



Call for submissions: A Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth

“Without care we are nothing, our progress is nothing. Without care there is no economy.”

Tim Jackson, ecological economist¹

Make Mothers Matter (MMM) thanks the Special Rapporteur for the opportunity to contribute to his next report on Eradicating poverty beyond growth.

Eradicating poverty beyond (GDP) growth requires **a change of paradigm and narrative about what the economy is and what its purpose is:**

- The economy is much more than the financialised economy as measured by GDP; it notably also includes informal work, as well as unpaid work, in particular unpaid care and domestic work
- The things most people value in life cannot be financially measured, beginning with love and family/human relationships; and as the feminist economist Nancy Folbre wrote: “Not all the inputs and outputs come with price tags attached. Somewhere along the way, babies are conceived, nurtured, educated, and launched into adulthood in a process that requires considerable time and effort as well as money”
- The main purpose of the Economy needs not be ‘GDP Growth’ - especially when it results in environmental damage, drives climate change, exacerbates inequality, and exploits women’s unpaid care work; instead, the economy should first serve the wellbeing of people and the planet—i.e. the sustainability of life, and ensure that human rights are respected, including the right to a healthy environment and the right to development

MMM has long highlighted the inequitable distribution of unpaid family care work and how it prevents women from accessing decent work and fully participating in the labour market, resulting in economic injustice and hardship for women, in particular when they are mothers (the so-called “motherhood penalty”). This ‘care gap’ is also a major driver of gender inequalities.

This issue came under the spotlight during the Covid-19 pandemic: indeed, this crisis has shown the importance of both paid and unpaid care work for the wellbeing of people and the sustainability of life. It also showed how essential care is for the functioning of our society and the economy.

A roadmap to eradicating poverty beyond growth must therefore include the incremental building of strong care systems and policies to provide support, protection, and assistance to both those who require care due to age, illness, disability, or other vulnerabilities, and those who provide care, in particular unpaid care.

In essence, a care system de facto recognises and values the work of caring; it should also promote a more equitable redistribution of unpaid care work, between men and women, but also across society, with every stakeholder—including governments at all levels and the private sector taking their share of responsibilities and costs.

¹ Speech at the #BeyondGrowth Conference at the European Parliament, Brussels, May 2023 – Available on <https://timjackson.org.uk/invisible-heart/>

Our contribution focuses on the elements of care systems that are most relevant to unpaid caregivers, in particular women who are mothers. It is relevant to both Policy Area 1—Access to social protection and services, and Policy Area 2—Labour policies and the care economy.

The principles behind national care systems

Framing Care as a collective responsibility and transforming to ‘care society’

The successive Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean have resulted in a series of agreements which have called for the adoption of national care policies, established the **principle of co-responsibility** (or collective responsibility), and set in motion the recognition of Care as a Right.

The most recent conference, which took place in Argentina in November 2022, resulted in the adoption by the governments of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) of the *Buenos Aires Commitment*², which lays the groundwork for building a **Care society** “that prioritizes the sustainability of life and the planet, that guarantees the rights of the people who need care, the rights of the persons who provide it and that considers self-care, that counteracts the precariousness of jobs in the care sector and that makes visible the multiplier effects of the care economy in terms of well-being and as a dynamic sector for a transformative recovery with equality and sustainability”³.

Recognising Care as a Right

The *Buenos Aires Commitment* also paves the way for the recognition of Care as a Right in Latin American countries. It calls for ‘recognising care as a right to provide and receive care and to exercise self-care based on the principles of equality, universality and social and gender co-responsibility’.

However, this right has yet to become a reality at national level—although it was part of the new Chilean constitution which was rejected by the people in 2022.

The only Constitution that recognizes care as a fundamental right, is Mexico City’s 2017 Political Constitution. Its article 9 states that “everyone has the right to care that sustains their lives and provides them with the material and symbolic elements they need to live in society throughout their lives. The authorities will establish a care system that provides universal, accessible, relevant, sufficient and quality public services and develops public policies. The system shall give priority attention to people in a situation of dependency due to illness, disability, life cycle, especially childhood and old age, and to those who, in an unpaid manner, are in charge of their care”⁴.

