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Labour, Care, and Economic Democracy

POLICY PROFILE 2.12

UNIVERSAL CARE INCOME

A contribution to the Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Conventional economic frameworks systematically undervalue care and support work, mislabelling it as “unproductive” despite its essential role in sustaining human life and social stability. This invisibility leads to profound gender inequalities, with women performing 76.2% of unpaid care work globally, i.e. 3.2 times more than men. This devaluation manifests as a systemic economic injustice and a “motherhood penalty” that extends across the life cycle, trapping caregivers in cycles of financial hardship and time poverty. The Universal Care Income (UCI) is proposed as a “participation income” tied to engagement in life-sustaining activities. These activities encompass direct personal care, support for persons with disabilities to ensure independent living, and “care for the planet,” such as regenerative farming and the defence of the environment. Where the dependency of the person being cared for reaches certain thresholds the UCI should encompass formal employment, access to training ,and the opportunity to collectively bargain over their work conditions.

Contrasting with a Universal Basic Income (UBI), the UCI explicitly rewards active contributions to social and ecological reproduction. Practical models that prefigure this approach include Bogotá’s “Care Blocks” and the proposed 2025 US Worker Relief and Credit Reform (WRCR) Act. UCI transforms care from an invisible private obligation into a formally recognised and remunerated social contribution. It addresses the historical “care debt” owed to women and marginalised groups while validating self-care as a fundamental human right . By including environmental care, it recognises land stewardship as vital maintenance work that sustains the planetary ecosystem. This policy advances the eradication of poverty beyond growth by centring human and planetary well-being over GDP. It reduces exploitation by decoupling livelihood from market-driven devaluations. Funded through progressive taxes on wealth and financial transactions, or through active monetary policy and public money creation, UCI expands the fiscal space to meet human needs without relying on aggregate economic growth. Ultimately, it aims to redistribute power, providing caregivers of every gender, including Indigenous and other human rights defenders, with the recognition and material security to refuse exploitative labour, benefit from social protection and engage in socially meaningful activity. At the same time, a Universal Care Income must be designed differently across Global North and Global South contexts, and accompanied by childcare, public services, and workplace reforms, so that it expands women’s agency and care recognition without reinforcing gendered expectations that they remain at home.

1. POLICY GOAL

The Universal Care Income (UCI) aims to address fundamental issues arising from the persistent undervaluation and invisibility of care and support work, both paid and unpaid, within conventional economic frameworks.[1] To provide a clear baseline, this policy adopts the UN's rights-based "Care and Support" framework, which distinguishes between "direct care" (nurturing and direct personal care), "indirect care" (cooking, cleaning, washing), and "support" (assistance provided to ensure the autonomy and independent living of persons with disabilities and older persons).[2] Throughout this proposal, these activities are collectively referred to as "care work."

In capitalist economies, care is often deemed "unproductive" because it is either unpaid or lacks exchange value, despite being essential to sustaining human life and supporting the broader functioning of society and the economy.[3] This devaluation results in significant gender inequalities, as women in all their diversity disproportionately shoulder the share of unpaid care and support work. According to a recent ILO report, it reaches in 76.2% in some regions[4]. This imbalance leads to systemic economic injustice and hardship for caregivers, especially mothers and other caregivers, the poorest in every society.

This evolution of the traditional "motherhood penalty"[5] reflects the realities of caregiving obligations that span people's entire lives, especially in an ageing society. This penalty is increasingly experienced by those performing "sandwich care" or "double care"[6] (i.e. providing care for children and older family members), "young carers"[7] (i.e. providing care to grandparents, parents, siblings, etc. from a very young age, sacrificing time for study and play, as well as entry into gainful work in early adulthood), and those in "old-to-old care"[8] (i.e. older persons providing care and support to other or more older persons, including children in their 60s and 70s caring for their parents in their 90s), and gender non-conforming carers. While women, girls, and gender non-conforming people predominantly shoulder these responsibilities, boys and men are also involved in these diverse forms of care and support provision. It includes racialised men who have historically performed poorly paid care work within a legacy of domestic servitude. However, it is overwhelmingly women and girls who continue to shoulder these responsibilities, which becomes a major cause of impoverishment

[1] Make Mothers Matter, 'Call for Submissions: A Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth', Report Contribution, Place, March 2025.
[2] International Labour Office et al., *Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work*, with International Labour Organization (International Labour Organization, 2018).
[3] Suryadeepto Nag et al., 'A Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth: A Joint Contribution by the REAL Project and Friends', Paper's contribution, 2025.
[4] International Labour Office et al., *Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work*.
[5] Make Mothers Matter, 'Call for Submissions: A Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth'.
[6] Simultaneous care for children and older family members.
[7] Children and youth sacrificing education and early career entry to care for relatives.
[8] Older persons, such as those in their 60s, caring for even older parents.

for them[9]. This is why eradicating women's poverty is key to any strategy aiming to end poverty.

Recognition and Compensation

UCI seeks to recognise the social and economic value of all care work, and to reward and compensate caregivers accordingly. Given the disproportionate amount of care work performed by women in all societies, it is expected that UCI will address their economic disadvantage, and gender inequality more broadly. This includes caregivers in paid and unpaid (informal) sectors. For those in the unpaid sector, UCI functions as a form of self-determination income that compensates for the significant time spent in caring labour and the associated opportunity costs of not engaging in other forms of gainful employment. For formally employed caregivers, UCI is intended to supplement, rather than replace, their salary. Crucially, UCI must be implemented as an addition to, not a subsidy for, formal wages, ensuring it does not allow employers to suppress pay scales. For paid workers, particularly migrant care workers who represent a significant share of the workforce, UCI must be linked to enhanced social protections, such as portable pension entitlements and comprehensive healthcare. By providing this income alongside formal pay, UCI ensures that the specific requirements of care work are compensated across the board, providing paid workers with the same access to enhanced social protections and recognition afforded to unpaid caregivers, recognising and compensating the extra work they do to respond to their own and family care needs. Domestic workers are a case in point as they are often forced to neglect their families in favour of their employers' families.

