



Business Environment Reforms and the Care Economy: The Case of Childcare and Parental Leave Policies

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACP	Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific
CAC	Collaborative Action for Childcare
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
EUR	Euro
FCFA	West African CFA Franc
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
ICR	Investment Climate Reform
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MOE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OACPS	Organisation of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SNV	Stichting Nederlands Vrijwilligers
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USD	United States Dollar
WEE	Women’s Economic Empowerment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Care economy is an integral part of Business Environment Reforms (BER). It is central to advance Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE).

In its broad definition, the term care economy encompasses labour and services that support caregiving in all its forms. It includes both unpaid and paid care work, for instance childcare and breastfeeding, care for the elderly, care for persons with disabilities, etc. It includes also value chains that rely on care workers, such as healthcare, domestic care, childcare, etc. as well as care-relevant infrastructures, services and technology, such as facilities and applications to mobilise and perform care services.

Care work consists of paid and unpaid labour and services that support caregiving in all its forms. While care work, paid and unpaid, sustains economies by providing essential services for the household and the society, this work falls disproportionately on women

and young girls in all countries, including in the ACP region. Unpaid care workload is the principal reason unemployed women give globally as a reason for being outside the labour force.

The gender inequalities on the share of unpaid care negatively affect women's possibilities to make economic choices that could strengthen their own economic empowerment, but also the wellbeing of their families and the growth of the overall economy.

Gender-responsive care policies can be powerful tools to reform the business environment in ways that positively impact women and their access to economic opportunities, such as access to quality jobs, entrepreneurship or education and professional training. A particularly important lever to improve the business environment for women is childcare policies for working parents, specifically the provision of childcare services and parental leave.

KEY FINDINGS

- » **The care economy and care policies are integral part of a conducive business environment.** They can be gender transformative, enabling women to have a better access to quality jobs, resources, capacities and entrepreneurship. This is the case from two perspectives. First, the formal **care economy sector is female-dominated**¹ and sectoral reforms will quantitatively benefit women. Second, care policies make **qualitative improvements, which in the first place benefit women**, who can reduce the time and resources they allocate to unpaid care work and reallocate them to other activities such as establishing a business, entering the formal labour market or training to improve their skills.



¹ According to the ILO, the global care workforce comprises 249 million women and 132 million men in 2018. ILO. (2018). Care work and care jobs. <https://dawnnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/ILO-2018-Care-Work-and-Care-Jobs.pdf>.

- » **Childcare is a central element of the care economy and the focus of this report.** Empirical evidence from the ACP regions has consistently found a positive relationship between affordable childcare and women’s labour market outcomes, including participation in the labour force, increased wages, and remunerated working hours.² In parallel, research indicates that even when childcare services are available, challenges such as high cost, low service quality, lack of convenience of the sites or hours, and social norms, could limit their utilisation and reduce the potential benefits. To be efficient, **policies must provide for accessible, affordable and quality childcare services**, but they must also **challenge gender norms** and **increase awareness on the benefits for the whole family of shared responsibilities** between fathers and mothers.
- » **While maternity leave is essential to protect women’s economic interests, paternity leave is also essential to support the redistribution of unpaid care work**, to materialise men’s rights to care, to shift gender norms and ultimately to reduce gender inequalities in the medium- and long-term.
- » **There is a wide variety in the availability of parental leave laws across globe and including in the ACP countries.** There is a global average **childcare gap of approximately 4.2 years** from when most leave entitlements come to an end, and the age at which children can attend primary school. Adapted childcare services can help close this gap for the period between the end of parental leave and the beginning of mandatory education, and hereby improve the opportunities for parents to participate in entrepreneurship and employment, disproportionately benefitting women due to the prevailing social norms in division of care responsibilities.
- » **To develop evidence-based care policies in ACP countries, it is key to mainstream the collection of sex-disaggregated data and gender gap analysis.** International standards (such as those set by the ILO and the UNICEF) can serve as target objectives for governments, for instance when they design reforms that address childcare services and parental leave. As care work is at the crossroad of several policy areas (macroeconomics, business and administrative regulations, labour rights, children’s education, etc.), it is also important when developing new laws to use a **multisectoral approach** and to establish **public-private dialogues** in order for all care actors to be consulted (government, employers and employees, entrepreneurs, care businesses and care workers, etc. and ensuring gender balanced representation of the different voices). Finally, the long-term efficiency of care policies is optimised when they come together with **communication campaigns** that challenge gender norms and inform societies about the benefits of sharing care duties between men and women, mothers and fathers.



2 World Bank. (2020). Better jobs and brighter futures: Investing in childcare to build human capital. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/a5e7a52e-115c-5dd1-97e6-c1b062c945c9/content>.

INTRODUCTION

Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE) is a central component in achieving sustainable economic development. Studies show that women’s full and equal participation in the workforce could add USD 12 trillion (approximately EUR 11 trillion) to the global economy by 2025.³ Despite this, women are still more likely than men to be unemployed, to be underemployed, to work in the informal sector, or to receive less and smaller loans to grow their business.

At the same time, countries worldwide, notably members of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), are introducing reforms to address gender-based structural inequities and promote women’s economic empowerment. While there are very few empirical studies which analyse such reforms, those that do, find that they produce significant improvement for women and the economy as a whole⁴.

The sustainable provision of affordable, accessible, and quality care services is an essential part of a conducive business environment. It requires the support, cooperation and investments of multiple stakeholders at the local, national and international levels, and from

both the public and the private sectors: governments, business associations, unions, enterprises, development partners, civil society organisations.

This report starts by providing definitions and data that show the current situation and namely, how care responsibilities, paid and unpaid, fall disproportionately on women’s and girls’ shoulders, globally and in the ACP region. It highlights the link between women’s share of care work and their access to economic opportunities, and analyses how care policies can be promoted as part of business environment reforms. The report then focuses more specifically on childcare policies, which covers the provision of childcare services and parental leave (including maternity and paternity leave). Case studies from ACP countries are showcased along the report as examples of innovative ways to develop childcare policies and parental leave provisions to create a more conducive business environment, as well as recommendations for policy-makers to design, enact and implement care policies that improve the business environment, foster women’s economic empowerment, support the development of children and challenge harmful gender norms.



3 UNICEF. (2019). Family-friendly policies: Redesigning the workplace of the future. <https://www.unicef.org/media/95051/file/Family-friendly-policies-EN.pdf>.

4 World Bank. (2022). Women, Business, and the Law Report. <https://wbl.worldbank.org/content/dam/sites/wbl/documents/2021/02/WBL2022%20Chapter%202.pdf>.

CARE POLICIES ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF AN ENABLING AND GENDER-INCLUSIVE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Care work heavily impacts women's economic empowerment

Across the globe, care work sustains societies and economies by providing essential services for the household, children, the elderly, sick persons, and persons with disabilities. The care economy consists of paid and unpaid labour and services that support caregiving in all its forms. The care economy is built on a continuum of care that includes care services, infrastructure, and policy. Care economy stakeholders encompass all those who produce and distribute care, through paid or unpaid work, as well as those that facilitate care provision through infrastructure, technology, services, and policy. This includes families and households, the State, the private sector, and civil society organisations.⁵

The care economy is a vital part of the global economy. It keeps households, workplaces, individuals, families, and communities fed, clean, healthy, and nurtured.⁶ It allows for the development and fulfilment of human capabilities and potential, and it makes all other forms of work and wellbeing possible. As such, care work is an important aspect of economic activity and an indispensable factor in contributing to the well-being of individuals, their families, and societies. According to time-use survey data conducted by ILO in 64 countries, approximately 16.4 billion hours are spent on unpaid care work every day. This is equivalent to 2 billion people working 8 hours per day with no remuneration and represents a significant share of produced value that is not accounted for in GDP calculations.⁷ A disproportionate part of this non-remunerated work is done by women.

DEFINITIONS

Care economy

Consists of labour and services that support caregiving in all its forms. It represents a new vision of economics that recognises the importance of care work, empowerment and autonomy of women to the functioning of the economies, wellbeing of societies and life sustainability⁸.

The care economy includes both unpaid and paid care work, carried out by people who are formally trained or not, for instance childcare and breastfeeding, care for the elderly, care for persons with disabilities, etc. It includes also value chains that rely on care workers, such as healthcare, domestic care, childcare, etc. as well as care-relevant infrastructures, services and technology, **such as facilities and applications to mobilise and perform care services.**

Care work

Consists of two overlapping activities⁹:

- direct, personal and relational care activities, **such as feeding a baby or nursing an ill partner;**
- indirect care activities, **such as cooking and cleaning.**

Care work can be:

- Unpaid: **when it is provided without a monetary reward to the carer;**
- Paid: **when it is performed for pay or profit by care workers (personal service workers such as nurses, teachers, doctors, domestic and personal care workers)**

5 Generation Equality. (2022). Increase women's economic empowerment by transforming the care economy. https://forum.generationequality.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/Blueprint%20on%20Care%20Economy_EJR%20Action%20Coalition_2022.pdf.

