

Investing in more reliable, affordable and quality care structures is the key to building healthier societies and resilient economies, where no one is left behind

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What does it take to build healthier societies and resilient economies, where no one is left behind?

It may be surprising, but investing in more reliable, affordable and quality care structures is the key.

Supportive care and work-life balance structures are essential to reduce the amount of unpaid care and, with it, stress levels. As stress is a key factor contributing to modern day ailments, child-care services that prioritize children's well-being and enable parents to focus on work and other responsibilities with greater ease are the foundation of a healthy society – and a more equal one.

Unpaid care responsibilities are still unequally distributed between women and men, with women taking on the lion's share of the duties. According to evidence from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), twice as many women than men spend at least 5 hours every day caring for children (2).

How does this relate to the economy?

One reason is that the amount of unpaid care correlates with women's financial stability and independence. Due to the heavier load of care responsibilities, many women are unable to seek employment. Across the economically inactive population in the EU, 19% of women and 3% of men in 2022 were not seeking employment due to caring for adults with disabilities or for children (3). As a result, women are employed less and work shorter hours than men. This situation puts women at a disadvantage in terms of wealth, with gender gaps increasing with age or the presence of children.

And when women's contributions are undervalued and underutilized, this has a negative influence on the economy. A study conducted by EIGE a few years ago revealed that improvements in gender equality could lead to up to 10.5 million additional jobs and an increase in GDP per capita in the EU of nearly 10% by 2050 (4).

So, there are clear and compelling reasons to invest in gender equality, such as through a focus on care.

How can public and private entities contribute? Both play a key role in investing in services and infrastructure that enable women and men in all their diversity to balance their work and personal lives. EU policies and legislation have put a spotlight on care by developing and implementing measures, such as the Work-Life Balance directive and the EU Care Strategy (5,6).

In addition, gender mainstreaming strategies can help the public sector to integrate a gender perspective into the design and implementation of policies. A good example of this is gender budgeting – a strategic tool used to support the integration of a gender equality perspective in budgets.

Private entities also have a crucial role to play by investing in child-care facilities and long-term care services, as well as work-life balance measures such as flexible working arrangements and parental leave. By doing so, companies create a more inclusive and supportive workplace culture that benefits both their employees and the broader community. We do have the tools – including gender equality and care related measures – to create a more healthy, prosperous and equitable future for everyone. Now we need to use them.

References¹

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¹ All references were accessed 7 March 2024.

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