Structural Distinction and Redistribution

UCI is fundamentally distinct from Universal Basic Income (UBI). While UBI is typically framed as a general "right to survive" irrespective of one's contribution, UCI is a care-centred policy explicitly designed to value and remunerate the active labour of care and support as the fundamental element of a sustainable society. While the term "universal" refers to the inclusion of all forms of care work (direct, indirect, and support) across all demographics, the income itself is a "participation income," contingent upon the performance of care labour. This includes ensuring access to adequate pensions (including by counting parental and other care leaves, e.g. to attend to family members with disabilities, older family members, and family members with long-term illness, towards pension contributions), comprehensive social protections, and safe, healthy working conditions.[10]

Moreover, UCI aims to redistribute unpaid care work, by promoting a more equitable distribution of care responsibilities across society members. This occurs by transforming care from an invisible "private" obligation into a formally recognised and remunerated essential social contribution based on a respectful humane relationship, thus raising the status of caring and of both the carer and the person receiving support. By attaching a clear

[9] International Labour Office et al., *Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work*.
[10] Center for Economic and Social Rights, 'Towards a Beyond Growth Blueprint That Creates and Enabling Environment for the Realisation of Human Rights', CESR's Input for the UN SR Roadmap on Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth, New York, 2025.

economic value to care labour, UCI incentivises all individuals, regardless of gender, to participate in the reproductive economy. It thereby breaks the current existing divide between the genders.

Addressing Care Debt and Interdependence

It also strives to address the historical "reproductive debt"[11] owed to caregivers, starting with the women and girls from low-income, rural, Indigenous, Black, immigrant, colonised or enslaved communities) for the long-term exploitation or free appropriation of their work, which has contributed to the accumulation of wealth for others, and to their own continued economic disadvantage.[12] While UCI may vary in its implementation[13], it should recognise that almost all caregivers are simultaneously receivers of care and support. In this view, access to UCI must be strictly non-deductible and supplementary. It should not hinder or replace simultaneous access to other social security benefits, such as disability pensions, aged-care allowances, or concessions for assistive devices and transport. By ensuring this, the policy ensures that the provision of care and the receipt of support are not mutually exclusive. They indeed are often interdependent roles that require concurrent material recognition.

Self-Care, Planetary Care, and Human Rights

Crucially, the policy adopts the UN's rights-based "Care and Support" framework, which distinguishes between "direct care" (nurturing and direct personal care), "indirect care" (cooking, cleaning, washing)[14] and "support" (assistance) to prioritise the autonomy and independent living of persons with disabilities and older persons.[15] Additionally, the policy recognises that funding self-care, recognised as an essential human rights dimension, defined here as the essential time required for personal health maintenance and well-being, rather than personal career development or general study, validates the time required for the rest and recovery. This recognition must particularly account for persons with disabilities to manage and exercise self-care since being disabled in an inaccessible world is hard work and they often face discrimination as well as well as higher costs and must dedicate significantly more time to maintaining their health and personal well-being compared to those without disabilities.

Furthermore, the goal expands to care in collective and community-based economies, especially in grassroots and indigenous contexts, as well as beyond human-to-human care to include "care for the land and planet" (e.g., regenerative agriculture, environmental defence, and protection, including wildlife, and defence for indigenous systems of living, communities

[11] Corinna Dengler, 'Invisible Debts: A Feminist Ecological Economics Approach to Debts from Below', *Feminist Economics*, 23 March 2026, 1–21, https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2026.2628777.
[12] Ibid.
[13] While some advocate for gender-differentiated payments to rectify the historical care debt, other models propose a non-gender-differentiated, universal distribution contingent on current participation in care work to foster non-discrimination and encourage the entry of all genders into caregiving roles.
[14] International Labour Office et al., *Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work*.
[15] Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons, OEA/Ser.L/V/II.155 (2015); United Nations, Transforming Care Systems in the Context of the Sustainable Development Goals and Our Common Agenda, UN System Policy Paper (2024).

and ecologies). Recognising these as vital maintenance tasks that sustain life and combat climate change.[16] Human rights defenders, often women, who protect land, forests, seas, rivers and air in order to protect their communities, are in fact care workers but they are often attacked, criminalised and even killed by powerful vested interests. These community and land carers must be supported and their life sustaining work acknowledged.

Central to UCI is the prioritisation of human and planetary well-being over GDP growth and profit, fundamentally challenging the dominant growth-driven economic model. In doing so, it promotes the vision of a more just, equitable, and caring society. Finally, UCI is grounded in the respect for fundamental human rights, including the right to a healthy environment, the right to human development, the right to independent living and community inclusion.[17]

2. POLICY FORMULATION

The Universal Care Income (UCI) is proposed as an income tied to the social participation of adults, specifically recognising and rewarding the care work performed by individuals. The primary formulation of UCI is as a care-anchored transfer that validates the contribution of life-sustaining work. It is structured as a form of "participation income," meaning eligibility is tied to engagement in a predefined set of caring activities.[18] This distinguishes UCI from UBI by positioning the income as a remuneration and reward for the active contribution to social and ecological reproduction, rather than a general survival grant. These activities are broadened to include direct and indirect care and support for people, "care for the planet" such as natural farming (e.g., Andhra Pradesh) and indigenous defence (e.g. Thailand), and student work, recognising higher education as a form of labour that provides social value.[19]

One of the central design features of UCI is its gender-responsive approach. Instead of explicit sex-based differentials that could conflict with non-discrimination principles, benefits should be universal and inclusive while addressing the "care debt" to women through a focus on the mothers and most impoverished and marginalised caregivers. While some advocate for gender-differentiated payments to rectify the historical care debt, other models propose a non-gender-differentiated, universal distribution contingent on current participation in care

[16] Global Women's Strike, 'Climate Justice and the Women's Natural Farming Movement in Andhra Pradesh', Presentation, 2023; Stefania Barca, 'Within and beyond the Pandemic: Demanding a Care Income and a Feminist Green New Deal for Europe', Short Essays, Undisciplined Environments, 7 April 2020, https://undisciplinedenvironments.org/2020/04/07/within-and-beyond-the-pandemic-demanding-a-care-income-and-a-feminist-green-new-deal-for-europe/.
[17] United Nations, Transforming Care Systems in the Context of the Sustainable Development Goals and Our Common Agenda, UN System Policy Paper (2024).
[18] MERGE consortium, *Potential Policy Instruments for Sustainable and Inclusive Wellbeing*, no. WP4 (2025), 96.
[19] Global Women's Strike, 'Climate Justice and the Women's Natural Farming Movement in Andhra Pradesh'; Global Women's Strike, 'SUPPORT & ENDORSE Worker Relief and Credit Reform (WRCR) Act 2025', Support Request, United States, 2025; Community Women Human Rights Defender Collective in Thailand, 'Statement on International Women's Day 2025: Resist, Defy, and Accelerate Action for Justice', Statement, 3 August 2025; Community Women Human Rights Defenders Collective in Thailand, 'Statement on International Women's Day 2024', Statement, 3 August 2024.

work to foster non-discrimination and encourage the entry of all genders into caregiving roles. These are defined as caregivers who face intersecting systemic barriers, including racialised women, single parents, migrant workers, and those in the informal economy. By remunerating the actual care work performed rather than the identity of the caregiver, the policy automatically directs resources to these groups who historically shoulder the heaviest care burdens. In practice, this requires simplified self-attestation mechanisms and community-based verification to ensure the policy remains accessible to those outside formal bureaucratic structures. To prevent financial control and abuse, UCI mandates that payments be made directly to the individual performing the care labour, rather than to a head of household. Recognising that many women and youth may lack individual bank accounts, the implementation must include alternative disbursement methods, such as secure mobile money or community-led cash transfers, to safeguard this financial autonomy. This individualised payment structure is essential for safeguarding the financial autonomy of women, gender minorities, and youth. It ensures that compensation for social reproduction remains an independent resource.

