

2025 High-Level Political Forum



Unpaid Care at the Core: A Catalyst for Achieving the SDGs

Report on MMM side-event
held online on Wednesday, 16 July 2025

Care is foundational to human well-being, economic prosperity, and social justice, yet it remains one of the most overlooked pillars of sustainable development. At the 2025 High-Level Political Forum, *Make Mothers Matter* convened a dynamic, multi-stakeholder dialogue to elevate care as a central driver of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 3 (health and well-being), SDG 5 (gender equality), and SDG 8 (decent work and inclusive growth).

The event emphasised that addressing the unequal distribution of unpaid care work through inclusive, intersectional, and rights-based policies is not only a matter of justice, but it is a strategic imperative. Speakers called for a reimagining of care as a collective responsibility and a public good, supported by strong institutions, equitable policies, and sustained investment.

By centring care in decision-making, governments and societies can unlock transformative synergies across sectors, paving the way for more resilient, inclusive, and caring futures for all.

Key Takeaways

1. Care is a strategic lever for sustainable development, cutting across sectors and goals. When addressed in a cross-sectoral manner, care systems can create synergies that advance not only SDG 5 (gender equality), but also other SDGs, in particular SDG 3 (health and well-being, including early childhood development and mental health) and SDG 8 (decent work, including women's labour force participation and a just transition)
2. The unequal distribution of unpaid care work is both a driver and consequence of gender inequality, with profound implications for women's physical and mental health, labour force participation, and access to rights, particularly among mothers, migrants, and those facing intersecting forms of marginalisation
3. Advancing care systems requires a paradigm shift towards intersectional, inclusive, and life-course approaches that work across sectors to address the needs of both caregivers and care recipients, while acknowledging the diversity of caregiving arrangements and realities
4. Reframing care as a collective social and economic responsibility is essential. This demands a move away from its relegation to the private sphere and toward its recognition as a public good, funded, legislated, and institutionalised as a matter of justice and societal resilience
5. 2025 offers a critical window of opportunity. Global milestones, including Beijing+30, the 2nd World Social Summit, and ECLAC's regional conference on women, must be leveraged to mainstream care into global development frameworks and ensure accountability for gender-transformative action

Welcome by Farah Arabe, UN Representative in New York for Make Mothers Matter

Farah opened the session by sharing key findings from *The State of Motherhood in Europe 2024*, a comprehensive survey conducted by Make Mothers Matter, capturing the experiences of nearly 10'000 mothers across 12 European countries¹. The results revealed concerning trends: over 50% of mothers reported mental health challenges, 55% changed their employment status after becoming mothers, and 27% felt that motherhood had negatively impacted their careers. Only one in four fathers took paternity leave, despite being eligible.

These figures reflect deep-rooted inequalities in how care is distributed, recognised, and supported both within families and across society. Farah stressed the urgency of policy responses that move beyond rhetoric to reshape care systems through equity, inclusion, and shared responsibility.

Introduction by Panel moderator Raquel Coello Cremades, Policy Advisor on Macroeconomics and Global Lead on Care, UN Women

Raquel opened the panel by reminding that unequal care responsibilities remain a key driver of gender inequality and broader social and economic disparities, especially for mothers, migrant women, and marginalised groups. She stressed the need to move from the traditional “3Rs” framework: Recognise, Reduce, and Redistribute, to an expanded “5Rs” approach², which also includes **Rewarding** and **Representing** care work.

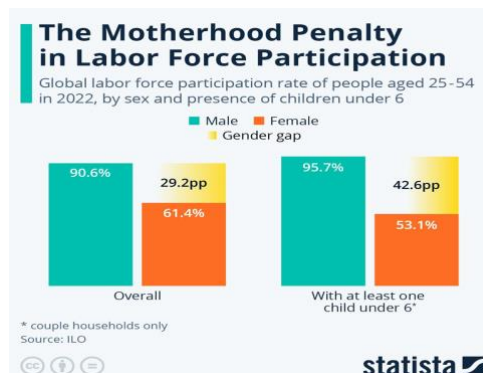
She outlined the objective of the side event: to explore the interlinkages between care and sustainable development, particularly as they relate to **SDG 3 (health and well-being)** and **SDG 8 (decent work and inclusive economic growth)**, and to call for integrated, intersectoral care policies that place caregiving at the centre of public policy and decision-making.