6 Oxfam. (2022). Care Policy Scorecard. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/care-policy-scorecard-a-tool-for-assessing-country-progress-towards-an-enabling-621287/>.

7 Stiglitz. (2007). Report on the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, Paris: Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, Paris. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/care-policy-scorecard-a-tool-for-assessing-country-progress-towards-an-enabling-621287/>.

8 United Nations Economist Network. (2022). New Economics for Sustainable Development: Care Economy. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/purple_economy_14_march.pdf.

9 ILO. (2018). Care work and care jobs. https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_633135/lang--en/index.htm.

Although care work is critical to both the functioning and overall well-being of economies and societies, this work falls disproportionately on women and young girls. Current global estimates indicate that women carry out 76% of the unpaid care work globally, without exception.¹⁰ This gap is greater in the Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific (ACP) regions due to more limited access to infrastructure and public services, low levels of public and private investment in the care sector, the labour-intensive nature of the work for rural populations, and gender norms that often position and designate care work as the sole responsibility of women.¹¹ This represents a significant barrier to women’s access to economic and business opportunities.

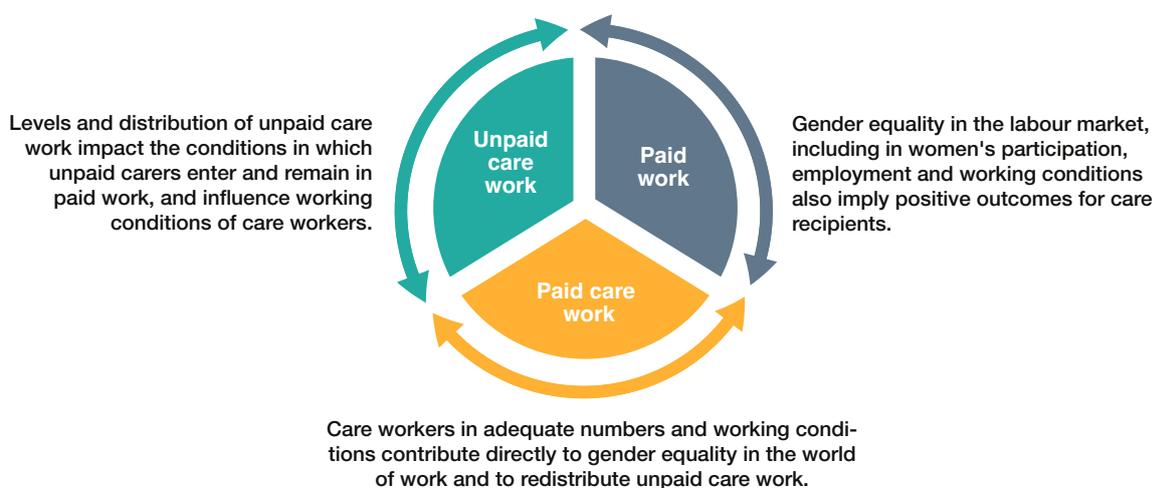
The care economy and care policies are integral parts of a conducive business environment and can be gender transformative as they can enable women to have a better access to quality jobs, resources, capacities and entrepreneurship. First, the formal care economy sector is female-dominated sector globally¹² and in ACP countries, and sec-

“While care work can be rewarding, when in excess and when involving a high degree of drudgery, it hampers the economic opportunities and well-being of unpaid carers and diminishes their overall enjoyment of human rights.”
ILO. (2018). “Care work and care jobs.”¹³

toral reforms will quantitatively benefit large number of women. Second, adapted care policies, provided by public agencies or by the private sector, make qualitative improvements for women as enabling tools to reduce the time and resources they allocate to unpaid care work and reallocate them to other economic activities such as establishing and running a business, entering the formal labour market, advancing to managerial and leadership positions and training to improve their skills.

Figure 1. The International Labour Organisation ‘unpaid care work - paid work - paid care work’ circle.

The ILO unpaid care work–paid work–paid care work circle illustrates the influence that paid and unpaid care work have on one another and on the economy as whole.¹³



10 ILO. (2018). Care work and care jobs. https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_633135/lang--en/index.htm.

11 OECD. (2019). Enabling women's economic empowerment. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/enabling-women-s-economic-empowerment_ec90d1b1-en.

12 According to the ILO, the global care workforce comprises 249 million women and 132 million men in 2018. ILO. (2018). Care work and care jobs. https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_633135/lang--en/index.htm.

13 ILO (2019). Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_633135.pdf.

Unpaid care workload is the principal reason why unemployed women remain outside the labour force globally^{14 15}. At the same time, greater equality in the sharing of unpaid care work between women and men is correlated with higher participation of women in the labour force¹⁶. A large share of women labour force could thus be activated by simply better distributing unpaid care work in the household between men and women. In addition, looking at ACP countries, an increase of the number of professional care providers combined with appropriate regulations could also alleviate much of the unpaid care workload, while creating jobs in a traditionally female-dominated sector.

Gender norms often situate women in the domestic sphere, holding them responsible for unpaid care work. For example, in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the fertility rate remains high at 4,6 in 2021¹⁷, women spend between three-to-five times as many hours on unpaid care and domestic work than men, performing 80% of the total hours devoted to the household.¹⁸ As a result of this responsibility, women are limited in their ability to engage in market activities, in formal quality jobs, in growing their own business, or in professional training. Instead, they find themselves in low-paying, insecure, part-time, informal, and home-based work, in order to reconcile unpaid care work and paid employment.



14 OECD. (2021). Caregiving in crisis: Gender inequality in paid and unpaid work. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/caregiving-in-crisis-gender-inequality-in-paid-and-unpaid-work-during-covid-19-3555d164/>.

15 ILO. (2019). The unpaid care work and the labour market. An analysis of time use data based on the latest World Compilation of Time-use Surveys. https://www.ilo.org/gender/Informationresources/Publications/WCMS_732791/lang--en/index.htm.

16 ILO. (2018). Care work and care jobs. https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_633135/lang--en/index.htm.

17 World Bank Data. Fertility rate, total (births per woman) -Sub-Saharan Africa. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=ZG>.

18 African Development Bank and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. (2020). Africa Gender Index Report 2019, <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/africa-gender-index-report-2019-analytical-report>.

Figure 2. The impact of unpaid care work

Macroeconomic measurements: Macroeconomic measurements:

- GDP calculations currently ignore unpaid care work, resulting in economic activity and growth figures misrepresenting what is truly produced in a country.
- Macroeconomic calculations leave out the added value created specifically by women through unpaid care work, and disregards their crucial contribution to the national economy and society.

Labour market:

- Unpaid care responsibilities can lead women to take lower quality, part-time, informal jobs.
- Women's limited availability for skills development or work commitment can restrict their career progression or ability to grow a business.
- Women's restricted involvement in the labour market hampers the overall productivity and economic growth of a country, and efforts to reduce poverty.
- Unpaid care work widens the gender pay gap.

Leadership and representation:

- Women's access to leadership roles, be it in local politics, business organisations, career development networks, etc., can be hampered by their unpaid care workload.
- The lack of access to leadership roles impedes their ability to influence policy-making, convey their needs and ideas, and help develop gender-responsive policies.

Health and wellbeing:

- Heavy care workload can leave women physically and mentally exhausted, and affect their ability to work and their productivity.
- The lack of appropriate maternity leave policies and quality childcare services can leave women working too long into their pregnancy, coming back to work too soon after childbirth, or bringing their infant to the workplace, hereby compromising their children's healthy development as well as their own productivity.
- Some domestic activities expose women to an increased risk of injury, health hazard, or assault, including collecting firewood, water or cooking with harmful fuel.



Recommendations for policy-makers: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT CARE POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

- Policy-makers should develop, enact and implement concerted and tailored care laws and policies by means of a **public-private dialogue approach** and a **cross-ministerial approach**. The public-private approach enables regulating authorities and private providers, as well as care workers, to convey their ideas and overcome challenges together, to develop tailored policies. The cross-ministerial approach ensures that all relevant public institutions work in a concerted manner and avoids duplication of efforts.
- It is essential along the way to **promote women's full and effective access to leadership positions** in political and economic fora, to ensure their views – including as mothers and care givers – can be represented and heard. Support should be provided for the establishment of (women-led) business associations for care providers that can centralise the demands of the private sector and represent care workers in public-private dialogues.
- National norms should be developed to **align with the international standards**, notably those set by UNICEF¹⁹ and ILO²⁰:
 - Formulate **maternity leave policies** for pregnancy and birth-related health needs, with a minimum of 14 weeks of paid maternity leave as per the ILO 2000 Convention on Maternity Protection Convention²¹.
 - In addition, provide for equal, fully paid and non-transferable **parental leave** for all parents, to also enable fathers to take leave to support with caring responsibilities.
 - Protect new-borns and working parents by requiring the **provision of childcare services** (publicly-funded, subsidised or fully private), as well as the **guarantee of job and income security** during the pregnancy and the early stages of infants' life.
- **A regulation and control agency should be established to specifically deal with** childcare businesses, in order to ensure that the services provided align with national norms and guarantee quality childcare for all.
- Governments can also **promote the childcare sector as a job-creating industry** and develop **childcare training centres and nationally harmonised curriculum** that ensure quality of services and can help meet the growing demand for care services.