To maintain the autonomy of all household members, UCI is designed as a non-deductible, stackable benefit that must not hinder or replace simultaneous access to other social security provisions. While UCI is paid to those providing care, disability benefits, old-age pensions, and support allowances must continue to be paid directly to the individuals requiring support. This ensures that cash transfers do not exclude one another and that power dynamics between caregivers and receivers remain balanced, avoiding any form of financial dependency or "institutionalisation at home". Furthermore, in households where care is a shared or intergenerational responsibility, UCI eligibility is determined by the specific engagement in care activities. This allows for multiple caregivers to be recognised and remunerated for their distinct contributions. It prevents the consolidation of income into a single recipient and reflects the reality of interdependent care networks.

In seeking to address the historical "care debt" owed to women in all their diversity and other gender-marginalised and impoverished caregivers, UCI should be structured in a way that reflects the disproportionate share of care and support work historically carried by these groups.[20] This devaluation results in significant gender inequalities, as women in all their diversity disproportionately shoulder the share of unpaid care and support work. This imbalance leads to systemic economic injustice and hardship, most notably captured in the phenomenon known as the "long-life penalty" for caregivers. By framing the "care debt" through an intersectional lens, proponents ensure that the policy compensates not only ciswomen but also trans and gender-non-conforming individuals, whose vital community care and "chosen family" support have been equally invisible to traditional economic metrics. This transition from identity-based to labour-based recognition allows UCI to rectify historical imbalances without reinforcing rigid gender binaries.

[20] Nag et al., 'A Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth: A Joint Contribution by the REAL Project and Friends'.

The policy is also intended to be redistributive, with funding sourced through progressive taxation. This would include taxes on income, wealth, resource extraction, and financial transactions. The funding design aims to ensure that the policy does not disproportionately benefit high-income individuals and that it avoids exacerbating public debt. However, funding for UCI should not necessarily be based on fiscal policy alone if financial democracy and public money creation are also pursued, utilising monetary policy as a strategic tool. To be meaningful, the UCI amount should be set to ensure an adequate standard of living, explicitly including disability-related extra costs to ensure persons with disabilities enjoy similar standards to others.[21] Importantly, UCI is not envisioned as a standalone intervention. It must be integrated with other complementary policies that foster non-commodified care and support, such as universal care and support services and job guarantee schemes delivered through public and community-based institutions.

The fundamental distinction between UCI and Universal Basic Income (UBI) lies in their conceptual anchor. Unlike Universal Basic Income (UBI), which provides income security irrespective of labour or participation, UCI specifically centres and rewards the active contribution of care and support work.[22] While UBI aims to provide a "right to survive" that may decouple livelihood from any form of labour, UCI aims to value and protect the specific relationships and labour of care and support that the market currently devalues. While UBI is often framed as a "right to survive" that may free individuals for leisure or provides individuals with the bargaining power to refuse exploitative wage work (or "bullshit jobs") by decoupling livelihood from market labour**,** UCI specifically validates and remunerates the immense contribution caregivers already make to keep society alive. UCI is defined not by the absence of work requirements, but by the radical recognition of care activities as the most socially and ecologically valuable form of work. It aligns with feminist and degrowth principles by introducing a monetised, but not commodified, form of paid labour that complements rather than replicates traditional wage work.

3. EXPECTED BENEFITS

Implementing a Universal Care Income (UCI) is expected to yield several significant benefits. First, it contributes to economic justice and material improvement by directly enhancing the living conditions of caregivers, providing financial compensation for labour that is often unpaid or undervalued. In this way, care and support work becomes a legitimate source of livelihood.[23]

Second, it helps to reduce/eliminate child poverty, especially in single parent households (overwhelmingly headed by women) as there are "no poor children without poor mothers". This will

[21] Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Human rights dimension of care and support, A/HRC/58/43, https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/58/43.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Corinna Dengler, 'Rereading the Wages for Housework Campaign: Feminist Degrowth Reflections on Social Reproduction, Commons, and a Care Income', *Hypatia* 39, no. 3 (2024): 538–57, Cambridge Core, https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2024.14.

prevent children being taken into state care as mothers' poverty is currently often used to claim 'neglect' and remove children causing lifelong trauma.

Third, it promotes health and wellbeing in caregivers as well as infants and children, as mothers will have the income, time and space to breastfeed and ensuring that households have the income needed for a more nutritious diet.

Fourth, it reduces domestic violence and marital rape by ensuring that caregivers, at present overwhelmingly women, are not financially dependent on their abusers.

Fifth, it advances gender equality by recognising, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care and support responsibilities. By challenging the traditional association of care and support work with femininity, UCI disrupts the economic and social inequalities that arise from this gendered division of labour.[24] Valuing care work is also expected to encourage more men to participate in these roles, helping to close the income gap and end the "triple day" charge currently carried by women in all their diversity and other gender-marginalised caregivers, not only as mothers but also as spouses, daughters, and sisters. Beyond childcare, UCI should recognise the lifelong support women provide to spouses, elders, and persons with disabilities. By valuing this comprehensive care, UCI directly addresses the systemic exhaustion women in all their diversity and other gender-marginalised caregivers face throughout their entire life cycles.

Social Well-being and De-Institutionalisation

Sixth, it enhances social well-being by positioning care and support as a fundamental element of societal transformation. By providing economic security for independent living and community inclusion of people who require care and support, UCI supports de-institutionalisation and enables caregivers to adapt to the specific rights and requirements of care receivers. However, to prevent "institutionalisation at home," UCI must be implemented alongside direct, non-deductible social protection for care receivers and strong wage policies recognising the strenuous and essential nature of the work? . This dual-track approach ensures that caregivers and receivers are not financially beholden to one another, fostering true mutual autonomy rather than new forms of domestic dependency. Shifting toward this community-based model is more resource-effective and dignifying than traditional large-scale institutions, which are often costly and detrimental to the well-being of those they serve.