Donna Cill, Associate Professor and Deputy Director, NYU College of Nursing

Donna highlighted the critical intersection between **unpaid care work, women's health, and gender inequality**, calling for **gender-responsive health and care systems** as essential to advancing **SDG 3**.

She highlighted the often invisible **health toll of unpaid caregiving**, particularly for women, noting that **time poverty** reduces women's access to education, employment, and self-care, while increasing stress, mental health challenges, and long-term health risks.

She denounced the “**motherhood penalty**”, citing a large labour force participation gap when looking at people with children under six: over 95% of fathers are employed, compared to just 53.1% of mothers.



¹ *State of Motherhood in Europe 2024*, conducted by Make Mothers Matter and Kantar, based on responses from 9,600 mothers across Belgium, Czechia, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, and the UK <https://makemothersmatter.org/mmm-state-of-motherhood-in-europe-2024/>

² A Toolkit on Paid and Unpaid Care Work, UN Women, July 2022, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/A-toolkit-on-paid-and-unpaid-care-work-en.pdf>

To address this, she called for:

- **Affordable childcare**
- **Paid parental leave** for both parents
- **Flexible work arrangements**
- Greater recognition and support for **informal caregivers**

Her remarks reinforced the event's central message: that transforming care systems requires coordinated investments and policy reform to support caregivers, promote shared responsibility, and build inclusive structures that ensure the **well-being** and **dignity** of both those who give and receive care across the life course.

Hannah Wu, Chief of the Women's Human Rights and Gender Section at OHCHR

Hannah emphasised that care and support systems are **fundamental human rights issues**, integral to **SDG 5 (Gender Equality)** and closely linked to **SDGs 3 (Health), 4 (Education), and 8 (Decent Work)**.

She drew attention to the growing recognition of **unpaid care work** in international law, highlighting the **UN Human Rights Council's adoption of Resolution 54/6** in October 2023, the first resolution to explicitly address the **rights of caregivers and care recipients**³. T

This resolution mandated the **OHCHR** to produce a dedicated report on the human rights dimensions of care. The report, which was published in January 2025 (A/HRC/58/43)⁴, outlines care through three human rights dimensions:

- The **rights of caregivers**
- The **rights of care recipients**
- The **right to self-care**

Hannah reminded that **women undertake over 75% of unpaid care work globally**, creating a significant barrier to gender equality and women's economic participation. She called for the **recognition, reduction, and redistribution** of both paid and unpaid care, principles grounded in both feminist movements and international human rights law.

She also expanded the conversation beyond care as labour to include broader rights:

- The right to health and self-care
- Sexual and reproductive autonomy
- Privacy and access to information
- Participation in care-related decision-making

Hannah highlighted the importance of **intersectionality**, noting that women and girls with disabilities, rural girls, and older women in particular, often face multiple reinforcing disadvantages.

³ Human Rights Council adopted **Resolution 54/6** on "Centrality of care and support from a human rights perspective" on **11 October 2023**, marking the first-ever international resolution focused on caregivers' rights, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4025103?v=pdf>

⁴ OHCHR's January 2025 report (A/HRC/58/43) analyzes the human rights dimensions of care systems across caregiver, care recipient, and self-care, rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5843-human-rights-dimension-care-and-support-report-united-nations>

For example, many rural girls are pulled out of school to provide unpaid care, violating their right to education and limiting future opportunities.

She concluded by urging states to build gender-responsive, disability-inclusive, and age-sensitive care systems. She drew attention to **CEDAW General Recommendation No. 34** on the rights of rural women⁵, which calls on States to reduce girls' unpaid care work and protect them from exploitation, child marriage, and gender-based violence.

Hannah's intervention framed care not just as a social or economic matter, but as a **core human rights obligation**, demanding integration into national policy aligned with international standards.

