

October 29th:
International Day of
Care and Support

TOWARDS A BETTER CARE ECONOMY IN LATIN AMERICA: EVIDENCE-BASED INNOVATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICIES

Photograph: Sebastián Castañeda/Niños del Milenio

In a historic resolution ([A/RES/77/317](#)), the United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed October 29th as the International Day of Care and Support. Our initiative celebrates this important step and seeks to support a transformative change to advance towards a care society.

Why is this so relevant?

The care economy is in crisis, and its distribution is unfair. Women and girls take care of children, the elderly and people with disabilities at home. They are also burdened with most of the domestic work, including cooking, cleaning, washing and all other activities that allow households, communities and our economies to function and reproduce. However, these activities are neither paid, acknowledged nor rewarded. As for paid care work, even if the care sector is a large employer for women, working conditions are unfair and precarious. This disproportionate distribution of care responsibilities has multiple negative consequences for women, limiting their economic autonomy –regarding both their participation in the labor market and work quality– as well as their education, training and recreation. These challenges further limit their physical and emotional well-being. This social care organization is also unfavorable for care receivers, since it deprives them of sufficient, accessible and quality care services.

There is a growing awareness worldwide that, unless we address the structural barriers that perpetuate gender inequalities, no intervention or policy will achieve its full potential to foster women and girls' empowerment. Since caregiving is essential for human well-being and sustainable economic growth, gender-transformative care policies will not only benefit women and girls in all their diversity, but also men, boys, girls, societies and economies at large, as well as our planet.

While COVID-19 has exacerbated the inequalities associated with an unequal distribution of care, it also provides a unique opportunity to make the care economy visible and shine a light on its importance. This can help combat its lack of recognition and the gender inequalities this creates, and further highlight the relevance of designing and implementing measures to address these issues.

Investing in the care economy contributes to developing care infrastructures, fostering

innovation and reducing inequalities between countries, as well as fighting climate change and its effects and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, among other benefits.

In recent years we have seen significant progress and responses regarding change and innovations in the care economy. National and subnational governments in countries such as Uruguay, Mexico, Argentina and Colombia have been working to acknowledge and promote fair care economies, also through national strategies and care systems. These policy innovations seek to acknowledge, reduce and redistribute care work, as well as rewarding and representing care workers in spaces where policies are carried out. However, there is still little evidence regarding how these innovations work, their impacts and their possible scaling and replicability. Addressing such evidence gaps can also spur additional policy innovation.



What are we trying to do?

Building on this growing momentum and policy experimentation, GRADE, in collaboration with UNRISD and the Global Alliance for Care, and with the support of Canada’s IDRC, launched a Public Policies Collaborative Action-Research Fund, aimed at fostering collaboration to enact change for a more just care economy, mobilize partnerships between local researchers and policymakers and generate evidence for care economy public policies innovations in Latin America.

The fund supports public policy innovation in the care economy by fostering partnerships between national or subnational policymakers and local researchers. It supports action-oriented research, in order to provide effective solutions to advance the care economy agenda and reduce gender inequalities.

The fund was announced in February 2023. More than 50 proposals were received, attesting to this growing momentum and demand for peer learning in order to scale innovation. Research is also needed to unlock resources and promote policy innovations throughout policy cycles. Many of the proposals sought to garner evidence to support care systems design at a local level. Other projects covered different aspects of the care agenda, including childcare and care for the elderly and people with disabilities. Many of them focus on caregivers, both paid and unpaid. The proposals represent public policy innovations both at a national and subnational government levels. The selected initiatives focus on gender equality and apply rigorous qualitative and quantitative analytical and methodological evaluation tools. They are co-designed by the agencies that carry them out and local research teams, allowing for rapid feedback loops.



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Selected projects

“Personal Assistants Program in Uruguay: Towards gender equality?” Interdisciplinary Center for Development Studies (CIEDUR) and the National Care Department, Social Development Ministry (MIDES)

In 2015, Uruguay launched one of the first national care systems in Latin America, made official through Law N°19.353. An important element of the system is the personal assistant program, which provides in-house care for severely dependent people through a subsidy for hiring a personal assistant. One of the challenges observed in the system’s implementation was a low uptake, despite an urgent need for this type of solution. To solve some of the issues, the program is trying out adding a process for hiring care providers collectively. The study will evaluate the results of this innovation in access and service quality, and analyze the impacts from the caregivers’ perspective, by assessing if it contributes to a reduction of unpaid care work at home while acknowledging, giving professional status and rewarding the work carried out by personal assistants.