Environmental and Economic Transformation

Seventh, UCI promotes environmental sustainability by acknowledging care for the natural world, such as the protection of soil, forests, and animals, as equally valuable. This care for the planet is primarily performed by peasants and Indigenous Peoples, with women often at the forefront of these efforts as the traditional guardians of biodiversity and seeds. Initiatives like natural farming demonstrate how care for the land can restore the water cycle and help reverse global warming. By providing a care income to these communities, UCI recognises that their environmental management is a vital form of reproductive labour that sustains the entire planetary ecosystem. These communities do not only protect our shared planet, however, they also do to protect alternative lifeworlds, socio-ecologies, and/or exercising their right on their own native land.

Eighth, and most importantly**,** the policy questions the dominant economic model by shifting focus away from GDP growth and profit maximisation, toward social and ecological reproduction, in line

[24] Nicolas Bueno, *Post-Growth Labour Policies for Poverty Eradication,* Report Contribution (UniDistance Suisse, n.d.).

with degrowth and post-growth perspectives, as well as eco-feminist and social reproduction approaches that seek to decentre growth-centric paradigms.[25] By remunerating care and support work, UCI enhances individual autonomy, economic security, and bargaining power. This creates the necessary social and economic space for engagement in socially and ecologically meaningful activities, such as community maintenance or environmental restoration, that are essential for societal flourishing but currently invisible in GDP metrics.[26] Finally, it fosters a holistic understanding of work that values all activities essential to societal flourishing, not just those rewarded in formal labour markets.[27]

4. EVIDENCE, EXAMPLES & BEST PRACTICES

Although a Universal Care Income, as conceptualised, specifically as a participation-based income for care rather than a general survival grant, has not yet been implemented in full, it draws on a strong foundation of feminist and social policy movements.

One of the most significant historical precedents is the Wages for Housework campaign, a movement started in the 1970s, which seeks to redefine work by recognising unpaid care labour as foundational to the formal economy.[28] It is important to note that the term "wages" was used intentionally to frame care as a labor struggle requiring regular remuneration (such as hourly or weekly pay) rather than a mere lump-sum transfer. This campaign was not solely about monetary compensation but aimed at reimagining the social organisation of work, advocating for shorter wage-working hours and guaranteed care income. Fundamentally, as argued by figures like Silvia Federici, this was an anti-capitalist strategy—a demand for wages "for and against" housework, designed to highlight that the capitalist system depends on this labor but could not survive its full, radical valuation. A major historical victory was won at the UN Beijing Conference (1995) in Paragraph 206 (g)(ii), where governments agreed to measure unremunerated work in satellite accounts to reflect its value.[29] The idea of a care income has since been included in major policy proposals, such as the Green New Deal for Europe, which advocated providing a care income to those engaged in full- or part-time informal care, including intergenerational and environmental caregiving.[30]

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[25] Center for Economic and Social Rights, 'Towards a Beyond Growth Blueprint That Creates and Enabling Environment for the Realisation of Human Rights'; Alessandra Mezzadri, 'Development as Life-Making', *World Development* 203 (July 2026): 107347, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2026.107347.
[26] Fiona Dukelow and Mary P. Murphy, 'Building the Future from the Present: Imagining Post-Growth, Post-Productivist Ecosocial Policy', *Journal of Social Policy* 51, no. 3 (2022): 504–18, Cambridge Core, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279422000150.
[27] Dengler, 'Rereading the Wages for Housework Campaign: Feminist Degrowth Reflections on Social Reproduction, Commons, and a Care Income'.
[28] Make Mothers Matter, 'Call for Submissions: A Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth'; Global Women's Strike, 'How the International Wages for Housework Campaign (IWFH) Won Recognition of Unwaged Work at the UN Decade for Women and Follow up Conference, 1975-1995', Report Submission, December 2025.
[29] Global Women's Strike, 'How the International Wages for Housework Campaign (IWFH) Won Recognition of Unwaged Work at the UN Decade for Women and Follow up Conference, 1975-1995'.
[30] Dengler, 'Rereading the Wages for Housework Campaign: Feminist Degrowth Reflections on Social Reproduction, Commons, and a Care Income'.

Global Advocacy and Local Demands

Support for a care income also comes from global advocacy groups and international organisations like the Global Women's Strike which is coordinated by the WFH Campaign), Research and Degrowth, Make Mothers Matter, and WIEGO, which continues to call for recognition and compensation of care labour as a fundamental labour right, rather than a form of social assistance. Current practical examples and demands include the following. The US Worker Relief and Credit Reform (WRCR) Act (2025), which expands the EITC to recognise unpaid family caregivers and students as workers, providing a monthly advance payment option.[31] The "natural farming" movement in Andhra Pradesh, where nearly a million women farmers regenerate soil to restore food security and the water cycle.[32] Thailand's WHRD Collective demands that the People's Constitution recognise care work on the land and in the home as socially and economically valuable work.[33]

Furthermore, while not identical to UCI, related programs have demonstrated positive outcomes. For example, the unconditional cash transfers to women in some states in India have the potential to decrease women's financial dependency on men. Some specifically acknowledge domestic and care work as a contribution that deserves to be rewarded[34]. Kenya's UBI experiments, as well as programs like Brazil's Bolsa Familia, Mexico's Progresa/Oportunidades, and West Bengal's Kanyashree Prakalpa, have significantly improved nutrition, education, health, financial access, and overall well-being, particularly for women and children.[35] However, critical analysis of these cash transfer models has highlighted risks of financialisation, specifically how benefits can be collateralised by banks and financial institutions, leading to predatory debt. To avoid these failures, UCI must be explicitly designed as a de-commodified resource that resists being used as a financial asset.

Holistic Frameworks

Additionally, national well-being frameworks in countries such as New Zealand, which incorporates Māori Indigenous principles through He Ara Waiora, and Scotland, through its National Performance Framework, offer examples of how governments are moving toward holistic policy metrics. Newer models like Bogotá's *Manzanas del Cuidado* (Care Blocks) provide integrated services and free laundry to alleviate women's care responsibilities and free up their time.[36] These models lay conceptual and operational foundations for policies like UCI, showing that alternative economic visions centred around care and well-being are both feasible and impactful .[37] However, many welfare states have established mechanisms

[31] Global Women's Strike, 'SUPPORT & ENDORSE Worker Relief and Credit Reform (WRCR) Act 2025'.
[32] Global Women's Strike, 'Climate Justice and the Women's Natural Farming Movement in Andhra Pradesh'.
[33] Community Women Human Rights Defender Collective in Thailand, 'Statement on International Women's Day 2025: Resist, Defy, and Accelerate Action for Justice'.
[34] Prabha Kotiswaran, 'Women's Work, Never Done, Now Paid: Assessing Tamil Nadu's Urimai Thogai Scheme', *World Development* 190 (June 2025): 106947, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106947.
[35] Nag et al., 'A Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth: A Joint Contribution by the REAL Project and Friends'.
[36] United Nations, Transforming Care Systems in the Context of the Sustainable Development Goals and Our Common Agenda, UN System Policy Paper (2024).
[37] Ritu Verma, 'Moving Beyond Growth: Global South and Decolonial Perspectives', Report Contribution, Out of the Box Research and Action, 30 March 2025.

that prefigure the UCI, such as parental leave, which secure income to focus on care responsibilities, as well as various forms of disability and caregivers' allowances paid as cash transfers. [38,39]

5. OBJECTIONS, POTENTIAL BARRIERS & COUNTERARGUMENTS

Despite its transformative potential, the implementation of UCI faces certain serious objections and barriers.

