



OHCHR Call for input just transition and human rights

We at Make Mothers Matter fully share the view of UNRISD and the Just Transition and Care Network (JTC)¹ that a **Just Transition (JT) must be care-centred**, i.e. recognize the central role of care in sustaining life, and prioritise human rights, the wellbeing of both people and the planet, and support for care work. In addition, we agree that ‘care’ must be understood in its broadest meaning, i.e. the combination of both paid and unpaid work and activities that ‘produce, sustain and provide for human life and the environment’².

A just transition must be rooted in a strong social dimension. Caring for people and caring for the planet are intertwined. Supporting mothers and other unpaid caregivers is therefore essential to advance social justice and strengthen the resilience of communities to climate change.

This answer to the call for input focusses on policies and practices that recognise and support care work – in particular the unpaid domestic, care and educational care work performed by mothers, and address its inequities: care work is climate work³ and care policies must be part of JT policies.

Questions 1 & 2

Globally women continue to shoulder more than 3/4 of unpaid domestic and care work, an inequitable distribution that remains at the root of gender inequalities: it is a cause of much discrimination and the main barrier to women’s full participation in the economy and in politics, their access to decision making positions, and the realisation of many of their human rights, including their right to health and decent work.

Climate change, like most crises, exacerbates these care-rooted inequalities, in particular when gender intersects with age, ethnicity, migratory status, maternity and other causes of discriminations. Mitigation or adaptation solutions also often increase women and girls’ unpaid care work⁴.

A just transition must therefore recognise and address the disproportionate impact that climate change and other environmental crises have on the unpaid family care work shouldered by women, in particular when they are mothers. Gender-responsive climate action is also an opportunity for achieving the recognition and redistribution of the unpaid work, responsibilities and costs of caring, including caring for the environment.

¹ This contribution draws on the Policy Brief *Care work in the just transition – providing for people and planet*; developed by UNRISD and the Just Transition and Care Network (JTC); June 2024 – available on <https://www.unrisd.org/en/library/publications/care-work-in-the-just-transition-providing-for-people-and-planet>

² Ibid

³ See for example <https://unitedworkers.org.au/blog/care-work-is-climate-work/>

⁴ See in particular *The Climate Care nexus*, work document, UN Women; 2023 – available on <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/working-paper-the-climate-care-nexus-en.pdf> – and The key takeaways from MMM 2024 HLPF side-event on *Mothers, unpaid care work and crises: connecting the dots*: <https://makemothersmatter.org/envisioning-care-as-a-common-thread-to-global-crises/>

Examples of promising laws, policies and practices that address the unpaid care work issue and that should be part of a JT are mostly from the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) region and the European Union (EU) and its member states.

Recognition of Care as a Right and as a common and shared responsibility

The *Buenos Aires Commitment*, which was adopted by the ECLAC's Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2023, paves the way for the recognition of Care as a Right in Latin American countries: "Recognize 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, and therefore, as a responsibility that must be shared by people of all sectors of society, families, communities, businesses, and the State, adopting regulatory frameworks and comprehensive care policies, programmes and systems with an intersectional and intercultural perspective that respect, protect and fulfil the rights of those who receive and provide paid and unpaid care, [...] and that free up time for women, so that they can engage in employment, education, public and political life and the economy, and enjoy their autonomy to the full"⁵.

However, this right, which would put obligations on States, has yet to become a reality at national level. So far, the only legislation that recognizes care as a fundamental right, is Mexico City's 2017 Political Constitution⁶.

Recognition of unpaid care work as productive & valuable work

A good 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"⁷.

At the global level, the 2013 International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) Resolution *concerning statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization*⁸ also de facto recognizes unpaid care and domestic work as 'productive work', and mandates States to include this work in national labour statistics.

Framing unpaid care work as productive and therefore valuable work opens the way to granting unpaid carers rights similar to those of workers in formal employment. In effect, this would mean disconnecting basic social protection from formal employment. For women who are mothers, basic social protection would notably include a minimum income, access to healthcare and maternity protection, which are all the more important in the context of a JT.