19 UNICEF. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. <https://www.unicef.org/media/52626/file>. Article 18 notably provides for the responsibility of both parents for childcare, the development of childcare facilities and the provision of childcare to children of working parents.

20 | 21 ILO (2000) Convention on Maternity Protection Convention. https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C183.

Bespoke care policies create an enabling business environment that works for all

Care policies are a sub-sector of business environment policies within a broader domain of gender equality policies.²² They cut across different sectors such as labour, business, health, education, and social relations. Care economy policies have been recognised by international organisations and development actors as key elements to foster sustainable development and gender equality. Within the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on Gender Equality, target 5.4 aims at recognising and valuing unpaid care work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies²³. The European Union in its Gender Action Plan III for its international partnerships states that there is an urgent need to address the care economy in order to strengthen women's and girls' economic and social rights, by increasing transition to formal and quality employment for care workers, improving the working conditions and labour rights of care workers, adopting universal social protection schemes, and challenging gender norms²⁴.

Care policies stretch beyond social protection and impact the business environments as well. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has developed the 5R Framework for Decent Care Work to approach gender-responsive care policies in a cross-sectoral approach. To provide good-quality care, that benefits both unpaid carers and recipients, and provides decent work for care workers²⁵, the 5R Framework identifies five fields of action and related recommendations: Recognise, Reduce and Redistribute unpaid care work; Reward care workers with decent work conditions, including remuneration; and Represent care workers through social dialogue and collective bargaining (Figure 3).²⁶

For care policies to be an integral part of an attractive business and investment climate in ACP countries, in which both employers and employees have access to the largest possible pool of skilled and capable human capital, they must address the accessibility, availability, and quality of public and private care services. Further, for these policies to succeed, they must first challenge the social norms on care work and duties that affect women disproportionately. These norms restrict women's ability to access economic opportunities, as well as to control their own resources and achieve economic autonomy and empowerment. Research has found that countries that introduce policies, including care policies, to close the gender employment gap, stand to increase their GDP by up to 20 percent²⁷.

The cross-cutting nature of care policies requires a cross-sectoral, cross-ministerial and multi-stakeholders approach. When the care economy file sits within one specific ministry (often with the ministry of women or gender, but sometimes also the ministry of labour or of economy), the actor leading must ensure a good level of consultation and coordination with other relevant stakeholders, in a public-private dialogue format, such as with other ministries (e.g. ministry of economy, finance, labour, public health, education), private sector representative organisations for care services providers, women's business associations, care workers associations, etc. as well as good coordination between the local and national levels of decision-making and implementation, given the realities of care work and services can also vary greatly between regions in a single country.

22 Ciccia, R. & Lombardo, E. (2019). Care policies in practice: how discourse matters for policy implementation. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14494035.2019.1702278>.

23 United Nations. (2015). The Sustainable Development Goals. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>

24 European Union. (2021). Gender Action Plan III. https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-01/join-2020-17-final_en.pdf

25 | 26 ILO. (2018). Care work and care jobs. https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_633135/lang-en/index.htm.

27 Observer Research Foundation. (2023). Leveraging Care Economy Investments to Unlock Economic Development and Foster Women's Economic Empowerment. https://t20ind.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/TF6_610_CareEconomy.pdf

Figure 3. The 5R Framework for Decent Care Work developed by the International Labour Organisation ²⁸

MAIN POLICY AREAS	POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	POLICY MEASURES
CARE POLICIES	Recognise, Reduce and Redistribute unpaid care work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure all forms of care work and take unpaid care work into account in decision-making • Invest in quality care services, care policies and care-relevant infrastructure
MACROECONOMIC POLICIES		
SOCIAL PROTECTION POLICIES	Reward: More and decent work for care workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote active labour market policies that support the attachment, reintegration and progress of unpaid carers into the labour force • Enact and implement family-friendly working arrangements for all workers • Promote information and education for more gender-equal households, workplaces and societies • Guarantee the right to universal access to quality care services • Ensure care-friendly and gender-responsive social protection systems, including floors • Implement gender-responsive and publicly funded leave policies for all women and men
LABOUR POLICIES	Represent care workers in social dialogue and collective bargaining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulate and implement decent terms and conditions of employment and achieve equal pay for work of equal value for all care workers • Ensure a safe, attractive and stimulating work environment for both women and men care workers • Enact laws and implement measures to protect migrant care workers
MIGRATION POLICIES		

Public investments in care policies and the subsequent drafting of laws to support the care economy take time. Both require budgeting, specific capacities for public and private actors, campaigns to shift social and gender norms and stereotypes, and infrastructure. They must also adapt to each country’s social context, economic landscape and governmental agenda. While publicly available international databases start to produce quantitative data for analysis, additional evidence on current care practices in

ACP countries and the impact of new care policies on economic growth at individual, firm and society levels is needed to continue to inform policy design and ramp up both public and private investments in the care economy.²⁹ This being said, interest in the care economy is on the rise, with an increasing acknowledgment of the key part it plays in enhancing sustainable and inclusive economies and societies and the potential it has for job creation.

28 Source: ILO Care (2019) Care work and care jobs. <https://dawnnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/ILO-2018-Care-Work-and-Care-Jobs.pdf>.

29 World Bank. (2022). Women, Business, and the Law Report. <https://wbl.worldbank.org/content/dam/sites/wbl/documents/2021/02/WBL2022%20Chapter%202.pdf>.

ADDRESSING CARE POLICIES THROUGH SUB-NATIONAL PILOT MECHANISMS AND MULTISTAKEHOLDERS PLATFORMS IN KENYA



While women in Kenya account for slightly more than 50% of the total working population, a lot of them cannot enter the labour market due to the absence of affordable, quality, and reliable childcare.³⁰

In 2021, in order to advance care policies, the national Kenyan government (ministries of education; public service, gender and affirmative action; health; labour and social protection; and the national early childhood education committee) with county governments (council of governors; county early childhood education committees) in Nairobi, Kisumu, and Kajiado, worked with the Collaborative Action for Childcare (CAC) to develop care policy reforms through county-level consultations. CAC is a platform that gathers national and county governments, private childcare providers and business associations, and childcare workers.

The process began with CAC reviewing the care policy environment in Kenya. CAC then focused on generating evidence, both quantitative and qualitative data, on the experiences of care workers and women doing unpaid care work, that could be used to inform a policy reform agenda as well as to generate buy-in from county governments. Next, CAC provided technical support to county governments to organise public-private dialogues with childcare providers and discuss requirements for care economy regulations, and the development of guidelines to support the implementation of regulations. Once a draft of the policy guidelines was finalised, it was disseminated to the public and feedback was collected for amendments, prior to the regulations being taken to the national government for review and adoption. The national government of Kenya is now in the process of passing the first National Policy on Unpaid Care and Domestic Work.

This case study uses country governments as entry points for operationalising care policies. The ease of consultations and impact assessment at sub-national level ensure the success of such pilots from which lessons learned and best practices can be drawn for implementation at national level.

30 UN Women. (2022). Gender Data Shines Policy Spotlight on Unpaid Care and Domestic Work in Kenya. <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/stories/news/2022/08/gender-data-shines-policy-spotlight-on-unpaid-care-and-domestic-work-in-kenya>.



Recommendations for policy-makers: COLLECT DATA TO DEVELOP EVIDENCE-BASED POLICIES

- In order to shift gender norms and implement care policies, data is needed on the value unaccounted for of unpaid care work; the impacts of care policies on participation in the labour force and individual incomes, on productivity levels in the workplace, on business development and growth for business owners that are parents, on time-use surveys, on overall women's economic empowerment.³¹
- Public institutions in all relevant sectors should mainstream the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data on the economic impact of paid and unpaid (child)care work and related policies, in each country's context.
- The collected data can then be used to inform decision-making processes – including public-private dialogues – and develop childcare and parental leave reforms that are evidence-based.



