



**63<sup>rd</sup> UN Commission on Social Development**  
**Sharing is Caring – Equal parenting, a path**  
**to social cohesion?**

***Report of MMM side-event***  
***held online on 12 February 2025***



Families in all their diversity are the cornerstones of human development and the most immediate environment where individuals learn to navigate social relationships, solidarity, conflicts, and responsibilities, while caring for each other. They also nurture the values, attitudes, and behaviours that extend into communities and societies.

**Fostering solidarity, social inclusion, and social cohesion begins at home. Promoting shared caregiving responsibilities and creating an inclusive culture of care within families are transformative steps toward achieving the 1995 Copenhagen commitments and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.**

### **Objectives of the Side Event**

- Spotlight the persistent inequalities in caregiving and their impact on gender and social cohesion.
- Challenge the structural and cultural barriers that prevent equal parenting and caregiving.
- Call on governments and institutions to recognize care as a pillar of sustainable development.

## Key Takeaways

1. Care is a shared responsibility, not a women's issue. Despite societal progress, caregiving remains disproportionately assigned to women, with mothers from the 12 European countries of the 2024 MMM survey undertaking at least 63% of caregiving tasks even when employed full-time. Equal parenting is essential for achieving true gender equality and social cohesion.
2. The “motherhood penalty” undermines women’s economic equality. Women face significant career setbacks after having children, including reduced working hours, lower earnings, and limited career growth. In contrast, men's careers often remain stable or improve, reinforcing structural inequalities in the workforce.
3. Fathers’ limited participation in caregiving is a missed opportunity. Paternity leave uptake remains low, with only one in three fathers using available policies in the 12 European countries of MMM 2024 Survey. Increased engagement from fathers in caregiving benefits child development, strengthens family bonds, and improves overall well-being for both parents.
4. Unpaid care work holds tremendous economic value. The economic contribution of unpaid care work remains invisible in GDP calculations. If valued at minimum wage, globally unpaid care work by women and girls would amount to \$11 trillion annually, highlighting the urgent need to recognize and support caregiving labour.
5. Workplace flexibility is crucial for supporting parents. Family-friendly workplace policies, such as flexible hours, remote work options, and paid parental leave, enhance employee well-being, increase productivity, and reduce absenteeism. Companies that support working parents see higher retention rates and stronger employee engagement.
6. Gender norms must be actively challenged. Gender stereotypes and cultural expectations about masculinity and femininity continue to reinforce caregiving inequalities. Policies alone are not enough: societal attitudes must shift to recognize caregiving as a shared social responsibility, not just a women’s issue.

## Introduction by Emilienne de León Aulina, Senior Advisor, Global Alliance for Care

For centuries, families have been at the heart of building communities and societies, with women traditionally taking on the primary role of caregiving. Today, as MMM emphasizes, families in all their diversity remain vital connectors of human development, continuing to shape the values and relationships that influence broader society.

However, societal shifts driven by globalization, technological advancements, and the growing participation of women in public life, whether in the economy, academia, or informal sectors have impacted family dynamics. Women still dedicate more than twice the time men do to caregiving, often balancing this with professional responsibilities. This raises an important question: how can we create a better balance that allows families to continue thriving?

The webinar explored how sharing caregiving work could foster social development, highlighting the importance of men's involvement in parenting. It aimed to promote social cohesion by advocating for equal opportunities both in caregiving and active participation in society so that responsibilities and benefits are shared equitably by all parents.

### Angela Garcia, Projects Director, Make Mothers Matter

Angela Garcia presented some of the findings from a survey conducted in 2024 across 11 European Union countries and the UK, encompassing responses from nearly 10,000 mothers:

- **Disproportionate Caregiving Load:** Mothers are responsible for at least 63% of caregiving and household tasks, even when engaged in full-time employment. This statistic highlights the persistent gender disparities in child rearing and domestic responsibilities.
- **Satisfaction with Parenting Roles:** Only 44% of mothers expressed contentment with the current distribution of parenting duties. This dissatisfaction points to a need for a more balanced sharing of responsibilities to improve family dynamics and personal well-being.
- **Paternity Leave Utilization:** Paternity leave uptake remains low, with only one in three fathers taking advantage of available policies. This low uptake not only reflects potential cultural and systemic barriers discouraging fathers from participating fully in early childcare but also a lack of awareness of the value and importance of caregiving. Also, it prevents fathers from creating strong bonds with their children, which are crucial for both child development and parental well-being.
- **Gendered Division of Caregiving:** When asked about after-school childcare support for school-aged children, the first choice was mothers themselves (35%), followed by grandparents (23%), and then fathers. This highlights the ongoing gendered division of caregiving responsibilities.
- **Career Adjustments by Mothers:** Many mothers experience career setbacks due to caregiving responsibilities. 23% have their working hours reduced, and 55% have changed their work status after having children. Nearly 27% report that motherhood negatively impacts their careers. This phenomenon, known as the **motherhood penalty**<sup>1</sup>, includes both

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<sup>1</sup> See also Tamar Kricheli-Katz's 2012 article, "Choice, Discrimination, and the Motherhood Penalty" examines how societal perceptions of motherhood as a personal choice contribute to workplace discrimination, leading

**career stagnation** and **financial repercussions**. Career stagnation occurs when mothers face limited professional growth, while 39% of mothers report a decrease in regular income. This financial strain not only affects their immediate earnings but also reduces long-term pension prospects. As a result, many mothers shift to part-time work, yet still bear the full responsibility of caregiving, leading to long-term financial insecurity.

- **Mental Health Implications:** A substantial 67% of mothers reported feelings of being overwhelmed, with 50% experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, or burnout. These issues not only affect mothers but also have a negative impact on their children and families. However, there is positive news: the survey data shows that mothers who share caregiving responsibilities with fathers or co-parents are significantly less likely to experience mental health problems or feel mentally overloaded. This finding emphasizes the positive impact of equal parenting on family health and harmony.

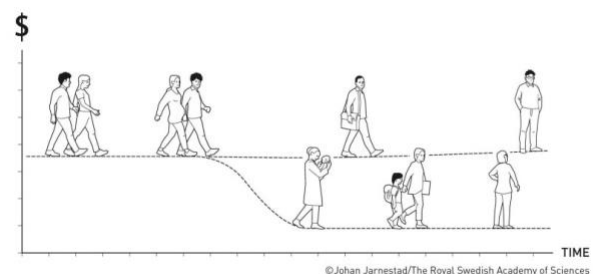
Angela Garcia concluded with this quote from Edward Sola, winner of a Goya Award for his film *Casa en Flames*: ***"Let's build a world where caregiving isn't based on sacrifice. Let's create a future where parenthood doesn't rely on super-mothers but on mothers and fathers, supported by the structures they need to raise their children with dignity and freedom."***

### Wessel van den Berg, Senior Advocacy Officer, Equimundo

Wessel van den Berg presented key findings from the **State of the World's Fathers (SOWF) 2023** report, which surveyed **over 12,000 individuals across 17 countries** to analyse the intersection of caregiving, gender roles, and economic disparities. His presentation underscored the urgent need for **policy reforms, workplace flexibility, and cultural shifts** to ensure caregiving is recognized as a shared responsibility rather than a women's sole responsibility.

### Gendered Economic and Social Impacts of Care Work

- The data reaffirmed the **"motherhood penalty"**, demonstrating how **women's earnings decline after childbirth and never fully recover**, whereas men's careers remain stable or even advance.
- This finding aligns with **Claudia Goldin's Nobel Prize-winning research on the gender pay gap**, which highlights how



to significant wage penalties for mothers – accessible on [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264688168\\_Choice\\_Discrimination\\_And\\_the\\_Motherhood\\_Penalty](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264688168_Choice_Discrimination_And_the_Motherhood_Penalty)

caregiving responsibilities systematically disadvantage women in the labour market.<sup>2</sup>

## Men's Mental Health Crisis & the Caregiving Gap

A critical inverse relationship emerged from the data: as women maintain caregiving bonds, their careers often decline, while men's careers tend to remain stable or improve. However, men's social connections, which are fostered through caregiving relationships, diminish as their involvement in care work decreases, leading to poorer mental health outcomes. The *State of American Men* (2023) report reveals alarming trends in men's mental health, a crisis also observed in other countries, such as South Africa<sup>3</sup>. The findings show that:

- Many men had not spoken to anyone in person for over two weeks.
- A significant percentage felt that no one truly knew them.
- Men expressed uncertainty and confusion about their future at a higher rate than women.