Establishing National Care Systems

⁵ <https://conferenciamujer.cepal.org/15/en/documents/buenos-aires-commitment>

⁶ 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" – quoted in *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>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Available on https://webapps.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/normativeinstrument/wcms_230304.pdf

A JT is the opportunity to establish national care systems, a policy area in which the ECLAC region has also been leading. At national level, Uruguay was a pioneer in 2015 when it created its National Integrated Care System, with a key feature being its intersectoral and inter-institutional organisation involving different government sectors as well as workers, academia, private entities providing care services, and non-governmental organizations. Other Latin American countries like Costa Rica, Chile and Argentina are following suit and are also in the process of building comprehensive national care systems.

In the EU, the **2022 Care Strategy**⁹ offers specific guidelines, actions, and recommendations to ensure comprehensive care services that include the provision of quality, affordable and accessible long-term care and early childhood services. If 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.

It is crucial to stress the **benefits of investing in comprehensive care systems as part of a JT**, and the economic, environmental and social returns it can bring. Care jobs are low-carbon, non-extractive and vital for having a healthy and functioning society. In particular, investing in early childhood care and education services improves the development of children to their full potential and their ability to contribute to society later in life. Spending on health, notably on prevention measures, induces great savings for the State when a long-term approach is adopted. Measures to increase women's participation in the workforce improves their economic autonomy and security, and consequently the quality of life and resilience of households.

A prospering and just society invests in its people and care for the environment, and thereby creates a virtuous economic and social cycle. A JT can only be achieved by **working across sectors**.

Other examples of good policies supporting caregivers

- The 2019 **EU Work-life balance directive**¹⁰ includes various provisions to support parents and other employees with caregiving responsibilities, such as the right to request flexible working arrangements (implemented in the UK since 2014¹¹).
- The concept of '**care blocs**' is an innovative policy successfully developed by the municipality of Bogota in several areas of the city¹². A care bloc is an area where users can access essential municipal services within a reasonable walking distance from home. This means that caregivers (mostly mothers or women caring for a sick or old family member) do not necessarily need transport to access health centres, childcare services, schools, parks and other essential public facilities. As part of this policy, the municipality also offers community laundry facilities, legal aid, as well as physical activities and high school or vocational classes. The municipality also offers care services so that caregivers can take part in these activities and take time for themselves.

The role of grassroots NGOs and the private sector in JT

⁹ 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>

¹⁰ <https://makemothersmatter.org/work-life-balance-eu-parliament-voted-the-directive-on-work-life-balance/>

¹¹ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/millions-of-britons-to-be-able-to-request-flexible-working-on-day-one-of-employment>

¹² <https://www.urbanet.info/centering-womens-care-work-bogota/>

Driven by governments, a JT must also embrace the principle of co-responsibility and involve/support other stakeholders, notably grassroots organisations working with communities and the private sector.

For example, governments should support **Mothers Centres**¹³ 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 social and learning space, where mothers can practice community parenting, share knowledge and challenges, relax, support each other, and embrace self-care.

Grassroots programs promoting the **involvement of men/fathers** in caregiving to redistribute unpaid domestic and care work more fairly, also deserve support, as they have proven benefits for mothers, children and fathers alike, and ultimately society as a whole.

A national care policy should also directly or indirectly encourage/oblige **private companies to take their share of responsibilities in a care-centred JT**. This includes company policies to support parents and other employees with caregiving responsibilities, such as flexible working arrangements, childcare support, emergency leave, adequate paid maternity/paternity/parental leave and support upon their return. 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 satisfaction and engagement.

In addition, motherhood – and more generally parenthood and other unpaid caregiving work – is a learning experience that equips those unpaid caregivers with **soft skills** that include among others: planning and organisation, problem solving, active listening and empathy, crisis or conflict management, negotiating, leadership and decision-making skills... All these skills are very much in demand in the Labour market – **but also very much needed in the context of a JT**. Recognising and valuing these skills as part of a broader policy to support employees with caregiving responsibilities, is a practical way of valuing their experience as unpaid carers. It also raises awareness of the **synergies that exist between the personal and professional spheres**.