A primary concern is its fiscal cost, as such a program would require significant public funding. While the progressive reduction of defence budgets is considered a viable funding source, the current global security environment presents new challenges to this argument. Despite the current context, redirecting these resources is framed as a necessary pivot toward "human security", defined by the stability of care systems, food sovereignty, and climate resilience, rather than traditional military dominance. This shift is further supported by analysing the massive subsidies currently provided to polluting industries and the growing cost of the private care industry, which drains significant economic resources from the public sphere. Making clear how much wealth is available is essential; once UCI is on the agenda, women (the majority of caregivers) cannot once again be denied well-overdue justice because of cost, allowing their poverty to continue when so much of the world's wealth is built on their unwaged labour.

Furthermore, the objection of public debt is challenged by Modern Monetary Theory (MMT) and financial democracy advocates, who argue that sovereign states can make use of public money creation and monetary policy to fund life-sustaining sectors without relying solely on taxation. Critics also worry that by introducing monetary compensation for care and support work, UCI may unintentionally reinforce capitalist valuation logics, where social worth becomes synonymous with financial value[40]. This could reduce care and support to a private, chosen responsibility rather than a collective, societal necessity.

Another concern is that, if poorly designed, UCI could reinforce traditional gender roles, encouraging women in all their diversity and other gender-marginalised caregivers to remain in positions of domestic isolation. Feminist critics, most notably Angela Davis, have historically warned that remunerating housework could institutionalise the role of the "housewife" by further segregating women from the public sphere, rather than subverting

[38] Joan Costa-Font et al., 'Do Public Caregiving Subsidies and Supports Affect the Provision of Care and Transfers?', *Journal of Health Economics* 84 (July 2022): 102639, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhealeco.2022.102639.
[39] This devaluation results in significant gender inequalities, as women in all their diversity disproportionately shoulder the share of unpaid care and support work. This imbalance leads to systemic economic injustice and hardship, most notably captured in the phenomenon known as the "long-life penalty" for caregivers. [25] Global Women's Strike, 'How the International Wages for Housework Campaign (IWFH) Won Recognition of Unwaged Work at the UN Decade for Women and Follow up Conference, 1975-1995'.
[40] MERGE Consortium, *Measuring What Matters* (2025).

the capitalist structures that rely on their unwaged labour.[41] However, proponents argue that these historical critiques must be viewed in a contemporary light: even without such interventions, women have remained the primary unpaid or poorly paid carers for decades. The failure of post-Keynesian states to provide adequate socialised care means the "anti-state" arguments of the 1970s left must be re-evaluated. It must be noted that women entering low-paid jobs in the formal or informal sector has primarily benefited corporations; it has not freed women from doing the bulk of caring work before and after their shifts. What women actually want has rarely been the priority for critics of compensating housework.

To mitigate this risk, UCI must be integrated into a broader policy package aimed at dismantling gendered roles across society. This includes the elimination of gender segregation in occupations, rigorous enforcement of equal pay for work of equal value, and the integration of care and support skill-building for both boys and girls within the educational system to foster a culture of shared responsibility from a young age. Some Feminist critics have historically warned that compensating housework could institutionalise the role of the “housewife” rather than subvert it.

Eligibility, Monitoring, and Universal Access

Additionally, defining eligibility for UCI poses difficulties. Many forms of care, especially political activism, environmental stewardship, or less visible community support, are not traditionally recognised and risk being excluded. Furthermore, eligibility must be expansive enough to recognize “chosen families,” such as those in queer communities who provide transition support or intergenerational care outside of nuclear family structures, which traditional state bureaucracies often ignore.

The current systems of eligibility for benefits are not models for a UCI. They are often discriminatory (based on immigration, age, or status), punitive, and create fear that deters those in desperate need. Their starting point is often a suspicion that applicants are not entitled, driven by an obsession with fraud, which is statistically very low. In contrast, entitlement to UCI must be regardless of immigration/refugee status or nationality. A precedent for this is the 1946 Family Allowance in the UK, introduced by Eleanor Rathbone, which was paid to all primary caregivers (invariably mothers) regardless of origin, marital status, or household income.

Recognising and evaluating unpaid care and support work conducted by people who themselves require care and support is also particularly difficult. For example, an older person with cognitive impairments or a person with a disability might perform essential daily tasks, such as light cooking, making beds, or cleaning rooms, while simultaneously receiving high-level support for other needs. Crucially, the implementation of UCI must strictly uphold its status as a non-substitutable benefit; it is an additional reward for labour and must never replace or diminish existing disability pensions or aged-care entitlements. There is a significant risk that these contributions remain invisible to formal evaluation metrics. This

[41] Nag et al., ‘A Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth: A Joint Contribution by the REAL Project and Friends’.

raises complex questions about how such interdependent labour is quantified and rewarded, and whether UCI frameworks can remain inclusive enough to recognise caregivers who do not fit the traditional, able-bodied "caretaker" profile. Implementing conditional eligibility may also lead to invasive monitoring, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and stigmatisation of recipients.[42]

Decommodification and the Refusal of Exploitation

To move beyond mere cash transfers, UCI must be advocated alongside the de-privatisation of reproductive services to ensure essential care remains a public right rather than a market commodity**.** Moreover, UCI might not fully achieve decommodification if it functions primarily as a cash transfer, leaving essential services to be accessed through markets. A lack of political will and public support, particularly from groups invested in preserving the current economic hierarchy, poses a further challenge.

