

The Salzburg Statement on the Value of Care and Caregiving

We live in a world undergoing profound and rapid transformations that affect every aspect of the personal, social, economic and political spheres. However, care and caregiving remain and will continue to be an ubiquitous part of the human experience and essential for human flourishing and well-being.

Care encompasses all activities undertaken by others to ensure those who cannot fulfill such activities independently maintain a standard of living and of functioning that allows them to reach their full potential, to fulfill their human rights and to maintain human dignity. This most often includes, but is not limited to, personal care, support with nutrition, household maintenance, social participation and engagement in community activities.

Care is most often provided by women, to children during the development process or to adults who due to illness, disability or other conditions face limitations in daily activities.

We, the participants of Salzburg Global Seminar's session on Health and Economic Well-being: Gender Equity in a Post-pandemic World, call for policies and actions that recognize, value and protect caregivers, while supporting a fairer and more sustainable distribution of care in our societies.

Every individual will need care at some point in their lives; every individual will give care at some point in their lives. Care for self and others is fundamental to building and maintaining social relations and its value to individuals, families and societies is truly incalculable. Care is also a productive activity, deserving of appropriate compensation, and a crucial resource for human and economic development.

Care and caregiving contribute to our societies in myriad ways, but most directly through:

- Promoting solidarity and compassion - care is essential to ensure all individuals can live with dignity, in fulfillment of their human rights, and is a precondition to inclusion, equity and non-discrimination;
- Increasing the health and well-being of individuals – care is essential for individual flourishing and attaining the highest standard of health during developmental periods, throughout the life-course during unavoidable periods of sickness, vulnerability or dependency, and towards the end-of-life, if and when functioning and health decline;
- Contributing to economic growth and productive activities – care and caregiving are preconditions and necessary for a productive economy and GDP growth;
- Strengthening social cohesion and nurturing relationships – by encouraging the development of harmonious group and societal interactions, care and caregiving promote social peace and security.

Sustained investment in care and in human relationships is the measure of the maturity of a society.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

By the end of 2025, we ask policymakers, funders and international, national, and regional stakeholder organizations and networks to tackle:

The failure of governments worldwide, of international organizations and of industrial and economic leaders to recognize the complexity of care and caregiving, as well as its contributions to societies, is increasingly being reflected in growing tension, discrimination and oppression and is complicit to the perpetuation of deeply ingrained inequalities and injustice. Unless care, caregivers and care workers are adequately supported through public and private provisions, societies will not be able to reach their full potential in terms of wellbeing, economic growth and more generally, human development.

Historically, low levels of investment in care and social protection systems, have been closely linked with the erosion of trust in institutions and of inter- and intra-generational solidarity.

In a polarized world in crisis, the lack of equitable and decisive investment in care, caregiving and social solidarity can be expected to lead to growing social divisions.

A systematic under-valuing of care, caregivers and care workers remains the main contributor to significant gender inequalities. No true progress can be made towards equal opportunities for women and men in a world that systematically undervalues what is traditionally constructed as female roles and strictly imposes gender roles with respect to care and caregiving.

The negative stereotyping of care, caregivers and care workers as low-skilled, unessential and insignificant for growth and development in a modern and digitalized world is creating and perpetuating a nexus of vulnerability, whereby caregivers and care workers are essentialized in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, migration status, skill levels and numerous other dimensions. Continuing to undervalue and push care and caregiving as a private personal and family matter will only reinforce patterns of discrimination and reproduce vulnerability and absence.

PRINCIPLES FOR REIMAGINING AND RE-VALORIZING CARE

To address these momentous challenges, we propose five key principles which should underlie a reimagining of care and caregiving and the development of modern, fairer care economies:

- Care and caregiving are universal and a shared human experience, irrespective of gender, although care is lived and may be interpreted differently across time, societies, communities and during each individual's life cycle.
- Caregiving should be a meaningful and unconstrained choice for each individual. It should be provided as much as needed and preferred.
- Caregiving is a shared responsibility of communities and must not be left exclusively to lower-income or marginalized individual to shoulder. Rather, care should be organized with equitable involvement and shared accountability between states and their inhabitants, between parents, siblings and between members of families and households, as well as between employers and employees.
- Care is local and is profoundly embedded in local communities. Families and local communities should be meaningfully engaged in shaping and designing care services and systems.
- Caregiving, especially when sustained for longer periods of time, is recognized as a profession performed by caregivers and care workers. They should be treated with dignity and respect and their work should be regulated on a scheme that provides for adequate, fair compensation and robust labor protections through continued public investment.
- We urge individuals, corporations, institutions and governments to adopt and promote these principles in all their activities and to work towards recognizing, rewarding and enhancing the value of care and caregiving in modern societies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A broad societal transformation is required to appropriately recognize, value and support care and caregivers and to promote fairness, sustainability and resilience of care systems. To achieve it, cross-sectoral partnerships, concerted action and the meaningful engagement of a broad range of stakeholders are paramount. Furthermore, a key precondition for progress is the balanced representation of community voices and of under-represented groups in the public discourse and in all decision-making bodies.

Governments and policy-makers at all governance levels should:

- Recognize the human right to give and receive care and ensure legal protections are in place to safeguard the social and economic rights, the well-being and the quality of life of caregivers, care workers and care receivers;
- Place care at the center of social policy and recognize it as a productive activity, as a public good and a public investment essential for societal well-being;
- Support a public discourse that challenges the stereotyping of care as a gendered, low-skilled and unproductive activity and ensure all official documents and public communications use language which does not perpetuate such stereotypes;

- Educate and improve awareness of the complexity of care work and the level of skills (relational, cognitive, emotional) and resilience of care workers, in close collaboration with civil society organizations representing caregivers and care receivers and take action to ensure comprehensive worker protections and fair pay;
- Step up investment and strengthen social protection systems to ensure affordability, quality, and availability of care and protect caregivers in the labour market to combat discrimination and unfair treatment, in close collaboration with employers and economic leaders;
- Invest in and develop social and technological innovations that promote a more equitable distribution and more effective delivery of care. This can be through training and support programs for caregivers, as well as through initiatives that encourage the more active involvement of men in care and caregiving and the equitable distribution of care tasks in families and in society;
- Support research to improve measurement of the value of care, beyond narrow mainstream economic approaches, and to explore the effects of societal and individual well-being – both positive and negative.

Employers and economic leaders should:

- Develop workplace policies and practices that allow all their employees to thrive and reconcile caregiving with work, without undue pressure to their health and well-being;
- Raise awareness and improve access to information among their employees of the rights of caregivers and the services and measures available to support them;
- Promote the development of inclusive working environments, where carers and people with care needs can fully participate and be appropriately recognized for their efforts - this can include providing fair wages, benefits, and protections, such as paid leave and flexible work arrangements;
- Promote a more balanced gender distribution of caregiving responsibilities through policies and practices that support both men and women to reconcile caregiving and professional responsibilities. This can include implementing parental leave policies which incentivize shared parental care and fostering a work culture that recognizes and values caregiving by both women and men.
- Recognize the skills developed through caregiving activities and invest in developing work places where such skills can be valued and deployed in innovative and productive ways.

Civil society organizations and communities should:

- Work to ensure caregivers and care workers are equitably represented in the public and policy discourse, that their rights are recognized and fulfilled and that they are afforded meaningful choices;
- Combat the stereotyping of caregiving as gendered, low-skilled and of low value;
- Work to raise awareness of the enormous societal contributions of carers, of their needs, their preferences and their skills;
- Develop shared spaces where caregivers can exchange with each other, interact and provide peer to peer support;
- Advocate for the development of social protection and support services for caregivers, and for the scale-up of community-based care models that ensure equitable remuneration and recognition of caregiving;
- Support the development of a public discourse on care that is ungendered and value-based.

OUR CALL TO ACTION

We call on all individuals, corporations, institutions and governments to join a global effort to recognize, support and invest in care and caregivers! You can do so by endorsing this statement, disseminating it widely and advocating for the transposition of the vision and principles it promotes into policies and practices at global, regional, national and local level.

We all have a stake in care and we all need to speak with one voice to shine a light on the immense value of care; to respect and ensure the dignity of caring; to recognize the diversity of care experiences and enable choice through flexibility of support; to care for others and care for ourselves.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this statement reflect consensus among participants in the Salzburg Global Seminar's session on Health and Economic Well-being: Gender Equity in a Post-pandemic World, and their individual opinions. These should not be taken to represent the views of any organization with which they are affiliated.