Nikki van der Gaag, consultant, author, and Senior Fellow at Equimundo

Nikki started her presentation by sharing key findings of **Equimundo's 2023 State of the World's Fathers** (SOWF) report, which is based on a survey of nearly 12'000 individuals across 17 countries:

- **70–90% of men** say they feel as responsible for caregiving as their partner
- Those satisfied with their caregiving roles are **1.5 times more likely** to feel they are the person they aspire to be
- Men who prioritise **emotional self-care** are **2–8 times more likely** to be actively involved in caregiving tasks, such as physical care, household chores, and emotional support

Nikki highlighted several programs that proved effective in promoting male engagement in caregiving:

- The **Bandebereho** program in Rwanda focuses on involving men in maternal and child health, fostering healthy relationships; it has shown lasting reductions in intimate partner violence
- The **MenCare Campaign**, active in over 70 countries, advocates for men's active participation in caregiving and fatherhood through research and policy work
- **Program P**, which was implemented in many countries, supports fathers from the prenatal stages through early parenting, integrating with health systems to encourage paternal involvement
- Lastly, the **Global Boyhood Initiative** works with boys aged 4 to 13 across multiple countries, including Bolivia, France, and the UK, promoting healthy masculinity and gender equality from an early age

Nikki emphasised that such initiatives need to be embedded in broader systems, public policy, education, and health systems, and should be supported institutionally rather than treated as standalone models.

She ended her presentation with six strategic recommendations:

- Centre care in inclusive public policy
- Promote a culture of care in the workplace
- Educate boys early about caregiving
- Invest in care and collect disaggregated data
- Normalise equal parental leave for all caregivers

⁵ **CEDAW General Recommendation No. 34 (2016)** elaborates on state obligations to protect rural women's rights, including care-related protections and girls' right to education, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/835897?v=pdf>

- Change media representation to portray men and boys as nurturing caregivers, all framed within the values outlined in the **CARING/CUIDAR/SOIGNER** model in the SOWF report.

Her message was clear: engaging men in unpaid care is essential not only for women's empowerment but for achieving broader equality, well-being, and systemic social transformation.

Aideé Zamorano González, Founder and President of Mamá Godín,

Aideé presented a compelling case for rethinking workplace policies to recognise caregiving as central to decent work, gender equality, and overall sustainable development. Her intervention emphasised how Mamá Godín's methodology is contributing to the achievement of SDG 5,3 and 8.

She began by sharing the personal motivation that led her to create Mamá Godín in 2016, shortly after the birth of her second child. Troubled by the lack of formal employment opportunities for mothers with decent pay and benefits, she launched Mamá Godín as a form of personal activism. By 2020, it had evolved into a **public policy tool**: the *Mamá Godín Ranking*⁶.

The **Mamá Godín Ranking** assesses organisations using **73 indicators** aligned with international and national legal frameworks, including **CEDAW**, **ILO Convention 156**, **Mexico's NOM-025**, **USMCA Chapter 23**, and the **Mexican Constitution**. The evaluation focuses on:

- Ensuring **equal pay for work of equal value**
- Promoting **co-responsibility for care** (e.g., gender-neutral parental leave, lactation support)
- Creating **real opportunities for women's leadership**

The methodology also includes governance on mental health, gender-based violence prevention, and flexible working arrangements, emphasising practical implementation beyond policy statements⁷.

Between 2020 and 2024, the ranking evaluated over **450 organisations** covering nearly **one million employees** in Mexico, revealing that:

- Only **10% of formal jobs** are held by mothers
- Just **20% of organisations** met the minimum standards supporting caregivers
- In companies consistently evaluated over five years, women's participation increased by **26%** and mothers' employment by **113%**

Survey data from 15'000 employees showed that **70% of women** bear caregiving responsibilities, with high levels of **stress (70%)** and **sleep disturbances (50%)** linked to multiple work demands⁸.

Aideé highlighted the economic costs for companies of care exclusion, estimating losses between **€12'000 and €90'000** per mother who leaves due to inadequate workplace support. Conversely, workplaces that integrate and support caregiving see gains in retention, productivity, and resilience, as shown during the COVID-19 crisis.

⁶ Visionarios 2030. (2024). *Ranking Mamá Godín 2024*. <https://www.visionarios2030.com/saladeprensa/ya-disponible-el-ranking-mam%C3%A1-god%C3%ADn-2024>

⁷ Mamá Godín Official Website. (2025). *Metodología de Evaluación*. <https://mamagodin.mx/evaluaci%C3%B3n>

⁸ For more information on Mamá Godín's surveys and workplace caregiving research, see the Mamá Godín official website: <https://www.mamagodin.com> Detailed internal data referenced in presentations may not be publicly available.