³¹ The Oxfam Care Policy Scorecard (2022) is a tool that can be used to generate evidence.
<https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/the-care-policy-scorecard-a-new-tool-to-shift-progress-towards-a-caring-economy-621437/>.

THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC IS UNDERTAKING A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO CARE



Because of sociodemographic changes and the epidemiological transition, which has led to increases in young children and the elderly population, the Dominican Republic is facing increasing demands for care services. Among the most vulnerable populations, it is estimated that 85% of boys and girls between the ages of 0 and 5 years do not receive institutionalised care service, which also impacts their cognitive and socio-emotional development. The lack of value associated with care work and the uneven distribution that is shouldered by women has resulted in women having limited time to access educational and job opportunities reducing their economic autonomy and increasing women's poverty.

In 2020, the Government of Dominican Republic launched a Communities of Care pilot programme in three communities (Santo Domingo Este, Azua, Bánica) as an effort to create a National Care System that would recognise the importance of the care economy in the country's socio-economic development.

The Care Communities pilot brings together efforts of programs implemented by diverse government institutions integrated by the Ministries of Economy, Planning and Development and Women; the "Supérate" Programme, the Single System of Beneficiaries (SIUBEN), the National Institute for Technical-Vocational Training (INFOTEP), the National Institute for Comprehensive Early Childhood Care (INAIFI), the National Council for the Elderly (CONAPE), the National Council on Disability (CONADIS), the National Council for Children and Adolescents (CONANI) and the Ministry of Labour.

Undertaking a holistic approach that involves all stakeholders, the pilot had five objectives:

- strengthen **coordination** between the institutions that provide care,
- develop **local plans** to guarantee that children, people with disabilities and older adults can access care services in their locality,
- implement **training and certification programs** for caregivers,
- design a **communication strategy** to inform citizens and institutions about national policy, and
- to produce and manage **data and evidence** for decision-making.

The Communities of Care pilot has led to concrete and encouraging results such as the creation of a new curriculum for childcare workers to be implemented and provided by the free National Institute for Technical-Vocational Training, the establishment of community childcare centres in each of the three communities to support the institutionalisation of childcare support, the development of an internal communication strategy to ensure a whole-of-government understanding of the care economy, and the enhancement of the institutional coordination and alliances across the country to support the care economy.

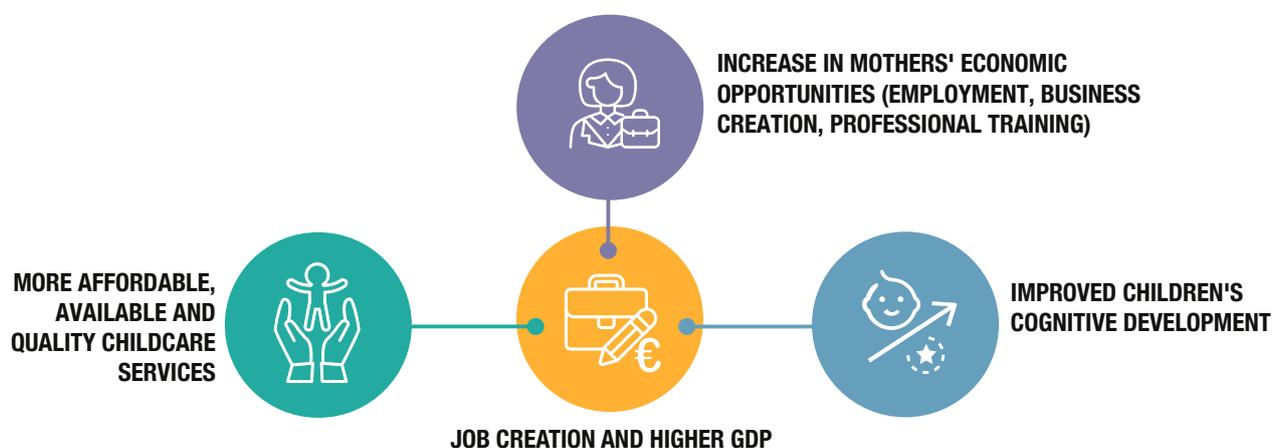
CHILDCARE PROVISION AND PARENTAL LEAVE ARE CARE POLICIES AND STRENGTHEN GENDER-SENSITIVE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENTS

Within the larger scope of the care economy, policies and regulations concerning childcare can be powerful tools for gender-sensitive business environment reforms that look to foster women’s access to economic opportunities. In this context, childcare is understood as the provision of childcare services and parental leave. Other components of the Care Economy presented above, such as care for the elderly, domestic work, care for the sick, children’s education after eight years of age, labour regulations for care givers, do also impact women’s economic empowerment but are not covered specifically in this report.

Parenthood-related leave and childcare services form a continuum of policies that improve the business environment for women and for families. They can be paid or subsidised by government and/or paid by employers. They are crucial to guarantee children’s safe development, families’ income and job security, women’s participation in the labour force, economic empowerment, and to prevent them from falling into poverty (Figure 4).

Evidence indicates that government-led policies on parental leave and childcare provision directly lead to the development of a conducive business environment for women in ACP countries³². When employers offer women and men parental leave and implement childcare policies (such as on-site day-care facilities or subsidies for external childcare), they can lead to the reduction of absenteeism, more consistent productivity levels, decreased disruptions to work schedules, reduced turnover, and attracts and retains talented employees. The reported cost to employers of employee turnover is equivalent to 16–20 percent of an employee’s annual salary and can be more than two times the value of employees’ salaries at senior levels. Thus, when factoring in the costs of recruitment, onboarding and productivity losses associated with new staff³³, the provision of parental leave and childcare benefits could be a powerful tool for businesses to take full advantage of the human capital they currently possess.

Figure 4. Benefits of childcare policies³⁴



32 | 33 World Bank. (2020). Better jobs and brighter futures: Investing in childcare to build human capital. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/385821d3-bce3-5640-b140-48e27b58296b>.

34 Source: authors

Childcare services benefit women, parents, businesses and economies

Childcare needs in the ACP region are growing and are likely to continue to grow, due to global shifts in family composition and population dynamics. Currently, there is a significant shift in demographics due to the rising youth bulge in most ACP countries. Africa, for example, has the youngest population in the world, with 70% of sub-Saharan Africa under the age of 30.³⁵ In addition, there is a shift in family composition, with the average household size declining nearly everywhere in the ACP region. As a result of these shifts, there is a reduction in the extended family support systems that have traditionally provided childcare support. This childcare challenge affects families across all income levels, in all countries, and in both urban and rural contexts, and due to prevailing social norms it affects especially women.

Governments in the ACP region are expanding access to public childcare services through the promotion of diverse types of care provision. The evidence to date shows that this diversity of means and providers is currently crucial to meet the needs of all families, as well as for bringing in additional care businesses, care workers, and investments – public and private – in the childcare sector. In the ACP region, governments are expanding access to childcare through four main approaches:

- (i) direct government provision;
- (ii) financial support to families;
- (iii) incentives for non-state provision (including community-based models); and
- (iv) mandates or incentives for employer-supported childcare.³⁶

CHILDCARE

DEFINITIONS

Childcare services are usually understood as the services provided to care for children from birth to three years of age.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE (ECEC)

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), also known as Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), is usually understood as the care and education of children for the period from birth to compulsory primary school age (commonly around six years old, but varies between three and eight globally). It includes centre-provided and family day care, privately- and publicly-funded, pre-school and pre-primary school.

Existing Legal Framework for Childcare in OACPS and OECD countries³⁷:

Percentage of countries that have a statutory childcare service system for children aged 0–2 years:

- Sub-Saharan Africa: 0%
- Caribbean: 16%
- Pacific: 0%
- OECD: 79%

Percentage of countries that have a national pre-primary education system for children aged 3 years and above:

- Sub-Saharan Africa: 21%
- Caribbean: 83%
- Pacific: 43%
- OECD: 87%

³⁵ United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries. <https://www.un.org/ohrls/news/young-people%E2%80%99s-potential-key-africa%E2%80%99s-sustainable-development>

³⁶ ILO. (2022). Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work. https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/care-economy/WCMS_838653/lang--en/index.htm

³⁷ OACPS and OECD member countries for which data is available. ILO. (2022). Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work. Annex A.7. https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/care-economy/WCMS_838653/lang--en/index.htm.