This research highlights the need for men to be more involved in caregiving roles, not only to advance gender equality, but also to improve their own mental health. Women's caregiving work is tied to emotional bonding and attachment, which sustain their social connections. For men, the lack of engagement in caregiving diminishes their ability to maintain these vital connections, contributing to social isolation and emotional distress. Engaging men more in caregiving work not only reduces gender inequality but also provides valuable mental health benefits, helping mitigate the growing crisis of loneliness and disconnection among men.

## Barriers to Equitable Caregiving

The survey identified three key **structural obstacles** preventing fathers from participating equally in caregiving:

- **Financial burden:** The **high cost of childcare** forces many families into gendered caregiving roles.
- **Lack of care infrastructure:** In many countries, **flexible, affordable, and high-quality child-care service remains inaccessible**.
- **Workplace constraints:** Policies like **paid leave and flexible working hours** are **either insufficient or underutilized** due to workplace stigma.

A case study from South Africa highlights a clear gender perception gap:

- Fathers cited work commitments as the reason for their limited caregiving involvement.
- Mothers reported a lack of support from their partners, despite men identifying themselves as the family's "providers."

<sup>2</sup> The Parenthood Effect. © Johan Jarnestad/The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. Available at: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/economic-sciences/2023/popular-information/>

<sup>3</sup> Equimundo. *State of the World's Fathers 2023*. Available at: <https://www.equimundo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/State-of-the-Worlds-Fathers-2023.pdf>

These insights suggest that the reluctance of men to engage in caregiving is not just a result of individual choices but is deeply **embedded in economic structures and social expectations**.

### Policy Recommendations & The MenCare Commitment

- Equimundo's **Care Leads to Care**<sup>4</sup> report found that **men who engage in self-care are twice as likely to provide care for others**, reinforcing a **positive cycle of caregiving**.
- The **MenCare Commitment campaign** calls for **male policymakers to champion caregiving policies**, ensuring caregiving responsibilities are more equally shared.

The findings presented by Wessel van den Berg illustrate the **far-reaching consequences of gendered caregiving norms** from the economic penalty faced by mothers to the **emotional and social crisis affecting men**. The report's data reinforces the urgent need to **restructure economic policies, challenge workplace stigmas, and build stronger caregiving support systems**. Equimundo's research makes it clear: **caregiving is not just a women's issue, but a societal one**—one that, if addressed, could lead to **healthier families, stronger economies, and greater gender equality**.<sup>5</sup>

*"It's not easy for men to engage in sharing parenting and family care, and it's also a cultural issue at the global level—not just in the Global South, but everywhere. One of the key points here is that mental health will improve when both parents connect and bond by sharing responsibilities. This can be a transformative shift for families."*

**Emilienne de León Aulina**

### Markus Sandmayr, Vice-President and Co-Founder, Be Family

The Be Family movement encourages businesses to ask themselves a critical question: **Are we providing the best conditions for our employees to be good parents?** This self-reflection forms the foundation for adopting family-friendly workplace policies.

Markus Sandmayr discussed the pivotal role of the private sector in facilitating co-parenting through such policies:

**Challenges Faced by Working Parents:** In France, 77% of working parents find it challenging to balance professional responsibilities with family life. Globally, 55% of parents feel they fail during the first year of parenthood due to the overwhelming demands, constant discoveries, and unanswered questions about sharing responsibilities. This reflects a broader issue where workplace demands often clash with family duties.

**Benefits to Employers:** Interestingly, businesses also have a vested interest in supporting parenthood. Studies show that parents who feel supported at work are twice less likely to take sick leave, six times less absent, nine times more attached to their company, 31% more productive, and

<sup>4</sup> See also: [Care Leads to Care](#), a report by Equimundo.