Expanding into Europe, Mamá Godín aims to scale its model up across the EU and Ibero-American regions by 2026, with the goal that by 2030, **three in ten formal jobs** will be held by mothers.

Aideé concluded by calling for a new social contract that recognises care as foundational to decent work and economic security: There is no decent work without safety, and there is no safety without care.

Camila Andrea Gómez Guzmán, Director of the Care System at the Bogotá Secretariat for Women,

Camila presented Bogotá's innovative integrated Care System⁹, which is designed to address the disproportionate share of caregiving borne by women, especially those from marginalised communities. This cross-sectoral strategy directly supports SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 3 (Health and Well-being), and SDG 8 (Decent Work).

The system is built on three core objectives: recognising care as essential labour, redistributing caregiving responsibilities across society, and reducing the intensity and time demands on caregivers through direct support. Using geo-referenced data, the city targets underserved populations to ensure equitable access to services.

Bogotá's Care System is designed to support and empower three key groups through a comprehensive range of services and programs:

1. **Women and unpaid caregivers:** The system offers educational opportunities to complete formal schooling, skills training, access to health services, legal and psychosocial counselling, cultural and recreational programs, and pathways to employment and entrepreneurship. These services aim to recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work while empowering caregivers.
2. **People who require care:** This includes children, older adults, and persons with disabilities. Tailored services are provided according to their specific needs and life stages, including artistic and recreational activities, early childhood and geriatric care, health-related services, and inclusive support environments.
3. **Men and families:** The system promotes cultural transformation through awareness-raising campaigns and educational programs that encourage shared caregiving responsibilities and challenge traditional gender norms within families and communities.

Service delivery is organised in 'care blocks' set up in 25 neighbourhoods. **Mobile Care Buses** are reaching rural and remote areas; **In-home personal care services** are for families unable to access external facilities; **Territorial coordination** is aligned with Bogotá's urban planning framework. By mid-2025, the system will have supported over 253'000 women caregivers, aided nearly 7'800 households with community laundry services, and advanced cultural transformation in traditionally underserved communities¹⁰.

⁹ Widely acknowledged as a pioneering urban care policy initiative, see United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Partnerships Platform, "Bogotá District Care System," accessed July 2025, <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/bogota-district-care-system>; and Bogotá Secretariat for Women, "Bogotá Care System," accessed July 2025, <https://www.sdmujer.gov.co/servicios/sistema-de-cuidado>.

¹⁰ See OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, "Bogotá Care Blocks," accessed July 2025, <https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/bogota-care-blocks/>.

Camila emphasised that caregiving is fundamental to social justice and urban development. The city plans to expand to 45 Care Blocks within the next five years, embedding care as a structural municipal priority.

She finished by saying that care must be a pillar of urban development and social justice. Bogota is building a city where care is no longer invisible, but supported, shared, and protected.

Q&A and Panel Reflections

The event concluded with panellists responding to audience questions on advancing care policies in resource-constrained settings, recognising older women as both caregivers and care recipients, addressing entrenched gender norms in caregiving, and tailoring approaches to care between Global North and South contexts.

Panellists highlighted the need for systemic investments in caregiving infrastructure, the expansion of human rights frameworks to cover care across the life-course, and the importance of structural support beyond individual adaptation. The critical role of engaging men in caregiving and shifting cultural perceptions was also emphasised. Bogotá's integrated care system was showcased as an effective, scalable model that centres territorial and rights-based approaches.

Closing Remarks by Ana Güezmes Moreno, Technical Secretary, Global Alliance for Care

Ana emphasised three key messages:

- prioritising care as a central pillar of sustainable development
- enhancing the collection and use of disaggregated data to inform policy and funding decisions
- and fostering a narrative shift that frames care as a collective societal responsibility instead of placing the onus solely on individuals or families

She urged continued collaboration and investment in territorial care systems, stressing the urgency of financing, legislating, and mainstreaming care at all levels.

In conclusion, the overall message of the event was re-enforced by all participants: Care must be recognised as fundamental to achieving SDGs 3, 5, and 8, requiring coordinated efforts from governments, the private sector, civil society, and families to realise its full potential.