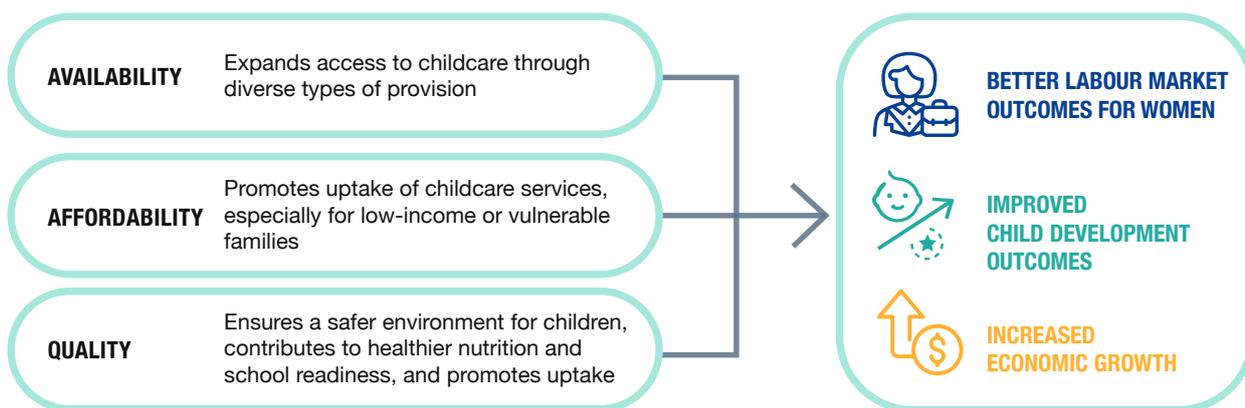
While childcare provisions are limited in most ACP countries, it is all the more so true in rural areas compared to urban centres. However, evidence suggests that women in rural Africa both desire and draw large benefits from institutional childcare provision and from men’s engagement in childcare pro-

vision³⁸. Thus, it is clear that governments need to include rural settings when drafting care policies.³⁹ Surveys from the Pacific likewise indicate a strong interest in institutional childcare provision, however island communities lack the population density of urban centres.

Available, Affordable and Quality Childcare

To continue to improve its assessment of the laws and regulations that affect women’s economic opportunity across the globe, the **Women, Business and the Law** team of the World Bank starting developing a pilot indicator on Childcare in 2021, which is structured around three pillars: availability for all parents regardless of where and when they work, affordability so that parents can financially access the services, and quality to ensure that children are cared for according to the needs of their age.

Figure 5. The three pillars of childcare services⁴⁰



38 Muheirwe, F., & Nuhu, S. (2019). Men’s participation in maternal and child health care in Western Uganda: perspectives from the community. <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-019-7371-3>.

39 Donald, A., Vaillant, J. (2023). Experimental evidence on rural childcare provision (working paper).

40 Source: Women, Business and the Law team.

GENDER ASSESSEMENT BROUGHT HIGHER LEVELS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME IN CAMEROON



Despite Cameroonian women's significant contributions to the household, they often remain excluded from control of strategic family assets and decisions (e.g. land, live-stock, money, children's education, access to health care, etc.), resulting in limited agency within the family.⁴¹

In 2016, the Government of Cameroon implemented the Safety Net Project that aimed at providing youth, especially women, with employment opportunities through a public works program and cash transfer incentives for their engagement.⁴²

The government soon realised that women's participation was low because of their unpaid childcare responsibilities. In 2018, the project not only introduced mobile crèches that followed participants from one work site to the next, but they also created job opportunities for the programme's beneficiaries by giving them the opportunity to become childcare workers. The selected participants were trained, monitored and provided with feedback on a regular basis by regulatory officials (such as early childhood development officers) who were brought in to ensure that young children were cared for according to relevant norms for their age.⁴³ In addition, the process worked closely with local communities, who were responsible for selecting sites for the mobile crèche, while local civil society organisations were responsible for raising awareness and promoting participation of eligible women in the program.

A later evaluation of the pilot found that mobile crèches enabled female participation in the public works program to increase to 50%, from the initial 38% and led to their economic empowerment.⁴⁴

The presence of children in the household increases the amount of time dedicated by women to unpaid care work, without exception globally⁴⁵. Providing quality and affordable childcare is a cost-effective way of supporting women's labour force participation, reducing gender pay gaps, increasing individual and household income, as well as increasing the learning capacities of children.⁴⁶ Sharing evidence related to the benefit of women's labour force participation for

women, their households, and the overall economy, is a crucial element to the creation, provision, and uptake of care policies. According to data from the World Bank, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, women who used childcare facilities saw a USD 38/month (approximately EUR 35) increase in their monthly household income, in comparison to a USD 16/month (approximately EUR 15) childcare cost.⁴⁷

41 OCHA. (2019). Data on gender equality in Cameroon. <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/data-gender-equality-cameroon>

42 | 43 World Bank. (2018). Social Safety Net Project. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/433291525399293923/pdf/CAMEROON-SOCIAL-SAFETY-PAD-04052018.pdf>.

44 World Bank. (2023). The double dividend of investing in care. Evidence from the Africa Gender Innovation Lab. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/12LHCZZDheBqURSlkoVcxWj723NXBAWgy/view>.

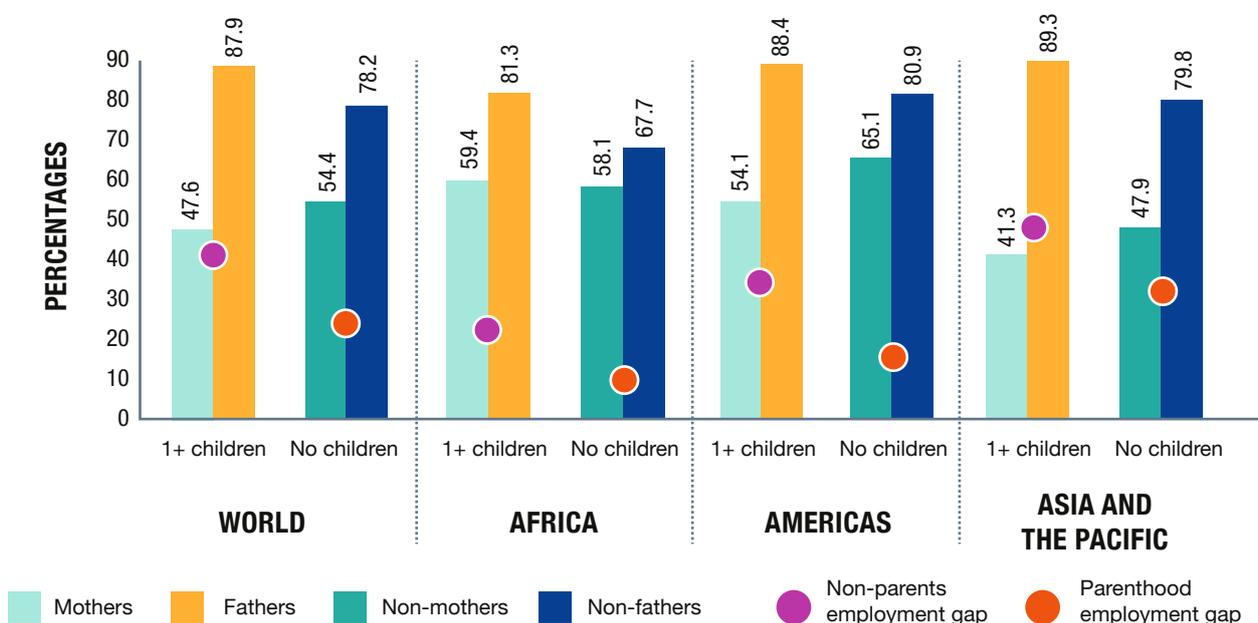
45 ILO. (2018). Care work and care jobs. https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_633135/lang--en/index.htm.

46 WeProsper. (2022). WeProsper Research Salon Brief: Childcare. <https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/WeProsper-Research-Salon-on-Childcare.pdf>.

47 World Bank. (2022). The double dividend of investing in care. Evidence from the Africa Gender Innovation Lab. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/12LHCZZDheBqURSlkoVcxWj723NXBAWgy/view?usp=sharing>.

Figure 6. Employment to population ratio of mothers and fathers of children aged 0-5 and of non-mothers and non-fathers⁴⁸

This graph shows there is a “motherhood employment penalty” and a “fatherhood employment premium” across the globe: mothers of young children account for the lowest employment rates compared to fathers, but also to non-fathers and non-mothers (except in Africa for the latter, where rates remain comparable); while fathers of young children report the highest employment rates compared with non-fathers, non-mothers and mothers. In addition, worldwide the gender employment gap is even greater between mothers and fathers than between non-mothers and non-fathers.



Empirical evidence from ACP regions has consistently found a positive relationship between affordable childcare and women’s labour market outcomes, including participation in the labour force, increased wages, and working hours.⁴⁹ That said, research indicates in parallel that even when childcare provisions are available, challenges such as high cost, low service quality, lack of convenience of the sites or hours, or cultural norms, could limit

their utilisation and reduce potential benefits. It is thus important when developing childcare policies to conduct cross-cutting gender assessment, to consult with all relevant stakeholders – including the parents – and to collect data that can inform evidence-based policy making and behavioural change campaigns to combat all factors limiting women’s full participation in the economy.