<sup>5</sup> How to join MenCare: <https://www.mencare.org/get-involved/>

55% more creative. These figures highlight that implementing family-friendly policies is not only a human-centric approach but also a strategic business decision.<sup>6</sup>

The **Be Family Movement** serves as a collaborative platform where companies can **exchange ideas, reflect on best practices, and take action** in building **Family Supportive Workplaces**.<sup>7</sup>

Why it matters:

- **Growing Female Talent Pool:** Women now make up the majority of university graduates and play an essential role across all professional levels. Ensuring **seamless reintegration post-parenthood** is crucial to retaining this talent and addressing career gaps that disproportionately affect women.
- **New Generation Expectations:** Younger employees seek workplaces that respect **work-life balance, flexibility, and caregiving responsibilities**. Companies must adapt to attract and retain top talent.
- **Societal Evolution:** Diverse family structures, including **single-parent and blended families**, require adaptable work models to accommodate different caregiving needs.

What can be done:

- **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Implementing adaptable start and end times, remote work options, and respecting caregiving responsibilities.
- **Recognising Parenthood as Part of Workforce Planning:** Keeping employees on parental leave engaged through business updates, meetings, and company activities.
- **Comprehensive Support for Parents:** Offering guidance during pregnancy, ensuring workplace safety, and facilitating reintegration after leave.
- **Encouraging Parental Leave for All:** Moving beyond maternity leave to embrace equal parental leave and **actively fostering men's participation** in caregiving. Companies must **promote and normalize paternity leave** to drive true workplace equality and challenge outdated gender norms.

### Creating Family-Friendly Workplaces: Simple Solutions for Big Impact

Companies are increasingly recognising the value of flexible work arrangements and supporting parents in the workforce. Key solutions for making workplaces more family-friendly include:

1. **Flexible Working Hours:** Allowing flexibility in start and end times. A small shift in meeting times such as starting meetings at 9:30 instead of 8:00 can help parents manage their caregiving responsibilities, such as taking children to school or daycare.
2. **Workplace Flexibility Beyond Home Office:** It's not just about working from home; it's about allowing employees to choose when and where they want to work. Understanding that

<sup>6</sup> *Parentality & companies*. Be Family. Make Mothers Matter. <https://makemothersmatter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/5-2025FEB-UN-CSOCD-Parentality-Companies-M-SANDMAR-Be-Family.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Be Family Care – <https://www.be-family.care/>



family responsibilities, like sick children, may require taking time off is essential for a supportive environment.

3. **Staying Connected to Parents on Parental Leave:** Often, parents, especially mothers, on parental leave are seen as detached from the company. However, by keeping them connected through business updates, team meetings, and company activities, they continue to feel part of the organization. This helps in retaining talent, and facilitate their return to work.
4. **Encouraging Parental Leave for Both Parents:** Shifting the perspective from "maternity leave" to "parental leave" helps create an inclusive mindset. When managers take parental leave, it sets a powerful example for others, breaking down gender stereotypes and encouraging other parents to take leave when needed.
5. **Supporting Employees During Pregnancy:** Providing a supportive environment during pregnancy, ensuring mothers' health, and offering flexibility can make a significant difference in their well-being during this time.

Markus Sandmayr highlighted that the private sector holds significant influence in shaping societal norms. By leading with progressive policies, businesses can drive the change toward more equitable parenting practices. He said: ***"You don't need a revolution, you need an evolution. Step by step, we can create workplaces that truly support families."***

### Francisco Cos-Montiel, Senior Research Coordinator, UNRISD

For over **60 years**, the **United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)** has been working on social development issues, including **gender equality and care work**. It has contributed significantly to global debates and policies on care, and its work has been widely used around the world.

### Engaging Men in Gender Equality: A Controversial but Crucial Approach

UNRISD is among the few UN agencies actively working to engage **men in the fight for gender equality**. This approach has faced criticism, yet without men's involvement, achieving true gender equality will be **difficult, if not impossible**.

### The Link Between Care Work and Development

The connection between a **fair distribution of care work** and **development** is long-established, as feminist scholars such as **Ester Boserup (1970s)<sup>8</sup>** and **Naila Kabeer<sup>9</sup>** have argued. Today, even traditionally **orthodox institutions** recognize the need to strengthen the care economy:

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<sup>8</sup> Boserup, E. (1970). *Women's Role in Economic Development*. Updated edition by Su Fei Tan, Camilla Toulmin, & Nazneen Kanji (2007). Routledge. Available at: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781315065892>.