Recognising unpaid care work as productive & valuable work

² <https://conferenciamujer.cepal.org/15/en/documents/buenos-aires-commitment>

³ Towards people-centred Comprehensive Care Systems and Policies: Dialogues between Latin America, the Caribbean, and the European Union – EU-LAC Foundation, UN Women for the Americas and the Caribbean, National Institute for Women of Mexico, Global Alliance for Care, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2023 – https://oig.cepal.org/sites/default/files/en_care_dialogues_report_eulac.pdf

⁴ The Right to Care. From Recognition to its Effective Exercise, Laura Pautassi, March 2023, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung – Available at <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/mexiko/20270.pdf>

An example of **National Law that recognizes unpaid care work as ‘productive’ work** is the 2008 Ecuador Constitution, whose article 333 establishes that "unpaid work of self-sustenance and caregiving, carried out in the home, is recognized as productive work"⁵.

Article 333 of the Ecuadorian constitution actually goes on to explicitly say what it concretely means to recognize unpaid care work as productive work: "The State shall strive towards a labour system that works in harmony with the needs for human caregiving and that facilitates convenient services, infrastructure, and work schedules; it shall, in particular, provide services for child care, care for persons with disabilities, and other services as needed for workers to be able to perform their activities; it shall furthermore foster the joint responsibility and reciprocity of men and women in domestic work and family obligations".

At the global level, the 2013 International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) Resolution *concerning statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization*⁶ also de facto recognizes unpaid care and domestic work as ‘productive work’, and mandates States to include this work in national labour statistics.

Recognising unpaid care work as productive work also means embracing a more holistic approach to work, where both paid work and unpaid care work are intertwined and can nurture each other, in particular with regards to skills development.

Building comprehensive cross-sectoral national care systems

Care relates to most governmental sectors including healthcare, social protection, family welfare, gender equality, labour, infrastructure, as well as taxation and budgeting. And applying the principle of co-responsibility means that every stakeholder must be involved.

Uruguay was a pioneer in 2015 when it created its **National Integrated Care System**. its **key feature is its cross-sectoral and inter-institutional organisation** involving different government sectors as well as workers, academia, private entities providing care services, and non-governmental organizations⁷.

Other Latin American countries like Costa Rica, Chile and Argentina are following suit and are also in the process of building comprehensive care systems⁸.

The elements of a national care system supporting unpaid caregivers

Ensuring the well-being of unpaid carers not only contributes to the realisation of their human rights, it is also a key element in guaranteeing the quality of care for those who need it.

Conversely, a focus on the rights of the person receiving care can also help to support the carer.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Available on https://webapps.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/normativeinstrument/wcms_230304.pdf

⁷ See UN Women report on Uruguay's National Integrated System of Care (NISC) <https://lac.unwomen.org/en/digiteca/publicaciones/2019/10/sistema-nacional-de-cuidados-oportunidad-empoderamiento-uruguay>

⁸ The Right to Care. From Recognition to its Effective Exercise, Laura Pautassi, March 2023, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung – Available at <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/mexiko/20270.pdf>

This is for example the case of the 2021 **EU Child Guarantee**, which is part of the European Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights: it seeks to ensure that every child has access to at least six basic rights (education and childcare, education and extracurricular activities, at least one healthy meal per school day, health, adequate housing and healthy nutrition). By aiming at reducing the number of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, it also contributes to support families/parents in their caregiving roles.

Social protection

Framing unpaid care work as a collective responsibility and productive work opens the way to granting unpaid carers rights similar to those of workers in formal employment, including basic social protection rights. In effect, this would mean disconnecting social protection from formal employment.

For women who are mothers, basic social protection would notably include a minimum income, access to healthcare—including mental health care—and maternity protection, as well as **care credits** in the calculation of pensions. It would be particularly important for mothers working in the informal sector, which is the case for the majority of women in most developing countries.

Maternity protection is key, both to preserve the health of the mother and her new-born, and to provide a minimum of job and income security around childbirth (through protection from dismissal and discrimination, the right to resume work after leave, and maintenance of wages and incomes during maternity leave...). However, only 36.4% of mothers with new-borns are covered by maternity benefits⁹.

Such basic social protection is particularly important for single mothers: not only do their childcare responsibilities expose them to a higher risk of poverty, but single motherhood is also a cause of discrimination and even stigmatisation.

Care services

High quality and accessible care services, including respite care services, are essential components of national care systems.

In particular, **childcare policies** are key to supporting mothers/parents. However, policies should not only ensure that quality childcare be accessible to all families, but also that it is not limited to crèches. Instead, childcare policies should promote various solutions to address the diversity of family situations and needs—like it is done in France. They should also promote intergenerational solidarity, like it is done in Germany with the “Leihoma or renting a grandmother” initiative¹⁰ or in Sweden where a law that adopted in 2024 to extend parental leaves to grandparents and friends¹¹.