⁴⁸ Source: ILO. (2018). Care work and care jobs. <https://dawnnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/ILO-2018-Care-Work-and-Care-Jobs.pdf>.

This graph covers countries that are not members of the OACPS.

⁴⁹ World Bank. (2020). Better jobs and brighter futures: Investing in childcare to build human capital. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/385821d3-bce3-5640-b140-48e27b58296b>.

MOBILE CRECHES INCREASE WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCIAL RESILIENCE IN BURKINA FASO



With few public preschools and community-based facilities, early childhood (0-3 years) development centres in Burkina Faso are mostly delivered by private actors and concentrated in urban areas. Given these restraints, public female employees typically rely on organising childcare amongst themselves⁵⁰ and, in some cases, on bringing their children to their work site. This puts their children in harm's way by leaving without adequate supervision, while women's productivity can also be negatively affected.⁵¹

In response to this, mobile crèches were developed by the Burkinabe government in 2019 for public works employees. The programme was developed in close collaboration with the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Women, National Solidarity and Family, and with the support of the World Bank.⁵² The mobile crèches consist of full coverage tents or existing safe spaces that offer an environment designed specifically for children aged 0-6 years - including space for breastfeeding - with added protection from the sun, dust, inclement weather and potential accidents. They give children two nutritious meals per day and are filled with low-cost toys and learning material, as well as information for parents on childcare and nutrition, based on contents from Burkina's national program of parental education.⁵³ While these mobile crèches were free, parents were asked to make a voluntary contribution of FCFA 1,500 to 6,000 (approximately EUR 2.28 to 9.14) per month when possible, in order to build a sustainable model for the programme.

An evaluation of the mobile crèches impact found a positive correlation on employment outcomes, financial resilience, and savings for women.⁵⁴ In parallel, they significantly increased child development scores in fine and gross motor skills, as well as women's mental health.

This success from the mobile crèches in Burkina Faso has inspired other countries: Cameroon has successfully organised four mobile childcare centres and plans to set one up on each public works site in the country, Madagascar intends to launch 278 mobile childcare units, and Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo are following suit.⁵⁵

50 | 51 Centre for Global Development. (2022). The effects of childcare on women and children. Evidence from a randomized evaluation in Burkina Faso. <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/effects-childcare-women-and-children-evidence-randomized-evaluation-burkina-faso.pdf>.

52 | 53 World Bank. (2021). Enabling women to work and their children to blossom: The Double Success Story of Mobile Childcare in Burkina Faso. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/03/08/enabling-women-to-work-and-their-children-to-blossom-the-double-success-story-of-mobile-childcare-units-in-burkina-faso>.

54 Centre for Global Development. (2022). The effects of childcare on women and children. Evidence from a randomized evaluation in Burkina Faso. <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/effects-childcare-women-and-children-evidence-randomized-evaluation-burkina-faso.pdf>.

55 World Bank. (2021). Enabling women to work and their children to blossom: The Double Success Story of Mobile Childcare in Burkina Faso. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/03/08/enabling-women-to-work-and-their-children-to-blossom-the-double-success-story-of-mobile-childcare-units-in-burkina-faso>.



Recommendations for policy-makers:

BOOST PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INVESTMENTS IN THE CHILDCARE SECTOR

- Policy-makers can **boost public and private investments** in childcare systems, public services, infrastructures and time-and-labour saving technologies through **favourable fiscal mechanisms and incentives** such as public subsidies, tax incentives for employers and for childcare businesses, blended finance, greater access to finance for women-led businesses.
- **The procedures to establish childcare businesses should be simplified** to enable these to grow and meet the increasing demand.
- Governments can help **foster partnerships between private employers and childcare providers** to provide flexible on- and off-site childcare solutions for employees.
- Childcare providers, public and private, can **take advantage of digital and tech-enabled platforms** to access customers (parents or employers) bases and their needs of childcare services.

Parental leave supports both working mothers and fathers

Paid parental leave policies not only increase women’s economic empowerment but also re-distribute care responsibilities between parents.⁵⁶

Introducing paid parental leave policies that integrate both maternity and paternity leave offers financial support and job security to mothers and fathers as caregivers during critical early stages of childcare, fosters work-life balance, reduces the gender pay gap and changes attitudes towards gender norms. Such policies benefit the economy and businesses by contributing to a more productive workforce, increasing individual revenues, while also supporting women and men in caring for their children. However, when in place, parental leave policies are often addressed to employees or legally registered self-employed, and do not cover the informal economy, which is important in the ACP region.⁵⁷

DEFINITIONS

MATERNITY LEAVE

Maternity leave is a leave from work entitlement for (expectant) mothers some time immediately before and after giving birth.

PATERNITY LEAVE

Paternity leave is a leave from work entitlement for fathers immediately following the birth of a child

PARENTAL LEAVE

Parental leave is a leave from work entitlement for mothers and fathers to care for or make arrangements for the welfare of a child after the expiration of maternity and paternity leave. The term parental leave is also commonly used to talk about all parenthood-related leaves (maternity + paternity + all other forms of parental leave).

⁵⁶ Stroman, Trish, et al. (2017). Why paid family leave is good for business. <https://media-publications.bcg.com/BCG-Why-Paid-Family-Leave-Is-Good-Business-Feb-2017.pdf>.

⁵⁷ ILO. (2023). Women and men in the informal economy: A statistical update. https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-promotion/informal-economy/publications/WCMS_869188/lang--en/index.htm.

The World Bank’s Women, Business and the Law (WBL) Parenthood Indicator⁵⁸ is a useful tool to analyse data on parental leave policies in ACP countries. It examines laws affecting women’s and men’s work during and after pregnancy, including paid leave and laws prohibiting firms from dismissing pregnant women.

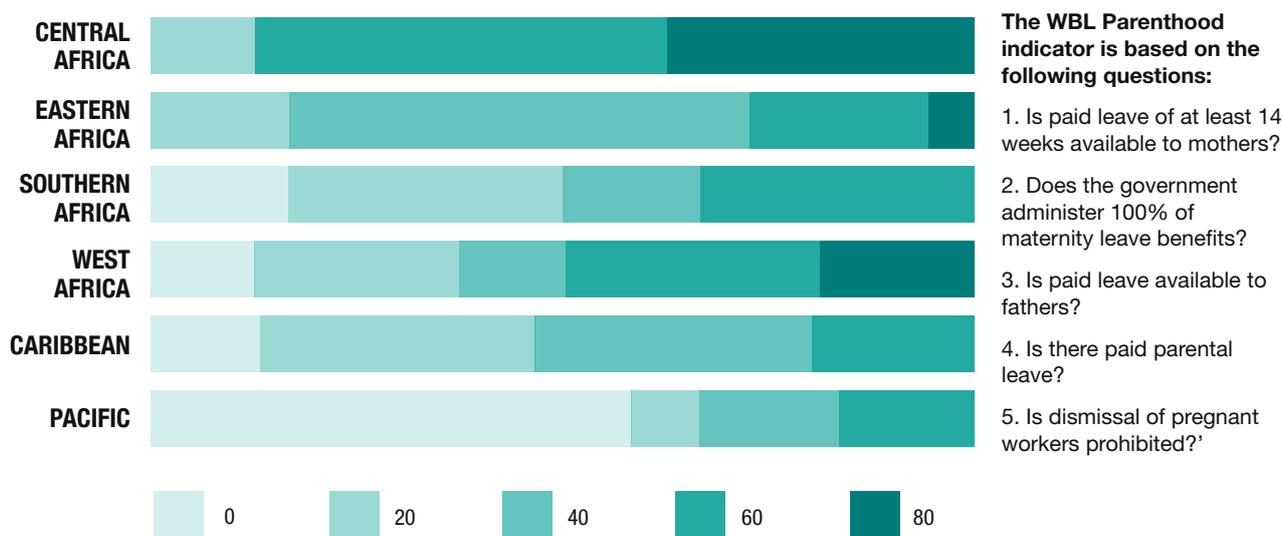
The Parenthood Score is obtained by calculating the unweighted average of the responses to 5 questions and scaling the result to 100. The five questions are:

- Is paid leave of at least 14 weeks available to mothers?
- Does the government administer 100% of maternity leave benefits?

- Is there paid leave available to fathers?
- Is there paid parental leave?
- Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?

The Parenthood Score reflects a wide variety in the availability of laws across the ACP countries and regions. The majority of ACP countries in the Pacific have a score of 0, as compared to those in Central and Eastern Africa where most countries have scores of 40 or 60. At the same time, it is important to note no country scored a 100, indicating that legal constraints continue to persist in the areas measured.

