

UN General Assembly Recognizes the Care Economy as a Pillar of Sustainable Development

The recent adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the resolution “*Contribution of the care economy to sustainable development*” marks a major advance in global social and economic policy. For the first time, the General Assembly explicitly positions the care economy as a strategic driver of sustainable development, poverty eradication and gender equality. The resolution strongly reflects priorities long advocated by the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), particularly the recognition of care as a public good and a cornerstone of inclusive and resilient societies.

Anchored in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the resolution reaffirms that eradicating poverty in all its forms remains the world’s greatest challenge. It emphasizes that care work—paid and unpaid, formal and informal—is essential to human well-being, social cohesion, economic productivity and environmental sustainability. By acknowledging that care underpins all other forms of work, the resolution challenges economic models that have systematically undervalued care, especially unpaid care and domestic work disproportionately carried out by women and girls.

A central contribution of the resolution is its clear call for transformative policy measures. It recommends adopting concrete actions to recognize both unpaid and paid care work and to reduce, redistribute and properly value unpaid care responsibilities. This includes promoting the equal sharing of care duties between women and men within households, prioritizing sustainable physical and social infrastructure, expanding social protection policies, and ensuring access to affordable, high-quality care and support services across the life course. The resolution further highlights the importance of adequate paid maternity, paternity and parental leave, as well as strong protection against discrimination on the grounds of maternity in the labour market—measures that are critical to enabling women’s full and equal participation in economic and social life.

The resolution makes a compelling economic case for investing in care. It notes that unpaid care and domestic work, if valued at minimum wage, could account for between 10 and 39 per cent of GDP, often surpassing traditional productive sectors. More importantly, it underscores that well-designed investments in the care economy yield substantial macroeconomic and social returns. According to International Labour Organization estimates cited in the resolution, such measures could generate nearly 300 million jobs globally by 2035, raise global employment rates by more than six percentage points, and reduce the gender employment gap by around seven percentage points. In particular, every United States dollar invested in closing childcare gaps could yield an average increase of 3.76 dollars in gross domestic product by 2035. These findings powerfully reposition care spending as an investment with high economic multipliers rather than a fiscal burden.

The resolution also addresses structural inequalities. It highlights how women’s overrepresentation in unpaid care and in low-paid, insecure care jobs contributes to the feminization of poverty and limits lifetime earnings, pensions and social security coverage. Comprehensive care and support systems—encompassing legal frameworks, services, financing,

infrastructure, training and governance—are identified as essential to reducing women’s economic vulnerability and preventing the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

For ICSW, the longer-term significance of this resolution is substantial. It provides a strong global mandate to integrate care into economic and social policymaking, national statistics and development planning, while reinforcing the links between care, decent work, social protection and human rights. As the international community is focused on accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda, this resolution offers a transformative vision: development rooted in care, shared responsibility, social justice and human dignity—core values at the heart of social welfare worldwide.