In addition, the 2022 **EU Care Strategy**¹² offers specific guidelines, through two Council Recommendations to ensure comprehensive care services that include the provision of quality,

⁹ Source: Question of the realization in all countries of economic, social and cultural rights, HRC58 report by the secretary General – <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/58/37>

¹⁰ <https://kinderschutzbund-bochum.de/angebote/grosselterndienst/>

¹¹ <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2024-07-29/sweden-parents-may-now-transfer-parental-leave-to-friends-and-family/>

¹² Communication 2022/440 on the European Care Strategy (September 2022) – Available on <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&furtherNews=yes&newsId=10382#navItem-relatedDocuments>

affordable and accessible long-term and early childhood services in all EU countries. Even though most EU countries have already adopted care policies focused on specific populations such as older people, persons with disabilities, and children, this strategy is an important step in moving from sectoral policies to cross-sectoral national Care Systems.

Other basic public infrastructure and services

The lack of basic infrastructure and public services is often compensated for by unpaid work, such as fetching water or collecting firewood, tasks that are mainly carried out by women.

Investment in infrastructure and basic public services (including water, sanitation, energy, transport and ICT) to reduce the time spent on this type of unpaid work should also be considered as part of the development of care systems.

Work-life balance

Flexible working arrangements are key for employees with caregiving responsibilities, in particular parents. They include the choice of a combination of working from home and in the office, making use of job-sharing, flexitime, part-time, as well as compressed, annualised, or staggered working hours.

The **EU Work-life balance directive**, which was adopted in 2019 and came into force in August 2022 is an example of good policy, now being implemented across EU countries¹³. This directive notably gives parents and other employees with caregiving responsibilities, the right to request flexible working arrangements, as demonstrated and implemented in the UK since 2014¹⁴.

Carers' leaves

Ensuring that young children receive quality care also starts with providing properly remunerated **maternity, paternity and parental leave** to support parents assume their care responsibility during the critical early months of the child. Parental leave policies in the Nordic countries are examples of good practices.

The 2019 Work-Life Balance Directive already mentioned above provides a first step in the right direction by obliging member states to introduce a minimum of 10 working days of paternity leave, 4 months of parental leave (for each parent) and 5 days of carers' leave each year. It serves as an important lever to induce a more equal sharing of care responsibilities within families.

The role of civil society organisations and the private sector

Driven by governments, national care systems must also embrace the principle of co-responsibility and involve/support other stakeholders, notably local governments, the private sector and grassroots organisations working at community levels.

Conversely, interesting policies can be initiated by other stakeholders that can potentially be replicated, scaled up and become part of a national care system.

¹³ <https://makemothersmatter.org/work-life-balance-eu-parliament-voted-the-directive-on-work-life-balance/>

¹⁴ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/millions-of-britons-to-be-able-to-request-flexible-working-on-day-one-of-employment>

Local governments

Local governments are key stakeholders in building care systems: they are closer to people and responsible for the provision of quality public infrastructure and proximity services supporting unpaid care caregivers, including health services, childcare and other essential services, transportation, education, social housing, etc. Local government can also ensure that urban planning facilitates the life and optimises the time of unpaid caregivers.

The **Care Blocks** concept developed by the City of Bogota in Colombia is an excellent example of what local governments can do as part of a care system¹⁵. The main objective of these *Care blocks* is not only to bring care and other support services closer to caregivers, but also to offer opportunities for leisure, sport, education and socialisation to unpaid caregivers.

Another example of an interesting initiative of a local government, is the municipal **status for single-parent families** created in 2024 by the municipality of Ris-Orangis in France, which offers 21 concrete measures to improve their daily lives¹⁶.

Civil society organisations

Grassroots NGOs focussed on caring for the carers are important stakeholders in building care systems that deserve support from governments: they are close to their beneficiaries and understand best their challenges and needs.

For example, governments should support structures like the **Mothers Centres**¹⁷ which have a proven track record in empowering and connecting mothers to build caring communities across the world. The concept is simple: a Mother Centre is a space, usually with a couple of rooms and a kitchen, where mothers can practice community parenting; share knowledge and challenges, relax, breathe, participate and embrace self-care. These are social and learning spaces created by mothers for mothers.

Grassroots programs promoting the **involvement of men/fathers** in caregiving to redistribute unpaid care and domestic work more fairly, also deserve support, as they have proven benefits for mothers, children and fathers alike. Examples of such programs include MenCare/Equimundo's Programme P, which has been implemented in a dozen countries,¹⁸ or ACEV's father support programs in Turkey¹⁹.

