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SOLIDARITY

**THE VALUE OF CARE IN A PANDEMIC AND
POST-PANDEMIC WORLD**

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The global pandemic has shown the world the value of interpersonal care work across sectors, including: health care, elder care, childcare, and environment care. But care jobs are often not considered economically valuable. By recognizing the true value of care work, distributing it equally across genders and minimizing unpaid care work, we can bring concrete benefits for a better global society. The G20 leaders have the opportunity and the responsibility to shift away from profit maximizing paradigms to more sustainable, caring, and socially just policies that can ensure continuous, sustainable progress of our civilization.ire planet, including child-friendly communities.

Global challenge

As the G20 leaders tackle the health and economic crises resulting from the COVID19-pandemic, a just, inclusive, and resilient recovery must be addressed. The pandemic showed that many health systems were not able to provide care for all who needed it. This forced many to rely on private care or, for the less fortunate, no care at all. It also highlighted across the health and other industries the amount of underpaid or unpaid care work that is required to meet the needs of the world's increasing population. These challenges pose significant hurdles for the G20 when building an inclusive global society supported by "strong, responsive, inclusive, and

sustainable health systems" (EGPRN 2020).

While care work may not have been a priority in the past, it has become evident that a global shift in focus towards the care economy is necessary to fully recover from the impacts of COVID19-, and to ensure we are more suitably prepared for any future pandemics.

The COVID19- pandemic exposed the inadequacies of all systems of care. Inequity in access to care was prominent in high, medium, and low-income economies. Weak social protection systems have left entire disciplines of workers unprotected, including: women, youth, artists, and contract workers, among others. Elderly communities have become hotspots of infections and deaths. Even care homes, one of the few alternative care spaces aside from hospitalization, have become places of contagion. The post pandemic experience has made the need to re-evaluate and re-conceive these care models evident.

Several studies compare health system responses across high-, middle-, and low-income countries. These studies exposed the stark disparities in hospitalization, death rates, and experiences across a broad range of vulnerable populations, including those with lower incomes and minority groups (Hughes et al 2021; Shadmi et al. 2020). For example, evidence from higher income countries, such as the US, point to a disproportionate impact of COVID19- on different American communities, compared to countries with universal health coverage (Wadhwa et al. 2020). Recent commentary about the COVID19- response in Iran epitomized the hurdles faced by lower income countries when equipping health workers with protective gear, establishing the necessary testing facilities, and providing other advanced medical services (Behzadifar et al 2020). Achieving greater health equity that improves access to care for all requires policies that promote universal and affordable health care coverage.

Care work exists in a variety of economies and in many cases, communities depend on unpaid care work. However, it is often women who bear the burden of care in most, if not all, societies,

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leaving them disproportionately affected by situations such as the COVID19- pandemic. There is a strong interdependence between the formal and the care economy (both paid and unpaid). The pandemic made this evident.

Additionally, the shift during the pandemic to working from home has also exposed how women were disproportionately affected and disadvantaged. Oxfam estimated that in 2020, unpaid care-related work around the world added up to 12.5 billion hours per day, equating to 11 trillion dollars a year (Coffey et al 2020). Most of the responsibility for such work is carried by women, who can take up more than three quarters of work responsibilities at home. This leaves more than 600 million women unable to find a paid job because they must take care of children or the elderly. The need for care work is likely to increase with the looming possibility of more global pandemics, the aging population in the Occidental world, and global demographic growth continuing the need for childcare. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that by 2.3 ,2030 billion people will require care while only 380 million paid care jobs currently exist (Addati et al 2018). The vast disparity between the number of people needing care and the number of those paid to provide care related work does not reflect the gravity of this global challenge that requires our immediate attention.

G20 policies that put the concept of care at the center of the social and economic reorganization across all levels, could improve the positive outcomes as we rebuild our societies as “healing” communities. In 2019, the G20 Health Ministers' Declaration committed to “scaling up innovative approaches to move towards the achievement of UHC through resilient, sustainable, person and community centered, gender-sensitive health systems” (EGPRN 2020). Achieving this relies on investing in the care economy and centering post-pandemic recovery plans around care policies. This will require immediate attention given the potential long term economic and social benefit of such policies, such as: democratizing care activities; providing access to

treatment and healthcare for all; providing public care for children and elderly; and supporting solidarity activities at the center of communities.

Global solution

The perceived value of care work needs to be addressed as a starting point. First, standard measures of working efficiency cannot be used to assess the efficiency of care work. Less resources available in care work simply does not mean more efficient outcomes. Other attitudes about child, elderly, and other household care should also be reconsidered. Advocating for the share of care is essential for breaking social conceptions around care responsibilities as well as the economic value of care. For example, countries could promote the importance of shared childcare duties between parents, especially in households where mothers continue to work either online or outside the home. Once care workers are recognized as essential workers, their rights to fair compensation, safety at work and social protection will become the anchor of governmental decision making around investment in the formal and informal care sectors.

