



Unlocking the Power of Care: Skills, Equity, and Social Transformation

Event report

UNLOCKING THE POWER OF CARE:
Skills, Equity and Social Transformation

Thursday 5 February 2026

10:00-11:15 New York | 16:00-17:15 Paris

Virtual Side Event

COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
64th Session

Speakers:

- Amber Parkes**
Care Economy Policy Specialist
UN Women
Moderator
- Lisa S. Kaplowitz**
Associate Professor and Executive Director
Rutgers Center for Women in Business, Rutgers Business School
- Agustina Palmieri**
Founder & CEO
Mom's in Co.
- Cassandra Menga**
EU Project Manager
Coordinator, MAV Project
- Regina Cabal**
Latin America Ambassador for *Lifed*
Founder, *Momlancers*, Mexico
- Sonia Malaspina**
Chief People Officer & Corporate Affairs, GLS
& President, *Winning Women Foundation*
- Ana Moreno**
Technical Secretary
Global Alliance for Care

#CSocD64

Logos: Make Mothers Matter, Global Alliance for Care, UN WOMEN, Rutgers Business School Center for Women in Business, Mom's in Co., MAV, LIFEED, GLS.

This webinar, hosted by Make Mothers Matter focused on **recognising unpaid care work—primarily performed by women—as real, skilled labour**, essential for social transformation, gender equality, and economic development.

The event emphasised moving beyond the “motherhood penalty” narrative to highlight the **“motherhood bonus”**—the valuable skills and competencies gained through caregiving.

Key Takeaways

- Unpaid caregiving is skilled work that builds essential leadership and workplace competencies.
- Recognition and valuation of caregiving skills can challenge gender stereotypes, foster men’s involvement in unpaid care work, and promote gender equality.

- Policies that integrate caregiving into employment frameworks benefit businesses, economies, and societies.
- Tools and narratives that empower caregivers to recognise and communicate their skills are critical to change.
- Men's caregiving involvement must be normalised and supported to redistribute unpaid care work.
- Care work must be integrated into economic metrics and labour policies to reflect its true societal value.
- A multi-stakeholder approach involving individuals, employers, governments, and civil society is essential for systemic change.

Introduction

Amber Parkes, Care Economy Policy Specialist at UN Women and moderator of the event, reminded that **unpaid care work** refers to the daily, often invisible labour of caring for children, older persons, sick or disabled family members, which is disproportionately borne by women. Historically, this work has been undervalued, unrecognised, taken for granted and excluded from economic measures such as GDP, undermining women's social and economic standing. Its unequal distribution is at the root of **gender inequalities**, a fact which is now well established.

To address this issue, the so-called “five Rs” framework – Recognise, Reduce, Redistribute, Reward, Represent – is widely used in care economy policy. However, **Recognition, the first and foundational step, remains the most overlooked in policy despite its critical importance.**

In particular, and this was the topic of the event, unpaid care work must be **recognised as real work—work that builds valuable and transferable skills**—a recognition that can be used as a lever to advance gender equity and achieve social transformation.

The skills embedded in caregiving and their workplace value

Lisa Katlowitz, Associate Professor and co-founder of the Rutgers Centre for Women in Business, presented groundbreaking research conducted in the US on the **workplace skills developed through unpaid caregiving**. Her findings challenge prevailing narratives by **reframing caregiving as a leadership training ground**.

Research revealed **18 core skills** grouped into three categories:

- **Humanity:** empathy, emotional intelligence, collaboration—skills that foster employee engagement and retention.
- **Productivity:** efficiency, persistence, patience—skills directly impacting organizational bottom lines.
- **Cognitivity:** mental load management, prioritization, multitasking—akin to project management, the organizational “glue.”

Workplace Skills Developed through Unpaid Caregiving



These caregiving skills align with highly valued workplace competencies and leadership capabilities: a follow-up analysis triangulated these skills with U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics workplace skills, finding a **77% overlap**, and a **100% overlap with leadership competencies** such as adaptability, problem-solving, decision-making, and leadership.

Importantly, these caregiving skills are **not replaceable by AI**, including empathy, resilience, mentoring, and coaching, underscoring caregiving's irreplaceable value in the future of work.

The research also found that when men increase their share of caregiving, women's workplace productivity rises; specifically, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a 1% increase in men's caregiving corresponded with nearly double productivity reported by women.

Changing the narrative: The motherhood bonus initiative

Augustina Palmieri, founder of Moms in Co. (Spain), introduced the **"Motherhood bonus"**, an initiative designed to **shift the dominant narrative from the "Motherhood penalty" to a recognition of motherhood as a source of valuable skills and leadership capabilities**. It repositions motherhood as a leadership asset, not a penalty

The initiative aims to **make visible the informal learning and skill development** occurring in the home, translating caregiving competencies into leadership skills recognised by organizations.

The "invisibility" problem has two layers: organizations undervalue informal skills, and parents often undervalue their own skill development.

The project invites executive mothers to share stories, focusing on a specific skill at each meeting, to empower mothers and provide role models.

Motherhood is a significant **career disruptor**, with over **50% of women changing careers after motherhood**. This creates a **high cost for organizations**, with replacement of senior management positions estimated at **120% of annual salary**.

Recognizing caregiving skills benefits business continuity and talent retention: companies that recognise and support caregiving talent reduce turnover, stabilise leadership pipelines, and protect profits, making recognition both a **business imperative** and a **social justice issue**.