Finally, critics argue that UCI could exacerbate caregiver exploitation by monetising a labour form that often extends beyond defined hours and cannot be reduced to a "job," ultimately benefiting non-caregivers at caregivers' expense. Exploitation here is a risk if remuneration is set too low to provide true "exit power" or if the "24/7" nature of care is collapsed into a flat, inadequate rate. To move beyond conditionality, degrowth scholars have proposed a universal care income that highlights the importance of unpaid (and highly gendered) care work necessary to sustain life and well-being. Crucially, this framework must explicitly value "support work" (assistance for persons with disabilities and older persons) as the time, workload, and specialised skills required for such assistance are often even more intensive than other forms of domestic care.[43] By recognising these distinct requirements, UCI ensures that the high social value and physical demands of support are fully remunerated. [44]

Proponent Counterarguments and Radical Intent

Proponents of UCI respond to these objections with a series of practical, evidence-based counterarguments. The fiscal cost, while substantial, can be managed through a combination of progressive taxation targeting income, wealth, resource extraction, demilitarisation, and financial transactions and active monetary policy aimed at public money creation. Crucially, these expenditures should be redefined as strategic investments with high dividends for social cohesion and human capabilities, a shift actively called for by UN analysis.[45] This reframing ensures that the wealthiest individuals and corporations contribute a fair share while avoiding increases in public debt.[46]

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[42] Dengler, 'Rereading the Wages for Housework Campaign: Feminist Degrowth Reflections on Social Reproduction, Commons, and a Care Income'.
[43] United Nations, Transforming Care Systems in the Context of the Sustainable Development Goals and Our Common Agenda, UN System Policy Paper (2024).
[44] Giorgos Kallis et al., *The Case for Degrowth*, The Case for Series (Polity, 2020).
[45] United Nations, Transforming Care Systems in the Context of the Sustainable Development Goals and Our Common Agenda, UN System Policy Paper (2024).
[46] Nag et al., 'A Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth: A Joint Contribution by the REAL Project and Friends'.

Rather than replicating the survival-centred logic of UBI, UCI is intended as a transformative measure that redefines the value of labour itself and asserts the fundamental right to be rewarded for that labour. It protects care and support from being "at the mercy of the market", which devalues life in favour of profit. Consequently, the effective implementation of UCI requires a resolute combination with Universal Basic Services (UBS) and Working Time Reduction (WTR). For example, pairing UCI with UBS ensures that a caregiver has the income to value their time, while also having access to free public transport, high-quality community health hubs, and public housing collectively de-marketing the entire ecosystem of social reproduction**.** When paired with these measures and community-based support that enables independent living, UCI effectively de-markets care and support provision and supports a broader post-growth transition. [47]

Redefining Work and Resisting the "Universal Breadwinner" Model

The defining characteristic of UCI is its protection of care and support relationships from market logic and the recognition of a key economic entitlement and right to a wage for labour performed. To mitigate the risks of reinforcing gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices, the policy must include measures such as equal reductions in paid working hours and public campaigns that encourage shared caregiving. The primary critique that a care income would further relegate women in all their diversity and other gender-marginalised caregivers to the domestic sphere represents a material risk that cannot be dismissed by a mere appeal to "intent." Rather, the policy must be evaluated through the strategic mechanisms framed by the historical Wages for Housework campaign, which are specifically designed to provide the material basis for caregivers to challenge and refuse such confinement[48].

This response is particularly relevant when addressing the neoliberal "Universal Breadwinner Model." This model, championed by figures like Barbara Bergmann, argues that emancipation lies solely in labour market participation[49]. However, proponents of UCI argue that this model often merely "shackles" women to a double or even triple shift, as they continue to perform unpaid care-work on top of full-time employment without any shift in internalised gender roles[50]. By glorifying waged market participation while failing to remunerate care, the breadwinner model fundamentally devalues reproductive labour, reinforcing the idea of care as an innate, unpaid "natural duty." This leads to burnout and "systemic exhaustion," which diminishes the quality of care[51]. Furthermore, the Universal Breadwinner Model often relies on a racialised division of labour; middle-class women in the

[47] Halida's Comments on UCI Policy Profile.
[48] Silvia Federici, *Wages against Housework* (Falling Wall Pr, 1975).
[49] Barbara R. Bergmann, *The Economic Emergence of Women* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2005), https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403982582.
[50] Nancy Fraser, 'After The Family Wage: Gender Equity and the Welfare State', *Political Theory* 22, no. 4 (1994): 591–618, https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591794022004003.
[51] Tithi Bhattacharya, ed., *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, 1st edn (Pluto Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1vz494j.

Global North frequently rely on the cheap, precarious paid care-work of migrant women of colour to enter the workforce, thereby deepening global care chains.

The radical intent of UCI seeks to subvert these hierarchies. Proponents like Selma James and Silvia Federici argued that "wages for housework" was never about institutionalising the role of the housewife; it was a strategic tool to make the invisible labour of social reproduction visible, thereby giving caregivers the power to refuse it. Indeed, this stands in sharp contrast to the counter-campaign "wages for housewives," proposed by the right in countries like the UK or Italy, which focused instead on the preservation of traditional gender roles. By centring the housework itself and not the performer of it, the radical campaign's main objective is to de-gender the labour involved[52]. By providing an independent income, UCI transforms care from a "natural" female obligation into a recognised form of social labour, which actually increases the bargaining power of the caregiver within the household and the market[53]. Selma James and the Global Women's Strike (GWS) further argue that it is poverty and financial dependence, not caring, that institutionalise women in the home. A care income is therefore necessary to enable women to escape violent relationships and create a society of carers that respects and protects rather than penalises mothers[54]. GWS defines this as "invest in caring not killing." The men's network Payday, which supports this perspective, provides an example of men seeing a care income as crucial to refusing violence and male supremacy.

Furthermore, to ensure this policy is not trans-exclusionary, the concept of "mothering" or "parenting" must be understood as a social labour performed across genders. One example of this was provided by the *What Mothers and Other Caregivers Want* international survey by the GWS, in which transwomen spoke movingly about the caregiving they did for each other and the community. UCI disrupts gender segregation by decoupling livelihood from the traditional male-breadwinner wage model, allowing all people to move freely between the formal and reproductive economies.

UCI similarly broadens the definition of care to include ecological and subsistence and protection work, recognising diverse forms of labour beyond domestic tasks. While concerns about monitoring are valid, proponents argue for participatory, democratic design processes that reflect local needs and reduce the bureaucratic hurdles, such as invasive means-testing or rigid documentation, that often plague conditional cash transfers. This validates and provides much-needed protection to human rights defenders, especially in the Global South, who work to protect communities and nature from extractive predatory industries and their vested interests. A universal structure based on the recognition of care and support as a social contribution can reduce stigma and ensure that the income is viewed as an earned reward for social reproduction rather than a handout.

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[52] Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Duke University Press, 2011), https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822394723.
[53] Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (PM Press ; Common Notions : Autonomedia ; Turnaround [distributor], 2012).
[54] Ashley D. Farmer, *Remaking Black Power* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469634388_farmer.

6. IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

The implementation of Universal Care Income is envisioned as a phased process.