Organisations supporting single parents through counselling, legal advice, professional training, financial literacy programs, childcare and other services also deserve support as they efficiently complement government policies to support single parents. Several of our members provide such support to lone mothers in very diverse social, economic and cultural contexts in Morocco (Ahddane²⁰), Uruguay (Ceprodih²¹), Spain (Fundacion Isadora Duncan²²), Kenya (Passion to Share

¹⁵ See for example: <https://www.urbanet.info/centering-womens-care-work-bogota/>

¹⁶ See <https://www.ville-et-banlieue.org/ris-orangis-statut-famille-monoparentale-36291.html>

¹⁷ See the work of MMM associate members *Mothers Centers International Network for Empowerment (MINE)* – www.minemothercenters.org and *Mothers Matter Center Canada* (www.mothersmattercentre.ca)

¹⁸ See <https://www.equimundo.org/programs/program-p/>

¹⁹ See <https://www.acev.org/en/what-we-do/our-programs/for-mothers-and-fathers/father-support-program/>

²⁰ <https://www.ahddane.org/>

²¹ <https://ceprodih.org/>

²² <https://isadoraduncan.es/>

Foundation²³), Democratic Republic of Congo (En Avant Les Enfants²⁴) and the Netherlands (Single Super Moms²⁵).

The private sector

A national care and support policy should also encourage the **private sector** to implement policies supporting parents and other employees with caregiving responsibilities. Such policy can include: flexible working arrangements, childcare support, emergency leave, adequate paid maternity/paternity/parental or other carers' leaves, support upon return, etc. These policies bring many benefits, not only to mothers and other employed unpaid caregivers, but also to employers in terms of better talent acquisition and retention, as well as improved productivity and employee engagement. In fact, supporting employees with caregiving responsibility should be part of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Be family²⁶, is a movement co-founded by MMM in 2024, that seeks to engage and support companies in creating family friendly workplaces. Its objective is to shift the paradigm, from families adapting to companies to companies adapting to families. Ultimately, it aims at contributing to building "an economy, which serves the well-being and interest of everyone and future generations".

To facilitate mothers' access or return to work, a **promising avenue is the recognition and validation of the skills that they gain through caring for and educating their children**. These are soft skills that are very much in demand in the corporate world and include among others: planning and organisation, problem solving, active listening and empathy, crisis or conflict management, negotiating, leadership and decision-making skills.... Recognising and valuing these skills as part of a broader company's policy to support employees with caregiving responsibilities, is a practical way of valuing their experience as unpaid carers²⁷. It also raises awareness of the **synergies that exist between the personal and professional spheres**.

Conclusion

We believe that building strong national care systems must be part of the roadmap to eradicating poverty beyond growth.

This contribution sets out the principles underpinning such care systems. It also gives concrete examples of laws, policies and practices, mainly from the countries of the UN ECLAC region and the European Union, which can be building blocks of these systems.

In order to overcome the challenges of gathering large political support and working across sectors, it is also important to promote the multiple benefits and the economic and social returns on investing in national care systems. These include:

- Improved well-being for people; in particular, early childhood care and education services is a high return investment as it can improve the physical, emotional and cognitive development of children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, with lasting effects into adulthood, notably in terms of employment and income prospects

²³ <https://www.passionto share foundation.org/>

²⁴ <https://www.enavantlesenfants.com/>

²⁵ <https://singlesupermom.nl/>

²⁶ <https://www.be-family.care>

²⁷ Practical tools exist: see for example the EU projects [MothersCan](https://www.motherscan.eu/en) (Bringing Mothers Back to Work– <https://www.motherscan.eu/en>) and [MAV](https://www.mav.mom) (Mom Virtual Assistant– <https://www.mav.mom>)

- Costs reduction in public spending; for example, a 2014 study in the UK showed that the cost to the public sector of perinatal mental health problems is 5 times the cost of improving services²⁸
- Job creation in the Care sector, which in turn means a return on income for the State through tax and social security contributions
- Increased women's participation in the workforce, which has a significant impact on mothers, improving their economic autonomy, increasing family income and the quality of life of households—with, again, an immediate economic return for States via taxes and a longer-term return on children's health and education

Last but not least, although our contribution focuses on the care of people, particularly children and their caregivers, its scope can and should be broadened to include the environment.

Care is central to our individual and collective wellbeing: it must be at the heart of the roadmap to eradicate poverty and building a care society.

²⁸ *Costs of perinatal mental health problems*, 2014, London School of Economic – <https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/59885/>