<sup>9</sup> Kabeer, N. (2003). *Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals: A Handbook for Policy-makers and Other Stakeholders*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat. Available at:



- **World Economic Forum (2024):** Strengthening the care economy enables solutions to key economic issues such as **job creation, talent flow, and productivity**, making care a pillar of future economic growth.<sup>10</sup>
- **World Bank (2023):** The care economy is a **key driver** of economic growth, human capital development, and employment.
- **International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022):** Investing in **universal childcare and long-term care services** could generate **up to 280 million jobs by 2030** and **299 million by 2035**, benefiting both men and women.<sup>11</sup>
- **Eurasia Group (2023):** Implementing universal childcare could add approximately **\$3.4 trillion** to the global economy by 2030 and bring **115.8 million additional women** into formal employment.<sup>12</sup>

This growing recognition of care as an economic necessity reinforces what feminist scholars have long argued: gender equality is not just about social justice; it is also about **sustainable economic growth and social well-being**.

### The Unexplored Role of Men in Care Work

Despite the growing body of evidence on the economic benefits of investing in care, there is little research on the impact of men's involvement in care work. More studies are needed to understand how **engaging men in caregiving** can contribute to:

- Economic **growth**
- Enhanced **welfare** systems
- Improved **well-being** for men and women alike

### Beyond Policy: The Cultural Transformation Needed

While policies such as shared paternity leave represent progress, they alone are not enough to achieve true gender equality. The real challenge lies in **deeply embedded cultural norms** that continue to shape perceptions of masculinity and femininity.

Men are still expected to belong in the public sphere, associated with strength, productivity, and career success. Meanwhile, those who take on caregiving roles are often seen as **weak or unemployed**. Similarly, women continue to be defined by **motherhood and caregiving**, making it difficult for them to fully participate in the workforce on equal terms.

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[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/246292366\\_Gender\\_Mainstreaming\\_in\\_Poverty\\_Eradication\\_and\\_the\\_Millennium\\_Development\\_Goals](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/246292366_Gender_Mainstreaming_in_Poverty_Eradication_and_the_Millennium_Development_Goals)

<sup>10</sup> World Economic Forum (2024). *The Future of the Care Economy*. Available at:

<https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-the-care-economy/>

<sup>11</sup> International Labour Organization & UNRISD (2023). *Childcare in Asia and the Pacific: A Review of Policies and Impact*. Available at: [https://cdn.unrisd.org/assets/library/reports/2023/ilo\\_apac\\_childcare\\_asia\\_pacific-2023.pdf](https://cdn.unrisd.org/assets/library/reports/2023/ilo_apac_childcare_asia_pacific-2023.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Eurasia Group (2023). *Women's Economic Power*. Available at: <https://www.eurasiagroup.net/live-post/womens-economic-power>

If we do not actively transform these cultural expectations, progress will remain limited and fragile.

### Transforming Norms: A Deeper Cultural Shift is Essential

To break these long-standing patterns, we must go beyond **behavioral science** and recognise that gender norms are deeply rooted in **culture and unconscious beliefs**. UNRISD takes a psychoanalytical approach to understanding how society reinforces these roles and why they persist.

As long as caregiving is not valued equally and men's involvement in the household is seen as unnatural or undesirable, gender equality will remain out of reach.

Transforming these norms requires:

- **Campaigns and public discourse** that normalize men's role in caregiving
- **Policy interventions** that support work-life balance for both men and women
- **A cultural shift** that challenges the idea that care work is only a woman's responsibility

One of UNRISD's key initiatives is the **MenWhoCare** campaign, featuring prominent figures including **Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General**, who emphasizes why care must be a **shared responsibility**. This campaign aims to shift societal perceptions and challenge traditional gender roles.<sup>13</sup>

The path to gender equality **cannot be walked by women alone**. True progress demands a **cultural shift, one** that redefines masculinity, normalizes men as caregivers, and ensures that care work is recognized as a **shared social responsibility** rather than 'a burden'.

