into India's G20 Priorities” at the 63rd Annual Conference of the Indian Society of Labour Economics at Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh on 3 March 2023. Participants: Balwant Mehta, Indira Hirway, Kiran Moghe, Prabha Kotiswaran, Ritu Dewan, Sher Verick, Sona Mitra, Sumitra Mishra, Susan Thomas.

<sup>2</sup> Ferrant, G., Pesando, L.M. and Nowacka, K., 2014. Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes. Boulogne Billancourt: OECD Development Center.

## Care is a sector by itself: Driving investments is imperative

Currently, there are around 16-17 million people globally in the care economy; to meet care requirements, by 2030, a total of 39 million strong care workforce would be needed, i.e., an additional 22 million jobs could be created. A significant proportion of the care workers are women. While care work has played an integral role in nation building, the economics of care work is seldom highlighted. It is difficult to quantify how paid and unpaid forms of care work provide crucial support for other conventional sectors. Given its critical nature, there is immense scope for recognising care as an independent sector to strategically plan for both demand and supply side requirements.

To maximise its economic potential, the care sector requires investments with considerations around making both capital and well-trained labour available. Investing in the care sector not only has a significant social impact but will also boost economic growth rates. Popular belief suggests that funding strategies focusing on high social impact may not yield high returns. On the contrary, the positive outcomes of investments in care will be manifested in other productive sectors. It essentially has a long-term multiplier effect by increasing overall profits in the economy. For example, robust childcare infrastructure provides support to women by reducing their care work responsibilities and enabling them to access employment opportunities. Investing in care thus allows more women to join the labour force which acts as a mechanism to translate their untapped potential into economic growth. There is, therefore, a strong business case for investing in the care sector.

Additionally, since the majority of the care workers are women, creating gainful employment in this sector can further boost women's labourforce participation. Globally and in the Indian context, several studies have highlighted the problem of women disappearing from the work force and the consequent economic losses to the tune of trillions

of dollars<sup>3</sup>. Sufficient public and private spending channelled to the care sector effectively provides an opportunity to address this 'missing women' conundrum.

The International Trade Union Confederation (2019) estimates suggest that investment of approximately 2 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in care can generate up to 11 million jobs, of which 32.5 per cent will be for women workers. While there is a dire need to apportion adequate government budgets towards building and sustaining the care economy, this alone will not suffice. The sector would need strong alignment with the private sector both in terms of increasing investments as well as developing innovative solutions to meet the exponentially increasing care requirements.

### a. Investing in care infrastructure requirements

Investing in physical infrastructure for care work is essential to support caregivers. The necessary infrastructure should be geared towards creating enabling mechanisms for women to take up paid work.

- Infrastructure planning and resource allocations need to be driven towards childcare facilities, geriatric care, tending to the sick as well as providing support for persons with disabilities so that they can lead dignified lives. Special focus on childcare is vital as it is instrumental in healthy growth and cognitive development. Safe, affordable, accessible and quality child care facilities are a necessity especially for informal women workers with little to no social support. Building quality human capital for the future cannot be considered the responsibility of women and caregivers alone but should be recognised as a public good with adequate resource allocations.

<sup>3</sup>2022, 2 Jun. Trillions at stake in India as women disappear from workforce. The Times of India.  
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/trillions-at-stake-in-india-as-women-disappear-from-workforce/articleshow/91954692.cms>

- The different models of childcare facilities (state-run, PPPs, CSOs) should be equipped to provide holistic integrated care for children-including health check-ups, immunization, infant stimulation, education, responsive caregiving and so on. This would also need a well-trained cadre of care workers equipped in childcare and related activities. Household chores take up women's time which can otherwise be used for education, upskilling, employment, entrepreneurship or to pursue other forms of economic activity. Provisioning of domestic infrastructure such as regular piped water supply, uninterrupted electricity, clean fuel as well as time- and energy-saving devices can reduce women's time spent on chores and can add to their productive engagements.

## b. Investing in care workers

Care workers are the backbone of the economy and strengthening their cadre leads to reinforcing the sector's economic as well as social outcomes.

- Social norms and gendered division of labour lead to care work being considered inherently women's work. The consequent devaluation of care work and care workers requires a change in perception through recognition of 'care' as work and caregivers, both paid and unpaid, as 'workers'. This also entails ensuring that the workers are treated with respect, sufficiently

compensated and provided decent working conditions.

- The care sector includes formally recognised workers (nurses, auxiliary nurse midwives), voluntary workers (health and frontline), and informal workers (domestic, cooks, nannies). These activities cannot be replaced by artificial intelligence or mechanisation. In essence, the care sector is relatively insulated from future job losses.
- However, this also highlights the need to build a strong workforce to deliver care services. Establishing formal contractual arrangements for care workers thus becomes necessary which ensures opportunities for upward mobility, minimum wages, provisions of comprehensive social security policies (accident, life insurance), family health insurance, pensions, maternity entitlements, and paternity leaves.
- The role of the state and private sector becomes important to ensure that care as a sector expands in the right direction. Ensuring fair pay and entitlements along with quality training would require the quantum of investments in the care sector to increase manifold. The role of state as a facilitator becomes important in attracting and creating private-sector interest to usher in sustainable funding mechanisms while also framing policies and legal safeguards to protect the care workers.





## 3

## Measurement issues in women's 'care work'

Discussions at the Roundtable also addressed underestimation of work performed by women, reflecting lower FLFPR, by using the standard tools applied in the national labour force survey. FLFPR estimations, generated through simplistic methods of data collection, often miss the complex nuances of women's work and have the possibility of undercounting. This results in the invisibilisation of women's contributions and lack

of recognition of 'care' as work in statistics leading to their subsequent erasure from policy discourse. Measurement of women's work that includes all forms of care and unpaid activities also constitutes a critical component of policy decisions on data collections for a more gender equal world, especially in the context of recognising women's contributions to care.

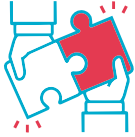


Anganwadi in Surat, Gujarat



# 4

## Actionable Points



Transforming the narrative on care work to build it into a sector with a strong business case



Investing to create gender-responsive care infrastructure for reducing time spent on childcare and domestic chores



Boosting investments for the care sector from governments, private players and other stakeholders



Recognising care workers and compensating them commensurately to meet decent work standards



Ensuring entitlements of care workers are protected through accessibility to legal safeguards



Image credit: Getty Images/Images of Empowerment









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