Practical tools supporting caregivers' skills recognition and workforce reintegration

Cassandra Manga, EU project Manager & MAV Coordinator, presented **MAV (MUM Virtual Assistant)**, a digital tool designed to help mothers re-enter the labour market by leveraging the skills gained through unpaid care work.

MAV supports mothers' return to work by building on caregiving skills: it offers **flexible training pathways personalised to mothers' real-life experiences**, combining existing caregiving skills with new digital and entrepreneurial competencies.

The project's pilot programs saw **higher than expected participation**, demonstrating mothers' motivation to invest in themselves and their careers.

Importantly, caregiving skills are recognised as **not exclusive to mothers** but shared by all caregivers, including fathers and others involved in care work.

MAV embodies the philosophy that **motherhood and caregiving are powerful forms of informal learning**, countering the misconception of motherhood as a career gap.

Recognizing multifaceted roles and Internal barriers to workforce re-entry

Regina Cabal, Latin America ambassador for Lifeed and founder of MomLancers in Mexico, introduced **Lifeed's Multime Finder** tool, which helps caregivers map their multiple roles and transfer skills across life and work domains.

Lifeed-based research in Mexico revealed that **93% of working mothers identify as caregivers**, and **84% possess strategic leadership profiles**, yet only **13% actually hold leadership positions**.

The main barrier for re-entry into the Labour Market is **internal: caregivers themselves often doubt their own value and skills**, perceiving caregiving time as "doing nothing."

Cultural norms reinforce gendered caregiving roles: in Mexico, **70% believe a good mother should prioritise family over career**, while the majority think a good father should prioritise work, highlighting **gendered expectations that limit fathers' caregiving roles**.

Fathers report developing caregiving skills but often feel these are invisible or unrewarded at work, underscoring the need to **transform leadership models to value whole-person capabilities**.

The future of work requires **integrating humanity and caregiving skills into leadership models** to foster diverse, innovative organizations and a care-centred economy.

Corporate best practices in supporting caregivers and embedding care in organizational culture

Sonia Malaspina, Chief People Officer at GLS Italy and President of the Winning Women Institute (Italy), shared insights from corporate policies that support caregivers and promote gender equity.

In Italy, where public care services cover only about 30% of needs, **70% of female employees are caregivers**, reflecting a significant intersection between work and care responsibilities. Initial internal surveys revealed low engagement among female employees, prompting data-driven advocacy to demonstrate care policies' impact on productivity and retention.

When she was working with Danone Italy, Sonia introduced **mandatory paternity leave** policies to shift cultural norms and encourage men's participation in caregiving, signalling organisational commitment to shared care responsibilities.

Caregiving skills align with key workplace competencies and merit recognition. Recognising caregiving as an asset, not a liability, led to improvements in employee engagement, skill recognition (crisis management, empathy, conflict resolution), and overall productivity.

Corporate care policies must be **gender-neutral, inclusive, and embedded in organisational culture**, not just symbolic gestures.

Sonia advocates for changing the narrative around care within companies and at broader institutional levels, including redefining economic metrics like GDP to acknowledge care's contribution.

Panel reflections and addressing systemic and individual challenges

The panel addressed audience questions highlighting critical themes:

- **Career breaks for caregiving** should be recognised as valuable experience, not gaps, with tools like LinkedIn's career break feature offering promising avenues, though societal and recruiter biases remain a challenge.
- Self-empowerment is essential: caregivers themselves must **recognise and articulate their skills** to advocate effectively in recruitment and workplace advancement.
- Policies alone are insufficient without cultural acceptance; **norms must evolve** to make caregiving visible and valued for all genders.
- Data and metrics are crucial: what is measured gets valued. There is a pressing need to develop **quantitative tools to assess caregiving skills** and embed them in performance reviews and promotion criteria.
- **Caregiving is a societal and collective responsibility** requiring collaboration across individuals, families, employers, governments, and institutions.
- The workplace and home environments are interlinked; changes at both levels are necessary to redistribute care and support caregivers.

Conclusion: toward a caring society – Recognition, Redistribution, and Rights

Anna Moreno, technical Secretary at the Global Alliance for Care, closed the session with a **call to action** to move beyond recognising why care matters, **to concretely addressing how to transform systems**.

The collective insights underscore that **care work is foundational for economies and societies** — it builds indispensable skills for leadership and teamwork. However, caregivers continue to face political and economic **exclusion and devaluation**, a deliberate political choice reflecting systemic inequities.

The imperative, she emphasised, is to shift from **gratitude to redistribution**, from symbolic gestures to **rights, resources, and recognition** embedded in policies and institutions.

Key areas for action include:

- Governments adopting care policies as **labour and economic policies**, investing in public care infrastructure/systems, and protecting caregivers' rights.
- Companies recognising caregiving transitions as **career-building, not career-breaking**, designing workplaces that support caregiver retention and advancement.
- Societal narratives evolving to see **care as a public good**, integral to democracy, economies, and social justice, not a private sacrifice or women's natural duty.

The path forward demands collaboration among governments, employers, civil society, and individuals to build a **care-centred economy and society** that values every caregiver's contribution.

The event synthesised multidisciplinary perspectives and evidence, advancing a compelling argument: **Unpaid care work is skilled, valuable labour, essential to economies and societies, deserving systemic recognition, support, and integration into social and economic frameworks.** The insights presented here offer concrete pathways for transforming social norms, workplace cultures, and policy landscapes to unlock the full potential of caregiving as a force for equity and social transformation.