Figure 7 . Women, Business and the Law 2023 Parenthood country scores per ACP region, out of 100 (countries for which data is available)



Most countries in the ACP region have adopted maternity policies. In Africa, all countries (with the exception of Sierra Leone) have maternity leave legislation with the length of leave varying from 8 to 17 weeks.⁵⁹

Most notably, in Burkina Faso and South Sudan, leave is also extended to women who give birth to stillborn infants.⁶⁰ Conversely, in Malawi and Tanzania, maternity leave is only available once every three years. In Lesotho, maternity leave is capped at two children.⁶¹

58 The Women, Business and the Law (WBL) is a series of annual studies measuring the laws that affect women’s economic opportunity across 190 economies.

The study presents eight indicators: mobility, workplace, pay, marriage, parenthood, entrepreneurship, assets, and pension.

59 | 60 | 61 UNDP. (2022). Africa Care Economy Index. <https://www.undp.org/africa/publications/africa-care-economy-index>.

Figure 8. Average length of maternity leave in weeks per ACP region ⁶²



In spite of the policies in place, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) reports that only 15 percent of the female labour force in Africa is “effectively protected” with maternity cash benefits.⁶³ This is due to legislative exclusions, restrictive qualifying conditions, and weaknesses in policy implementation and controls. In regions such as the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands, there has been a significant lag in legislating all essential care provision. For example, only five countries in the world do not have any form of paid maternity leave and all of them are in the Pacific Islands (Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Papua New Guinea, and Tonga).⁶⁴

To support the redistribution of unpaid care work, to materialise men’s rights to care, and to shift gender norms, paternity leave is integral and brings many economic and gender-transformative benefits. It supports mothers and new-borns after childbirth, enables fathers to bond with their child, and changes gender perceptions with a better distribution of unpaid care work. Evidence shows that fathers taking paternity leave increase their long-term participation to unpaid care work and hereby also enhance mother’s participation in the economy and overall women’s economic empowerment.⁶⁵ Moreover, care policies

that ensure fathers have the support they need to prioritise their family responsibilities, while also meeting work demands, can significantly increase the personal and economic wellbeing of families.⁶⁶

Yet, paternity leave entitlement in the law does not translate into fathers actually using this time, notably because of gender norms that assume women are caregivers and men breadwinners. Studies have found however that there is a snowball effect when other men in the workplace take paternity leave, increasing the likelihood of their colleagues to do the same. It is thus important when countries design paternity leave policies that they also associate it with behavioural change campaigns and incentivise fathers by explaining the many benefits – economic, social, health – of paternity leave.

Current legislation allows for paid paternity leave in a large majority of African countries.⁶⁷ Even though the duration is often short and policies grant only 1 to 6 days to new fathers, the leave is fully paid. In Rwanda, fathers are allowed to take four days. By recognising the crucial role of fathers in childcare, the Rwandan government has started to challenge societal norms and encouraged a more equitable division of parenting responsibilities. This shift has positively impacted the

62 n=75 (all ACP countries for which there was data, and thus includes countries that have no maternity leave policy). Source: Women, Business and the Law 2023 Parenthood Indicator.

63 UNDP. (2022). Africa Care Economy Index. <https://www.undp.org/africa/publications/africa-care-economy-index>.

64 World Policy Analysis Centre. Care Economy Dataset. <https://www.worldpolicycenter.org/topics/care/policies>.

65 ILO. (2022). Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work. https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/care-economy/WCMS_838653/lang--en/index.htm.

66 Equimundo. (2023). State of the world’s fathers. <https://www.equimundo.org/resources/state-of-the-worlds-fathers-2023/#:~:text=The%20State%20of%20the%20>

67 UNDP. (2022). Africa Care Economy Index. <https://www.undp.org/africa/publications/africa-care-economy-index>.

workplace, by redistributing the unpaid care work between mothers and fathers. Overall, the country has experienced an increase in female workforce participation and career advancement. In the Caribbean and the Pacific, the picture on paternity leave is more dismal and less countries in these regions offer paternity leave, as compared to Africa.⁶⁸ For those countries that do offer paternity leave, the average amount of days also remains five for both regions.

Currently, legislation and policies relating to maternity and paternity leave in ACP states only account for the period immediately after birth. This means there is a gap of approximately 4.2 years from when most leave entitlements come to an end, and the age at which children can attend primary school. During this period, parents lack care policy entitlements and care needs are covered by unpaid care work, mostly delegated to women, or family-paid care solutions, such as reliance on domestic workers or privately-run facilities.⁶⁹

In countries where affordable and quality childcare services are not available, parental leave can serve to cover the childcare policy gap. It enables working mothers and fathers to reconcile their care

duties while protecting their place in the workforce (and consequent economic outcomes) until the beginning of compulsory primary education.

DEFINITIONS

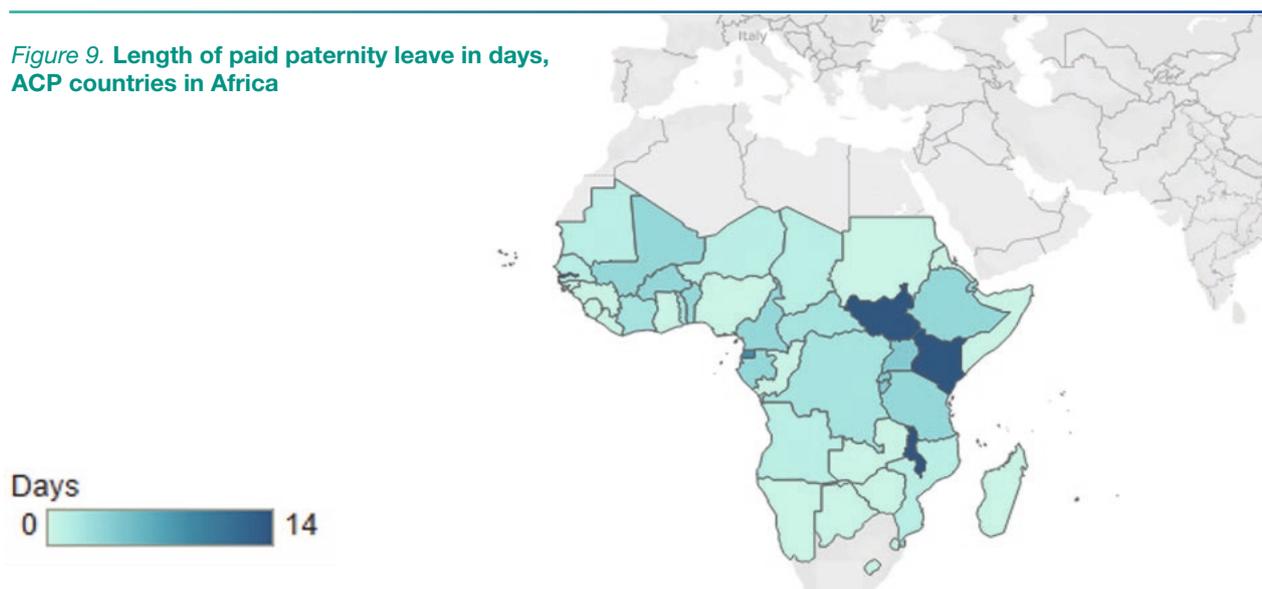
THE CHILDCARE POLICY GAP

The childcare policy gap was defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as the difference between the age at which childcare leave entitlements end (calculated as the sum of paid maternity, paternity and parental leave) and the age at which a child can avail childcare or educational services as mandated by national legislation.⁷⁰

Parental leave is often available to either parents, but it is mothers that make the greater use of it.

When parental leave is used by fathers too, it can act as a driver of change in gender norms. Indeed, research has found that parental leave taken by men reduces burnout for working mothers and leads men to take a bigger share of unpaid care work in the long-term⁷¹. Parental leave should thus be designed in a manner that preserves gender equality at work and incentivise both mothers and fathers to take it.

Figure 9. Length of paid paternity leave in days, ACP countries in Africa



68 World Bank. (2022). Women, Business, and the Law Report. <https://wbi.worldbank.org/en/reports>.
 69 Heymann, J., Sprague, A. and Raub, A. (2023). Equality within our lifetimes: How laws and policies can close or widen gender gaps in economies worldwide. <https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520392311/equality-within-our-lifetimes>
 70 | 71 Source: ILO. (2022). Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_838653.pdf. <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/care-economy/lang--en/index.htm>.