In the short-term (2-3 years), the policy should begin with legislative enactment at the national or state level. This includes drafting legal frameworks and initiating pilot programs in selected regions to test and refine eligibility criteria, funding mechanisms, and local implementation models. Alongside these pilots, governments and civil society actors should engage in broad public debates and participatory design processes to ensure that the policy reflects local realities and respects cultural definitions of care.[55] Initial funding strategies should be implemented, including progressive taxes on wealth, income, resource extraction, and financial transactions. Even at this early stage, immediate benefits are expected, particularly in reducing poverty and improving the material well-being of caregivers.

In the medium term (5 years), UCI should be scaled nationally or across multiple regions, informed by pilot outcomes. While child protection is vital, this stage must simultaneously strengthen the rights of persons with disabilities and older persons within care and support systems, focusing on protection, participation, and coordination to prevent violence within families across all generations. This period should also see the full integration of UCI into complementary policy frameworks, particularly the development and expansion of universal care and support services and job guarantee schemes. Efforts to institutionalise gender-equal redistribution must be resolute, involving not only households but also States and businesses, with public campaigns and workplace reforms promoting shared responsibility as outlined in the UN 5R framework. Crucially, a robust national Care Skills Accreditation Framework should be established to map complex competencies (e.g., emotional intelligence, complex logistics) against formally recognised skills, ensuring care experience is valued as professional experience by employers and educational institutions.

In the long term (10 years), UCI should become a fully institutionalised element of the welfare state. Cultural norms around work and gender, care and support, and gender would be expected to shift significantly, with UCI contributing to a broader redefinition of social well-being that is decoupled from economic growth. At this stage, UCI could inspire international cooperation, mutual learning, and harmonisation of care-related policies across borders, laying the foundation for a global "care society".[56] Implementing UCI requires coordination across multiple governance levels, global, national, regional, and local, each playing a distinct role in enabling a coherent and context-sensitive rollout.

Multi-level governance

At the global level, international institutions such as the United Nations and the International Labour Organisation can provide normative frameworks that recognise care and support as a human right, a global public good, and a manifestation of "provisioning sovereignty." This concept, as developed by Ulrike Knobloch, emphasizes that the provisioning of life-sustaining needs is a foundational ethical and economic right that must be protected from market volatility and prioritized as a collective

[55] Nag et al., 'A Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth: A Joint Contribution by the REAL Project and Friends'.
[56] Make Mothers Matter, 'Call for Submissions: A Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth'.

responsibility.[57] The UN System Policy Paper (2024) specifically calls for a paradigm shift that places the care of people and the planet at the centre of development. These bodies can facilitate knowledge exchange, promote mutual learning across countries, and advocate for reforms in the global financial system to address resource imbalances and tax justice, particularly for the Global South. Global tax reform is a prerequisite to prevent capital flight and ensure that care infrastructure is equitably financed, particularly for the Global South.[58]

At the national and state levels, governments must take the lead in enacting UCI legislation. This includes defining eligibility criteria, setting the care income amount above the poverty line, designing redistributive tax structures, and ensuring integration with broader labour, welfare, and care and support policies. The following mechanisms should be included. First, constitutional reforms should be implemented, enshrining care income as a right to protect it from political reversals (e.g., Thailand's demand for a People's Constitution).[59] Then, tax reform should be carefully considered. A modernisation of the tax system (e.g., the WRCR Act) to provide monthly advance payments for caregivers and students is necessary.[60] Cross-ministerial coordination is essential, involving departments such as labour, gender equality, health, education, social protection, and economic planning.[61] Regardless of UCI implementation, national authorities must directly fund public care and support services and strictly regulate private sectors to ensure quality and equity, as income alone does not guarantee the availability, accessibility, or adequacy of services.

Regional and sub-national governments play a critical role in tailoring UCI to local contexts. Governments can adapt income amounts to local costs of living and act as incubators for innovative designs like Bogotá's Care Blocks.[62] However, these models must be expanded to integrate the perspective of care receivers (persons with disabilities and older persons) alongside that of caregivers to ensure true autonomy. At the local and community level, municipal governments and grassroots organisations are essential for the democratic design and delivery of UCI. These actors are best positioned to assess the needs of caregivers and care and support receivers, co-design eligibility criteria, and provide supportive infrastructure such as accessible transportation, childcare, support services for persons with disabilities and older persons, and health services. Community-based care and support services (or facilities) or discussion networks, such as Mothers Centres, and the Community Women Human Rights Defenders in Thailand, can offer responsive and culturally grounded caregiving models.[63] Additionally, involving local men and fathers in care and support provision, where women welcome this, helps promote the redistribution of unpaid labour. Active participation from civil society ensures that UCI remains people-centred, context-specific, and responsive to changing care needs on the ground.

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[57] Ulrike Knobloch, 'Feminist Economics and Ethics', in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics and Economics*, 1st edn, ed. Mark D. White (Oxford University Press, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198793991.013.16; International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), 'ITUC Submission to the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights', Report Contribution, Bruxelles, 2025.

[58] Center for Economic and Social Rights, 'Towards a Beyond Growth Blueprint That Creates and Enabling Environment for the Realisation of Human Rights'.

[59] Community Women Human Rights Defender Collective in Thailand, 'Demands for Inclusion in a New Peoples' Constitution', n.d.; Global Women's Strike, 'SUPPORT & ENDORSE Worker Relief and Credit Reform (WRCR) Act 2025'.

[60] Global Women's Strike, 'SUPPORT & ENDORSE Worker Relief and Credit Reform (WRCR) Act 2025'.

[61] Nag et al., 'A Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth: A Joint Contribution by the REAL Project and Friends'.

[62] United Nations, Transforming Care Systems in the Context of the Sustainable Development Goals and Our Common Agenda, UN System Policy Paper (2024).

[63] Nag et al., 'A Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth: A Joint Contribution by the REAL Project and Friends'.

A differentiated approach is crucial for the equitable implementation of UCI. Across all income levels, benefits should be universal, meaning that the right to a standardised, non-discriminatory income level is guaranteed for all caregivers regardless of the specific nature of their care work, recognising care and support as the universal labour of social reproduction. In agrarian economies (LICs/MICs), the policy must also be linked to land ownership and/or restitution, climate justice and food sovereignty.[64] UCI should support subsistence farmers, particularly women, for whom garden and subsistence farming are a foundational act of care for the family, by ensuring land redistribution and remuneration for restoring the planet. In the Global South, employment policies must focus on rights-based, accessible work with reasonable accommodation rather than generic job guarantees.