Building a care society and transforming to a human rights-based wellbeing economy

Although our societies and most governments continue to prioritize GDP growth, productivity and short-term profit – in an economic system which prospers on the back of the environment and women’s unpaid care work, and is at the root of climate change, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, as well as rising inequalities – there is increased recognition of the inadequacy of GDP as a driver of our economic policies, and of the urgent need to transform our economic system. At the UN Summit of the Future, member states have officially agreed to go ‘beyond GDP’, and develop alternative metrics to assess human and planetary well-being in order to guide policy making, but much remains to be done.

Among promising pathways:

- A few governments – namely Canada, Finland, Iceland, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales – have started to engage in transforming to **wellbeing economies**¹⁴.
- The *Buenos Aires Commitment* already mentioned also lays the ground 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

¹³ 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)*

¹⁴ See <https://weall.org/wego>

effects of the care economy in terms of well-being and as a dynamic sector for a transformative recovery with equality and sustainability”.

Focusing on care actually provides a common thread and a holistic approach to identify the synergies between environmental, economic, labour, health and education policies.

Indeed, a JT requires a profound transformation of our economic and social systems: these must be repurposed to prioritize human rights, the wellbeing of both people and the planet, as well as inclusion, sustainability and equity in all policy making – with care at its centre.

Question 3

Certain groups face particular challenges in the context of a JT. In particular, **women living in rural areas** and working in the agricultural sector or doing subsistence farming are not necessarily paid or recognized for their contributions, which come on top of their domestic and care responsibilities in the household. They do not benefit from the social protection induced by formal employment. Additionally, limited public infrastructure and a smaller concentration of services – in particular healthcare and childcare – make the distance to these infrastructure and services sometimes considerable. Climate change only makes things worse¹⁵. A JT must therefore take particular attention to include rural women, again with a care lens.

We also wish to draw attention to **single mothers**, who are particularly vulnerable to poverty. A JT must not reinforce this vulnerability, especially in relation to rising energy and transportation costs.

Question 6

To complement the examples of good practices highlighted above we wish to make the following recommendations:

- Recognize that care work, whether formal or informal, is essential for individual well-being and societal development – especially in the context of a JT
- Make sure that mitigation or adaptation measures to climate change, as well as decarbonisation measures do not disproportionately increase women and girls’ unpaid care work and their vulnerability to poverty – in particular rural women and single mothers
- Promote participatory approaches and involve mothers in the design and implementation of JT policies and projects, particularly those related to the development of infrastructure and the allocation of resources
- Support initiatives that amplify the voices of women in decision-making
- Consider universal social protection as an investment in people, and ensure that informal carers benefit from social security and protection, including through a minimum income
- Implement or reinforce gender neutral care credit systems to properly compensate for the time taken up by unpaid care activities – including care for the environment
- Invest properly in care services (ensuring a diversity of options so that families can choose the one that best fits their need), as well as in care jobs (which contribute to decarbonising the economy) to ensure the attractiveness of the sector through adequate pay and proper working conditions

¹⁵ *The Climate Care nexus*, work document, UN Women; 2023 – available on <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/working-paper-the-climate-care-nexus-en.pdf>

Conclusion

The well-being of the people and the planet must be at the core of JT efforts. A JT must be care-centred, recognise care as a collective responsibility that has to be equitably shared between women and men and across society, and not just fall upon the already most vulnerable. Last but not least, a JT cannot happen without ‘shifting from a care-less to a care-full economic system’¹⁶.

¹⁶ Policy Brief *Care work in the just transition – providing for people and planet*; developed by UNRISD and the Just Transition and Care Network (JTC); June 2024 – available on <https://www.unrisd.org/en/library/publications/care-work-in-the-just-transition-providing-for-people-and-planet>