Increasing the global economic focus on the care economy

The concept of care has often been associated with unproductive activities, but—as this pandemic highlighted—we are all interdependent and what is considered work in the formal economy today cannot be sustained without the heavy reliance on the, often unpaid, work of caregivers, most of the time women. Women worldwide are primary caregivers for children and the elderly, a key role that ensures the health of families and communities and that builds every nation's labor force. However, much of women's work driving the care economy is invisible in official statistics, but all over the world numbers say that (even if in different proportion) the time women invest in direct care and household services is much higher than men's (Population Reference Bureau 2020). Care work is, simply, vital to every society. The

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G20 must focus on all settings, both formal and informal, and re-imagine them. This may be done by pushing care work from the periphery of national and global interest to the center. Now is the time to turn this challenge into an opportunity by recognizing, formalizing, and investing in care work.

Prioritizing investment in robust health and social protection systems

To recognize the value of care in a post-pandemic world, investment in robust health and social protection systems is both imperative and urgent. This includes devising fiscal policies to boost the expansion of care services for children and older persons, which require highly developed skills to be performed efficiently. In fact, evidence from the UK Women Budget Group showed that investing far more public money in the care sector would potentially create more jobs (1.5 million) than an equivalent investment in the construction sector (750 thousand). Evidence from Scandinavian models of care also confirm this. With robust health and social protection systems, we become more agile and efficient at dealing with persistent as well as emergent crises that continue to test our resilience as a civilization.

Transforming labor markets to enable reconciliation of paid employment and unpaid care

A transformation of global, national, and local labor markets is also critical to create a fairer distribution of unpaid care and domestic work. Multiple studies and reports have found that the persistent gender inequalities in the labor market are not economically sound (Woetzel 2015; OECD 2017; ILO and UN Women 2020). Reconciling these inequalities may simultaneously strengthen economies and provide future proof that our societies are in growing need for care, given the increasing risk of pandemics, aging populations, climate change, and many other emergent and persistent issues.

Values-centric policy solutions for care work

relate to frameworks that transcend the concept of solidarity. Such solutions impact economic growth, create decent work, break social injustice, strengthen the economic contribution of women, and foster better collaboration. We can call all these actions a policy of care, where care represents everything we do, both individually and collectively, to allow communities to persist and thrive in a complex network of relationships with the world around them. To give a concrete idea of good practice in this sense, the Argentinian government provides a great example of such a policy of care in action, through the Decree 2021/475 (Argentina 2021). This decree seeks to remedy some of the gender inequity resulting from unpaid or informally paid care work, by providing pension contributions commensurate with the time people have spent raising and caring for children.

By strengthening economies of care, and providing equal access to necessary public resources, the fear of the fragility and needs of others will disappear. This will contribute to quelling anxieties, increasing mutual trust, increasing individual and collective wellbeing, and mitigate some uncertainties.

Policy recommendations

The pandemic, despite its dire consequences, has opened space for the debate on new global agendas that has the potential to create positive outcomes if navigated with focus on care, equality, and inclusion. We call on the G20 leaders to:

1. Promote policies which redistribute the responsibility of care across multiple sectors, which aligns with the G20's priorities to encourage solidarity and symbiotic communities through:

- a. Devising national policies and legislation that codify how care-work is defined and recognized both in the public and private lives of citizens.
- b. Partnering with employers in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors, who can play a major role in developing concrete policies focused on care work.
- c. Raising awareness by activists'

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movements around care-work as important drivers in changing policies.

d. Promoting volunteering and community-based sharing to build resilient, socially just, and fair societies through national programs.

2. Implement public investment and tax actions with direct impact on the care economy.

In a pragmatic way governments should focus on:

a. Strengthening investment in care sectors, through public works programs, preserving employment involved in care responsibilities including provisions for women workers.

b. Supporting targeted sectors affected by pandemics including microenterprises, self-employed women, and sectors where women are overrepresented like health care centers, clinics, and nurseries.

c. Adopting fiscal and tax policies with a beneficial impact on the care economy (i.e., pensions to housekeepers like in Argentina, fiscal deduction for families with children or elders needing care).

3. Investigate new models to measure the impact of care work.

Investing in care work can provide better care services and create jobs. G20 leaders could explore new economy-of-care perspectives centered on peoples' needs and not on those of the financial markets by reconsidering new nonstandard measures of economic efficiency. This requires mobilizing economists, policy-makers, civil society members to rethink how to enrich standard economic models.

4. Activate policies that promote the equal distribution of care work.

This point is critical to rectify social injustices to which women have been systemically subjected by:

a. Implementing work/family care policies like extension of parental leave for fathers.

b. Implementing income protection for caretakers/parents who faced a reduction of working time or unemployment to take care of the family during COVID19- time.

c. Adopting measures to address the income protection of women-headed households.

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