In HICs, UCI can enable a reduction in working hours, promoting a better work-life balance and the redistribution of care and support responsibilities. Financing in HICs relies on robust progressive taxation, including maximum income policies, wealth taxation policies, steep rises in corporate tax, and luxury carbon taxes.[65] In contrast, LICs and MICs face constraints rooted in colonial exploitation and extractive debt.[66] Therefore, UCI in these contexts is often linked to demands for reparations and debt cancellation. Labour market dynamics also vary; in the Global South, employment policies must be linked to rights-based, accessible work (ensuring reasonable accommodation and access to an open labour market) rather than generic job guarantees.[67] In HICs, UCI can serve a different but equally important function by enabling a reduction in working hours. This promotes a better work-life balance and allows for the redistribution of care and support responsibilities across genders and households, reducing dependency on full-time wage labour as a source of social inclusion. The active responsibility of States and businesses to support this transition is also not to forget, according to the UN 5R's care framework. [68]

While respecting diverse cultural understandings of care is essential, UCI must actively challenge the confinement of care responsibilities within the family. Respecting "voluntary choice" must not serve as a justification for maintaining women's time poverty. At the same time, this policy must ensure that the state does not take over care to the detriment of people's wishes and agency. It must support the relationship between the carer and the person who needs care and de-privatise care through accessible social infrastructure. Finally, UCI must support the needs of gender minorities and diverse care relationships falling outside normative family structures.

7. INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS

The Universal Care Income is grounded in international human rights law. By providing income support to persons performing care work, the policy contributes to the realization of the rights to work, just and favourable conditions, social security, protection and assistance to the family, an adequate standard of living, and health, without discrimination and on the basis of the principle of equality between women and men, as recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Arts. 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12).

[64] Global Women's Strike, 'Climate Justice and the Women's Natural Farming Movement in Andhra Pradesh'.
[65] MERGE consortium, *Potential Policy Instruments for Sustainable and Inclusive Wellbeing*.
[66] Bueno, *Post-Growth Labour Policies for Poverty Eradication*.
[67] Make Mothers Matter, 'Call for Submissions: A Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth'.
[68] International Labour Office et al., *Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work*.

In the same vein, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women affirms that child-rearing must be understood as a shared responsibility between women and men and requires States to put in place the social support structures needed to make that responsibility effective, including accessible childcare systems (Arts. 5(b), 11(2)). Under these binding commitments, the policy also addresses children's rights, particularly with regard to the obligation of States to provide appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities through, *inter alia,* access to social security, childcare services, and an adequate standard of living as recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, all in accordance with the principle of the best interests of the child (Arts. 3 and 18).

In the same vein, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities strengthens this framework by requiring access to support in the home, in residential settings and in the community, including personal assistance arrangements that enable autonomy and participation. It also recognizes support in the exercise of parenting responsibilities and requires State measures to address disability-related costs, including financial support and respite services (Arts. 19(b), 23(2), 28(2)).

Further progress has been made in recent years within the framework of the International Labour Organization, such as the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), which requires fair terms of employment, decent working and living conditions, minimum wage protection, occupational safety and health, and social security protections for domestic workers who perform a large share of paid care work and are often excluded from ordinary labour protections (Arts. 6, 11, 13, and 14). The ILO also issued Recommendation No. 202 in 2012, which calls on States to establish social protection floors that guarantee, at a minimum, access to essential health care and basic income security for children, persons of working age unable to earn sufficient income, and older persons (§§ 4 and 5).[69]

Since 1991, the CEDAW Committee has called on States to promote research capable of identifying, measuring and assigning value to women's unpaid domestic work, and to reflect that contribution in national statistics and include the unremunerated activities in the gross national product.[70] In 2017, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities clarified that States should provide adequate support services to family carers so they can in turn support their relatives to live independently, including through respite care services, childcare services and financial support (§67). [71]

More recently, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has recognized both paid and unpaid forms of care, acknowledged that self-care may depend on assistive technologies and accessible environments, and warned that unpaid care burdens and the norms surrounding them must not erode the rights of caregivers.[72] This was

[69] International Labour Organization (ILO), Social Protection Floors Recommendation No. 202 (2012).
[70] CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation No. 17: Measurement and Quantification of the Unremunerated Domestic Activities of Women and their Recognition in the Gross National Product, A/46/38.
[71] CRPD, General comment No. 5 on living independently and being included in the community, CRPD/C/GC/5.
[72] Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Human rights dimension of care and support, paras. 6, 8, 10, 31, A/HRC/58/43, https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/58/43.

reinforced by Human Rights Council resolution 54/6 on the fundamental role of care and support from a human rights perspective, which urged States to increase their investment in public policies to ensure universal access to support services and to promote technical studies to quantify unpaid care work.[73]

The policy is also supported by soft-law standards on the recognition of unpaid care and domestic work. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action calls on States to recognize the economic and social value of women's unpaid work, improve methods for measuring such work, and reflect it in national statistics and economic policy.[74] In this sense, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for the recognition and valuation of unpaid care and domestic work through public services, infrastructure and protective policies that promote shared responsibility within the home and family (SDG 5, Target 5.4).[75]

The proposed policy is also consistent with international soft-law standards on ageing. The United Nations Principles for Older Persons affirm that older persons should enjoy adequate conditions through the provision of income security and family and community support, should have opportunities to generate income where appropriate, and should be able to remain in their own homes for as long as possible.[76]

At the regional level, developments in the Americas have gone even further. In Advisory Opinion OC-31/25, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights recognized the right to care as an autonomous right derived from the American Convention on Human Rights, the American Declaration of Rights and the Charter of the Organization of American States. The Court explained that this right protects both those who receive care and those who provide it, and that it comprises three essential dimensions: receiving care, providing care and self-care. It further linked this right to the principles of social and family co-responsibility, solidarity, and equality and non-discrimination, emphasizing that care must not be distributed or experienced in a way that reproduces structural inequalities, particularly between women and men.[77]

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[73] Human Rights Council (HRC), Resolution 54/6, Centrality of care and support from a human rights perspective, A/HRC/RES/54/6 (2023).
[74] Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+5 Political Declaration and Outcome) (1995).
[75] United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Resolution 70/1, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1 (2015).
[76] United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Resolution 46/91, United Nations Principles for Older Persons (1991).
[77] I/A Court H.R., The Content and Scope of the Right to Care and its Interrelationship with Other Rights (interpretation and scope of Articles 1(1), 2, 4, 17, 19, 24, 26 and 29 of the American Convention on Human Rights; 34 and 45 of the Charter of the Organization of American States; I, II, VI, XI, XII, XIV, XV, XVI, XXX and XXXV of the American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man; 7, 8 and 9 of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women; 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17 and 18 of the Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights; 6, 9, 12 and 19 of the Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons, and III of the Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities. Advisory Opinion AO-31/25 of June 12, 2025. Series A No. 31, para. 132.

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