FROM FREE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TO PARENTAL LEAVE, THE FIJIAN ROAD TO HIGHER LEVELS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKFORCE



In Fiji, only 38% of women are economically active, compared to 74% of men,⁷² a statistic that has not evolved over the past decades. Recognising the significant economic losses resulting from women's low rates of economic participation, the Fijian government granted the right to early childhood education in the 2013 Constitution, which also states that **'The State must (...) achieve the progressive realisation of the right to free early childhood education (...).'**⁷³

The government allocated resources to offer one year of free pre-primary education for enrolled five-year old children. In 2019, it also increased paid maternity leave from 84 to 98 days and introduced for the first time five days of paid paternity leave.⁷⁴

Despite policy and budgetary commitments, large gaps remain, especially for younger children. A 2019 survey on staff from leading public and private employers revealed that the lack of affordable and accessible childcare options had a negative financial impact on businesses and the economy, with an average FJ\$ 550,000 (approximately EUR 228,000) a year for employers⁷⁵, and the equivalent of FJ\$1,000 (approximately EUR 413) per employee, directly related to lost work time due to childcare responsibilities.⁷⁶ In addition, over 80% of employees with preschool-aged children reported that their care responsibilities negatively impacted their work.⁷⁷

Following this survey, the Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations announced the establishment of a National Task Force on Early Childhood Education and Care and Education (ECEC) to identify and prioritise the government's response to growing demand for childcare services.⁷⁸ In recognition of the cross-ministerial and cross-sectoral nature of childcare, the task force gathered representatives from several actors, including the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, private sector representatives from leading industries⁷⁹, development partners and NGOs.

Following the recommendations of the Task Force, in May 2023, the Fijian cabinet approved a childcare guidance note that will help to design the country's first National Early Childhood Care Services Policy and Regulatory Framework. The new policy is expected to establish minimum standards for early childcare services, a licensing and inspection system for service providers, and a central regulatory authority for oversight.⁸⁰ It will also provide important guidelines for businesses seeking to offer employer supported childcare services to their employees.

72 World Bank. (2022). Gender Data Portal. Fiji.

<https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/fiji/#:~:text=In%20Fiji%2C%20the%20labor%20force,older%20that%20is%20economically%20active..>

73 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji. (2013). Government of Fiji.

<https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/fiji/#:~:text=In%20Fiji%2C%20the%20labor%20force,older%20that%20is%20economically%20active..>

74 | 75 Twigg, S., Fusimalohi, L., and Nguyen, N. (2019). Tackling Childcare: The Business Case for Employer-Supported Childcare in Fiji. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/821061567691424126/tackling-childcare-the-business-case-for-employer-supported-childcare-in-fiji>.

76 | 77 | 78 IFC. (2019). Press release: New IFC Report Shows Employers and Workers Pay High Cost for Lack of Childcare in Fiji. <https://pressroom.ifc.org/all/pages/PressDetail.aspx?ID=24709>.

79 Private sector participants: Fiji National Provident Fund, Grand Pacific Hotel, Magi Enterprises Fiji, Mindpearl Fiji, RCL Services, Vinod Patel Group, Westpac Bank Fiji

80 IFC. (2023). Press release: Fiji's Cabinet Backs Recommendations to Support Improved Childcare. <https://pressroom.ifc.org/all/pages/PressDetail.aspx?ID=27554>.



Recommendations for policy-makers: GENDER NORMS AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

- In order to optimise the impact of the establishment of a favourable legal environment for care work and services, policy-makers should in parallel create and deploy social behaviour change initiatives such as advertising, or education and awareness campaigns.
- Such communication campaign can help challenge gender norms in households, workplaces and societies and highlight the numerous benefits of shared care work between men and women, including for businesses.



CONCLUSION

Care work, both paid and unpaid, is at the heart of ACP societies and economies. Shifts in demographic, socio-economic, environmental and gender contexts in ACP countries and around the globe are increasing the demand for a supportive care economy. If addressed properly, current deficits in care work and its quality could help prevent a severe care crisis, enhance economic growth and sustainable development, reduce gender inequalities and improve women’s access to economic opportunities.

More specifically, the provision of childcare or working parents and the existence of parental leave for both mothers and fathers are key reforms that can improve women’s participation in the labour force. An adapted legal framework providing for childcare and parental leave is essential to create an enabling business environment that benefits both women and men workers and entrepreneurs, the private sector, and the economy as whole.

As depicted across this paper, we recommend focusing on four mutually reinforcing areas:

- **Developing and implementing a tailored childcare and parental leave regulatory framework** that is aligned with international standards by means of a public-private dialogue approach and a cross-ministerial approach;
- **Mainstreaming the collection of sex-disaggregated data on childcare** responsibilities and assessing the impact of pilots or newly introduced policies at individual, firm and national levels, that can inform public-private dialogues and help develop evidence-based policies;

- **Boosting public and private investments in the childcare sector**, through vocational and professional trainings, adapted infrastructures, new businesses, etc., to make available, affordable and quality childcare a concrete reality;
- **Creating gender norms awareness campaigns** to accompany social and behavioural change for more equality in the share of childcare responsibilities.

The Investment Climate Reform Facility (ICR Facility) provides technical assistance to public and private stakeholders in the ACP region on Business Environment Reforms (BER) that contribute to Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE). The ICR Facility can be a partner to help address policy analysis and implementation to achieve a more supportive care economy.



Additional resources on Care policies and Business Environment Reforms:

REPORT – ILO. Care work and care jobs for the future of work. 2018. [Report: Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work \(ilo.org\)](#)

REPORT – ILO. Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work. 2022. [Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work \(ilo.org\)](#)

REPORT & DATABASE – World Bank. Women, Business, and the Law Report. 2022. [Reports, Key Findings - Women, Business and the Law - World Bank Group](#)

REPORT – Generation Equality. Increase women's economic empowerment by transforming the care economy. 2022. [Blueprint on Care Economy_EJR Action Coalition_2022.pdf \(generationequality.org\)](#)

POLICY BRIEF – UNICEF. Family-friendly policies: Redesigning the workplace of the future. 2019. <https://www.unicef.org/media/95051/file/Family-friendly-policies-EN.pdf>.

POLICY BRIEF – Observer Research Foundation. Leveraging Care Economy Investments to Unlock Economic Development and Foster Women's Economic Empowerment. 2023. [TF6_610_CareEconomy.pdf \(t20ind.org\)](#)

REPORT – Stroman, Trish, et al. Why paid family leave is good for business. 2017. <https://media-publications.bcg.com/BCG-Why-Paid-Family-Leave-Is-Good-Business-Feb-2017.pdf>.

RESEARCH ARTICLE – Ciccio, R. & Lombardo, E. Care policies in practice: how discourse matters for policy implementation. 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14494035.2019.1702278>

REPORT – Equimundo. State of the world's fathers. 2023. <https://www.equimundo.org/resources/state-of-the-worlds-fathers-2023/#:~:text=The%20State%20of%20the%20> >

REPORT – African Development Bank and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Africa Gender Index Report. 2019. <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/africa-gender-index-report-2019-analytical-report>

RESEARCH PUBLICATION – Heymann, J., Sprague, A. and Raub, A. Equality within our lifetimes: How laws and policies can close or widen gender gaps in economies worldwide. 2023. <https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520392311/equality-within-our-lifetimes>.

POLICY BRIEF – WeProsper. WeProsper Research Salon Brief: Childcare. 2022. [WeProsper-Research-Salon-on-Childcare.pdf \(icrw.org\)](#)

PRESENTATION – World Bank. The double dividend of investing in care. 2022. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/12LHCZZDheBqURSikoVcxWj723NXBAWgy/view?usp=sharing>.

BLOG POST – Center for Global Development - Blogs. Unpacking Childcare's Return on Investment Opportunity. 2022. <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/financing-childcare-understanding-return-investment-opportunity>.

POLICY BRIEF – GenderSmart / 2X Collaborative Care Economy Working Group. Briefs: The care economy: an introduction; Investing in the care economy: a primer for gender-smart investors; and Engaging with the care economy: A guide for investors, employers and corporate actors. 2022. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6089294d7cb43b4cffb93591/t/637d-d91192491c57ed5865fa/1669191954810/GenderSmart-CEBrief+2-Nov22.pdf>

RESEARCH REPORT – Melesse, Martha, and Mary O'Neill. 2018. Who Cares? Exploring Solutions to Women's Double Burden. Policy Brief. Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW). 2018. <https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/10625/56948/IDL-56948.pdf?sequence=5>.

PODCAST – Rouhani, L, and Grantham, K. The Impact of COVID-19 on women's paid and unpaid childcare. 2021. <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/enterprise-development/episodes/Episode-1-The-Impact-of-COVID-19-on-Womens-Paid-and-Unpaid-Childcare-e171dvt/a-a6fusqk>

PODCAST – Sharpe, J. Care Economy: Reducing Unpaid Work and Inequality. 2023. <https://socialprotection.org/learn/podcasts/ep-28-care-economy-reducing-unpaid-work-and-inequality>

IMPRINT

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