As **Francisco Cos-Montiel** powerfully stated:

*"Parity is the bottom line. If the human condition is mixed, and if men and women are increasingly present in the public sphere, then men must also be present in the private sphere."*

Beyond economic arguments, gender equality is a **moral, social, and democratic imperative**. At a time when fundamental rights are being questioned, we must **hold firm** to the vision of a **more just and balanced world, one where care is valued, equitably shared, and embraced by all**.

### Selection of Key Questions from the Discussion

How does the term "equal" versus "shared" parenting impact co-parenting outcomes? In what ways can the emphasis on "equal" parenting be counterproductive and detract from the benefits of collaborative co-parenting? **(Kyle Pruet Marcus)**

How does mandated shared parenting affect situations involving child sexual abuse, domestic violence, coercive control, or other forms of criminal assault at home? Research from institutions

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<sup>13</sup> *MenWhoCare – UNRISD video campaign featuring Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General.* Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiwTqV7VwFg>.

like Manchester University and Australia's Feminist Legal Center suggests that courts often side with abusive fathers under the guise of shared parenting being in the child's best interest. What can be done to ensure child safety in such legal frameworks? **(Dr. Joseline A. Scott)**

What are some successful examples of intergenerational caregiving, such as grandparents caring for grandchildren or vice versa? **(Kinga Joo, National Association of Large Families)**

How have women caregivers in the U.S. been affected by recent executive orders? What pathways have they developed to sustain their work and prevent burnout while continuing to support their clients? **(Maxia Na Nuka)**

What actions are governments taking to support equal parenting and caregiving policies? Can governments implement more flexible parental leave policies, allowing parents to take leave at different points in their child's development path instead of immediately after birth? What corporate policies should be implemented to encourage equal caregiving among employees? **(Moderator)**

Given that many workers in the Global South operate within the informal economy and lack labor protections, what policies can be introduced to support equal caregiving in these contexts? **(Moderator)**

Does emphasising the positive side of care for men help to counter the current backlash? **(Audience)**

## Answers Given

Angela Garcia (Response to Differences Among Countries on Caregiving): There are differences, but the major trend shows that women perform most caregiving duties, even in countries with strong parental leave policies like Sweden. Emotional and educational caregiving responsibilities are most commonly shared, but other tasks still fall heavily on women. Sweden has pioneered paid grandparental leave, allowing extended family members to contribute to child care.

Markus Sandmayr (On Role Models in Parental Leave): Leadership in companies plays a crucial role in normalising parental leave. Employees are more likely to take parental leave when they see managers, both male and female, utilizing it. When men take parental leave, it shifts the perception that caregiving is solely a woman's responsibility.

Francisco Cos-Montiel (On Men in Caregiving and Countering Backlash): While highlighting the benefits of male caregiving can be helpful, it is not enough to drive change. Many men will not willingly give up traditional privileges unless structural and societal shifts demand it. Women need to push for equitable caregiving responsibilities within households and workplaces.

Wessel van den Berg (On Caregiving in the Informal Economy): Informal workers often do not receive labour protections that support caregiving responsibilities. Expanding social protection policies to include informal workers is essential to ensuring equitable caregiving opportunities.

### Final remarks from the Speakers

**Angela Garcia:** "We need to redefine the value of care beyond economic measures. Without care, there is no functioning economy." "Many young women are seeing how difficult caregiving is, and some are choosing not to have children."

**Wessel van den Berg:** "Men deeply care about their families, but that is different from actually doing the care work. Caregiving should not just be emotional support but actual participation."

**Francisco Cos-Montiel:** "Intergenerational caregiving does not just flow in one direction, boys also learn caregiving from their mothers, and girls from their fathers."

### Conclusion

The discussion emphasised the urgent need for stronger policies, corporate responsibility, and cultural shifts to achieve gender-equal parenting and caregiving. While some countries have implemented progressive frameworks, deeply ingrained societal norms and economic constraints continue to hinder true equality in caregiving. Future discussions should focus on integrating informal workers into caregiving policies and advocating for a well-being economy that prioritizes care as a fundamental pillar of sustainable development.