“The project will benefit the care agenda generating evidence of innovations in the Personal Assistants Program. The study will help us to understand the incentives, obstacles and facilitators for the adhesion and permanence in the program and to improve its design and impact in the recognition, reduction, and redistribution of care work”.

Chiara Di Fabio Pereda
Care and Disability National
Department – MIDES



“Promoting gender justice in care for older people in poor Brazilian communities”

Institute of Public Health, Federal University of Bahia and Brazil’s Ministry of Health

Like many other countries, Brazil is starting to develop new policies to meet the care needs of a growing population of the elderly, in a way that does not exploit family caregivers, most of whom are women. One Brazilian city, Belo Horizonte, has been operating a program to support family caregivers of the elderly living in poor neighborhoods. This project consists of expanding the program to other cities under the leadership of the Ministry of Health.

“This project will assess the extent to which this program addresses gender injustice in elderly care. We will study whether it reduces negative effects of elderly care on family caregivers and whether it challenges norms and stereotypes about gender and caregiving”.

Peter Lloyd-Sherlock

Visiting professor at the Institute of Public Health,
Federal University of Bahia



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“Implementing a pilot program to bolster organizations leading community care initiatives in peri-urban territories in Cartagena, Bolivar”

OXFAM Colombia, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana and the Vice-presidency of Colombia, Care Policies Department

During the past years, care systems in Colombia have been promoted through public policies coordinating programs, regulations, policies and actions to consolidate a more equitable social care organization, encouraging co-responsibility between the State, the community, families and the private sector, as well as between men and women in the home. These efforts have been internationally acknowledged. However, in general terms, the approach has mainly focused on public programs and has not always acknowledged or shone a light on community care as essential for the organization of social care. This project seeks to strengthen care community networks in Colombia by identifying, through a participatory process, their main needs and carrying out measures to support them in selected territories.

“The project will shine a light on the role of community care, contributing to the process of building the National Care System in Colombia. This project seeks to recognize community care as a main actor in social care organization and understanding its material, symbolic and economic contribution, as well as its historical contribution to the sustainability of life in our society”.

Natalia Moreno Salamanca

National Care Policy manager
Office of the Vice President

“The project will collect very relevant evidence for the replicability of a comprehensive model of territorial, interinstitutional and intersectoral intervention that addresses –in solidarity, co-responsibility and with a gender approach– the coordination of policies to promote caregivers’ economic autonomy, as well as their physical and emotional well-being, with the participation of actors at the state and municipal, private and social levels”.

Marina Ortiz Tirado González

Gender Approach Mainstreaming and
Regulation director
Substantive Equality between Women and Men
Department, Jalisco

“Care environments in Jalisco (Mexico): Participatory design of a territorial, inter-institutional and inter-sectoral model to coordinate care and pre-test services in two municipalities in the Guadalajara Metropolitan Area”

Demoscópica: Social, Political and Market Strategic Research, and the Substantive Equality between Women and Men Department, Jalisco state, Mexico

Since 2019, the Substantive Equality between Women and Men Department has centered the care economy in Jalisco public policies, carrying out actions to guarantee the right to care and articulate in Jalisco a Comprehensive Care System, the first of its kind in a subnational government in Mexico. The project focuses on the design, piloting and evaluation of a comprehensive care program in this state. [It is inspired by the “care blocks”](#) experience, implemented as part of the District Care System by the Bogota Municipality, in Colombia. It involves participatory design and the coordination of existing programs and services in the territory. The project’s main objective is promoting a wider and enhanced care ecosystem and providing training to improve conditions for care providers.

Beyond the Projects: Contributing to the International Care Agenda

While the selected projects are expected to contribute to implementing and furthering comprehensive care systems and gender-transformative care economy policies in each country, there is an important opportunity for peer learning beyond these innovations.

With the support of IDRC, GRADE, UNRISD and the Global Alliance for Care –as part of the Care Economy Partnerships for Change project– will develop a cohort-level knowledge translation and promotion of evidence uptake, in order to foster cross-project collaboration and amplify impact regionally and globally. This also involves developing topic knowledge products, drawing insights from the different projects and summarizing results. The program includes support for peer learning exchanges and joint learning journeys, as well as amplifying results by engaging in global forums that center the care agenda. It will also seek to collaborate with initiatives in other regions, such as Africa, as well as the IDRC and Global Affairs Canada Scaling Care Innovations in Africa program.

Our final objective is to promote evidence-based policy innovations in Latin America and the Global South to spark systemic and gender-transformative change in the care economy. We join the celebrations for the International Day of Care and Support by sharing our efforts to contribute to this day's general aim: to raise awareness, improve policies and scale up investments to transform the care economy and advance gender equality.



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